

**Donald Romanik's Presentation at Meeting of the House of Bishops –
Developing Leadership for Evangelism**

Monday, September 20, 2010

Phoenix, AZ

In addressing the issue of developing leadership for evangelism within the broader theme of changing contexts for God's mission, I want to briefly suggest four ideas for your consideration, deliberation and perhaps even implementation.

1. Reclaiming our missionary roots.
2. Revamping our ordination processes to ensure that we raise up clergy who have the calling, skills and abilities to be evangelists.
3. Developing meaningful and appropriate processes for members of our congregations to discern their gifts for ministry and leadership, especially in this area of evangelism.
4. Reforming our governance structures which I believe inhibit rather than enhance our ability to evangelize our local communities.

Idea Number One. As we all know, the Episcopal Church was incorporated by an act of the legislature of the State of New York as "The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America as established in 1821, and since amended at various times". We have a long history of bringing the Gospel to all parts of the United States, this hemisphere and the entire world. We have trained and commissioned both lay and clergy leaders to be evangelists and missionaries and sent them out with our prayers, love and money. Society changed, life became more complex and missionary work lost much of its popularity and support.

Recently, we have done a better job of defining ourselves as a Church in mission. Too often, however, we tend to equate mission with outreach. According to the Book of Common Prayer, the Church pursues its mission "as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love." While I think we have done a good job

with prayer, worship, justice, peace and love, we have not been as effective in proclaiming the Gospel. Which brings me to Jesus. I firmly believe that there is nothing politically incorrect, exclusionary or inappropriate for a Christian, an Episcopalian and a priest or bishop, to boldly proclaim that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Unless and until we are able to do this with ease and comfort, but with appropriateness, context and grace our evangelism efforts will fail.

The Episcopal Church is not just another advocacy organization for peace and social justice. In fact, there are plenty of secular organizations that people can join if they want to work on these issues where they don't have to go to church on Sunday. Neither should we behave as liturgical Unitarians and simply articulate our social activism with vague references to divine or holy work in the world. People in our communities back home are hungry for the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Episcopal Church has a unique opportunity to fill that void. We have to better articulate that "we do what we do" and "we are who we are" not only because of our commitment to social justice but, more importantly, because we proclaim Jesus as Lord. We cannot allow our detractors to remove Jesus from our very core, essence and our being.

Idea Number Two. The Church needs to create effective and innovative processes that raise up potential clergy who are entrepreneurial leaders with the inherent skills and abilities to be evangelists in the world. As important as good pastors are, we have plenty of them. What we need are catalysts, facilitators, trainers, community organizers and people empowerers. And some of these new types of clergy are not going to make us warm and fuzzy as they challenge us to move beyond our comfort zones. Nevertheless, we need them and we need them now.

In many dioceses, and you know who you are, ordination is conferred on those who know how to jump through hoops, glad-hand the commission on ministry and get their paperwork in on time rather than for those emerging transformational leaders who have the call, potential and ability to proclaim the good news of Jesus to a broken world and the capacity to teach others to do the same.

Idea Number Three. During my twenty-five years of lay leadership in the Church prior to taking this current job, not once was I ever asked – “Donald, what are you passionate about and what do you feel God calling you to do?” I was simply put to work. Often, when someone expresses an interest in getting involved in a local parish or congregation, we give them a task to do, put them on a committee or, heaven forbid, the vestry. We ask accountants to be parish treasurers and kindergarten teachers to teach Sunday school without any process of discerning interests, calling or gifts for ministry. We continue to stick round pegs in square holes and wonder why there is leadership burnout. The Church needs to implement thoughtful, prayerful and contextual ways for people in our congregations to discern and determine appropriate roles in their local communities of faith. Who knows, in addition to church school teachers and vestry members, we may even identify people who feel called to invite their family and friends into a relationship with Jesus through the doors of the Episcopal Church.

Idea Number Four. The metaphor I like to use for the institutional Episcopal Church is a circle of friends holding hands facing inward rather than outward. We are very self-absorbed and are obsessed with our polity, politics and governance structures. We engage people by keeping them busy serving on committees, commissions, vestries and conventions rather than teaching and encouraging them to tell stories of their own faith journeys and become evangelists in their own right. No wonder many of our lay leaders are tired, frustrated and bored. Which brings me to General Convention. Doesn't it strike you as somewhat absurd, that for a denomination that has about 700,000 people in church on a good Sunday, we gather about a thousand elected representatives every three years for multiple days at great expense to engage in a process that resembles a high school “model congress” and pass resolutions that nobody really reads, few care about and are never really implemented. Imagine, if instead, we took this time to train and empower these same 1000 people to evangelize their local communities and proclaim their faith in the risen Christ.

The Episcopal Church needs and deserves a governance structure that is not only streamlined, but flexible, innovative, strategic and poised to respond to key priorities and changing needs including those associated with evangelism.

My friends, we have a powerful story to tell and we're not effectively telling it. "Leadership for Evangelism" requires new models, new approaches, new structures and new attitudes. It involves the development of effective partnerships between clergy and laypeople who are identified, trained and empowered to proclaim the Gospel as well as to share the prayerful, beautiful, graceful and inclusive way we express our faith in Christ through the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church.