



# Vital Practices

for leading congregations

Vestry: Listen to  
God's Call

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## Adapt or Die

BY KEN HOWARD

At a recent conference I was asked to speculate about what our parishes would look like a decade from now. My answer was brief: "One thing I can say with certainty is this: The only way our churches will look like they do now is if they have been stuffed and mounted and displayed in a museum of natural church history."

The context in which our congregations exist is shifting so dramatically that mere tweaking of method and message can no longer return us to health, let alone vitality. We are facing radical change – *radical* as in *going to the root* – requiring of us both radical recognition and radical response.

As congregational leaders, we must confront the fact that our churches are dying. While we may wish they were timeless and eternal, at the core our churches are living human organisms, and

dying is what all living organisms eventually do. But first they are born, live, adapt, create new life, and pass on their DNA to the next generation. We cannot insulate our churches from death without isolating them from the very process that would empower the next generation, not just to survive but also to thrive.

To guide our churches into a vital future, vestries and other church leaders must help our congregations to embrace their organic nature – to see death not as the ultimate failure but as the door to greater life. We need to help our congregations learn how to die in a way that plants the seeds of their resurrection. But how? How can we as congregational leaders learn this radical response and walk this counter-intuitive, paradoxical path? How do we help our congregations live into a more incarnational Christianity that values organism

over organization?

## Changing the Paradigm

If we as leaders are to help our congregations change their ways of doing Church, we first have to recognize that our old and familiar paradigm of Church is fading away, and that a new and unfamiliar paradigm of Church is emerging. And because the new paradigm is not yet fully present, we have to help our congregations learn to explore its pathways and boundaries.

Leading congregations in a time of paradigm shift is no easy task. Be wary of any who call themselves experts in times like these; when a paradigm shifts, everyone goes to zero. There are no experts, only fellow learners. While I do not claim to be an expert in the emerging paradigm of Church, I do have some experience in helping my own congregation – as well as a few other congregations and dioceses – to explore it. And I am willing to share some of what my congregation and I have learned since it was born in 1995.

My congregation began its journey into the emerging paradigm with an exploration of the Apostle Paul's image of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12):

*There are many members, yet one*

*body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (NRSV)*

We began to ask ourselves what our congregation would be like if we took this passage seriously. *If in this passage Paul is expressing his deeply organic understanding of the nature of Christian community, then how is God calling our own Christian community to live?* As we engaged this question with imagination and prayer, our image of Church began to shift. We began to think of Christian community less as an organizational structure in which people occupy various fixed and static roles, and more as a living organism that

grows, adapts to its environment, reproduces, thinks, and moves – one which has a vision and a calling implanted in its DNA by the Spirit of God.

As our paradigm of Church began to shift, our behaviors as leaders and as a congregation began to shift as well. We began asking ourselves additional "so what" questions. If we were to answer the call to become an organic, incarnational Christian community, how would we need to change:

- The way we think of congregational unity?
- The way we develop and articulate our congregational vision?
- The way we think about the lifecycle of our congregation?
- The way we organize to get things done?
- The way we develop our leaders, followers, and various working groups.

## What this Means

Wrestling with questions like these have led to profound shifts in how we think, what we do, and how we do it – shifts which are summarized in the following outline.

### **1. Unity: Moving from boundary-set unity to centered-set unity**

**When we think of church as an organization**, unity is achieved by clearly defining boundaries. Leadership asks, “What characteristics (e.g., doctrines, practices, etc.) separate THOSE WHO ARE A PART OF US from THOSE WHO ARE APART FROM US?”

**When we think of church as an organism**, unity is achieved by clearly defining focus. Leadership asks, “WHO is the center of our community?” (The answer was/is “Jesus”) and “HOW do we clarify our focus (on Jesus) and invite others to share with us in it?”

**The implication of this shift is that** we avoid making others into copies of ourselves and instead allow all of us together to be transformed into God’s image.

### **2. Vision: Moving from vision-setting to vision-birthing**

**When we think of church as an organization**, leadership creates and propagates an organizational vision. Leadership asks, “What is God calling this congregation to be and to do?”

**When we think of church as an organism**, leadership facilitates the emergence of a shared vision

from the congregation. Leadership asks, “How can we help our congregation discern what God is calling us to be and to do?” Leadership does this by paying attention to the gifts and callings of those participating in the life of the community and those God is calling into it.

**The implication of this shift is that** we remind ourselves to remain attentive to the Spirit’s movement in our congregation and in the world around us.

### **3. Moving from organizational permanence to congregational vitality**

**When we think of church as an organization**, leadership assumes current structures and processes are there for a good reason. Leadership asks, “HOW can we do WHAT we’re already doing more effectively?”

**When we think of church as an organism**, leadership assumes nothing. Leadership first asks, “WHY do we exist?” then, “HOW do we organize and behave to fulfill that calling?” then, “WHAT specific activities is God calling us to carry out?” Leadership also asks, “What does the congregation do that is so unique and valuable that it would be missed if the congregation ceased to exist?” and, “If our church were to die

today, what would the community around us write as our epitaph?” Leadership pays attention to what feeds and energizes the congregation (and the leadership) and finds ways to do those more of those kinds of things, while letting those things that do not promote congregational vitality die.

**The implication of this shift is that** we continuously rediscover and reconnect with our spiritual DNA, and allow ourselves to be watered and pruned by God’s Spirit.

### **4. Moving from hierarchical structure to organic networks**

**When we think of church as an organization**, leadership (and followership) is organized and structured via power, position, and turf. Leadership asks, “What COMMITTEES should a healthy church have?” and “Who can we get to lead and staff them?”

**When we think of church as an organism**, all congregational structures and processes are functional and provisional. Work is accomplished through small-group, co-led teams, which can expand and contract, as needed. Leadership asks, “What needs to be done?” then, “Who is called to be on a TEAM to do it?” then, “Which of its members are called to lead the team?”

**The implication of this shift is that** we assure that our structures and processes are nimble and flexible, capable of growing and adapting to our context.

### 5. Moving from individual perfection to interconnected completeness

**When we think of church as an organization,** leadership strives to help every individual person and part of the organization become as self-sufficiently effective as possible. Leadership asks, "What does this person/committee need to be the best, most well-rounded person/committee possible?"

**When we think of church as an organism,** leadership strives to help every person and part of the organization become more complete through interconnectedness with others. Leadership asks, "What connections can we forge between persons/teams that make them more complete in their interconnectedness?"

**The implication of this shift is that** we allow each person to give their best gifts and strengthen our organic interdependence as the body of Christ.

### An Invitation to Exploration

What I have offered above is not intended to be a quick fix or a step-by-step guide. It cannot be that because the new paradigm is still emerging. Think of it rather as an example of the kinds of questions your vestry will have to ask yourselves and your congregations if you commit yourselves to this journey.

One thing I can promise is this: Embracing the organic and incarnational nature of Christian community can both make your congregations more vital in the present and enable them to face the "changes and chances" of the future with adaptability and resilience. And it will make your job as leaders more exciting and creative, and perhaps even fun.

***Ken Howard** is the author of *Paradoxy: Creating Christian Community Beyond Us and Them* (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), the founder and director of *The Paradoxy Center for Incarnational Christianity at St. Nicholas Church*, and the rector of *St. Nicholas Episcopal Church in Germantown, Maryland*. *St. Nicholas Church* was the first successful church plant in its diocese in nearly forty years. Growing steadily since its start in 1995, it is in the top third of diocesan congregations in size and the top 5% in per capita giving. Ken's blog,*

*Paradoxical Thoughts* may be found at *PracticingParadoxy.com* and the website for *St. Nicholas Church* is *www.Saintnicks.com*.

### Resources

- Molting Out of Our Old Shells, a video interview with missionary and church planter Tom Brackett <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/molting-our-of-our-old-shells/>
- St. Nicholas Episcopal Church, Germantown, Maryland [www.Saintnicks.com](http://www.Saintnicks.com)
- Practicing Paradoxy blog [PracticingParadoxy.com](http://PracticingParadoxy.com)
- Paradoxy: Creating Christian Community Beyond Us and Them by Ken Howard (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010) <http://practicingparadoxy.com/books/paradoxy-book/>

## Editor's Letter

Welcome 2014!

That beginning of a new year offers a clean slate: A chance to start over, to rid oneself of unproductive habits; an opportunity to be more of those things one would like to be more of, and less of those things that weigh us down. In 2014, my resolution is to minimize the stress I create for myself – to pay attention to the ways I can unnecessarily complicate things, to teach myself to recognize the triggers, and to learn how to keep things simple.

For many congregations, January brings annual meetings and vestry elections. Changes in leadership teams bring opportunities for new ways of looking at the familiar challenges related to congregational finances, membership, and mission. As new vestries form, fresh perspectives emerge as the group begins their work together to discern what God is calling them to do.

In our January Vestry Papers, we share stories and experiences of congregations and vestries who are facing – and successfully navigating – the realities of a changing world while remaining faithful to

God's call.

Here are their stories:

- Doing things the same way is unlikely to produce different results, yet often organizations are unsure about how to break out of old patterns. In “Adapt or Die,” Ken Howard shares the process congregational leaders at St. Nicholas Episcopal Church in Germantown, Maryland use to live into a more incarnational Christianity.
- As annual meetings and vestry elections approach, some congregations find it difficult to recruit nominees for vestry and other leadership positions. When John Mark Wiggers learned this was a challenge for his new congregation at St. James Church in Knoxville, Tenn., he saw an opportunity to explore a different method of vestry selection. “Apostolic Selection? Choosing Vestry Members” is the story of what’s working for St. James. Available in English and Spanish.
- Making people feel valued and welcome is key to building community. In “Feeling

Valued,” high school senior Ariana Gonzales-Bonillas invites congregational leaders to reflect on the ways youth are valued – or not – in their congregation. Available in English and Spanish.

- Imagine if every vestry included a member who helped everyone keep Christ at the center of every conversation. In “Why Not, if it is for Christ?” Denis C. Brunelle shares a practice vestries can use to deepen their own discernment skills, one he learned from a man named Roy.
- How might a congregation ‘refresh’ its spiritual identity, keeping it front and center in all that they do? “Ongoing Discernment: The Way of Jesus” by Blair Pogue shares how St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church keeps Christ at the center of all they do through their practices Dwelling in the Word and The Way of Jesus.
- You’ve been elected or selected senior warden for your congregation. You’re eager to take on this challenge and, truth be told, a bit anxious. Demi

Prentiss' "Roadmap for Senior Wardens," weaves the collective experience of senior wardens into a practical orientation tool to help you get started.

- Can the Episcopal Church learn something from Tevye of "Fiddler on the Roof?" In "Stirrings of the Spirit" Tom Ely and Susan Ohlindal use Tevye's struggle to adapt to the changes he faces to introduce the ways the Episcopal Church in Vermont is "open [ing] our selves to new understandings and expressions of what it means to be spiritual beings."
- Might the way you run your meetings be keeping people away from leadership positions? Many of us have sat through meetings that drone on and on, spending valuable time dealing with routine reports or rehashing business from earlier meetings. To help congregational leaders break that cycle, Bob Schorr offers "The Consent Agenda: More Efficient Meetings."

These new Vestry Papers articles represent just a small portion of the resources available on the ECF Vital Practices' website? Use the Topics index on each page of the site to find other resources related to serving on the vestry including past Vestry Papers articles, blog posts, and the many resources found in our Your Turn and Tools sections.

What else is new this month? If you are interested in seeing our Spanish language content, please visit our new, searchable index for our Spanish content at <http://www.ecfvp.org/topics/language/>; then click on the "ECFVP en Español" button on the right side of the page.

As your congregation welcome new vestry members this month, please remember to share this issue of Vestry Papers with them and to invite them to subscribe to ECF Vital Practices and Vestry Papers. Subscriptions are free; visit [ECFVP.org](http://ECFVP.org) and click on the Subscribe tab on the upper right hand corner of this page. New subscribers are asked to fill out a short registration form to have

Vestry Papers and ECF Vital Practices content delivered twice a month to your email inbox.

Faithfully,

Nancy

Nancy Davidge

PS: To make it easier to find the resources offered through *ECF Vital Practices*, please consider adding a link to ECF Vital Practices to your website. Here's how: Using your websites 'add a link' tool, insert our full URL – <http://www.ecfvp.org/>.

PPS: Do you live in an area with limited Internet access? If you have a smart phone, consider browsing ECF Vital Practices from your mobile device; the site has been optimized for smart phones which makes it easier to search for content.

# *Apostolic Selection? Choosing Vestry*

BY JOHN MARK WIGGERS

In recruiting people for the ministry of vestry I have found several points of hesitation on the part of potential nominees. I often hear stories of people who stood for election and were surprised how hurt they were when they were not elected. Others felt that they were not well known enough to be elected even though they were faithful in serving the congregation and had something to offer by serving on the vestry. When I came to serve as rector of St. James, Knoxville, Tennessee I saw an opportunity to explore the matter of vestry selection. There had to be a better way to select vestry members than an election that might favor the popular and exclude gifted ministers.

A friend recounted that he had served in a parish where vestry members were selected by randomly drawing the number needed from a pool of nominees. I asked my bishop, George Young, what he thought about this process and he was excited. In fact, he had practiced this method in a congregation where he had served. I discussed the prospect with the senior warden and other leaders. We then presented this to the vestry to consider allowing the parish to

propose a change in our parish by-laws. The vestry liked the idea and we set about informing the parish of the proposed change.

In a letter to the congregation, the parish newsletter, and Sunday announcements we referenced Acts 1:15-26 where Peter called the apostles together to choose someone to replace Judas. The apostles chose two faithful people, prayed, and cast lots. Now we don't think of our former vestry members as being like Judas, but choosing faithful candidates and asking for God's guidance resonated with many of us. We also had two opportunities to discuss the by-law change during public forums prior to our annual meeting.

At our annual meeting the discussion was more heated than the earlier forums. Those who dissented primarily did so out of a spirit of democracy. They wanted their vote to count. It was noted that this matter of selection called on us to carefully consider our nominees. We also wrestled with whether to allow nominations from the floor in this process. We decided to allow nominations from the floor and to encourage parishioners to prayer-

fully and deliberately engage the nomination process. By the end of the meeting a by-law change was approved allowing us to "select" vestry members rather than "elect" them.

We've now used this process for three years. Our nominating committee, comprised of the four outgoing members, carefully considers candidates for nomination. At our last annual meeting we presented eight well qualified candidates for four available seats on the vestry. During the meeting we shared stories of ministry, naming all of the nominees as capable leaders. We prayed for God's guidance and recalled the apostles' example. We then chose four other members of the congregation to come and share about a ministry that they are part of after which he or she was invited to randomly select one name from the eight names placed in a basket.

Eight nominations was a high for St. James. I feel that our selection process was encouraging to some who might not have stood for vestry otherwise. I am finding that those who are not selected do not feel rejected but affirmed by the parish. This process calls on

the parish to recognize and name faithful leaders among us. On a practical note, I personally appreciate doing away with the logistics of balloting and focusing instead on stories of ministry.

Months after we initially made the by-law change someone asked me if we were still going ahead with allowing nominations from the floor. They were concerned that such a nomination could be used in a manipulative way. I expressed that I certainly hoped that all nominations could be considered and made in advance of the meeting. Even so, I acknowledged that we would continue to allow nominations from the floor and that this was probably the right thing to do. To this the parishioner replied, "Wow! You really do believe in God!" Yes, I do. I don't think voting by ballot promotes disbelief, but I find the selection process we are using calls on the faithful to trust that God will guide us and provide the leaders we need.

**John Mark Wiggers** serves as the rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. He has been ordained 14 years and served in Dothan, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia. John Mark and his wife Liz have two boys (14 and 8), and share a love of cooking, board games, and documentaries. The whole family loves serving at

camp and youth retreats. They hope to start a family band if the parents start practicing their instruments.

### Resources

- Build a Healthy Vestry by Janie Kirt Morris <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vital-vestries/build-a-healthy-vestry/> (in English and Spanish)
- St. James Episcopal Church, Knoxville <http://stjamesknox.dioet.org>
- St. James Episcopal Church – Selection bylaw <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/a-different-way-to-choose-a-vestry/> (in English and Spanish)
- Vestry Selection by Anne Ditzler <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/vestry-selection-2/>
- Vestry Discernment Process by Janie Kirt Morris <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/vestry-discernment-process/> (in English and Spanish)

# ¿Selección Apostólica?

BY JOHN MARK WIGGERS

Al reclutar gente para el ministerio de la junta parroquial encontré varios puntos de vacilación en los posibles candidatos. A menudo oí historias de personas que habían presentado candidatura y lo dolidos que se habían sentido al no ser elegidos. Otros sintieron que no eran suficientemente conocidos como para ser elegidos, a pesar de servir fielmente en la feligresía y de tener algo que ofrecer como integrantes de la junta parroquial. Cuando asumí la rectoría de St. James, Knoxville, Tennessee, vi una oportunidad para explorar el tema de la selección de los miembros de la junta parroquial. Tenía que haber una manera mejor que una elección que podría favorecer a los candidatos más populares y excluir a candidatos dotados.

Un amigo me contó que había servido en una parroquia en la que los miembros de la junta parroquial se elegían sacando al azar el número necesario de un conjunto de candidatos. Le pregunté a mi obispo, George Young, qué pensaba de este proceso y se entusiasmó mucho. De hecho, lo había empleado en una feligresía en la que había servido. Hablamos

sobre el proyecto con el coadyutor y otros líderes. A continuación le presentamos la idea a la junta parroquial para que considerara permitir que se cambiaran los estatutos de nuestra parroquia. A la junta parroquial le gustó la idea y empezamos a informar el cambio propuesto a la feligresía.

En una carta a la feligresía, en el boletín de la parroquia y en anuncios los domingos mencionamos Hechos 1:15-26, donde Pedro pide a los apóstoles que elijan a alguien para que reemplace a Judas. Los apóstoles eligieron dos fieles, oraron y seleccionaron al azar. Evidentemente no pensamos que los miembros anteriores de la junta parroquial son como Judas, pero elegir candidatos fieles y pedir orientación a Dios resonó con muchos nosotros. También tuvimos dos oportunidades de hablar sobre el cambio en los estatutos durante foros públicos anteriores a nuestra reunión anual.

En nuestra reunión anual la discusión fue más acalorada que de costumbre. Los que disintieron lo hicieron principalmente por espíritu de democracia. Querían

que su voto contara. Se señaló que este método de selección requería que consideráramos cuidadosamente nuestros nombramientos. También debatimos si permitiríamos que los presentes nombraran candidatos en este proceso. Decidimos permitir que los presentes nombraran candidatos e instamos a los feligreses a que en oración y deliberadamente participaran en el proceso de nombramiento. Al final de la reunión se aprobó un cambio en los estatutos que nos permitiría “seleccionar” a los miembros de la junta parroquial en lugar de “elegirlos.”

Hemos empleado este proceso por tres años. Nuestro comité de nombramiento, formado por los cuatro miembros que finalizan su mandato, considera cuidadosamente los candidatos a nombramiento. En nuestra última reunión anual presentamos ocho candidatos bien cualificados para cuatro puestos disponibles en nuestra junta parroquial. Durante la reunión compartimos historias de ministerio y nombramos a todos los candidatos como líderes capaces. Oramos por la orientación de Dios y recordamos el ejemplo de los apóstoles. Después elegimos a cuatro otros

miembros de la feligresía para que vinieran y nos hablaran sobre un ministerio del que eran parte. A continuación se les solicitó que eligieran un nombre al azar de los ocho que se habían puesto en un cesto.

Ocho nombramientos era un número elevado para St. James. Creo que nuestro proceso de selección alentó a algunos que de lo contrario no se habrían ofrecido para servir en la junta parroquial. Hallo que los que no resultan elegidos no se sienten rechazados, sino afirmados por la feligresía. Este proceso requiere que la parroquia reconozca y nombre a los líderes fieles entre nosotros. Desde el punto de vista práctico, aprecio personalmente no tener que pasar por la logística de las papeletas y en lugar de ello concentrarme en historias de ministerios.

Meses después de que hicimos los cambios en los estatutos alguien me preguntó si seguiríamos con la idea de permitir que los presentes nombraran candidatos. Les preocupaba que ese método pudiera conducir a manipulaciones. Dije que esperaba sinceramente que todos los nombramientos se consideraran y realizaran antes de la reunión. Incluso así, admití que seguiríamos permitiendo que los presentes realizaran nombramientos y que probablemente eso

era lo correcto. A ello el feligrés respondió, “¡Oh, usted realmente cree en Dios! Sí, creo en Dios. No me parece que votar por papeleta promueve dejar de creer, pero sí creo que el proceso de selección que empleamos requiere que los fieles confíen en que Dios nos guiará y nos proporcionará los líderes que necesitamos.

*John Mark Wiggers es rector de la Iglesia Episcopal St. James en Knoxville, TN. Ha estado ordenado por 14 años y sirvió en Dothan, AL y Atlanta, GA. John Mark y su esposa Liz tienen dos hijos, de 14 y 8 años de edad. Disfrutan cocinar, jugar juegos de mesa y ver películas documentales. Toda la familia disfruta servir en campamentos y retiros espirituales de jóvenes. Esperan crear una banda de música familiar si los padres empiezan a practicar sus instrumentos.*

### Resources

- Formación de Juntas Parroquiales Sanas, por Janie Kirt Morris <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vital-vestries/build-a-healthy-vestry/> (disponible en inglés y español)
- St. James Episcopal Church, Knoxville <http://stjamesknox.dioet.org>
- St. James Episcopal Church – Estatutos de selección <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/a-different-way-to-choose-a-vestry/>

[www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/a-different-way-to-choose-a-vestry/](http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/a-different-way-to-choose-a-vestry/)

- Vestry Selection por Anne Ditzler <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/vestry-selection-2/>
- Vestry Discernment Process por Janie Kirt Morris <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/vestry-discernment-process/>

# Feeling Valued

BY ARIANA GONZALES-BONILLA

*Editor's Note: As editor of ECF Vital Practices I watch – and listen – for common challenges congregational leaders face. Often congregational leaders are interested in learning more about how to attract – and keep – our youth and young adults interested in church. After 'meeting' high school senior and lay deputy Ariana Gonzales-Bonilla through the pages of the November 2013 Episcopal Journal and being introduced to her experience at all levels of our church, from congregational youth group to General Convention, I invited her to reflect on things vestries might consider when it comes to strengthening their youth and young adult presence.*

On a recent Sunday, shortly before Christmas, there were about fifteen teenagers present in my high school youth group at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Chandler, Arizona. This was a low Sunday for us, in a group that does not include middle school students, or the 3rd through 6th graders. In total, the youth group at St. Matthew's has about 50 youth from grades 3rd to 12th. The Sunday School has more children, from nursery age to 2nd grade.

Welcome to a family church. In 2012, St. Matthew's had 641 members, 355 that regularly attend Sunday services. What is working for us: the adults on vestry recognize that the youth are vital to the church and the adults that facilitate youth group make an effort to be a part of the youth's lives and care for them and want to help them to grow not only in their faith but also in the world while keeping their faith. This focus on youth is a big part of why St. Matthew's is growing.

Here's what I have learned from my experience at St. Matthew's, as well as through participation at diocesan events and church camp, the Episcopal Youth Event, and the 2012 General Convention Official Youth Presence:

- Youth are vital. Making them feel included, not only by the adults, but also by their own peers, is the key to greater youth participation across the church at all levels. When youth are making friends in church, we tend to feel more included and want to attend more often. The youth group will grow when they find church to be an

enriching environment for their faith and life where they can make friends and bring friends to share in their blessings. Vestries should consider hiring a director of children and youth ministries to welcome youth to the church; preferably this person will be a "teenager-in-an-adult-body" to make that first teenage connection.

- On all levels of the church – local, diocesan, provincial, and national – we must let the youth and young adults know that they are cared for by caring about their spiritual well being. Young adults should be included in youth ministries because they still need guidance and are they are also vital to the church.
- A new ministry at St. Matthew's that I am excited about is the help being offered to high school seniors and recent graduates in finding a new spiritual home as they move away from Chandler and St. Matthew's. This ministry is about the community taking care of their young adults as they grow into their independence.

■ We must also let youth know that they are important by caring about their opinion. At St. Matthew's, "PB & Jesus" is a youth-founded and youth-led ministry that provides food for people who are homeless in downtown Phoenix. Started a few years ago by two teenagers who have since graduated from high school, another youth group member and I now lead PB & Jesus, motivating others to commit to this ministry the first Sunday of every month. The adults drive us downtown and pay for the supplies, but they acknowledge that the youth are the ones running it and keeping it vital and fresh in ideas. This ministry is one way St. Matthew's recognizes youth's power to help others.

The dilemma with religion and faith is that there are collective beliefs and you want everyone to have a similar experience in their upbringing in youth group, but then Protestants also want to have their own individual experience in faith. You don't want to be the boring youth group that reads from a book and expects the youth to answer run-of-the-mill questions. This might ask the youth to participate, but teenagers and the younger kids that look up to them are not enthusiastic about being put "on the spot." Youth group is neither fun nor deep then; it

becomes superficial because the discussion is stagnant. Faith is what needs to be discussed in a memorable way, and each individual will develop his or her own faith from this. For instance, one of the most memorable lessons to me in youth group – out of many – was about doubt and how we can grow in our faith from having doubt. But to start the lesson, the leaders set up pitchers labeled with a doubt, such as "God exists," "Miracles exist," "God loves me personally," etc. Each youth received a cup of green water, and we poured water into the pitchers with the statements we doubted sometimes. Most people put water in "God exists," but no one put water in "God loves me personally." From the following discussion, I learned that even as I doubt, my faith is stronger because of it. This is how youth come back to church to stay: the company is fun, but the lessons should encourage participation and be memorable and meaningful to their lives.

Ultimately, the youth will come to the church that accepts them and expects them to be leaders instead of the afterthought.

Interested in growing your youth group? Then ask yourself these questions:

1. How does your congregation today take care of the youth in

your congregation?

2. How are you encouraging or empowering the youth already present at your church to become leaders?

3. Churches with vibrant youth programs recognize the value they bring to the congregation; what benefits do the youth in your congregation add to the church?

4. Does your congregation facilitate youth founded and youth led ministry?

5. In what ways are your Sunday School and/or youth programs creating space for youth to discover their faith?

**Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas** is a lay deputy for the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona to the 2015 General Convention. She has written for the *Episcopal Journal*, was part of the *General Convention Official Youth Presence in 2012*, and is part of the *Episcopal Youth Event Planning Team for 2014*. Ariana will graduate with the high school class of 2014 and is a candidate for the *International Baccalaureate Diploma*.

## Resources

■ St. Matthew's Church <http://saintmatthewschurch.org/>

- Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) 2014 <http://www.episcopal-church.org/page/episcopal-youth-event-2014>
  
- General Convention 2012 Youth Presence <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/document/final-report-general-convention-official-youth-presence-general-convention-childrens-progra>
  
- St. Matthew's General Parental Consent and Medical Release Form/Annual Participation Agreement [http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/permission\\_slips](http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/permission_slips)
  
- St Matthew's Youth Group [http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/youth\\_groups](http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/youth_groups)
  
- St. Matthew's Youth Newsletter <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/YG-News--September--2013.html?soid=11>

# Sentirse Valorados

POR ARIANA GONZÁLES-BONILLA

*Nota de la redacción: Como jefa de redacción de ECF Vital Practices observo – y escucho – los retos comunes que enfrentan los líderes de las feligresías. A menudo los líderes de las feligresías están interesados en aprender más sobre atraer – y retener – a nuestros jóvenes y adultos jóvenes interesados en la iglesia. Después de ‘conocer’ a la estudiante de último año de la escuela secundaria y diputada lega Ariana Gonzales-Bonilla mediante las páginas del Episcopal Journal de noviembre de 2013 y de haber sido introducida a su experiencia en todos los niveles de nuestra iglesia -- desde grupos de jóvenes de la feligresía hasta la Convención General --, la invité a que reflexionara sobre cosas que las juntas parroquiales podrían considerar en lo referente a reforzar la presencia de jóvenes y de adultos jóvenes.*

En un domingo reciente, poco antes de Navidad, había unos quince adolescentes presentes en mi grupo de jóvenes de escuela secundaria en la Iglesia Episcopal St. Matthew's en Chandler, Arizona. Ese era un domingo bajo para nosotros, en un grupo que no incluye estudiantes de escuela intermedia ni del 3er al 6º grado. En total, el grupo de St.

Matthew's tiene unos 50 jóvenes de grados 3ero a 12º. La Escuela Dominical tiene más niños, desde el preescolar al 2º grado.

Bienvenidos a una iglesia familiar. En 2012, St. Matthew's tenía 641 miembros, 355 de los cuales asistían regularmente al servicio religioso dominical. Lo que está funcionando para nosotros es que los adultos en la junta parroquial reconocen que los jóvenes son fundamentales para la iglesia y que los adultos que facilitan grupos de jóvenes se esfuerzan en ser parte de las vidas de esos jóvenes, se preocupan por ellos y desean ayudarlos a crecer no sólo en su fe, sino también en el mundo conservando su fe. Esta concentración en los jóvenes es una parte importante del motivo por el St. Matthew's está creciendo.

Esto es lo que aprendí de mi experiencia en St. Matthew's, así como mediante la participación en eventos diocesanos y en el campamento de la iglesia, en el Evento de Jóvenes Episcopales y en la Presencia Oficial de Jóvenes en la Convención General de 2012:

Los jóvenes son esenciales. Hacer

que se sientan incluidos, no sólo por los adultos, sino también por sus pares, es fundamental para que haya una mayor participación de jóvenes en todos los niveles de la iglesia. Cuando los jóvenes estamos haciendo amistades en la iglesia, tendemos a sentirnos más incluidos y deseamos asistir más a menudo. El grupo de jóvenes crece cuando halla que la iglesia es un medio enriquecedor de su fe y su vida, donde pueden hacer amistades y traer amigos para que compartan sus bendiciones. Las juntas parroquiales deben considerar contratar un director de ministerio de niños y jóvenes para darles la bienvenida a los jóvenes a la iglesia; preferentemente esa persona debe ser un “adolescente en el cuerpo de un adulto”, para hacer esa primera conexión con los adolescentes.

En todos los niveles de la iglesia: local, diocesano, provincial y nacional, debemos permitir que los jóvenes y los adultos jóvenes sientan que adultos que se realmente se preocupan por ellos velan por su bienestar espiritual. Los adultos jóvenes deben ser incluidos en ministerios de jóvenes porque todavía necesitan orientación y son sumamente importantes para la

iglesia.

Un nuevo ministerio en St. Matthew's que me entusiasma mucho es la ayuda que se ofrece a los estudiantes del último año de escuela secundaria y a los graduados recientes para encontrar un nuevo hogar espiritual a medida que se mudan lejos de Chandler y St. Matthew's. Este ministerio es sobre la comunidad ocupándose de sus adultos jóvenes a medida que se independizan.

También dejamos hacerles saber a los jóvenes que son importantes indicándoles que su opinión cuenta. En St. Matthew's, "PB & Jesus" es un ministerio fundado y encabezado por jóvenes que proporciona comida a gente sin hogar en la ciudad de Phoenix. Fue iniciado hace algunos años por dos adolescentes que desde entonces terminaron la escuela secundaria y otro miembro del grupo de jóvenes, y ahora yo lidero PB & Jesus, motivando a otros a que se comprometan a ser parte de este ministerio el primer domingo de cada mes. Los adultos nos llevan al centro de la ciudad y pagan los suministros, pero aceptan que los jóvenes son los que lo manejan y que lo mantienen activo y con nuevas ideas. Este ministerio es una manera en que St. Matthew's reconoce el poder de los jóvenes de ayudar al prójimo.

El dilema con la religión y la fe es que hay creencias colectivas y que usted desea que todos tengan una experiencia similar en grupos de jóvenes, pero asimismo los protestantes quieren tener su propia experiencia en la fe. Usted no desea ser el grupo de jóvenes aburridísimo que lee de un libro y espera que los jóvenes contesten preguntas trilladas. Esto puede pedir a los jóvenes que participen, pero a los adolescentes y a los niños más pequeños que los imitan no les gusta que los pongan en situaciones incómodas. En esos casos el grupo de jóvenes no es ni divertido ni profundo: pasa a ser superficial porque la discusión es algo estancado. La fe es algo que se necesita discutir de manera memorable para que cada individuo desarrolle su propia fe a partir de ello. Por ejemplo, una de las lecciones más memorables que tuve en mi grupo de jóvenes – entre muchas – fue sobre la duda y cómo podemos fortalecer nuestra fe a partir de la duda. Pero para iniciar la lección los líderes pusieron jarras vacías con etiquetas con una duda, tales como "Dios existe", "Los milagros existen", "Dios me ama personalmente", etc. Cada joven recibió un vaso de agua verde y lo vertió en la jarra con el enunciado de lo que a veces ponía en duda. La mayoría de la gente vertió agua en "Dios existe", pero nadie puso agua en "Dios me ama personalmente." En la

conversación subsiguiente aprendí que incluso si dudo mi fe es más fuerte a causa de ello. Es así como los jóvenes regresan a la iglesia para quedarse: la compañía es divertida, pero las lecciones estimulan la participación y son memorables y significativas para sus vidas.

Finalmente, los jóvenes acudirán a la iglesia que los acepte y que espere que sean líderes, en lugar de algo accesorio.

¿Está interesado en formar un grupo de jóvenes? Entonces hágase estas preguntas:

- 1) ¿De qué manera su feligresía se ocupa actualmente de los jóvenes en su feligresía?
- 2) ¿Cómo está estimulando o empoderando a los jóvenes que ya están presentes en su iglesia para que se conviertan en líderes?
- 3) Las iglesias con programas dinámicos para jóvenes reconocen el valor que traen a la feligresía; ¿qué beneficios añaden a la iglesia los jóvenes en su feligresía?
- 4) ¿Facilita su feligresía ministerios fundados por jóvenes y ministerios encabezados por jóvenes?
- 5) ¿De qué maneras sus programas de Escuela Dominical y/o de jóvenes crea espacio para que los jóvenes descubran su fe?

**Ariana Gonzalez-Bonilla** es diputada lega de la Diócesis Episcopal de Arizona a la Convención General de 2015. Ha escrito para el *Episcopal Journal*, fue parte de la *Presencia Oficial de Jóvenes en la Convención General de 2012* y es parte del *Equipo de Planificación de Jóvenes Episcopales para 2014*. Ariana se graduará de la escuela secundaria en la clase de 2014 y es candidata al *Diploma International Baccalaureate*.

de St. Matthew's [http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/permission\\_slips](http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/permission_slips)

- Grupo de Jóvenes de St Matthew's [http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/youth\\_groups](http://saintmatthewschurch.org/saintmatthews/youth_groups)
- Boletín de Jóvenes de St. Matthew's <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/YG-News--September--2013.html?soid=11>

## Recursos

- Episcopal Youth Event (Evento Episcopal de Jóvenes, EYE) 2014 <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/episcopal-youth-event-2014>
- Presencia de Jóvenes en la Convención General de 2012 (General Convention 2012 Youth Presence) <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/document/final-report-general-convention-official-youth-presence-general-convention-childrens-progra>
- St. Matthew's Church <http://saintmatthewschurch.org/>
- Consentimiento de Padres y Formulario de Exención de Responsabilidad Médica/ Acuerdo de Participación Anual

## Why Not, if it is for Christ?

BY DENIS C. BRUNELLE

Allow me to tell you about a member of a parish where I was rector. He was a man who possessed incredible faith. “Roy” would sit at vestry meetings and listen to all the plans and dreams and proposals presented. Then he would ask searching questions. After he was satisfied, he would always say the same thing, **“Why not, if it is for Christ and his kingdom?”**

His words were so predictable that some of the vestry decided to see how far they could go and still get the same response. They came up with a lavish proposal, an idea that seemed totally ridiculous. No way could the parish ever work hard enough to see the proposal accomplished. But they presented it and this man listened. He asked his searching questions, and when they were through, he said, **“Why not, if it is for Christ and his kingdom? If we are doing this for Christ, and God is a part of it, why not?”**

Roy shared with us all the longing to invest in things that matter, and to have the parish in which we serve be successful. Our hope is to ensure that when we step aside, our congregations exist stronger and more faithful for the next gen-

eration. No easy task in today’s environment.

In essence Roy had a discerning heart — if the parish is doing this for Christ, why not! Discernment is the spiritual discipline of seeking clarity in identifying the mission of the parish and how the parish (vestry) will respond to God’s call. **Discernment means that every member of the vestry comes together not for his/her own purpose, but for the well being of the larger community, putting it first in both vision and decision making.** Discernment means making a habit of noticing and reflecting on what each member hears God calling the parish to be and to do.

Discernment does mean prayer. Not just a hurried prayer “lifted up” just prior to making a decision, but an established life of prayer.

Discernment involves a commitment to keep going so that the good of all people is represented by the decision — where little or no self-centered motivation is observed in the decision making process. Discernment brings

about a sense of peace and “rightness” for the whole vestry and parish once the decision is made.

So how does this apply to such mundane things as spending money, repairing buildings, mutual ministry reviews? The spiritual discipline of discernment requires vestries to first look at ministry/mission and then evaluate all aspects of stewardship in light of that mission.

Discernment values the gifts of time, talent, and treasure more from the dynamic process of “can do” than one of limitations. Discernment leads vestries and congregations into the process of valuing people more than buildings and programs.

Discernment leads vestries into being mutual ministers of the spiritual life of the parish with their priest. Discernment does not allow for sacred cows/bulls (buildings, groups, programs). Rather, the faithful are led in their call to be disciples of the Savior. Vestries actively involved in the discernment process of decision making are more willing to try the new and are more willing to step

out in faith and take the risks that God will guide them in that boldness of faith.

Ultimately that is the bottom line of discernment — not the bottom line as pertains to finances or even numerical bodies of people sitting in pews — but the bottom line of discernment as the call to faithfulness in discipleship and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Practical? Not to the world and the way it accounts for things! Fiscally responsible? Absolutely — in that we show the ultimate stewardship for the whole life of a parish! **After all, it is for Christ and his kingdom. Why not?**

*Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the January 2008 Vestry Papers issue on Vestry Meetings.*

**Denis C. Brunelle** serves as rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in East Hampton, NY. A former director of the George Mercer, Jr. Memorial School of Theology in the Diocese of Long Island, Denis began his ministry as a retreat director in the Cleveland, Ohio area. Ordained in 1978, Canon Brunelle worked for four years out of the MSC Center in Shelby, Ohio and the Jesuit Retreat House in Parma, Ohio and is a certified spiritual director. He has served parishes in Ohio, Illinois, California, West Virginia and Long

Island.

## Resources

- "A Bible Study for Difficult Decisions" by Jane Patterson and John Lewis, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, November 2008 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/spiritual-discernment/a-bible-study-for-difficult-decisions/>
- "Cultivating a Culture of Discernment" by Blair Pogue, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, January 2010 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/discernment/cultivating-a-culture-of-discernment/>
- "Discerning Individual Gifts on the Vestry" by John de Beer, , ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, July 2010 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/discernment/discerning-individual-gifts-on-the-vestry/>
- "Vestry Discernment Begins with the Soul" by Will Thompson, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, January 2010 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/discernment/vestry-discernment-begins-with-the-soul/>

# Ongoing Discernment: Way of Jesus

BY BLAIR POGUE

In July 2010 I wrote a short piece for Vestry Papers discussing ways my vestry and I have worked to create a culture of discernment at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, St. Paul, Minn. Since 2006, ongoing wondering conversations about what God is up to in our church, neighborhoods, and lives have played an important role in shaping our communal imagination and life. One of the great gifts of this emerging congregational culture – the fruit of it – was the ability to discern a way of life our entire faith community could embrace. This was a pretty amazing feat given the fact that the people of St. Matthew's come from all over the U.S. and world (twelve non-Western nations are represented), are dispersed throughout the Twin Cities metro area, and come from many different theological backgrounds.

For those who did not see my earlier essay, over the past nine years the people of St. Matthew's have committed to beginning every meeting with prayer and a time of "dwelling" in scripture. Dwelling consists of engaging scripture imaginatively, wondering about it and paying attention to the words and images that jump out

at us. It is part Lectio Divina, part Ignatian prayer, and part Godly Play. In the biblical story of the Pearl of Great Price, for example, someone might wonder what the pearl was, or why someone was willing to give everything to possess it. We also invite participants to raise a question they would like to ask a biblical scholar. This question is not answered, however, until the dwelling time is over. Dwelling is about raising questions, not answering them. One of the objectives is to show lay leaders that engaging with scripture doesn't require a seminary-trained "expert." God can speak to them and their daily experiences through scripture.

Over time Dwelling in the Word has become one of our core communal spiritual practices. The other is Eucharist. Almost every time members of our faith community gather together, they engage in one of these practices. While these practices are powerful in themselves, we often don't create spaces for people to interpret them theologically together. In many different venues, continually, and over time, we have intentionally cultivated spaces to reflect on how the biblical

story and Christian practices relate to our daily lives.

Two years ago the vestry oversaw a more in-depth discernment or wondering process, as we sought to discover what the people of St. Matthew's and all who joined us thought about God and God's movement in their daily lives. We wanted to learn more about their hopes and hungers, and what they wanted to learn about the Christian faith. We wanted to know if it was possible to come up with a shared vision of the Christian life in our particular context. We also wanted to learn more about the language and spiritual practices that spoke most deeply to the people entrusted to our care.

Once the vestry agreed to undertake this more intensive discernment effort, we appointed a discipleship task force comprised of vestry members and others in our community interested in learning more about how the people of St. Matthew's understand God, and what they would like to learn more about. After some initial planning meetings, always beginning with prayer and dwelling in scripture, they came up with a series of

groups representing a broad cross section of our community – from people who grew up in the Anglican Church overseas, to twenty-somethings, to empty nesters, to parents of young children. The groups were asked questions like, “What does it mean to you to follow the Way of Jesus in daily life?”

After all the interviews were done, the discipleship task force presented what they learned, and the questions this learning raised, to the congregation at the annual meeting. This brought everybody on board early in the game. The presentation was preceded and followed by many newsletter articles letting people know what was happening and what was being learned.

The Way of Jesus Task Force followed on the heels of the work of the former task force. For this group, I looked for lay leaders who tended to be theological – people who often asked what God was up to in a particular situation, or were able to connect the themes of a particular conversation or meeting to biblical themes or stories. This group conducted additional focus groups, asking more finely honed questions, and then sat with and prayed over all the “data,” all the words and insights that had emerged. And somewhat amazingly to this group, eight spiritual practices emerged clearly: story,

prayer, simplicity, discernment, reconciliation, hospitality, generosity, and gratitude. We came up with short descriptions for each of these spiritual practices, trying to use fresh and non-churchy language. We then drew on the expertise of vestry members who excelled in process, and learned from them how to “test out” these practices to see how they resonated with the congregation.

The Way of Jesus at St. Matthew’s was shared publicly in September 2013. Since then it has been our spiritual GPS. Whenever a new idea comes up at St. Matthew’s (I am presented with multiple great ideas every week), we can now ask, “how does that relate to the Way of Jesus at St. Matthew’s?” It has given us focus. Because it emerged from the congregation rather than being imposed by the clergy, staff, or the vestry, there is widespread acceptance and engagement. From the beginning we have made it clear that this Way of Jesus is not one more program, but a way of life intended to help us as we live out our faith in the world.

Those facilitating gatherings to learn more about each of these spiritual practices make no assumptions that people know what spiritual practices like prayer are, or how to pray. At each gathering we dwell in a scripture text related to the spiritual practice. We

ask questions like, what is prayer? Or have you ever had a powerful experience of prayer? We teach people different ways to pray that they can then try out during the week. We also assign simple “homework” like praying for the people you encounter during the day, and people come back the following Sunday to share stories of what happened. Probably most importantly, these gatherings are relatively safe co-learning spaces. Participants can ask any questions or share their struggles and doubts without being shamed, and the format is always facilitated discussion, never a lecture.

I can’t begin to tell you how exciting the response to this Way has been. I think we are actually engaging the questions, practices, and hopes of our congregation, and the discussions are amazing. In the first session on Generosity we dwelt in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Not long into the dwelling participants began to share powerful stories of alienation and reconciliation in their families and lives, including a parent attending the wedding of a gay son even though he had formerly refused to meet the son’s partner or visit their house. The dwelling was so rich that I jettisoned the rest of the day’s questions on the spot. Part of embracing a culture of discernment is letting the Holy Spirit move as God’s story links up with where

people are in our world.

**Blair Pogue** is rector and lead pastor of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her passion is for encouraging all people to discover their spiritual gifts and serve God's purposes in the world. Prior to joining St. Matthew's in 2005, Blair served as associate rector of Church of the Holy Comforter in Vienna, Virginia. A graduate of Whitman College and Yale University Divinity School, she pursued doctoral studies in American religious history at the College of William and Mary.

- Way of Life Definitions and Practice <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/the-way-of-jesus/>

## Resources

- "Creating a Culture of Discernment" by Blair Pogue, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, July 2010 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/discernment/cultivating-a-culture-of-discernment/>
- "Generosity" <http://stmatthewsmn.wordpress.com/2013/09/19/generosity/> St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, St. Paul, Minn. <http://www.stmatthewsmn.org>
- The Way of Jesus Conversation <http://www.stmatthewsmn.org/page/way-jesus-conversation>

# Roadmap for Senior Wardens

BY DEMI PRENTISS

So you've just learned that you're about to become your congregation's newest senior warden. Wow. Now what?

First of all, take a deep breath and remember that you're part of a body, with many parts, with many gifts. This is a team sport. You're not alone – not in human terms, and certainly not in the spiritual sense. You can gather a team of trustworthy advisors around you. And you stand in a long line of senior wardens – a communion of saints – whose experience and wisdom can support you.

Before you develop a year-long timeline of action items, take a moment for, as our 12-step friends call it, a "fearless moral inventory." What are your resources, what are your challenges, and where will you find allies and mentors? These preliminary lists will grow during your time in office.

Here are some "starters" to inspire your stocktaking and perhaps point to a growing edge you might want to develop. Which one(s) will build your leadership? Which are already working for you?

## Personal Passions

Every person who becomes a senior warden brings a unique portfolio to the job. Take stock of your:

- **Energizers** – What are your gifts? What are the things that energize you and engage your passions? When you're doing these things, you'll be offering your best to your congregation. Put these on the "My Priorities" list.
- **Enervators** – What are the things that suck your energy? These things will wear you out, and your out-sized efforts will bring only modest results. Put these on the "Team Priorities" list. As you build your leadership team, remember to gather around you (com)-passionate partners who have skills and gifts in these areas.

## Hard Skills

Skills that help a senior warden function well sometimes come through previous experience, and sometimes through intentional skill building as part of

the vestry team. They can even be learned on-the-job. Which of these belong on your "My Priorities" list? How can you identify and utilize your team/ vestry colleagues who already have one or more of these skills? As senior warden, you can be the catalyst for this learning.

- **Thinking strategically** – It's important to be able to take the longer-range view, and to "get on the balcony," as Ron Heifetz and Donald Laurie counsel in their groundbreaking article "The Work of Leadership." They name six essentials of breakthrough leadership: "getting on the balcony," identifying the adaptive challenge, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving the work back to people, and protecting voices of leadership from below. Who can help you develop these skills?

- **Team building** – Just as the apostle Paul reminded us we are one body, part of the vestry's responsibility is to help mobilize the many members of the congregation to function as one. How can you invite

partners? How well does your vestry model teamwork for the congregation, and encourage others to play their parts?

- **Delegating** – Sharing responsibility and authority are a hallmark of mature leadership. Giving away the task means focusing more on the outcome, less on the process. What might it mean to risk giving up control? Because failure is an essential aspect of growth, what might you be prepared to learn from failure – yours and others’ – that you could never learn from success?

- **Communicating clearly and often** – Telling the story well means giving enough background for people to walk with you all the way through to your punch line. Sharing the story means using multiple channels – print, electronic, verbal – and many modes – auditory, visual, kinesthetic – with various audiences – children, youth, adults, seniors, and more.

Congregations love sharing stories. How can you leaders make sure you’re all equipped to tell the important, life-giving ones?

- **Learning together** – Learning communities forge special bonds that provide a support network for improved practice.

What does your vestry need to learn together? passionate partners who have skills and gifts in these areas.

- **Building relationships** – Strong, loving relationships with God and with people are the essentials of life in Christian community. Relationships flourish where safety, trust, and openness are carefully nurtured. How can your vestry practice building that environment?
- **Setting priorities** – Knowing what’s important is easier when you have a vision of where you’re headed. Both the vision and the priorities grow out of the whole community, and it’s the leaders’ job to articulate them. Do you have a process for hearing what the community has to say?

### Essential Growing Edges

There are some skills where a small investment in initial learning is made especially fruitful through long-term practice and development. Three areas of learning, in particular, have proven to pay lifelong dividends for church leaders. You can become increasingly more capable and more resilient as you grow in these areas. Book study or a workshop can start you (and

your team) on the way. Check the list of resources at the end of the article.

- **Listening** – There are many avenues for learning intentional, active listening. The “one-on-one” relational meeting is a particularly focused and effective practice to identify community concerns and discover new leaders.

- **Church size typology** – Arlin Rothauge, an Episcopal priest, first developed this line of thought as a way of understanding how congregations welcome and incorporate new members. Further study has shown how a congregation’s size influences its style, its organization, its assumed norms, and what works. Knowing the strengths and challenges of your congregation size will shape your work as leaders.

- **Family systems theory** – Rabbi Ed Friedman applied Murray Bowen’s theory to congregational life, and transformed the thinking of congregational leaders. Leaders grow in resilience as they develop a basic understanding of the role that anxiety, triangles, emotional process, and differentiated leadership play in congregations.

With inventory in hand, you may discover that there's lots you want – and need – to learn. Be prepared to enlist supportive partners, both inside and outside the congregation. And be encouraged! There's lots of hope and help out there.

### Reports from the Field

Hear the voices of experienced senior wardens, telling where they have found strength for the journey:

**Robin Schreiber, St.**

*Bartholomew's, Atlanta, Georgia* – “Prayer of course and talking with former senior wardens helped. Also, I worked with a very experienced and highly regarded rector who trusts his senior warden and vestry.”

**Jack Hauber, Emmanuel,**

*Moorefield, West Virginia* – “Other member of our Ministry Leadership Team and the supply priest / mentor for our team.”

**Raymond Arcario, Cathedral**

*Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania* – “My relationship with my wife, my children, the clergy and the congregation. The affirmation that I am having a positive impact for the good of our congregation, diocese and in service to God is powerful.”

**Tracy Esguerra, St. James, Tigard,**

*Oregon* – “The congregation at my parish has been very supportive of me.... I think they were just happy that they weren't in my position. But it is very encouraging to hear that someone appreciates the work you are doing, especially when you wonder if your decisions are seen as favorable by others.”

*Anonymous* – “Hope and encouragement came from my junior warden as well as the other vestry members. We were in the final process of our search for a new rector so we became close as a vestry. Others who played this role include a leader for many years in our catechumenate program, [who] advised and listened and coached me during regular one on one meetings. Her help was invaluable.”

**Karen Ogelsby, St. Michael and All Angels, Portland, Oregon** – “Past senior wardens, clergy, family and close friends within the congregation.”

**Jeff Nelson, St. Andrew's, Encinitas, California** – “My life experience as a Christian and as an Episcopalian helped.”

**Karen Clausen, Grace Church, an Episcopal Community in the Southern Berkshires, Great Barrington, Massachusetts** – “I told the rector and the nominating

committee that I would only take the position if it filled me with joy and was spiritually expanding. It created a standard for me at the same time it established the theme of my prayer life with God regarding my work.” “

**Demi Prentiss** is ministry developer for the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. For 25 years she has worked in national, diocesan, and congregational settings equipping and supporting God's people as they become intentional partners in God's dream for the world. She lives with her husband and two dogs in Denton, Texas.

### Resources

- Church size theory - <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/overview-of-church-size-theory/>
- Church size theory - <http://www.alban.org/raisingtheroof/changingSize.asp>
- Family systems theory - <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9119>
- Family systems theory - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgdcljNV-Ew>

Continued....

- Family systems theory – (practical application) - <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7537855-resilient-leadership?ac=1>
- Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry by John Savage - [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/960967.Listening\\_and\\_Caring\\_Skills\\_in\\_Ministry?ac=1](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/960967.Listening_and_Caring_Skills_in_Ministry?ac=1)
- Listening – <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>
- Listening – One-on-One relational meetings <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/sites/default/files/individual%20meetings.pdf>
- The role of the warden – “You’re a new warden. Now what?” by Donald Romanik, <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/ministry-of-wardens/youre-a-new-warden-now-what/>
- “The Work of Leadership,” by Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, 1997 Harvard Business Review, [http://www.alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Consulting/Learning\\_Events/Heifetz%20-%20The%20Work%20of%20Leadership.pdf](http://www.alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Consulting/Learning_Events/Heifetz%20-%20The%20Work%20of%20Leadership.pdf)
- The Vestry Hand-Off: Orientation for new members by Linda Grenz <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/the-vestry-hand-off-orientation-for-new-members/>

# Stirrings of the Spirit

BY TOM ELY AND SUSAN OHLIDAL

“One of my favorite characters in the theatre is Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof. Nearly fifteen years ago I performed as Tevye in a ten week run at a community dinner theatre in Connecticut. Every Friday and Saturday night I was Tevye. Every Sunday morning I was Father Tom.

“If you are familiar with Fiddler on the Roof, you know that Tevye was challenged (pushed, cajoled, forced?) to look at things in new ways by his daughters and the changing realities of the world in which he lived. What I came to appreciate most about Tevye was the way he struggled with his grounding in the traditions of the past and his awareness that something new was emerging that meant he had to pay attention.”

Routine problem solving for Tevye usually meant doing things the way they had always been done – “Tradition!” But as life unfolds and changes come to his village, Tevye’s “ways” stop working for him. Throughout the play Tevye “tries on” new ideas, new ways, new concepts, and new “traditions,” even as his three oldest daughters move him further and further away from

the customs of his culture and faith by their marriage choices.

There is deep struggle in all of this for Tevye, often expressed in his ‘conversations’ with God. At the end of the day, it is the love for his daughters, his abiding faith in God, and his own mindfulness about the changing times and the reality in which he is living that makes all the difference.

We think the Episcopal Church, indeed all so called mainline Christian denominations, are experiencing a Tevye moment, and it is not a brief moment. It is a watershed moment. And, like Tevye we are challenged to do our adaptive work around those three challenging human tasks: figure out what to conserve from past practices, figure out what to discard from past practices, and invent new ways that build from the best of the past.

How are our traditions (indeed, everything about us) being questioned, and challenged to speak a word of hope and new life to a world that is so rapidly changing? Will we have the courage of Tevye to struggle with these new realities and find the possibility of some-

thing good there?

In Vermont, the Episcopal Church has embarked on a three-year initiative to discern where the Spirit is calling us through exploring new understandings and expressions of what it means to follow Jesus in a rapidly changing world. We call this initiative *Stirrings of the Spirit*.

*Stirrings* is about creating exciting and innovative models of church, of “trying on” new ways of being and, as followers of Jesus, focusing on both the established church as we know it and the communities beyond our doors:

- Strengthened formation of *lay leadership*
- New expressions of *clergy partnership*
- Experimentations and innovations within *liturgy*
- Exploration of the church’s role in neighborhoods and communities
- Enhanced understandings of what *mission, and discipleship, and baptismal ministry* look

■ like for Vermont Episcopalians in the 21st century.

Growing out of the desire and efforts of lay and clergy leaders in Vermont to try new things, this initiative began to take shape as diocesan leaders sought other voices for conversations. We invited into our gatherings people who were already doing innovative and risky ministry and mission initiatives. This intentional importing of people and ideas helped to spark local leaders with similar or other innovative ideas.

These formational efforts along with creative ideas and new expressions of ministry already underway led to the passing of a diocesan resolution in late 2012. The resolution tells us, "To be faithful to our calling in a rapidly changing world, we must strengthen our spiritual lives, and at the same time, open ourselves to new understandings and expressions of what it means to be spiritual beings." Further, "...the Episcopal Church in Vermont will support our congregations with few, if any, limits on how they want to do God's work and carry out God's mission." Vestry members, clergy, and ministry teams were encouraged to apply what they were learning and what they were inspired to do in their local contexts.

In the first year of *Stirrings*,

2013, new forms of liturgies have been "tried on" and reflected upon. Partnerships have been formed between non-profit groups and congregations wanting to transform communities, more than just serving a need. Interdenominational and ecumenical partnerships are being explored and built. New ministry projects and missional initiatives will soon be given support from *Stirrings* grants using diocesan funds.

Leadership for *Stirrings* now resides with a team of lay and clergy members. As year two of the three-year experiment unfolds, the Leadership Team is speaking from a position that allows possibilities to exist. Our posture in this initiative is one of trying to be open to being disturbed by the Spirit, of being vulnerable to the Spirit, of acknowledging the chaos, and of finding ways of inserting / bringing / offering / displaying the sacramental to the sacred outside of our Church. Our leadership in these high heat moments of change requires us to be confident yet to hold things loosely. We also must be prepared for and welcome failure as opportunity to reflect and to keep practicing.

In this "New Advent" or "New Pentecost," happening in our Church and the societies in which we find ourselves, *Stirrings* of the Spirit calls us to grant greater

freedom in particular areas in our Church in Vermont, areas which challenge us in worship, in ways to invite and support new spiritual communities to form, and in ways that we minister outside of our doors. To nurture and support spiritual health in our existing congregations and in new initiatives for ministry and mission that emerge will mean developing the generative structures that offer life and resources while not encircling the new expressions with program or top-down limits and expectations.

In this work to which we believe God is calling us, we are moving between chaos and order. Things are messy and unclear at times. There are tensions between the ways we have done things for many years—and love! —and new ways into which we are being invited. There are tensions. There are failures and things left undone. And there is also joy and satisfaction. As leaders, whether local or church-wide, we must hold all these and be willing to stand in the midst. The Spirit is stirring!

**Tom Ely** is bishop and **Susan Ohlidal** the canon for ministry development for *The Episcopal Church in Vermont*.

*Continued....*

## Resources

- Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations by Anthony Robinson <http://www.anthonibrobinson.com/books.htm>
- Christianity After Religion by Diana Butler Bass <http://www.dianabutlerbass.com/dianas-books.html>
- Cultivating Missional Imagination, by Joe Bjordal, Episcopal News Service <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2014/01/27/cultivating-missional-imagination/>
- Diagnose the Adaptive Challenge: Understanding the Human Dimensions of Change by Ron Heifetz <https://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cbmp/product/3276BC-PDF-ENG>
- Liturgy Resources: Ancient and New <http://diovermont.org/Stirrings-of-the-Spirit/liturgy-ancient-and-new.html>
- Midwifing the Movement of the Spirit (pdf) <http://diovermont.org/PDFs/stirrings-of-the-spirit/>
- Seizing the Episcopal Moment, Schell and Ward, 2009 (pdf) <http://diovermont.org/PDFs/stirrings-of-the-spirit/>
- The Convention Resolution <http://diovermont.org/PDFs/stirrings-of-the-spirit/>
- The Great Emergence by Phyllis Tickle <http://www.phyllistickle.com/books/>
- To Get Things Stirring: Books, Liturgy and Music Resources, and Websites to Explore (pdf) <http://diovermont.org/PDFs/stirrings-of-the-spirit/ToGetThingsStirringResources.pdf>

# The Consent Agenda: Efficient Meetings

BY BOB SCHORR

As leaders in a denomination that pokes fun at itself for *doing things the way we have always done them*, I believe good governance and good stewardship of our time suggests we turn that saying on its ear and explore the possibilities of “*We’ve always never done it that way.*”

## Who Wouldn’t Like a More Productive Meeting?

The monthly vestry meetings are too often testaments to endurance rather than efficiency. A three hour meeting is rarely twice as productive as a 90 minute meeting. And, each hour of a meeting consumes one hour of time for every person at the table. For a rector, vestry of 12, and a treasurer, that three hour meeting consumed 42 hours – an entire individual work week.

The monthly meeting is the most valuable time the vestry expends, so it should yield the highest return. It should be used to do those things that you can only do, or best do, together. This requires minimizing the amount of passive participation during a meeting – time when everyone sits and

listens to one person give an oral report, or when everyone reads a report or document passed out at the meeting and that, for some reason, everyone thinks needs to be dealt with tonight.

How do we trim time from our vestry meetings? In the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, we recommend vestries consider the practice of using a consent agenda for routine and procedural decisions.

## What is a Consent Agenda?

It is a collection of items that require action by the vestry, but that can be dispatched without further discussion, debate, or information.

Minutes of the previous meeting are a good example. Rather than taking time to: Ask for a motion to approve the minutes; note the presence of a Second; ask if there are any additions/corrections/deletions to the minutes; ask for any further discussion; and then call the question, the minutes are approved in a single, non-debatable motion along with a host of other items.

For a consent agenda to work, it is important that all the reports and items on the agenda are identified in advance and materials sent to members in a timely manner, giving all members time to read the material before coming to the meeting. This requires that the draft minutes be circulated for review and correction within one week of a meeting. Members then have a week to submit corrections, additions, and deletions to the clerk or secretary, and the minutes are finalized and distributed at least one week prior to the next meeting where they are to be approved.

Another example is the rector’s report. This should be written, but the rector should have time to briefly highlight or discuss sensitive matters orally during the meeting.

Examples of items suitable for a consent agenda are attached here: <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/consent-agendas/>

## How does the Consent Agenda fit with the Meeting Agenda?

The consent agenda is one of the listed items in the business

meeting agenda. Usually, it will fall in the first five items:

- I. Call to Order and Opening Prayer
- II. Bible Study or Devotional
- III. Declaration of a Quorum
- IV. Adoption of the Business Meeting Agenda
- V. Consent Agenda
- VI. (Balance of Business Meeting Agenda)

### How does it Work?

The consent agenda lists each item, the action to be taken (received, approved) and the supporting detail for each item is attached to the consent agenda.

The consent agenda is moved, seconded, and voted on without discussion of any kind. This means everything on the agenda should be noncontroversial or already decided at a previous meeting. The motion is documented in the minutes and the consent agenda and all documentation are included with the minutes of the meeting in the official records of the congregation.

Any member may contact the Chair prior to the meeting and request an item be removed due to a need for additional information, late breaking developments, or further discussion. The item is struck from the agenda prior

to the vote. It should not be moved to that business meeting agenda, but rather handled “off line” or put on the agenda for the next meeting.

While each vestry is unique, a consent agenda should save 30 - 60 minutes per meeting. This opens up time for more strategic mission and ministry discussions and for shorter and more productive meetings.

### Critical Success Factors

As a governance and strategic planning consultant, I need to spend at least two hours preparing for every hour I facilitate or consult. For a productive meeting, vestry members need to spend at least two hours preparing for each hour of the meeting. When this preparation is combined with the use of a consent agenda it can transform the members’ productivity as well as their sense of accomplishment and satisfaction at the end of the meeting...and the meeting will be shorter.

This requires the business meeting agenda, consent agenda, and all supporting documents to be in the hands of all members a minimum of one week prior to the meeting. Members who have questions should contact the appropriate individual prior to

the meeting.

**Bob Schorr** is coordinator of church plants and strategic development for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and a facilitator and non-profit governance consultant. His responsibilities at the diocese include coaching and supporting church planters; assisting new and existing congregations with siting, master planning, design, and construction; facility management; vestry organization and governance, and general congregational development. Feel free to contact Bob at [bschorr@epi-center.org](mailto:bschorr@epi-center.org) or (713) 353-2108.

### Resources

- BoardSource – [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org) – is an excellent resource for information and guidance for organizing and leading boards. Both congregational and individual memberships are available.
- Consent Agenda <http://www.boardstar.org/assets/documents/Consent%20Agenda.pdf>
- The Consent Agenda <http://nonprofit.adelphi.edu/files/2012/09/consentagenda.pdf>

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- List of items suitable for a consent agenda <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/consent-agendas/>
- Sample Consent Agenda [http://www.glcyd.org/pdf/npo/2011/presentations/sample\\_consent\\_agenda.pdf](http://www.glcyd.org/pdf/npo/2011/presentations/sample_consent_agenda.pdf)