

Developing Leaders for Evangelism

House of Bishops meeting

September 16, 2010

Presented by: Bob Honeychurch, Missioner for Congregational Vitality

In the mid 1990's I hit a sort of crisis in my life. It wasn't a crisis of faith, but it was most certainly a crisis of vocation. It might have been easier for me if that crisis had emerged as a bolt of lightning, jarring me from one world into the next. But this crisis happened much more insidiously, sneaking into my consciousness like a cat in the night. I am a life-long Episcopalian, and the awareness that was emerging within me, this dis-ease which was becoming ever-more present in my life, was that the Church in which I had been raised, the church where I was baptized and confirmed and ordained and at that point had been a priest in for about 10 years – that Church simply didn't exist anymore. The problem was, though, I didn't have any idea what was taking its place. And so, that crisis led me into a period of re-evaluation and re-formation... trying to figure out if there was a place for me in a Church that was not yet formed, in a world that was changing faster than I thought I had the capability to keep up with, in a relationship with God that was not so neat and tidy and sterile and predictable as I once believed it was.

Survey after survey indicates a growing percentage of the population – both within the US and around the world – as being (by one definition or another) “Spiritual but not Religious.” Now, as a religious insider and one who is overly-steeped in the church culture, I used to scoff at those folks as little more than shallow, self-indulged wanderers who were simply looking for the next new trend to hang their heart on for the moment. But as the numbers of those “Spiritual but not Religious” swelled, they started to creep their way into my world – into my family, into my circle of friends, into my neighborhood, and yes even into my church – until they were no longer this disembodied mass of humanity that I could simply caricature and dismiss, but instead had real names, and real faces, and real needs.

So now, I have come to the point that I view the “Spiritual but not Religious” among us as some of our greatest teachers. You see, I have come to understand that we live in a world filled with people who are deeply concerned about spiritual issues. The problem is, they come to us looking for God, and we give them the Church. They come looking for some way to make sense out of the chaos of their lives, and we give them a list of committees they can join in our local parishes. They come looking for some kind of deep, genuine, and transformative community experience, and we give them a pledge card and a time and talent survey or spiritual gifts inventory so that they can identify all the ways they can serve the Church.

“Extra Ecclesiam nulla salum.” “Outside of the Church there is no salvation.” The earliest account of that phrase traces its way all the way back to St. Cyprian of Carthage in the 3rd century. By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, it had become the official doctrine of the Church. Whatever the original intent of that phrase, it has, over the past 1800 years, sort of crept its way into our DNA to the point that we have all come to behave as though it is true... whether we say we believe it or not. Unfortunately, for many people (both inside the Church and outside) this phrase “Extra Ecclesiam nulla salum” has come to be less about saving people’s souls, and more about saving the institution of the Church.

I was struck by Bishop Dan Edwards’ blog post following the presentations last Thursday afternoon by Anne Rudig of the Office of Communication and Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. If I may quote you, Bishop Edwards, it read: “There was one proposing a medium; the other proposing a message.” I must say, Dan, that I think you described for me the discontinuity I heard in their respective presentations. One offered a medium, a platform through which we can tell a story. But there was little sense of what that story could be in people’s lives. The other gave a compelling argument to be clear about our message, but in an almost disdainful way which disregarded the need to be intentional and strategic and proactive in communicating that message.

All of which brings us to today... developing leaders for evangelism – both lay and ordained – is about bringing together both the message and the medium in such a way that people’s lives can be changed. Is there something unique about the Christian story – grounded upon the birth, life and ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ – which is so compelling that we echo the words of Robert Wadsworth Lowry’s hymn:

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing.

All things are mine since I am his – how can I keep from singing?”

I believe that there is, and that it is not only our responsibility as Christians, but our joy as well, to sing that song every moment.

At the same time, we have to sing that song with text and tune that make sense to the world around us. And equally as important, we have to learn to sing that song in venues where people will actually hear and be changed by that encounter. In other words, the medium matters. This means moving away from the insularity of the walls which we have constructed to protect us, and shelter us, and separate us from the rest of creation – the insularity of our buildings, the insularity of our polity, the insularity of our canons, the insularity of our language, the insularity of our presumed position at the center of the cultural circle – and in its place to find ourselves firmly planted in the world as it is, in that world in which God is already fully present and actively involved.

We have with us this afternoon four different individuals who each have a unique view of the opportunities for Christian formation and leadership development which lie before us. Each of them is going to make a presentation of approximately 15 minutes. Following their opening remarks, you will have another 15 minutes or so to process their comments at your tables, followed by a final period of time when you can engage one another and the presenters, responding to the issues that they have raised in your small groups.

Our first presenter this afternoon will be Donald Romanik. Donald is the president of the Episcopal Church Foundation. The stated mission of the Episcopal Church Foundation is to strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses, and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry. Donald is also the author of *Beyond the Baptismal Covenant: Transformational Lay Leadership for the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century*.

Our second speaker will be Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook. Sheryl is Professor of Practical Theology and Religious Education at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont California, as well as Professor of Anglican Studies at the Episcopal Theological School at Claremont. Her most recent book, co-written with Fredrica Harris Thompsett is entitled, *Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations*.

Next will be Jim Lemler. Jim serves as rector of Christ Church, Greenwich CT. He is also the author of *Transforming Congregations*, as well as the series editor for “Transformations: The Episcopal Church in the 21st Century”, which includes other such titles as *Transforming Evangelism*, *Transforming Leadership*, *Transforming Vocation*, *Transforming Preaching*, *Transforming Stewardship*, and *Transforming Disciples*. You may see a pattern there.

Finally, we will hear from Barbara Wheeler. Barbara is one of the leading experts in theological education today. She currently serves as the director for the Center for Theological Education at Auburn Seminary in New York City, after having served as Auburn’s president for nearly 30 years. Barbara’s article on theological education is available for you all via your College for Bishops website.

Now, I am pleased to welcome Donald Romanik...

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Table-Level Questions for Reflection

What are the greatest issues facing your individual dioceses around the developing of leaders for evangelism?

How have you utilized the canonical provision for the licensing of “evangelists” in your dioceses? What training model(s) do you have in place for preparing those evangelists?

If you are not utilizing that canonical provision, why not?

How are our seminaries helpful/not helpful in developing leaders for evangelism?

What parts of the presentations from our speakers this afternoon particularly spoke to you – either positively or negatively?