

Small and Rural Churches

July-August 2017

Facebook for Small Churches

Jenny Shutt

Editor's Note: To read some of Jenny's wonderful posts, be sure to visit the St. John's Episcopal Church in Bedford Facebook Page - [@stjohnsbedford](#)

I'm the Parish Administrator for St. John's Episcopal Church in Bedford, Virginia. St. John's is small but vibrant. It's full of the kind of people you want to live next door to. Young people and old. Parents and grandparents, teenagers and toddlers. There's a little bit of every kind of person here.

I came to St. John's in 2008 looking for a part-time job that would allow me to tend to my (then) newborn son while also contributing to my family's financial well-being. When I started working at St. John's there was a website but no social media presence. It seemed like a good idea to keep up with the times and meet the people where they were: online.

Managing the professional presence on social media was not in my original job description, but as with any job, time marches on and the duties have evolved to reflect the changing times. I was never asked to "do" social media but someone has to do it, and there aren't a lot of options. So, you know, you just get done what needs to be done.

Setting the ground rules

I started enthusiastically. I set up a Facebook page. And a Twitter account. And an Instagram account. And...I soon realized I was going to have time for only ONE of those. I can't "do" Instagram from a desktop; it's just not designed that way. I don't really like Twitter as it feels like a hurricane in a bathtub in there. Too many voices and not enough complete sentences. So, I chose to focus on Facebook. I already had a personal account there, I understood how it worked, many of our members used it, and it was simplest for me.

Our church had no set policy about social media usage, and since St. John's has such a small staff, there continues to be no set "rules" other than my self-imposed guidelines:

1. Be kind
2. Don't post anything that portrays the church in a negative light
3. Avoid politics. At.all.costs.

The first year or so that the page was active, I did my best to follow the unwritten "Facebook rules of growing a page". That is, I kept the posts short and to the point. I always included a picture. And I tried very hard to maintain a consistent posting schedule with no long gaps between posts.

What I found was that:

1. I felt stressed if I couldn't post regularly enough
2. The page grew to only include people already associated with St. John's
3. There was no interaction at all on any posts
4. The page looked just like every other church Facebook page in existence. It was, in a word, a bit dull.

What works for you?

Like many small churches, there is no budget at St. John's for advertising of any kind, so I couldn't make use of Facebook's advertising to boost our page metrics and interactions. Instead, I began thinking about ways to make better use of social media as a tool. I looked at what several other really successful pages that I found interesting were doing. I also looked at what folks responded to on my personal page.

I also began to think about what I would like the St. John's Facebook page to accomplish. Was it going to simply be a vehicle for sharing coming events with the established congregation? Should it have broader appeal? If we were seeking a broader appeal, what would that look like? And how would I measure the success of the page?

Based on my (admittedly limited) research, I thought humor might work well. People like to laugh. I'm not terribly funny, but I do like to write, and so I started making up longer vignettes that tied in-however remotely-to whatever was going on at St. John's. I quickly noted that liking to write does not automatically translate to "good" writing. I ultimately focused on telling a story with each post. I included bad-dad puns (You know the ones: "have you heard of those new corduroy pillows? They're making headlines.") Yeah, I know, it's bad. But it also makes you smile. I included plenty of pop-culture references whenever possible to make up for the noticeable deficiency in actual jokes, and to give folks something to relate to. I let go of feeling as though I had to publish something regularly, and just did what I could, when I could, or when I felt creative.

Measure successes, incorporating feedback

In just a couple of months the page grew from under 100 followers to nearly 200, and it currently has a following of 269. While I wouldn't call that wildly successful, for a church with an average Sunday attendance of 77, that's not too bad.

Is the page successful? I don't know. I know our page metrics regularly rival those of other area churches with 2-5 times our following. I know we get more page visits and more interaction than we had before.

Success for our page isn't going to look like success for a Facebook page at a church with a congregation of 8,000, no matter how witty I am. And that's not really what it's all about anyway. I usually gauge whether or not the page is "successful" in any given week if I get just one like or share from someone who is *not* a member of St. John's.

Though most of the feedback I received was positive, several folks did not care for the new style. There was (and there continues to be) a minor generational disconnect, which is difficult to overcome. Some folks didn't like the first-person perspective, and others just couldn't connect because they had no idea who I was.

My writing style is very informal, and doesn't appeal to everyone. But then, social media is informal. It's the modern day equivalent of a backyard barbecue, but without the food. And like any good barbecue, there should be plenty of vibrant conversation, hopefully with people who aren't all exactly the same.

It was (and is) hard to address all the complaints perfectly, and it certainly caused me some consternation for a while. While I thought I was being amusing and injecting some fun, others thought I was being too casual. I did however, make a few adjustments.

I occasionally include a more formal-sounding post to reach those who prefer that style, or simply because the topic requires it.

While I love sharing puns and jokes, I reined it in a tiny bit. There's a very, very fine line between hilarious and "inappropriate when it comes to jokes and church. Navigating that line is bit like walking a tight rope over a surging sea of hedgehogs. It won't kill you if you fall, but it will certainly be unpleasant.

Make it personal

What I enjoy the most is sharing personal stories from around the parish. My favorites are when I can shine a light on someone in the parish who has gone above and beyond in their service. We had a bird trapped in a drain pipe outside my office one day and I was able to use that as a post to highlight two of our dedicated members who rescued it from certain demise. It was one of our most-liked posts. Second only to a post about pie.

Special Events (or regular events) happening around the parish also make good posts. We don't have special events every week, but those obviously make great posts. I like to come up with new ways to invite people to worship at St. John's during our regular worship services too. It gets me thinking creatively about what others might find appealing about our parish.

I stuck with the first person perspective though for a couple of reasons. While I recognize that writing in the first person probably makes me sound self-involved, it serves my purposes by allowing the reader to get to know me personally, and it is that personal connection that hopefully draws readers back again. Like most novice writers, it's also "easiest" for me. When I'm constrained by time, whatever is simplest and flows fastest is what ends up on social media.

I also started "signing" my posts. Because the Rector also posts on the page, and because several people asked, I started including my first name at the end of each of my posts as a way to connect better with my readers. I also regularly include information about me in my posts and sometimes throw in a picture so that people can get to know me, and put a face to the page.

As with any job, there are times when things are less busy and other times when the hours fly by. I use the slow time to make notes about ideas for posts. Though I'm generally much more creative in the spur of the moment, I do find having a few ideas prepared makes things faster. Most of my posts take no more than 10-20 minutes to compose. If I'm really struggling, I usually just decide it isn't meant to be

and move on with my day. I often use posting to Facebook as a mid-morning break from my usual routine. The creativity allows me to come back to my other duties with energy.

Finding a voice for your page that works for your congregation can be a challenge. But it can also be fun, engaging and worthwhile. Try it and see.

Jenny Shutt is the Parish Administrator at [St. John's Episcopal Church](#) in Bedford, Indiana.

Resources

- [Episcopal Communicators](#) website
- Episcopal Communicators [Facebook page](#)
- [Anglican/Episcopal Rural Churches Facebook Group](#)
- [Using Instagram Effectively for Church](#) by Charis Bhagianathan, Vestry Papers, November 2016
- [Social Media Campaigns](#) by Charis Bhagianathan, Vestry Papers, November 2016
- [Follow-up: St. Paul's Open Letter to Presiding Bishop Curry](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices Blog

Sent Out Two by Two

Kimberlee Auletta and Sarah Kooperkamp

Editor's Note: This article is written in first-person narrative by the authors, accurately presenting their experience in their own voice.

In 2013, newly ordained and a mother of two children under four, Kimberlee Auletta was appointed to serve three-quarter time as priest in charge of a church in the South Midwood section of Brooklyn, New York. In 2014, Sarah Kooperkamp, with a newborn and having served as an associate priest, was appointed to serve three-quarter time as priest in charge of a church in Windsor Terrace Brooklyn. Over the next two years, the two spoke two to three times a week about the challenges they faced in their under-resourced, under-staffed, struggling churches with great potential – the challenges of loneliness, building repairs, low budgets, dysfunctional church-family systems that had been left to flourish under prior priests, and disempowered, unhealthy lay leadership. They thought back to their time together at Union Theological Seminary and the collaborative spirit that was fostered there; they talked about their desire for discipleship and transformation in their own lives and in the lives of their parishioners; and they couldn't see, being so exhausted and overwhelmed, how being solo pastors would let them get beyond the challenges that were crippling them to the joy of spreading and living out the Good News.

And then in Winter 2016, while Sarah was on maternity leave and as Kimberlee left her parish, they were given a gift.

Kimberlee: I knew for my own health, my relationship with my husband, and for my children, I had to finally leave the parish I was at. I knew I didn't want to be a solo pastor again. More importantly, I wanted to work collaboratively to build a church of disciples. Sarah and I had been talking for over two years about how much more fun, joyful, creative and productive we would be if we could work together. After being alone for three years, I knew whatever I was giving up being the one "in charge" would be worth it in order to work with someone who I deeply respect and felt I could partner with for many years to come.

Sarah: I had thought after being an associate priest that I wanted to be in charge. Or that I wanted some autonomy. And I did like many aspects of being the solo priest-in-charge at Holy Apostles, but I also felt like I wasn't fully functioning. I knew I could be a better priest and have a more balanced life. I felt like I wasn't able to plan, to teach, to think big. I wasn't even praying enough. I realized that my problem

hadn't been autonomy; I came to see that what I had really wanted was collaboration. When Kimberlee and I thought about working together the thing I worried most about was my own ego. I was already here at Holy Apostles and I wondered if I really could share and give up my own sense of "I am helping grow this church" and "I am the priest."

Bishop Lawrence Provenzano listened to their proposal about being co-Priests-in-Charge, each continuing serving three-quarter time so that they could be the priests, moms, partners, and people they hoped they could be and believed God wished for them. Bishop Provenzano was willing to invest and take a chance on this new shared model of ministry.

Five months in: More fun, more prayer, more time for Jesus

Kimberlee: I get excited almost every day coming to church now, especially Sunday. There is a lot to do but it doesn't feel overwhelming. I feel that I am working hard but it's so much more rewarding. We have more time to brainstorm, to plan, to talk about God's call for our community and to pray. Praying is central to our partnership. Jesus is central to our partnership. While that might seem basic, when I was alone, it was easy to forget that and just get caught up in the busy-ness and the business of church.

Sarah: Since the day I arrived here three years ago, Holy Apostles has been a welcoming, Spirit-filled place, just waiting to welcome people from the neighborhood and beyond. But I had never had the time or energy, dealing with building issues and just week-to-week tasks, to help the congregation turn that welcoming spirit outward. And now I am not alone in a basement office hoping that a parishioner might drop by just so that there would be someone to talk to. I am engaged in constant creative conversations where new ideas develop and new thoughts occur to me – ones that I can follow through on with a partner. I am able through talking and praying to better understand what God is doing in my life, and more ready to share that good news.

Decisions big and small

Sarah: But who is in charge? People wanted to know when we began. God! Jesus! We gave all kinds of great answers. Both of us! And that's really been true. We get to talk a lot and figure it out together. It feels a lot less random than decisions used to feel for me. I still go home thinking of work--but it is less dreading carrying the weight and more a feeling of wanting to continue the discussion. The hard stuff is still hard but I don't feel overwhelmed by it or alone in it anymore.

Kimberlee: When I was alone, decisions were much more difficult to make – or I made them in a vacuum. Folks, especially our clergy colleagues, had a hard time understanding that Sarah and I were going to make decisions together, that one of us didn't have the final say but that we were going to work through and model what partnership really is. It's not always easy and we don't always agree, but I always trust that we make space for each other and for God to be heard in our process.

Ultimately, Sarah and Kimberlee hope they are modeling the type of shared ministry for their parishioners they believe Jesus calls us all to.

Kimberlee Auletta and Sarah Kooperkamp are co-Priests-in-charge at [Church of the Holy Apostles](#) in Brooklyn, NY.

Resources

- [Equal Partners](#) by Donald Romanik, Vestry Papers, July 2013
- [From Challenge to Opportunity](#) by Susan Elliott, Vestry Papers, May 2016
- [Shared Leadership](#) by Beckett Stokes, Vestry Papers, July 2014

- [By-laws & Shared Ministry, Part 1: Unburdening the Vestry](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices Blog
- [By-laws & Shared Ministry, Part 2: The Difference Between Vestry and Congregation](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices Blog
- [Bylaws & Shared Ministry, Part 3: Entrusting and Empowering Parish Staff](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices Blog

Church Administration and the Diocese

Martha Goodwill

Only three people attended the last diocesan workshop I hosted. I expected ten, which would not have been a big group, but would have represented at least half of the churches in our diocese that are using QuickBooks. In the end, the group of three was small but mighty because we learned a lot from each other. I was able to answer some basic accounting questions, but the help they provided each other was the real support.

My job title is Parish Administration Resource. What is that? Well, I am a resource for parish administration. Any questions that a church might have about the financial side of managing church operations, I am their resource. I, as well as everyone on the bishop's staff, serve the churches in our diocese. Our goal is to make the administrative responsibilities of the church less burdensome and to be their support so they can go about the business of being church to each other and to the world. Through this work, I have been blessed to know so many clergy and laity who are devoted to the Episcopal Church, to our Diocese, and to their parish. Many of our parishes are struggling and through my job, I can help get them financially stable enough to remain viable.

Learning from each other

Our staff offers many workshops to our churches throughout the year. For me, I always start my workshops off by saying to everyone, “We learn best when we learn from each other.” I am prepared with information to share, but the questions asked and the answers given by the attendees are what make the workshops truly useful.

Our small churches generally have part-time priests and part-time or no staff. Because of this, parishioners must fill in some of the gaps in many areas of church operations. The diocesan staff can support small churches uniquely by being their help desk. We offer workshops on audits, parochial reports, budgeting, website maintenance, and communications – almost any area where we see a need. We also offer an annual vestry retreat, where vestries can meet together as a church but also benefit from hearing about best practices in other churches. And, all of us are available for questions by phone or email at any time.

Not alone

The most valuable support the diocesan office can provide, however, is in helping our small churches realize they aren’t alone in their part-time circumstances. When these church leaders come together, they build their own support community. They share best practices with each other. They network so they have others of whom to ask questions. Sometime I feel that the participants at our workshops are just waiting for the next break so they can have the time to talk to their peers. Yes, we provide useful information, but the real learning comes from interaction with those doing the same job in another church.

The diocesan office is always there to answer questions and provide resources, and to underpin the operations of the church. My hope is that by being the support, the church will be free to go into the world and do the work that God has called us all to do.

Martha Goodwill has worked for the [Diocese of Southwest Florida](#) for four years as Parish Administration Resource. In this role she supports the parishes in her diocese by being the resource for all parish administration questions. Martha is also the Diocesan Coordinator for Education for Ministry.

Resources

- [Who Can You Call?](#) by Chris Meyer, Vestry Papers, May 2014
- [Administrator's & Treasurer's Lunches](#) by Nancy James and Ann Turne, Vestry Papers, November 2015
- [Forms and Publications](#) from the Church Pension Group
- Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs, [English](#) and [Spanish](#)

Reimagining Leadership in Small and Rural Churches

Kelsey Schuster, Susan Daughtry and Karen Olson

In the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (ECMN), we're seeking to change the narrative on leadership by living into the ministry of all the baptized.

For us, that means welcoming a sense of holy creativity and communal discernment to the process of choosing a ministry model that fits for each faith community.

The first step in this process is communal discernment. This discernment is deeply rooted in uncovering the gifts and missional work of each faith community, and using holy listening to sit with the question of how God might be calling them collectively into action in their community.

We rely on asset-mapping to help discover the gifts, resources, time and talent that God has given each individual and the faith community to steward. In the midst of that process is an opportunity to think creatively about how the life and work of the church needs to be pastored, and how that faith community will meet its needs for lay and ordained roles.

Christ Episcopal Church in Austin, Minnesota has lived out this discernment process. They had been drawing heavily on their endowment in order to sustain the employment of a full-time rector for the church, and it became obvious that this was going to be unsustainable if the practice continued.

So, Christ Church engaged in a discernment process in which they identified their gifts and developed a model of ministry that was based on those gifts and that helped the church live out its ministry and mission.

The model they use relies on non-stipendiary leadership – a priest that engaged in formation and ordination locally, along with a team of lay leaders. The lay leaders organize several commissions that include a broad group of individuals in the church to oversee and lead the mission and ministry work.

In order for the team at Christ Church in Austin to live out this model, they needed to be able to access formation and ordination processes that addressed the barriers of time, geography and economics. They couldn't be expected to quit their jobs and move away for that formation; it needed to happen while they were still living in their community and ministering with their church.

The work of the [ECMN School for Formation](#) centers on building opportunities for teams like Christ Church to get the skills they need to do the ministry they are called to do. The School for Formation contracts with professionals and experts from around Minnesota and around the country to offer courses, workshops and resources that are available online to everyone in ECMN.

Churches of all shapes and sizes benefit from this local formation, but it's particularly useful for those who are doing their ministry in small communities, far from the opportunities available in metro areas.

By offering courses online, the School for Formation is able to mitigate the amount of time and energy we expect leaders from smaller and more rural faith communities to invest in order to access the resources they need. By offering opportunities to gather together with leaders near them for in-person workshop days, we help to create a thriving network of local leadership, one that supports and shares resources between faith communities.

We are aware that more work needs to be done as we continue to discern the needs of leaders in faith communities across Minnesota and address barriers to formation. Yet we are on the road, journeying towards becoming the church that God is calling us to be in the places that we have been planted.

Kelsey Schuster is the Missioner for Communication, Susan Daughtry is the Missioner for Formation and Karen Olson is the Missioner for Ministry with the [Episcopal Church in Minnesota](#). Their work centers on providing resources that support faith communities across the state, and strengthening the connective tissue that binds us together.

Resources

- [Episcopal Church in Minnesota \(ECMN\) School for Formation](#)
- [Episcopal Church in Minnesota website](#)
- [Shared Leadership](#) by Beckett Stokes, Vestry Papers, July 2014
- [I'm Excited to See the Potential in the Rural Church](#) by Peter Doddema, ECF Vital Practices Blog
- [Preparing for Lay Only Leadership](#) by Heather Barta, Vestry Papers May 2015

Resources and Support for Small Churches

Susan Elliott

While we talk about listening a lot in the church, we don't always do it. But that's exactly what Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) did this summer in an effort to learn more about the challenges facing part-time clergy leaders in small Episcopal congregations. ECF issued an open invitation to part-time leaders from churches that average fewer than 60 worshippers each Sunday, and on two summer afternoons, its program staff listened as 40+ leaders from churches across the country discussed their challenges, and the support and resources they need.

The team at ECF learned a great deal from the online discussions. "More than anything, I think we learned the value of spending time listening to these leaders," says Miguel Escobar, ECF's Managing Program Director. As participants described their struggles with time and unrealistic expectations—their own and their congregation's—he found it "telling that most couldn't name resources that took the realities of part-time clergy into account effectively."

What ECF learned

First and no surprise, these part-time clergy leaders are every bit as committed to their congregations as their full-time colleagues. "We're a sweet little church, but we're the best kept secret in town," one participant said wistfully. "That's not the right place to be." Another spoke compellingly of efforts to help her congregation see their transition to part-time clergy "as an adventure," an opportunity to discover new ways to live faithfully. Throughout the discussions, it was clear that these leaders are working hard and bringing their experience, their gifts and their faith to strengthen their communities.

It was also clear that they are frustrated. Practical resources for everything from bulletin production to stewardship programs don't always work in their context. They're too expensive or they call for

technical skills that may not be available. “The out-of-the-box programs I’ve seen,” said one participant, “take more time to adapt to our setting than to start from scratch.” Even standard resources, like the hymnal, may not work when a congregation lacks skilled musicians.

Their dioceses, with few exceptions, are not providing support or resources that work for these small churches either. “I go to a stewardship presentation,” said one leader, “and what they’re talking about is going to take months and a committee of six people. My stewardship committee is me and a couple that spends half their time in Florida.”

Resources that fit the context

Like all parish clergy, part-time clergy leaders are time-challenged—only more so. Often the only employee, they’re juggling building and grounds issues, mail and voicemail, volunteers, liturgies...and the list goes on. At the same time, they’re trying to avoid the trap of full-time work for part-time pay.

Most resources are designed with larger churches in mind. These focus group participants are asking for tools that fit their congregations. Stewardship training packaged for a small congregation. Simple, singable music that can help a small group of non-musicians make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Communications is a primary challenge for these clergy. They talked about the multiple modes of communication used by their congregations—email, websites, social media, and the more venerable print and telephone, even word of mouth—forcing them to use a variety communication channels to stay in touch. One said, “That eats up a lot of time. When am I going to write my sermon?” In rural areas, where broadband and WiFi are spotty, it’s even more difficult to keep members and the community at large informed.

The pressure to use social media to attract new members and stay current puts extra pressure on these leaders. One wrote, “I’ve heard of churches growing through social media, but I haven't gotten that to

work for us. I tried Twitter and got four subscribers, which included my mom in Indiana, God bless her! I gave up.”

It was not surprising, however, that money surfaced as a major issue. One participant, concerned about her church’s anxiety about finances, said she “doubts there’s such a thing as too much information about stewardship.” These leaders are looking for stewardship materials that work for their small churches and tools that can help them talk about money and its relation to faith.

The big issue, as these leaders look ahead, is vision and planning. It is work that can help their congregations see past their current anxieties and struggles to discern God’s call and a hopeful future. ECF President Donald Romanik talked with the first focus group about ways the organization might work with small congregations, from a day-long diocesan workshop to a simple phone consultation and online resources that fit their situation.

Creative clergy and tuned in dioceses are making progress

Despite their challenges, these online conversations provided ample evidence of participants’ creative efforts and progress. One held a joint acolyte training at his church with the large church in which he had served previously. He feels these events can help forge links between churches. Another organized an Appreciation Day to honor the 55 people who serve her small church every month in roles from vestry to altar guild and lector. She added that she’s rewarding them with a little time off by simplifying services for the summer months.

Some dioceses are paying attention to the unique challenges facing small churches and part-time clergy leaders. In the Diocese of Maryland, Assistant Bishop Chilton Knudsen leads the Small Church Movement, sponsoring quarterly gatherings to help small churches understand that they’re not alone, that they can share ideas and resources, and advocate for the support they need from the church. In

Utah, where about half the congregations are led by part-time clergy, Bishop Scott Hayashi has brought in consultants to help small churches develop lay volunteer systems to carry out their life and mission.

Stay tuned

One leader added this hopeful grace note to the two online sessions. Her church's first part-time clergy leader, she remembers the anxiety and sorrow that greeted her arrival. "In the last two-and-a-half years," she said, "the congregation has come to appreciate that there is extra money to refurbish the rectory where our unpaid associate lives, contribute to mission, maintain the church and make important repairs." Improving Christian formation is their project for the coming year.

ECF's summer exercise in listening is sure to bear fruit in the months and years ahead. In keeping with its mission to help congregations respond to the changing needs of the Episcopal Church in the 21st century, we can expect to see new resources and opportunities that support the growing number of congregations transitioning to part-time clergy. "These leaders deserve all the help they can get," says Escobar, "as they show us what it means to be small and vital Episcopal congregations."

Susan Elliott is a writer and editor, working with the [Episcopal Church Foundation](#), [Forward Movement](#), [Renewal/Works](#), and parishes and other organizations in the Episcopal Church. She is the writer of ECF's 2015 Vestry Resource Guide, and collaborates with Jay Sidebotham on "Slow Down. Quiet. It's Advent," published annually by Forward Movement.

Resources

- [Equal Partners](#) by Donald Romanik, Vestry Papers, July 2013
- [Make it Personal](#) and [Confronting Clergy-Congregational Conflict](#) by Donald Romanik, ECF Vital Practices Blog Post, November 15, 2011 and August 15, 2014

- Church Pension Group guides for clergy and administrators for [Special Circumstances](#) in which clergy may earn years of Credited Service while not actively working in the diaconate or priesthood
- [Church Pension Fund plans major revisions for greater flexibility in a changing Episcopal Church](#) by Mary Frances Schjonberg, Episcopal News Service, May 30, 2017
- Church Pension Group [Research and Publications page](#), includes annual Church Compensation Reports and other studies
- [Statistical Data on Episcopal Congregations](#), free reports about your congregation's finances, membership, average Sunday attendance, and a twelve point study of demographics around your church
- [Overview of Church Size Theory](#), overview of church size theory that can be used by lay leaders or clergy to explain how church size effects the culture of a congregation

Sustainability in the Scrappy Church

Nancy Frausto

Seminary can prepare you for many things but it will not prepare you to be a plumber, electrician, landlord, and/or handymen. Serving as the priest-in-charge of Trinity Church, Los Angeles, I quickly realized I needed to be a "jack-of-all-trades" if I was to put out all the fires that arise when serving a scrappy church.

What is a scrappy church?

I often describe scrappy churches as those that sound like the emergency room at the county hospital: chaotic, loud and messy, with too much suffering and unmet needs and not enough nurses or doctors to

tend to all the “patients” seeking help. The buildings often look like they have been abandoned.

Everywhere you turn you see broken doors, rotten wood, bursting pipes, and falling roofs. And yet there is a certain magic to scrappy churches.

Anna Olson, rector of St. Mary’s Church, Los Angeles and former priest-in-charge of Trinity Church, describes scrappy churches as churches that survive and do ministry in contexts where models developed for middle class and affluent communities do not apply or make sense. Scrappy churches are frequently in communities where the neighbors are struggling to meet basic needs. They are usually found in gritty places, and can never hope to compete for the affections of well-heeled church shoppers looking for safety, convenience, program choices and smoothly run services.

Scrappy churches are often confused with dying churches due to their decaying buildings and financial instability. Though they have some similarities, scrappy churches have the energy, creativity, and lay leadership that dying churches lack. But both dying churches and scrappy churches struggle financially because, as Anna Olson so eloquently described, “scrappy churches do not attract many affluent church shoppers, thus sustainability in scrappy churches is a tricky thing to master.” As a matter of fact, sustainability and scrappy churches often feel like an oxymoron! All one needs to do is look at the church's bank account balance to realize that the game of “what bills do we pay this month” is no game at all. When you serve a scrappy church, you know all too well that this might be the month you must close shop because the bills have been piling up for too long and yet every month, without fail, scrappy churches survive and do ministry.

Survival of the scrappy

Scrappy churches make creative use of the resources at their disposal, and engage the leadership of their local communities. For example, at Trinity we made a real effort to build relationships with our neighbors. This meant inviting them over for conversations on issues that affected both them and the church. After a couple of conversations, the neighbors realized that “church staff” meant a part-time

priest and a part-time parish administrator. With so many needs and not enough people, many things fell through the cracks. One such thing was building and grounds. When our neighbors found out that the church was struggling to keep its campus clean, they took it upon themselves to organize monthly street and church cleanings. The neighborhood co-op paid for a gardener to service the church monthly and they bought paint to cover the graffiti on the church walls. The mom-and-pop store down the street donated vegetables for the annual thanksgiving lunch which the whole neighborhood was invited to. Sometimes they would also donate water and juice for the snack bags that the church gave out every day to their homeless neighbors. How do scrappy churches survive? It's simple. Scrappy churches can only survive if they step outside their doors and build relationships with their neighbors. When the neighborhood sees that the church is out on the streets doing ministry and is committed to bettering the lives of people, even those who are "unchurched" and "non-believers", people will commit their time and talent to a place they see is doing good work.

Scrappy churches also survive because the people who worship there have an unbreakable bond with God and a commitment to the work of God in the world. Every time I was asked how Trinity seemed to survive with so little, my answer would always be the same: "We survive because of the single mother who wakes up at 4AM to clean houses, and then after a long day of work, takes the bus back to church to cook meals for the homeless individuals sleeping at the church door. We survive because of the perseverance of the LGBTQI+ young adults that have found a home in the church. We survive because of the love and dedication of all the immigrant families who work so hard to save their church."

In short, scrappy churches survive because of the people who have been marginalized by society and the mainstream church, but have found a home and a place where they are full participants of the leadership - not just charity cases. Scrappy churches are made up of people who fit perfectly because they themselves are scrappy. They have been told by society and even other churches that they don't belong. They have been dealt horrible hands by an unjust society, but they refuse to be victims. Instead they thrive, and by extension their church thrives.

A scrappy church is energized by the faith of its people, it has an outward-looking focus, it is flexible to change, and it serves its community. As I stated before, there is a certain magic that happens in scrappy churches, but it comes at a cost.

I do not want to romanticize scrappy churches because doing so would be a disservice to the people and the work they do. Many times, family relationships suffer because so much time is spent making things work at church. The level of burnout for both clergy and laity is high in scrappy churches. Until structural changes are made at the diocesan level, and the work of scrappy churches is prioritized, we will continue to have people who burn out and communities that suffer. Unfortunately, there aren't many resources out there for scrappy churches and the standard Episcopal expectations do not apply. If we fail to come up with some new wisdom around resourcing these types of ministries, we run the risk of losing leaders and churches that are transforming their communities with their love, perseverance, and service.

Nancy Frausto is the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles' first Latina leader to have grown up in a Spanish Speaking Episcopal Church who has gone on to pursue ordination. She is the recipient of the Episcopal Church Foundation and Beatitudes Society Fellowship. In 2014, she was selected as one of the Future 50 Interfaith Leaders in Los Angeles to watch by the Interreligious Council of Southern California. Currently she is serving as the Associate Rector at St. Luke's Long Beach. She is a board member for Bloy House and has served in the board for Forward Movement.

Nancy completed her Diploma in Theology from [Bloy House](#) and was the recipient of the Thomas Crammer Scholarship for Distinguished Achievement in Liturgical Scholarship. She then received her Master of Divinity from the [School of Theology at Claremont](#).

Resources

- [Blessings and Struggles of Scrappy Church Ministry](#) an ECF webinar led by Nancy Frausto, September 22, 2015

- [Nancy Frausto speaking](#) at the 2017 Missional Voices Conference
- [Talk by Nancy Frausto](#) at the 2017 FORMA Conference
- [Claiming Resurrection in the Dying Church: Freedom Beyond Survival](#) by Anna Olson, Westminster John Knox Press (2016)
- [Bag of Marbles](#), [Unpacking the 700,000](#), and [The "Both/And" of Church and Tech](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, October 29, 2014, August 27, 2013, and October 28, 2015
- [Feeding the Community](#) by Renee McKenzie, ECF Vital Practices Blog, June 6, 2017

A Small Church Capital Campaign Experience

Wanda R. Copeland

It all started when our priest wouldn't relent. As far as anyone could remember, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Horseheads, New York had never entered into a capital campaign in its over-150 year history. But we began, ran (administered) and completed a capital campaign with the help of [Episcopal Church Foundation](#) (ECF).

The right start

It all began when we finally acknowledged how badly we needed a new roof on the parish house. Everyone knew the shingles were shot, but we were dreading the cost. Our priest encouraged us to have a consultant from [ECF](#) come and talk to us about a [capital campaign](#). A capital campaign would specifically address the need for funds to replace the roof, and would do so in keeping with our mission to our community.

Ms. Linda Buskirk, an ECF consultant, attended our vestry retreat and explained the capital campaign process. While we had difficulty imagining that we could accomplish the goal she believed we could, we slowly began to realize that whatever we raised would be more than if we did nothing. And, we still had the question of what was St. Matthew's long-term vision about mission.

Visioning together

We assembled a team who began to dream about what projects, large and small, we might want to engage in. Ideas ranged from the cheaper and less complicated ideas of how to make our buildings more attractive and functional, to the extravagant remodeling of the undercroft to make it completely accessible and available for everyone in the community. The leaders of this effort were largely 'the usual suspects' in the congregation—from the person who usually promotes annual stewardship, to the person who is considered 'the property person'. But we also tried to include newer members who would bring fresh ideas to the table.

One of the difficult tasks was sorting out whether projects were helpful and exciting or necessary. For example, we spun our wheels for a while about the structural integrity of the church building as we considered undercroft renovation.

Next, we went out and got very preliminary bids for those projects, and brought all the information back to the annual meeting. Here we each were given stickers to vote for the project(s) we thought most important. The projects were posted on large paper around the parish hall, and we all had a chance to vote. Not surprisingly, the roof got the most votes but the surprise was that kitchen renovation quickly floated up—a move many of us didn't see coming.

Campaigning with clarity

The vestry voted to contract with [ECF](#) to help us in a formal campaign. Throughout this part of the process, we were blessed to have a contributor who was donating money “wherever you need it most,” and those funds became the seed money for our campaign. Ms Buskirk helped us understand that if we clearly told our story of why these projects supported and furthered our mission, and the projects were the right ones, people would have no problem contributing to the campaign. With this kind of encouragement, we tentatively moved forward.

We didn’t have enough members to fully flesh out all the committee assignments that we needed, but we also didn’t need to reach all the people expected in a larger campaign. We worked hard to keep the campaign in front of people regularly as we did the background tasks. We faltered to keep things going as key members went south for the winter. We were challenged as key individuals had personal issues that drew their focus away. But we persisted.

We finally narrowed down the project list to a financially manageable size. We went through the normal campaign steps and discovered that likely givers were in agreement that most top priority projects were shared concerns, and they were willing to be supportive.

We kicked off the campaign with a wonderful catered dinner by the local vocational-tech students, and everyone was amazed at the size of gifts that had come through the “silent” phase. The vestry agreed en masse to act as the campaign workers (calling committee). While it was a new experience for some, all were willing to pitch in.

We closed the solicitation phase and have been actively receiving donations for about six months. Now, we are re-connecting with contractors to complete the long-anticipated roof.

Here are some of our key learnings as a small church going through this process:

- We're more closely bound together than we thought, and have a very committed group of members and supporters who want good things for St. Matthew's.
- We did not get as much in pledges as some had predicted, but we got far more than if we had never begun the campaign. We need to not be shy or dismissive of asking for money (and other forms of giving).
- COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE. It is so easy to guess that everyone knows what is going on, especially in a small congregation, but that is NOT true. We also deeply appreciated the time and willingness of some members to listen to others. The stories are precious. In short: you can never over-communicate.
- It really *is* all about mission. I think members are far more aware now of our 'public' image, and there seems to be even more interest in looking at our vision and our mission now that we have begun that work in conjunction with this effort.
- We could never have done this without ECF's support. We have a lot of smart people who can figure things out, but this was a beast that most of us had never encountered before. We can't imagine trying to manage a capital campaign without professionals.
- We now need to turn our attention to broader understandings of stewardship. We need to encourage people to consider making legacy gifts.
- It's never really done. The work of the church continues in cycles—some annual, some less frequent. But each time we think we are done, we realize that there is one more task, or one more person, etc.
- GOD IS GOOD.

The Rev. Wanda R. Copeland is the Rector at [St. Matthew's Episcopal Church](#) in Horseheads, New York.

Resources

- [How to Prepare for a Capital Campaign](#), a tool that shares 10 essentials that ECF has identified for creating a successful capital campaign

- [Limited funds, limited time, yet success](#) by Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows and Sabrina Colman, Vestry Papers, May 2010
- [Basics of a Capital Campaign](#) an ECF webinar led by Leslie Pendleton, September 14, 2016
- [Transformational Side Effects of Capital Campaigns](#) an ECF webinar led by Leslie Pendleton, January 28, 2015
- [Integrating Annual, Capital & Planned Giving](#) an ECF webinar led by Terri Mathes, October 1, 2014
- [Debt: What it is, its impact, & what to do with it](#) an ECF webinar led by Erin Weber Johnson, March 12, 2014
- [“Crossing from Debt to Mission”](#) by Erin Weber Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, February 19, 2015
- [Pledging: Should Clergy Know?](#) by Erin Weber Johnson, Vestry Papers, May 2014
- [Finding God’s Purpose for Your Capital Campaign](#) by Maurice Seaton, ECF Vital Practices Blog, April 14, 2016
- [Sexy Boilers](#) and [Fear Not the Capital Campaign](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices Blog, May 12, 2017 and July 14, 2016

Rethinking Rural Church Ministry

Rebecca Wellborn

Editor’s Note:

In February of this year, a Rural Church Gathering was held in Mineola, Texas. Organized by the Rural

Church Ministry Commission (RCMC) in the Diocese of Dallas, this annual gathering is an important time of learning and sharing new ideas. Rebecca Wellborn, Chair of the Commission, writes about the significance of this gathering and the difference it is making in rural church communities across Dallas.

It is easy for Episcopal rural churches to be overlooked in any diocese. A sacramental church in a rural community faces challenges that other churches may not face. How can the small Episcopal churches provide the sacraments without clergy? And how can small and rural churches afford to pay for clergy?

Bringing rural church leaders together

Rural churches are truly grassroots organizations that utilize the time, talent and treasure of the laity. There is tremendous opportunity for growth in rural areas. The number of un-Churched and under-Churched throughout this country, including rural areas, is the majority by far, and the Episcopal Church can reach out to them. The Diocese of Dallas recognized this potential with the formation of the Rural Church Ministry Commission (RCMC) to support the rural churches in their mission. Since 2007, the RCMC has gathered lay and clergy leaders of all rural churches in the diocese to “Share Ideas to Spread the Kingdom.” This gathering has always been held in the rural community, and every time the rural church leaders come together there are encouraging success stories and witness to the excitement they share.

The annual gathering of rural churches has always presented resources for a variety of ways to minister to the community. Every year the gathering introduces ideas that can be undertaken by the laity and implemented immediately. Presenters have addressed the issues of outreach, evangelism, youth groups (when there are so few youth), stewardship, church music, multi-generational Christian formation, communications techniques, and establishing an identity in the wider community.

At every gathering there is enthusiasm that results in a renewed vitality in the individual congregations, and the implementation of new programs inspired by the information shared during the day. Since the

RCMC was formed there has been growth in the rural churches. Two churches have successfully completed major additions to their facilities. Partnerships between small rural churches and larger urban churches have been formed. At least one mission has become a parish. And, mostly, the rural churches have been recognized as an important part of the diocesan family.

A focus on community

The rural communities of the Diocese of Dallas are primarily populated by congregational churches. In some ways that demographic landscape makes it difficult for the Episcopal Church to “explain itself.” But it also offers a unique alternative to every other church in town. The un-churched of the rural community may be familiar with what a congregational service looks like. But they may not be going to church because they hunger for a sacrament they never knew existed. Rural Episcopalians have often heard visitors say they “found the missing piece” the first time they experienced Holy Communion. The challenges are how to introduce the sacrament to a non-sacramental population, and how to best use the resources of the laity in a sacramental church without full-time clergy.

The priority of the rural church is to teach the rich, historical, biblically-based faith and practice of the Episcopal Church, and to develop strong lay ministries and active fellowship. Rural churches must mold the ministry to the community – it is vital for them to be an active part of their community. As a former diocesan bishop once told a new rural church priest, “Your congregation is this entire town, not just the people who come to your church.” Rural churches are involved in outreach simply as a matter of heart, not program. They minister to the community because they love their neighbors.

The 2017 Gathering focused on a variety of different outreach programs followed by an afternoon of brainstorming. The Rt. Rev. George Sumner, bishop of the Diocese of Dallas, spoke about how the new strategic plan of the diocese is based on the strength of the laity, a topic very familiar to the rural churches. He introduced the development of programs to license Lay Evangelists and Lay Catechists to assist rural and small churches of the diocese with no or part-time clergy.

Being the church God uses

In 2017 the gathering also began its second decade, so time was set aside to once again “check in” on the current challenges of the rural churches. When the RCMC was formed the lack of clergy was a major issue. Now, however, most of the rural churches do have clergy, many of them part-time. The rural church challenges now are more similar to the challenges of the urban church, although the rural church might have a bit of an advantage over the urban churches in some ways. For example, it’s much easier to communicate, and it’s more likely that church members are well known in the broader community. It is easier to become visible in a smaller community, and small towns often have a central meeting place that urban areas don’t have. So the need now is how best to tap into those advantages and take the Gospel out to meet the neighbors. The disadvantage is, of course, the smaller number of neighbors there are to meet.

Every Gathering focuses, in one or more ways, on “Being the Church God Uses.” As Dallas Missioner for Evangelism Carrie Headington says, “It’s really all about prayer, care and share.” And in today’s world, it’s about doing it outside the church walls.

Rebecca Wellborn is the Chair of the Rural Church Ministry Commission in [the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas](#).

Resources

- [Anglican / Episcopal Rural Churches](#) Facebook group, open to all
- Task Force on Leadership Formation of Clergy in Small Congregation, copy of General Convention [Resolution 2015-A045](#) and list of [Episcopal Church Interim Bodies 2016-2018](#)
- [I'm Excited to See the Potential in the Rural Church](#) by Peter Doddema, ECF Vital Practices Blog

- [Parish Partnerships](#) by Kimberly Durnan, Vestry Papers, July 2016
- [Shared Leadership](#) by Beckett Stokes, Vestry Papers, July 2014

One Missional Way to Grow Your Small Church

Sandra Montes

This article is also available in Spanish [here](#). Este artículo está disponible en español [aquí](#).

Our mission is clear: Go into the world and spread the Good News. The struggle, however, is real.

In a Church where the Average Sunday Attendance is 58, there are some small churches that average 100-300 in regular Sunday attendance thanks to their financial support of Latino/Hispanic ministry.

Times have changed

When I started attending the Episcopal Church at St. Matthew's in Houston, TX, I was part of a growing Latino population in a church that had begun as an English-speaking congregation. They opened the church doors, albeit begrudgingly, to the Latinos because the demographics of the neighborhood had changed dramatically. The Bellaire area, where St. Matthew's was located, later became better known as the Gulfton or Sharpstown area of Houston, TX. Between 1980 and 2000 the population of the Gulfton neighborhood increased by almost 100% without significant additional residences being built. Between the 1990 and 2000 US Census, the Hispanic population in this area increased 81% from 18,422 to 33,424, even as the non-Hispanic White population decreased 23% from 6,371 to 4,908. Today, the Spanish-speaking community at St. Matthew's continues to have a very large Salvadoran and Central-American community.

Things do not always work

St. Matthew's/San Mateo had English-speaking rectors and Spanish-speaking assistants since the early 80s. When my dad, the Rev. Alejandro Montes, started his ministry there in 1986, he was a lay minister under Bishop Hugo Pina. Although the English-speaking congregation was dwindling, their financial support was significant. Approximately 40 members gave about four times as much as the much larger Spanish-speaking congregation. After the numbers and the money kept decreasing, St. Matthew's became a mission. The Spanish congregation kept growing and the English speakers kept leaving or dying (one year there were 9 funerals) and sadly the communities divorced in 1994. That is the only way I can describe the pain, arguments, hurt feelings, sadness, and the eventual split we went through. We called ourselves one church, but we were really two congregations tolerating each other. We did not have many bilingual services. The older people did not like our music that included guitars, *guitarrón* (bass), percussion, lots of rhythm and a loud joyful noise. We sometimes felt like the English speakers owed us something instead of being grateful for their hospitality. What I have learned from that, however, is that there are several congregations that have similar issues all over the Episcopal Church. And, thankfully, most are making it work.

There are "small" English speaking congregations that are supporting financially larger and often growing Spanish-speaking congregations. I have seen this in my visits throughout the Episcopal Church in the United States. Most of these churches do not enter this partnership because they are doing outreach or even because they feel called to it. Rather, like St. Matthew's, the reasons they enter into this partnership are complicated. Some churches respond to the need by starting a Spanish language service. Some churches are told by their diocese that they must open their doors to their neighbors, with or without assistance. Other churches start out by renting out their space. Many churches are co-existing and coming together once in a while for bilingual services.

Two Churches making it work

Judith Delgado Beltran, daycare director at St. Michael & All Angels/San Miguel in Berwyn, IL, shared that their 10 a.m. English-speaking service has an ASA of 20 people and the 12 p.m. Spanish-speaking service has about 70. The Latino/Hispanic ministry there has been going strong for about 15 years and the English-speaking congregation has been supporting it. She explained that the 10 a.m. congregation has pledges and gives every Sunday, while the 12 p.m. congregation may give one dollar per adult. She says the giving varies by attendance while the 10 a.m. is constant. Judith says the Spanish-speaking congregation needs more education on giving (stewardship) and how the Episcopal Church works. There is a bilingual service once a month but it is not very popular because it is longer and at a different time than they are used to. They do, however, come together to have garage sales, food sales, and bazaars to raise funds for the many needs of the over hundred-year-old Church. Judith says that the Latino/Hispanic community has brought a lot of life to the church in the form of children, families, and culture. She thinks that St. Michael and All Angels may have already closed if they had not invited and supported San Miguel.

Elsie Saldaña, Director of Administration at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, Elgin, IL shares that their 9 a.m. English service has about 35 people and a couple of families have small children. Their 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Spanish services average about 110 people and there are multiple families. She suggests that not only does the Latino/Hispanic ministry need to have more formation on giving and stewardship, but there should be more transparency. Elsie says that the English speakers understand how the parish works. She says that you have to sustain the Episcopal church, not only financially but also have volunteers and programs. It is not like the Roman Catholic tradition from where most of their congregants come. There is another English-speaking church close by and Elsie says some people tell other English speakers not to attend Redeemer because it is a “Latino” church. They have a bilingual service twice a year but it is also challenging for various reasons including music and language. Elsie has been at Redeemer since 1997 and the Latino/Hispanic ministry will be turning 25 years in August - and she has seen some progress. One piece of advice she gives non-Latino priests who are going into

Latino/Hispanic ministry is “Even if you are fluent in Spanish, understanding the many cultures and backgrounds is tough. Go with the flow and get to know your congregation for the first two years and then start changing things little by little.”

There are many examples such as these all over our Church. Maybe your church is small, maybe it is struggling. Maybe your church is in a neighborhood that is changing and God may be challenging you to include your neighbors. Although Latino/Hispanic ministry is growing in numbers, we often need to partner with our sisters and brothers who may have the financial resources to help it be viable. Together we can help our Church grow into a vibrant, diverse community by bringing together all the different gifts we have to offer. Together, we will bring life and *sabor* to the Eucharistic *Fiesta*.

Sandra Montes is the [Episcopal Church Foundation's](#) Spanish Language Resource Consultant. Born in Perú, Sandra grew up in Guatemala and settled in Texas as soon as she could. Her passions are God, family (especially her son), music, education, and writing. She has been developing original bilingual resources for her church, school, and others for years. Sandra has been volunteering and working in the Episcopal Church since she was welcomed into Her in 1986. She serves as musician, translator, speaker, consultant, and writer. She is a full-time teacher and doctoral student.

Resources

- [Latino/Hispanic Ministries](#) of the Episcopal Church
- [Nuevo Amanecer](#), a biennial conference on supporting ministry within the Latino/Hispanic Community
- [Nuevos Horizontes Conference](#), an annual conference exploring how the church can continue ministering to the Spanish-speaking, first-generation Latinos, while adjusting to the cultural and linguistic realities of the second, third-plus Latino generations

- [Episcopal Church Woos Latinos To Congregations](#) by Chris Lehman, NPR Morning Edition, September 11, 2012
- [Latino/Hispanic Studies](#) at Seminary of the Southwest
[Ingredients for Joyful, Inclusive Bilingual Liturgy](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, March 13, 2015
- [The Spanglish Congregation](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices Blog, October 25, 2011
- [¡Hola! A warm welcome in Spanish](#) by Daniel Vélez Rivera, Vestry Papers, March 2010
- [Reaching the American Born Latino](#) an ECF webinar led by Al Rodriguez, March 25, 2011
- [Expanding Our Understanding](#) by Sam Dessórdi Leite, Vestry Papers, July 2013

Una manera misionera de crecer tu iglesia pequeña

Sandra Montes

This article is also available in English [here](#). Este artículo está disponible en inglés [aquí](#).

Nuestra misión está clara: ir por el mundo y anunciar las buenas nuevas. La lucha, sin embargo, es real.

En un mundo en el que la asistencia dominical promedio es 58, hay algunas iglesias pequeñas con un promedio de 100 a 300 gracias a su apoyo financiero al ministerio latino/hispano.

Los tiempos han cambiado

Cuando empecé a asistir a la Iglesia Episcopal, era parte de una creciente población latina en una iglesia que en sus comienzos había sido una iglesia anglohablante. Abrieron sus puertas – con resistencia – a las

personas latinas porque la composición de la población había cambiado significativamente. La zona de Bellaire en Houston, TX, en la que se encontraba St. Matthew's, pasó a ser mejor conocida como la zona de Gulfton o Sharpstown. Entre los años 1980 y 2000 la población de Gulfton prácticamente se duplicó, pero no se construyó un número significativo de viviendas. Entre los censos de EE UU de 1990 y 2000, la población hispana de Gulfton aumentó un 81%, de 18,422 a 33,424, mientras que la población blanca no hispana disminuyó en un 23%, de 6,371 a 4,908. Hoy la congregación hispanohablante sigue teniendo una gran comunidad salvadoreña y centroamericana.

Las cosas no siempre funcionan

St. Matthew's/San Mateo tuvo rectores anglohablantes y asistentes hispanohablantes desde principios de la década de los 1980. Cuando mi papi, el Rvdo. Alejandro Montes, inició su ministerio allí, en 1986, era un ministro laico bajo el obispo Hugo Pina. Si bien la feligresía anglohablante se estaba reduciendo, su apoyo financiero era significativo. Los aproximadamente 40 miembros donaban unas cuatro veces más que los feligreses hispanohablantes, cuyo número era mucho mayor. Después de que los números y el dinero siguieron disminuyendo, St. Matthew's se convirtió en misión. La feligresía hispana siguió creciendo y los anglohablantes se siguieron yendo o fallecieron (un año hubo 9 funerales) y lamentablemente obtuvo un divorcio en 1994. "Un divorcio" es la única manera en que puedo describir el dolor, las discusiones, los sentimientos heridos, la tristeza y finalmente la división por los que pasamos. Decíamos que éramos una iglesia, pero en realidad éramos dos congregaciones que se toleraban entre sí. No teníamos muchos servicios bilingües. A los de mayor edad no les gustaba nuestra música, que incluía guitarras, guitarrón, percusión, mucho ritmo y una música sonora y gozosa. A veces sentíamos que los anglohablantes nos debían algo, en lugar de sentir gratitud por su hospitalidad. Lo que aprendí de eso, sin embargo, es que hay varias congregaciones con problemas similares por toda la Iglesia Episcopal y que, afortunadamente, la mayoría de ellas están logrando que funcionen.

Hay "pequeñas" congregaciones anglohablantes que están apoyando financieramente a congregaciones hispanohablantes de mayor tamaño y en expansión. Lo he visto en mis visitas por toda la Iglesia

Episcopal en Estados Unidos. La mayoría de las iglesias no entraron en esta asociación porque estaban haciendo extensión o porque se sintieron llamadas a hacerlo, sino que, como en el caso de St. Matthew's, el motivo es más complicado. Algunas iglesias responden a la necesidad iniciando un servicio religioso en español. A otras su diócesis les dice que deben abrirlas las puertas a sus vecinos, con o sin asistencia económica. Otras iglesias empezaron alquilando su espacio. Muchas iglesias están a favor de coexistir y se unen de vez en cuando con servicios religiosos bilingües.

Dos Iglesias que funcionan

Judith Delgado Beltrán, directora de la guardería infantil de St. Michael & All Angels/San Miguel en Berwyn, IL, dijo que la feligresía anglohablante de las 10 de la mañana tiene una asistencia dominical promedio de unas 70 personas. El ministerio latino/hispano ha permanecido firme por unos 15 años y la feligresía anglohablante lo ha estado apoyando. Ella explicó que la feligresía de las 10 de la mañana cuenta con promesas de fe y da ofrendas todos los domingos, mientras que la del mediodía tiende a dar un dólar por adulto(a). Ella dice que los donativos varían según la asistencia, mientras que los de las 10 de la mañana son constantes. Judith dice que necesitan más formación sobre cómo ofrendar (mayordomía) y cómo funciona la Iglesia Episcopal. Hay un servicio religioso bilingüe aproximadamente una vez por mes, pero no es muy popular porque es más largo y no es a la hora de costumbre. Sin embargo, se unen cuando hay baratillos, ventas de comidas y bazares para recaudar fondos para las numerosas necesidades de esa iglesia más que centenaria. Judith dice que la comunidad latina/hispana trajo mucha vida a la iglesia en la forma de niños, familias y cultura. Ella piensa que St. Michael & All Angels probablemente ya habría cerrado sus puerta si ellos no hubieran invitado y apoyado a San Miguel.

Elsie Saldaña, directora de la administración de la Iglesia Episcopal del Redentor, en Elgin, IL, nos dice que su servicio religioso de las 9 de la mañana cuenta con unas 35 personas y que un par de familias tienen niños pequeños. Sus servicios religiosos de las 11 de la mañana y de la 1 de la tarde cuentan con un promedio de 110 asistentes y hay varias familias. Ella sugiere que no solo el ministerio latino/hispano

necesita tener más formación sobre los donativos y la mayordomía, sino que también debería haber más transparencia. Elsie dice que los anglohablantes entienden cómo funciona la parroquia. Explica que la Iglesia Episcopal necesita que se la sostenga financieramente y con voluntarios y programas, a diferencia de la tradición de la Iglesia Católica Romana, de donde provienen muchos de los feligreses. Hay otra iglesia anglohablante cercana y Elsie dice que algunas personas les dicen a otros anglohablantes que no asistan a Redeemer/el Redentor porque es una iglesia “latina”. Tienen un servicio religioso bilingüe dos veces por año, pero también es complicado por varios motivos, incluyendo la música y el idioma. Elsie ha estado en Redeemer/el Redentor desde 1997 y el ministerio latino/hispano celebrará su 25º Aniversario en agosto. Ella dice que ha habido un cierto grado de progreso. Un consejo que da a los sacerdotes no latinos que entran al ministerio latino/hispano es: “Incluso si habla bien el español, entender los numerosos antecedentes y culturas es difícil. Siga la corriente y conozca a su feligresía en los dos primeros años y después empiece a cambiar las cosas poco a poco”.

Hay muchos ejemplos similares por toda nuestra Iglesia. Tal vez tu iglesia es pequeña y tal vez estés luchando. Tal vez tu iglesia esté en un barrio que está cambiando y que Dios la está retando a que incluya a sus vecinos. Si bien el ministerio latino/hispano está creciendo en números, a menudo necesitamos asociarnos con nuestros hermanos y hermanas que puedan tener los recursos financieros para ayudar a que sea viable. Juntos podemos hacer que nuestra Iglesia crezca a ser una comunidad vibrante y diversa juntando todos los dones que tenemos. Nosotros traeremos la vida y el sabor a la Fiesta Eucarística.

Sandra T. Montes nació en Perú, se crió en Guatemala y se instaló en Tejas lo antes que le fue posible. Sus pasiones son Dios, familia (especialmente su hijo), música, educación y escribir, y ha estado esperando y orando por este puesto por años. Sandra ha estado elaborando recursos bilingües originales para su iglesia, escuela y otros por años. Sandra ha estado trabajando como voluntaria y en la Iglesia Episcopal desde que le dieron la bienvenida a Ella en 1986. Se desempeña como música, traductora,

oradora, asesora y redactora. Es docente a tiempo completa y está estudiando para obtener su doctorado.

Recursos

- [Ministerio Latino/Hispano](#) de la Iglesia Episcopal
- [Nuevo Amanecer](#), una conferencia bi-anual ofrecerá herramientas prácticas para fortalecer y equipar aquellos que trabajan en el ministerio de la comunidad Latina/Hispana y a aquellos que desean incursionar en este ministerio
- [Nuevos Horizontes Conference](#), una conferencia anual explorará como continuar ministrando al Latino Hispano-parlante de primer generación, mientras ajustándose a las realidades culturales y lingüísticas de los Latinos de segunda y tercera generación, y su manera como Latinos aculturados que son inglés parlantes o bilingües
- [Latino/Hispanic Studies](#) a Seminary of the Southwest
- [Ingredients for Joyful, Inclusive Bilingual Liturgy](#) por Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, March 13, 2015