

Evangelism and Discipleship

May - June 2017

A Practical Theology of Episcopal Evangelism

Steve Pankey, Andy Doyle, David Gortner, Nick Knisely and Stephanie Spellers

Adapted from a paper by Steve Pankey, Andy Doyle, David Gortner, Nick Knisely and Stephanie Spellers, members of the Task Force on Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism

Evangelism is front and center for Episcopalians today. At General Convention 2015, Presiding Bishop-Elect Michael Curry promised to serve as C.E.O.: the Chief Evangelism Officer. He shared his vision of a whole church freshly oriented toward the proclamation and embodiment of the good news of Jesus Christ.

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement, we exist to follow Jesus and help the whole world to grow loving, liberating and life-giving relationships with God, with each other, and with creation. Evangelism is one of the most important ministries in the Jesus Movement – this is where we focus on accompanying our neighbors and communities as we all develop more loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with God on the journey.

So what exactly is an Episcopal practice of evangelism? Scripture tells us it is rooted in the Greek word *evangélion*, meaning gospel, glad tidings or good news (see Mark 16:15). With the Great Commission, Jesus sent his followers to go make disciples everywhere, baptizing and teaching people to

follow his commandments (Matthew 28:16-20). In the Baptismal Covenant, we promise to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” and “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” (The Book of Common Prayer, 305).

Here is a practical definition collectively crafted by members of the Presiding Bishop’s Evangelism Initiatives Team, the Task Force for Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism, and many more partners: **We seek, name and celebrate Jesus’ loving presence in the stories of all people – then invite everyone to MORE. #EpiscopalEvangelism**

Note it’s the length of a tweet. We think evangelism is best practiced utilizing modes real people use to communicate. But there is a lot more to share and learn, so let’s unpack it:

Episcopal evangelism. We as a Church are starting to embrace the word “evangelism.” Episcopal evangelism is not some heavy-handed duty. It is not a tool, and not merely for use to get more people as converts, church members, or pledging units. At its heart, Episcopal evangelism is a spiritual practice. When we do it, we embody the very life and practice of Jesus in the world (active); and we are filled with the Spirit and formed ever more into the likeness of Christ (receptive). It’s a joyful sharing of what you know to be good news and deep truth, and a celebration of how you see God at work in others’ lives and in the world. It wells up from the experience of God’s love poured out for us and into us; so much love it can’t help but overflow from us in grateful story and celebration.

Seek. As Episcopalians, we promise “to seek and serve Christ in all persons.” To actively listen for God present in others is a bold statement of faith. We dare to go out like sleuths, genuinely curious and assuming we will find the presence of the Holy Spirit, and that God has gone before us into all places and is at work in every life.

Name. Evangelism is the telling of God’s good news. It involves our words and all of our expressive powers. It can be so simple: “You know, I hear God working through you in your story of how you and

your family handled that situation.” This is one of the great gifts of evangelism – announcing God’s goodness and presence in people’s lives, and holding up a mirror to let them know. If we do not name God as the one we see, people around us may never know.

Celebrate. When we seek and find Christ, we find ourselves encouraged, grateful, surprised and delighted, like the widow who finds her lost coin and goes out saying “Rejoice with me!” (Luke 15:8-10). There is nothing naïve about this celebration. Ask people who have struggled for liberation, and they will tell you mature Christians celebrate every breath – not always by jumping up and down, but with a contagious surge that says “yes” to life and to God.

Jesus’ loving presence. We are Trinitarian Christians: the Father has created us in love, the Son has redeemed us in love, the Holy Spirit sustains us in love. Many of us feel hesitant talking about Jesus, perhaps because we’re worried about stereotypes. We are *Christ*-ians, patterning our lives after the one who was and is God among us, revealing the truest and fullest incarnation of the Holy ever to grace the earth. In our evangelism, we invite people to discover more of life with him. Without Jesus, it’s not evangelism.

Stories of all people. At the heart of our Christian faith is the Great Story, the collection of stories of God’s creating, redeeming work in scripture, especially in the story of Jesus. We are all part of this Great Story – all made in God’s image, all moving through a world shot through with God – but we need to grow our capacity to seek, name and celebrate God at work in our own lives. Practice telling the stories of God’s goodness in your life – journal them and practice with others. Then, ask people for their stories. It is an amazing dance when we welcome others’ stories, share our own and link it all to the Great Story.

Invite everyone to MORE. Evangelism is more than conversing, being a friend or even listening. Celebrating the good news of Jesus’ loving presence inspires us toward something more. We’re not turning people into projects or objects. Simply invite someone to more dialogue (“Could we meet again?”), more reflection (scripture, books, poems, videos or movies) or more Christian community

(worship, outreach, study group, link to others with mutual interests). It could be the invitation to see more of God at work in themselves, in us, in the world.

Episcopal evangelists are not selling Jesus or the church, nor are we in charge of whether anyone follows Jesus. That movement belongs to the Holy Spirit. Still, the more we're in tune with the loving presence of Jesus, the more we're experiencing the fullness of a loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, the more it wants to overflow. That overflow is evangelism.

Resources

- [Episcopal Church Evangelism Initiatives](#) web page
- [Episcopal Church Revivals](#) page
- [Genesis](#) - Episcopal church planting initiatives
- [Storytelling as Evangelism](#), an ECF webinar led by Edmund Harris, May 24, 2016
- [Your Church Needs a Welcome Video](#) by Christian Anderson and Trevor Black, Vestry Papers, November 2016

Asset Mapping as Evangelism

Tamara Plummer

“How do you know what you can't see?” said Jane Cisluycis, Diocesan Operations Coordinator in the [Diocese of Northern Michigan](#), in one of our recent calls on The Episcopal Asset Map. “We need to know our gifts; if they are hidden we can't share the stories.”

Katie Mears from Episcopal Relief & Development and The Rev. Canon E. Mark Stevenson from The Episcopal Church had a very similar thought in late 2012. Canon Stevenson was looking for better ways to engage Episcopalians in Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) models for addressing domestic poverty. Katie, Director of the US Disaster Program wanted a more efficient and inclusive way of knowing all the gifts that The Church could mobilize in the time of disasters. Out of their conversations was born what we now call The Episcopal Asset Map (episcopalassetmap.org). This grassroots populated website seeks to support a more streamlined process in understanding the stories of the church. Rather than wait on reports that are often outdated as soon as they arrive on someone's desk or inbox, we could flip the entire system and allow anyone to provide information about their Episcopal Community.

How it works:

- *Anyone (no log in is required) can add information about their church, school, nursing home, hospital, social service agency or other Episcopal community.*
- *The update is then sent to a Bishop appointed map administrator (DMA) who reviews and approves (or rejects) the update.*
- *The update is then made public for all to see!*

What once could take 3-6 months can now be done in 24 hours. And if anything changes, one does not have to wait for another reporting cycle- they can update the information immediately.

The sharing of stories

While we have learned so many ways that the site is a gift to our organizations, we didn't quite understand how well this tool aligned with one of our main priorities out of General Convention 2015: evangelism. The Evangelism Matters Conference this past November had one resounding message: Embrace our baptismal covenant to "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ."

And in our very Episcopalian way, we embraced this controversial term as an invitation to an evangelism that is beyond conversion, beyond recruitment to our side. Rather, we are called to an evangelism based on mutually beneficial relationships with Christ at the center.

Evangelism for our work is then defined as a “loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship with God, each other and creation.” This evangelism is not about filled pews on Sunday morning. It is about “making the world right side up again,” says Bishop Curry. It is an opportunity for us to own our stories of faith, to share these stories of faith and most importantly, listen to our neighbors so that we might acknowledge and honor the ways that God is showing up in the neighborhood. This embrace of evangelism is about celebrating God where God is, all around us. It is about telling the world, even on the Internet, how we are being the hands and feet of Christ, how we are walking with our neighbors, how we are worshipping and celebrating God’s love through word and sacrament.

When I first started working with church leaders there were some who wondered about the grassroots population of a website and doubted it could be done. As with our work on evangelism, we often doubt our skills and abilities. If you ask The Rev. Frank Logue, Canon to the Ordinary, [Diocese of Georgia](#), he will tell you that “Episcopalians are ‘natural evangelists’ - you can’t go a few minutes in conversation without them recommending a book, recipe, or podcast.” But when we asked people to talk about the church they have loved and worshipped in for 25-30-50 years, the response was often: “This is nice, but I have to ask my priest first,” or “I don’t do computers, but here is a picture of my new grandchild on Facebook.” “By empowering all levels of the church to engage with this map,” says Canon Logue, “we are guided to tell our stories in ways authentic to us. You can share all that your congregation is doing in your community, sharing what you offer quite naturally.”

Communities and connections

Jason Lewis, Canon to the Ordinary in the [Diocese of Kentucky](#), sees it as a [congregational development tool](#). And building strong congregations is one major step in developing evangelists. Through this guided

process, churches think anew their role in spreading the Gospel via service times or ministry projects. As Margaret Woody, a lay leader in Virginia says, “As a Regional Delegate involved with outreach ministries, and a vestry member, it is great to connect directly with other congregations in our Diocese.” Church leaders no longer are networking just through the clergy leadership. They can now connect directly to each other.

This cross diocesan inspiration happened at [St. Augustine’s](#) in the [Diocese of Louisiana](#). Members of the church took a look at their gifts and the needs of the community. They quickly realized that a community garden would be a great way to build stronger relationships with their neighbors and address issues of food insecurity. One of the places they looked for support was the Episcopal Asset Map. After a couple of clicks they found others in their diocese that had already traveled the road. Once the project was established, they posted their new ministry on the Asset Map. The update prompted Karen Mackey, Communications Coordinator to show up and cover their grand opening and blessing. The church was surprised to see a member of the diocese show up. “How did you hear about this event?” “I saw the update on the asset map and thought I would stop by to learn more.” Their evangelism, updating their profile – a simple act, sparked the diocese to tell the story, and who knows who has been inspired by seeing this story manifested.

Tracie Middleton, Ministry Support and Communications Officer in the [Diocese of Fort Worth](#) says that evangelism is about redefining membership and church participation. “Building community partnerships is a form of evangelism,” says Middleton. “There is a switch that happens in thinking about who's involved in church when you ask members about what they're doing outside of just worship services. They start to redefine participation. Is participation in the community's life confined to those who gather on Sunday morning? What about the 200-300 college students who gather every Thursday for lunch and conversation, where a box on a side table inviting prayer requests is usually filled with slips of paper afterwards. Isn't that connection? Isn't that evangelism?”

In addition to the cultural switch that happens by engaging with the map, there are others that are inspired to create their own digital tools with the information obtained via the Episcopal Asset Map. John Burruss, Canon for Sustainable Ministries, [Diocese of West Tennessee](#) says, “When I first learned of the Episcopal Asset Map, I was moved by the idea of capturing and cataloguing the ministries of our congregations and diocese. It had me wondering if there is a way to repackage all of that data to create new ways of engaging people who are looking for connections in their communities.

Creating www.transformwtn.org was about taking the data of the Asset Map, creating an evangelism tool and finding new ways of inviting people into our communities.”

While I know that evangelism isn’t about filling pews, I see the story of a church like [All Saints](#) in Salt Lake City, UT and I want to take a flight there. Storytelling, networking, revisioning, reimagining, reframing, resource sharing, deep listening, community organizing, empowerment, faith expressed digitally; these are all skills and themes that have resonated in the experience of users of the Asset Map. These are some of the skills we need to be evangelists. At the end of the day, The Episcopal Asset Map is a website. As with all digital platforms, we must allow our real, lived experiences to inform that space. The process of engaging a congregation on what they love about their church, recording stories of ministry and mission, and the gathering and consolidation of these materials in one searchable digital platform is the evangelism. As Hannah Wilder, Communications Director, [Diocese of San Diego](#) told me, “this is not about our very local stories, that is important, but the asset map reflects our connections. We are a part of this bigger community of faith. We are The Church.”

Resources

- [The Episcopal Asset Map](#) website
- [Mapping Assets: Power for Growing Our Future Together](#) by Jason Lewis, ERD Blog
- [Episcopal Asset Map](#) an ECF webinar led by Katie Mears of Episcopal Relief and Development, November 3, 2015

- [Episcopal Asset Map: The Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement working in the world](#) by Tamara Plummer, ERD Blog
- [Church with Garden and Food Pantry Seeks Same](#) by Nathan Davis, Vestry Papers, March 2015
- [Statistical Data on Episcopal Congregations](#) a free resource for Episcopal congregations on their congregation and community profile

Surviving and Thriving in Community

Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE

Editor's Note:

While the author writes about best practices for raising new disciples within a monastic community, it is clear that the principles of planning, hospitality and community building he shares are all critical when forming new groups and disciples in a variety of contexts.

As a member of a monastic community for over thirty years, I have been deep in the lab of human community, watching and participating in experiments for half my life. I've experienced the best of times and the worst of times. Life together is first a challenge to survive, and then it becomes an invitation to thrive. "Our Father," Jesus taught us to pray, not "my father." Because the journey of discipleship is always a shared one. We meet God together, in and through one another, in the struggles we share as much as in the successes we celebrate.

Summer approaches, and the season of temporary communities is upon us – summer camps, and youth group trips, and university students poised to enter residential communities come fall. At our monastery, we are about to welcome a new group of monastic interns, young adults who will live and work alongside the Brothers for the next nine months. Perhaps your parish or diocese awaits a similar beginning. I want to share some very practical observations on how we can begin well in leading such

communities to engage, learn, and thrive together. While my comments are directed specifically toward youth or young-adult residential communities, I hope that these principles will also apply more broadly to all communities that bring us into close contact with one another.

Begin Well

Your participants' life together will be one of the richest and hardest experiences of their lifetime. They will arrive with high hopes and expectations. They will also arrive with some anxiety about both the known and the unknown. You will have many opportunities to encourage, adjust, and intervene. Their "learning laboratory" of life together will need to be complemented by the experience of sustenance – where each participant experiences a daily dose of respectful dignity, kindness, and gratitude – and where their shared residence is a sanctuary, a place to feel safe and to rest deeply.

From the outset, name:

- **Important people** and their responsibilities & authority

o the group's immediate liaison or supervisor

o the peer leader (whether someone is pre-designated, or whether leadership rotates)

o a companion (a therapist or spiritual director who will meet on a regular basis with the group to help process their inner experience)

- **Norms and non-negotiables.** Solicit input from past participants and/or from similar programs on what's important to have in place from the get-go, or to get in place soon through discussion with the incoming participants, e.g., menu planning and cooking; dirty dishes and house cleaning; repair needs; sound & silence; designated times for shared meals, prayer and worship, conversation and play; transportation (public) and communal/personal car (gas, maintenance, insurance, accidents); social media and confidentiality; health care and insurance; "Safe Church"

training and practice; family and friends as house visitors; sexual relationships; alcohol and drugs; addiction and recovery. What's negotiable; what's not? Prepare a "Customary" which names both the norms *and* the non-negotiables by which they share their life together.

- **House Meetings** oil the gear work. Scheduled on a regular basis (probably led or attended by the liaison or supervisor), these meetings invite a review of the life together: what is going well; what is not going well, is unclear, or conflicted; what are desired changes to try. If a change is desirable, seek agreement to try change(s) for a certain period of time, then review. House meetings name and claim the good, and help keep conflicted issues from escalating into crises. Keep the Customary up-to-date.

What Are They Getting Into?

Your participants' best qualities will be discovered and tapped; meanwhile most all of their character flaws will be exposed. Your participants will arrive with both eagerness and anxiety:

- **Anxiety** because of the "baggage" they bring from their family of origin, from other experiences living in community, and/or from their very personal vulnerabilities. Anxiety is extremely creative and can compromise or enervate living abundantly in community if allowed just to fester privately.
- **Eagerness** in their hope for the adventure of new life: a fresh chance to integrate who they are and what they value, and the freedom to reinvent themselves. They will be both surprised *and* disappointed. Their first disappointment(s) will likely be projected outwards towards their fellow participants, towards you their hosts, or onto who knows what: the food, the accommodations, the church, politics. Their second round of disappointment(s) will likely be about their own self: their old patterns of life re-surfacing, their own fraudulency, their personal "baggage" which may seem more like freight. Meanwhile, their delight will come in new ways to experience old things, their freedom in losing the control from some of their neuroses; their

love in being accepted despite the “deal breakers” in their personalities; and the unexpected boon: the teacher.

- Their teacher will be someone (probably a fellow participant) who could otherwise be labeled an irritant or an adversary who, like none other, may elicit their anger, judgment, and disdain. People who get under our skin probably belong there. They will expose us like none other. They will likely shatter our glittering image. When Jesus says, “bless, don’t curse,” he’s talking about the teacher. Your participants will need help – collectively and individually – to claim their teacher, and with gratitude. It’s very difficult, absolutely transformative, and possible with help. Help is helpful.

This Matters!

Everyone will arrive carrying their values: what they find enjoyable, comforting, meaningful and, conversely, what they find particularly difficult, irritating, or offensive. These values are hugely important, though they are largely hidden from one another at the outset. Create an occasion for the sharing of personal values in a way that is safe, revealing, enjoyable, and sensitizing. Prepare a handout for your participants: “This Matters to Me,” which will require some homework in advance. Ask a series of questions, allowing blank spaces for the individual’s responses, e.g.:

- I really feel cared for when:
- My birthday is on _____, and my favorite meal & favorite cake is:
- My favorite foods are:
- I’m allergic to or don’t eat:
- These dates are significant to me (positive and/or negative):
- When I’m feeling exhausted or discouraged,

- I often exhibit:

- I often need:
- What makes me anxious is:
- What I find particularly irritating is:
- What you probably wouldn't know about me is:

Invite the participants to an occasion where you serve food and drink they will all enjoy. Open the conversation for each other's sharing what matters. The conversation will be fascinating. Your participants will have a significant experience sharing the person they are with a community to which they now belong. They will better face the inevitable irritations in life together as invitations. Keep these completed handouts in a notebook in a public space, and invite the participants to keep their "What Matters" up-to-date. Paying attention to what matters bequeaths dignity to one another, invites a collaboration of care, and helps avoid unwittingly "inflicting good on one another" (Mark Twain's phrase).

You will have only one opportunity to begin your participants' life together. Say your prayers and make your plans to begin well.

***Br. Curtis Almquist** came to the [Society of Saint John the Evangelist \(SSJE\)](#) in 1987, having served previously as a parish priest. He was the Superior 2001-2010 and now lives at Emery House, the Society's rural monastery.*

Resources

- [Leadership in Community: A Dance of Mutual Love](#) by Geoffrey Tristram, SSJE, Vestry Papers, January 2015
- [Tools for Healthy Communities](#) by David Vryhof, SSJE, Vestry Papers, May 2015

- [Radical Welcome: Embracing the Other](#) by Stephanie Spellers, Vestry Papers, September 2007
- [At the End of the Day...](#) by Mary Parmer, Vestry Papers, January 2012
- [Invite*Welcome*Connect: Building a Vital Newcomers Ministry](#) an ECF webinar led by Mary Parmer, May 27, 2014

Evangelism for the 21st Century

Day Smith Pritchard

Even the jokes about using the words “Episcopal” and “evangelism” in the same sentence are getting old. Episcopalians have been vowing to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” for as long as we’ve had the “new” prayer book, and now, under the leadership of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, there’s a groundswell of energy and interest around evangelism. Re-thinking how to share God’s love in the world is becoming normative for us, as is a fresh examination of that world through the lens of God’s love.

It’s hardly breaking news that our neighborhoods are full of people who wouldn’t darken the door of a traditional church. Perhaps they have sought, but never encountered the living God in a traditional church; perhaps they have come to feel unwelcome in the church of their roots and, by extension, in all established churches. Perhaps they believe the secular script that Christians are judgmental and hypocritical. Perhaps the habit of joining a faith community is more than a generation removed from their experience. Whatever the reason, they aren’t driving around looking for red doors. Yet Episcopalians, riding the groundswell of evangelism, believe that a world who knows God’s love, a world that interprets that love through the person of Jesus Christ, is a better world.

The [Episcopal Evangelism Society](#) (EES) has been awarding grants for innovative evangelism to seminarians and others in seminary communities for some time now, and it’s my privilege to execute

that work. We get to meet, listen to and support some of the church's most innovative practitioners while they are in formation for ministry leadership. I'm sharing the stories of some of the projects we've participated in, with the hope that these examples may inspire you to evaluate your existing ministries through the lens of evangelism, and seek opportunities for innovation.

Welcoming change

Perhaps the most visible work is the launching of new worship communities. One such congregation is the [Church of the Woods](#) in Canterbury, NH. Founder and chaplain the Rev. Steve Blackmer describes their mission as deliberately trying to crack open what it means to be "church." The community welcomes people of all faiths and traditions; anyone who longs for a place and community for communing with both God and nature is welcome at their Sunday services and other events. [Blackmer's story of call and conversion](#) is unique, and he and his congregation stand for repentance of environmental destruction and reconciliation of all creation to God.

Another new community, one that looks very different from Church of the Woods but similarly welcomes those who aren't interested in traditional congregations, is the ecumenical [Slate Project](#) in Baltimore, MD. An ELCA mission, Slate is staffed by a Lutheran pastor, a Presbyterian, and Episcopal priest -- the Rev. Sara Shisler Goff. Slate offers opportunities to connect both online, via live tweet discussions and other digital content on social media, and face-to-face, via [Breaking Bread](#), a weekly dinner church. Slate recognizes that "racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, xenophobia, colonialism, patriarchy, disrespect for other religions, and a bunch of other bad stuff have been a part of the structures of the church and the way we relate to one another" and vows to clean these things "off the slate."

Others have started worshipping communities in existing settings. The Rev. Teresa Wakeen is leading several services each week at the Crossroads Center, a social services outreach agency in Detroit. And the Rev. Stephen Lane is working to launch a 12-step based congregation within the HOPE Center in Western New York, a thriving recovery community.

Leaders who envision new communities are able to offer the stories and actions of Jesus in a setting that is clear of whatever barriers have previously kept people away. They are able to become church within the identity of their congregations. But innovative evangelism isn't limited to starting new congregations, or to connecting with people who are outside of traditional parish settings. The opportunities for wiping the slate clean, for re-aligning all that we do in traditional parish settings so that we are formed to model God's love, as shown to us in Jesus, are limited only by our willingness to do the careful work of evaluating and discernment.

Innovative evangelism

Christian formation, for adults, families and children, is a setting that is ripe for innovation. Are your parish formation leaders connected to [Forma](#), the network of formation professionals? That's a place where the difficult questions of how programs really form our congregations to reflect God's love outwardly are regularly asked. It's also a place where program innovations are tried, evaluated and shared.

Among the innovative parish programs we've supported recently is the Spirituality and Dementia work of Dr. Janice Hicks. Intended to equip the church to share the hope that is central to Christianity, Hicks leads workshops and [offers resources to parishes](#) to minister to persons with dementia, their caregivers and their families.

The Rev. Ragan Sutterfield and Emily Sutterfield have developed a parish curriculum called [Church, Creation and the Common Good](#), intended to help parishes discover their identity in the face of climate change. Another environmentally-based curriculum is [In the Beginning](#), which features videos of ordained scientists explaining how they understand creation, evolution and the Biblical basis for environmental care.

The Rev. Al Rodriguez has recognized the acculturation shifts represented by 2^[1], 3^[2] and 4^[3] generation US-born Latinos, and the implications for churches in ministry with them. He's working in partnership with Latino/Hispanic Ministries of the Episcopal Church and EES to develop American Latino Evangelism Outreach (ALEO), a program to empower congregations to reach out to them distinctly.

Perhaps the greatest opportunities for innovative evangelism may be found as church people join forces with non-church people, addressing issues of racism, immigration, affordable housing, and other social issues. Representing the church in these battles demonstrates that God's love is grounded in compassion and justice. [The Rev. Gayle Fisher-Stewart](#) has been a vocal spokesperson against police violence and the social structures that support it, and she envisions a church that is known for its interest in justice.

So, have any of these stories tickled your imagination? Do any of these examples suggest opportunities for discerning a mission of evangelism in your congregation? For example, your congregation may not be as connected to God through nature as is Church of the Woods. But where is the need for repentance and reconciliation incarnate in your community? You may be an established Anglo parish, red doors and all. But what are your opportunities to re-interpret the culture around you? What are the urgent personal and social needs of your congregation, and where does Gospel hope meet them? Living into these challenging questions may, with God's help, show your congregation a life of love that so resembles the love of God in Christ that when people look at you, they see Jesus. That's evangelism for the 21^[4] century.

Resources

- [Episcopal Evangelism Society](#) website
- Episcopal Evangelism Society [grants program](#)
- [Missional Voices](#) conference and resources

- [Our Missional Voices](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECFVP Blog, April 26, 2017

Discipleship in the Episcopal Church Today

Jay Sidebotham

What are the spiritual practices of Episcopalians? What beliefs have a hold on their hearts? What motivates Episcopalians to be of service in the world? How are church leaders supporting them in addressing these questions?

These are the kinds of questions explored through RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement. RenewalWorks seeks to make spiritual growth the priority in parish life, building cultures of discipleship in our Episcopal congregations. That work fits well with the vocation of Forward Movement, which for more than 75 years has sought to reinvigorate the Episcopal Church by supporting individual spiritual practices. As Scott Gunn, Executive Director of Forward Movement, often says: “We are in the discipleship business.”

RenewalWorks has worked over the past four years with almost 200 Episcopal congregations, gathering insights from more than 11,000 Episcopalians. The goal of the work is simple: to encourage Episcopalians in discipleship, in the confidence that this will build spiritual health and vitality in our denomination. Through the research of RenewalWorks, a portrait of a distinct Episcopal culture is emerging. We have learned that we are an older denomination (75% over 50 years of age). Our parishioners have long tenures in their churches (54% longer than 10 years). 47% of the churches surveyed reported membership of 101-350 parishioners. Many congregations are much smaller. And we are gaining insights into the beliefs and practices of Episcopalians, described later in this article.

How does RenewalWorks work?

Renewal Works begins with an online inventory taken by parishioners. Questions in this survey explore the spiritual lives of individuals, and how the church is supporting the journey of discipleship. After the inventory is completed, a small working group meets for four workshops to address these four questions:

Where has the congregation been?

What is the current state of spiritual vitality in the congregation?

Where does the congregation feel called to go?

What next steps will help the congregation get there?

One of the benefits of the process comes as it triggers conversation about the spiritual journey. Many Episcopalians discover they have attended church for years and have never spoken to others about discipleship, about their beliefs or practices, about why the church matters to them. RenewalWorks, an evocative and occasionally provocative process, gets people talking as it also offers insights into the current state of the Episcopal Church.

Stages in our faith journeys

The research on which RenewalWorks is based identifies four stages of spiritual growth in a continuum. The stages include those who are exploring the faith, those who are growing in faith, those who are going deeper in faith, and those who hold faith at the center of their lives. Among all the respondents from many denominations, about two-thirds are in the first two stages. That percentage is higher for Episcopalians (73%). In those first two stages, people are especially reliant on the church and its leadership to guide them into deeper spiritual life. Through the research, which includes almost 2000 churches, denominational and non-denominational, the research has indicated eight archetypes of churches with distinct characteristics.

Of these eight archetypes (described in a book entitled RISE by Cally Parkinson), almost all Episcopal congregations fall into one of three categories. About 25% are in a category called “extroverted,” characterized by a strong commitment to mission and outreach. However, there may not be a strong biblical or theological connection or motivation for that outreach. Another 25% are in a category called “complacent”, which suggests passivity, maybe even indifference to the challenge of spiritual growth. There is not a strong inclination to go deeper, not much expectation of transformation, nor a clear understanding of why such development matters. (One church which fit in this category jokingly described themselves this way: We are spiritually shallow and fine with that.) 55% of the churches represent an archetype called “troubled” which might be more helpfully described as “restless” or “hungry.” In these congregations, there is a desire for a deeper spiritual life, a yearning to discover what discipleship looks like in the world these days, though parishioners are not certain how to go deeper. They are not sure that church leadership is providing pathways for spiritual growth. This third group presents a wonderful opportunity, as it reflects a desire to go deeper.

With that in mind, the role of the leader becomes especially important. Leaders of notably vital congregations share these characteristics: they are humble, transparent and vulnerable as they lead others in the spiritual journey. They model discipleship in their own lives, and communicate to their parishioners that they are working on spiritual growth themselves. They focus on making disciples. They seek to stay in touch with the calling that first drew them to ministry (their first love) and they have found ways to focus on their faith journey amidst the urgency of many other demands that face people who lead churches. With single-mindedness, they focus on engaging the hearts of their parishioners, and let concern for other metrics (like Average Sunday Attendance or number of pledging units) follow.

Spiritual practices

Since the hunger for deeper spiritual growth is strong among Episcopalians, and since many claim to be uncertain about how to go deeper, the role of clergy as Chief Spiritual Officer is critical. Teaching, specifically about scripture and sacraments, can be especially transformative. We note anxiety among

clergy about gloomy statistics in mainline congregations, and a resultant reticence to challenge parishioners to go deeper, even though 60% of Episcopal respondents want leadership to help them develop a relationship with God in Christ. 57% claim to want to be challenged to grow and take next steps spiritually. Only 38% said they were extremely or very satisfied with how the church challenged them to grow and take next steps. People want more. They want to go deeper.

We are identifying specific catalysts that help people grow in the life of faith. Engagement with scripture makes a big difference for Episcopalians at all stages of spiritual development, though only 14% of Episcopalians claim to read scripture on a daily basis. Especially for those moving from exploring to growing deeper, participation in the Eucharist has special power to transform their spiritual life. Teaching about the meaning of this sacrament helps people deepen their experience. As people move along the spiritual continuum, prayer life shifts in focus. As people are just exploring a life of faith, their prayers are often specific intercessory requests. The deeper that people go in the journey, the more they shift into prayers of gratitude and worship, and desire more solitude and contemplative approaches to prayer.

Among Episcopalians, spiritual practices are relatively low when compared to other churches. In addition, a commitment to beliefs can be less intensely held. For instance, 57% of Episcopal respondents stated a strong belief in the Trinity. 56% very strongly believe that the sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace. 48% believed we are called by God to go deeper in the faith.

In summation, Episcopalians seem hungry to be led into deeper discipleship. The heart of the leader, committed to his or her own development as a disciple, is key. And that leadership role is not only an issue for clergy. It also includes lay staff at a church, and members of the vestry. A growth edge for our denomination is to regard the vestry as a spiritual community, one that is comprised of spiritual leaders. While our denomination faces challenges, there is great opportunity for deepening discipleship in the Episcopal culture. Led by a Presiding Bishop who calls us to be the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement, there is great opportunity to form disciples in our churches.

For more information about RenewalWorks, go to www.renewalworks.org or contact the Rev. Jay Sidebotham, Director of RenewalWorks at jsidebotham@renewalworks.org.

Resources

- [RenewalWorks](#), a ministry of Forward Movement
- [Monday Matters](#), weekly message from RenewalWorks
- [Beliefs and Teachings that Engage My Heart: What's Your List?](#) by Jay Sidebotham, ECF blog post
- [Spiritual Vitality](#) by Bill Nesbit, about the pilot process for RenewalWorks, Vestry Papers, September 2013
- [Spiritual Gifts](#) by Jennifer LeBlanc, Vestry Papers, January 2017

Testing Mammon: Learning Financial Discipleship

Steven Tomlinson

When he's not talking about the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus is usually talking about money. He boldly condemns the greed of the religious authorities. He calls out the grip that wealth and possessions have on many in the crowds that follow him. In his sermons and parables, money is God's most powerful competitor for our attention, devotion and trust. He even names it a rival divinity: "You cannot serve God and Mammon."

Since the stakes are so high, it's worth asking: If money *were* my god, how would I know?

If Money were my God

As the center of my life, it would absorb my thoughts. I would turn to it first when I was afraid and do anything to avoid separation from it. I would sacrifice all other goods for its sake. I would praise its power to deliver from trouble and measure everything else against it.

If money were my god, I wouldn't question our culture's assumption that good things are scarce and that we must compete to survive or the belief that people are valuable if they are useful. I wouldn't question these assumptions because they would be obviously true, a simple description of how things are.

If money were my god, I'd be appalled by Jesus' economic vision, the command to give to everyone who asks, the suggestion that the rich are somehow at a disadvantage. I'd drive quickly past the parable of the brutal king in Luke 19:11-27 where the hero refuses to play the money game. I'd contemptuously dismiss the dishonest steward of Luke 16:1-13. I'd envy the rich fool of Luke 12:13-21, since history seems to favor folks who build bigger barns.

Money is my god more often than I'll admit. Money functions as god for most people I know and love and worship with. It's not the god we want. It's the god we've inherited, the one you get for free in our society.

Financial discipleship

The willingness to see what you really worship is the beginning of fruitful discipleship. To see how money works on us — how it filters our perception, shapes our hopes, directs our attention, limits our imagination — is to grasp what a god really is. To understand the spiritual power of money in your own life is to desire something more loving and liberating — a better god.

Jesus offers us a King who overrules Mammon's assumptions. Instead of scarcity, competition and people as means to an end, Jesus tells us that we have plenty and enough to share and that sharing with others, particularly the poor, is communion with God, our fulfillment — and when he says this, he stirs our deepest aspirations, and we recognize the truth of it.

But even as Jesus exposes Mammon as the Matrix, Mammon warns that the Kingdom of Heaven is wishful thinking for the weak and naïve (that is, for losers), and that its own power is our only protection in the *real* world. In this way, the God-Mammon dilemma pits our deepest hope against our greatest fear — and because we've played by its rules for so long, Mammon seems like a safer bet.

But what if Mammon has tricked us, scared us into self-fulfilling belief in a grubby game that pits all against all and offers only money as savior? What if the Kingdom *is* the real world? How might we discern the truth?

What if we ran some tests?

As part of our Comprehensive Wellness Program at the Seminary of the Southwest, faculty and students have been crafting small experiments to test the grounding assumptions of the dominant culture against the countercultural claims and commandments of Jesus. We're exploring how our habits (particularly with respect to money, the body and relationship) reveal unexamined assumptions about how things work and what matters most, assumptions that are often at odds with the faith we profess. We're also seeing how very small intentional changes can prove enlightening. Many of our most fruitful experiments have involved money.

Here's how the process works:

1. Find a point of tension.

Identify some conflict between your behavior with money — getting and spending, saving and giving — and the Kingdom you want to believe in. You might start with one of Jesus' teachings or commandments that inspires you but that you find hard to believe or obey. For instance, am I willing to "give to everyone who asks" (Luke 6)? Would I refuse to sell my possessions and give to the poor (Mark 10) if Jesus made that the condition of eternal life? Am I unable to refrain from worrying (Matthew 6) about material provisions?

Alternatively, start with a money behavior that makes it hard for you to respond to God's call in your life. Are you anxiously spending more than you make? Is work consuming your life? Are you resisting the help you need?

2. Pay attention to what you're doing now.

If you picked the commandment, "Give to everyone who asks," you're probably not giving to everyone, but what *are* you doing? Are you hurrying past beggars, ignoring requests, quickly explaining why you can't help? This awareness helps set up your experiment.

If overspending is an obstacle to following God's call, notice when you spend. What triggers a trip to the computer or the mall? What does it feel like when you're shopping? What does it feel like later? How much could you afford to spend without creating financial stress?

3. Ask: What would happen if I followed this teaching?

What are you afraid of? "Isn't it obvious?" snapped the friend who was afraid to give. "I'd be exhausted, broke. I'd look stupid and irresponsible. People's needs are bottomless. I can't help everybody."

Entertaining the Gospel possibility flushes limiting beliefs out into the open.

The Big Spender confessed: “If I didn’t shop, I’d get bored or anxious or depressed.” And then, “I’m not sure I could sit still with my thoughts.”

4. Ask: What would I need to believe before this teaching would make sense?

It helps to sit with the Gospel as you ask this question. Jesus’ passionate vision of the Kingdom loosens the grip of what our culture calls common sense. My friend who wanted to give answered: “I’d have to believe that I had enough to share. I’d have to believe that I had something to give that wouldn’t run out.”

My spending friend said: “I’d have to believe that God is greater than whatever I’m afraid of. I’d have to believe I wouldn’t be alone in the stillness.”

5. Now ask: What experiment could I try?

If you’ve picked a commandment, what safer and simpler version of this commandment could you actually keep? The aspiring giver wasn’t prepared to expose her bank account to a needy world, but she was determined to find some way to explore the promise of the teaching with manageable cost and risk. That intention inspired her experiment: “For a week, I’m going to give my full attention to everyone who’s asking for something.”

The lonely spender said: This week I’m going to say a short prayer when I enter a store, when I go online and again before I buy anything: “Lord, you are with me here and always.”

Here’s the trick: You’ve got to find the smallest possible experiment. Anything that requires sustained effort or heroic sacrifice will go the way of the New Year’s resolution. You must craft a test so vanishingly small that it flies under the radar of your fear and resistance. The best experiments are almost pure intention.

6. Reflect on what happens.

These small experiments are habit disruptors, and we recover creativity anytime we break a habit.

I asked the aspiring giver what she learned from her experiment. She said, “I have something for everyone who asks.”

“Did you give people money?”

“Sometimes,” she said. “Most people are really asking for something else.”

“Were you afraid of running out?”

She replied: “When I remember that I have enough, I’m not afraid to see their need — or mine.”

The spender said: “I wasn’t afraid because I wasn’t alone.”

“What difference did that make?”

“I didn’t buy anything I regret.”

Because Mammon is our culture’s god — and often our own — practice with money is uniquely powerful formation for Christian discipleship. Instead of avoiding Jesus’ tough teachings and ignoring impossible commandments, we can see them as opportunities for small experiments. We can apply whatever faith we might have to creative tests of his promises. With prayer and playful curiosity, we may discover that Kingdom thinking works in the real world, that money’s illusions are optional, and that we can afford the luxury of a greater God.

***Steven Tomlinson** is the Crump Visiting Professor of Pastoral Leadership at the Seminary of the Southwest and a Master Teacher at the Acton School of Business.*

Resources

- [A foundation for financial health and wellness](#), ENS article on Seminary of the Southwest's new programs to promote student success, November 21, 2014
- Church Pension Group [Financial Learning Center](#) tools, including:
[Financial Assessment - Overview](#)
This link takes you to a check list to help you assess your financial picture.
- [Monthly/Annual Spending Plan](#)
Here is a sample spending plan so you can identify where your income/expenses are.
- [Life Goals](#)
This tool helps you describe your life goals and to see how they tie to your spending habits.
- [Setting Financial Goals](#)
This chart provides a way to plan how to achieve your short and long term goals.
- Church Pension Group [Financial Wellness Resources](#) list
- [Your Money Personality Type](#) online quiz
- [Money – What's It to You?](#) an ECF webinar hosted by Donald Romanik and Demi Prentiss, April 4, 2017
- [Treat the Disease, Not the Symptom](#) by Jerry Keucher, Vestry Papers, March 2016

Evangelism Matters, but Can We Do It?

Scott Gunn

When he was elected, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said he wanted to be known as a CEO, a Chief Evangelism Officer. His election was part of a wider surge of interest in the knowledge and practice of evangelism in our Church. At the same General Convention in 2015, in an almost unprecedented move, the church-wide budget was amended from the floor to add \$2.8 million for evangelism initiatives.

So it shouldn't be surprising that an Episcopal conference focused on evangelism would be A Big Deal. In November 2016, Forward Movement partnered with the Presiding Bishop's office to offer Evangelism Matters — an entire conference on evangelism. The name of the conference has a bit of a double meaning. Evangelism matters a great deal. And if you want to tell people about Jesus, you'll want to learn more about evangelism matters — the “stuff” of sharing the Good News.

A new day for evangelism

That the conference was oversold, with a waiting list, speaks volumes. If you had told me several years ago that the Episcopal Church would host a conference on telling people about Jesus and that there would be a waiting list, I'd have thought you were delusional. But here we are. It is a new age.

No longer must we speak in circumlocution, “the E-word”. We can speak proudly of evangelism and what it means. The tenor of the conference was to claim our newfound desire to share the Good News of God in Christ. Aside from practical matters, one important aspect of the conference was the simple and repeated assertion that inviting people into a loving relationship with Jesus is a good thing to do. In the past this has sadly been a controversial idea.

Practical evangelism

Frank Logue offered a [summation of the conference](#) in the final session, and it's worth reading to see his summary of what happened, especially in plenary sessions. The core theme of the conference, repeated again and again, is that sharing Good News is a good thing — because it leads to transformation.

In one session, Stephanie Spellers invited conference participants to practice sharing good news with cardboard testimonies. It's a simple but powerfully effective idea. You write before and after messages on the two sides of a cardboard sign. Flipping the sign reveals the effect of God's transforming love. You can [see an example of what this looks like on Youtube](#). Part of the power of an exercise like this — which could work in any vestry or congregation — is that it empowers us all; it helps us realize that all we need is a simple, short phrase or two to reveal the transforming love of Jesus Christ at work in our lives.

The workshop sessions were filled with practical ways to practice effective evangelism. Casey Shobe taught us how to practice “elevator evangelism.” Imagine you're in an elevator, and you have just a few seconds with someone to share your story of transformation. Through a bit of preparation and some practice, we can all be ready to bear witness to what God is doing in our lives. We don't need to go to seminary or memorize the Bible; we just need to stand ready with thirty seconds or so of our own story.

Mary Parmer shared [Invite*Welcome*Connect](#), an excellent free program she has created to help congregations be more welcoming to seekers and to help newcomers make connections with church ministries.

Continuing a theme of free resources to support evangelism, Melody Shobe and your author offered a workshop on the formation that must accompany evangelism for those who seek to become followers of Jesus. Forward Movement has created a free resource, [Transforming Questions](#), that congregations can use to teach people some of the basics of Christian faith and encourage their continued formation in following Jesus.

There were plenty of other workshops for those starting new churches, for incorporating new members into the life of a church community, and for practicing evangelism with our community — in person and online. You can see the array of workshops and [download handouts on the Evangelism Matters website](#).

While practical tips were a clear part of the conference, perhaps more remarkable was the shared sense that evangelism is something that we Episcopalians can and must do — and that we are capable of doing it. We don't need to live in fear, thinking that evangelism is impossible. Rather, we can live in hope that God's Spirit abides in us and that we have already been equipped to proclaim the Good News of what God is doing in our own lives and in the world.

The planning team is already working on Evangelism Matters 2.0, slated for early 2018. Stay tuned to the Evangelism Matters website at www.evangelismmatters.org for news and updates.

Scott Gunn is executive director of Forward Movement, whose mission is to inspire disciples and empower evangelists.

Resources

- [Evangelism Matters](#) website
- [Episcopal Church Evangelism Initiatives](#) web page
- [Cardboard Testimonies](#) video from Evangelism Matters
- [Handouts and downloads](#) from workshops at Evangelism Matters
- [Transforming Questions](#), free downloadable course by Scott Gunn and Melody Wilson Shobe
- [Invite*Welcome*Connect](#) website
- [St. Paul's Open Letter to Presiding Bishop Curry](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF blog post

- [Follow-up: St. Paul's Open Letter to Presiding Bishop Curry](#)
- [Loving, Liberating, and Life-Giving](#) by Michael Curry, ECF blog post

Farm Workers Ministry – Discipleship in Action

Juan Carabaña

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

Father Antonio Rojas, better known as Father Tony, is a legend among the people he serves. Since 1998 he has been traveling to the farms of marginalized migrant workers to take the Mass directly to the farmers. The idea behind his ministry was initiated by a woman who took clothes to the farmers. She identified the need and communicated it to father Tony, who was the missionary for that population but wasn't initially on-site at the farms. I became aware of the program through my Episcopal Church, and soon realized that there was an unfulfilled need to address this particular Latino population within the city of Durham. I started helping out however I could and when the job of Program Coordinator for the ministry was announced I thought I may want to try it out for a year. Years later, here I am, still helping the community.

Isolation and fear

There are different kinds of farm workers. Due to the fact that only 12% of them have work visas, they're frequently taken advantage of by the contractors with impunity. It's a situation worsened by the fact that they are forced to remain on the farms. 50 - 70% of the workers are undocumented and go from state to state looking for work. These families work for whatever they're given. The work is exhausting. They rent homes in deplorable conditions and live in extreme poverty, having no contact with their surrounding communities. Sometimes, because they have no knowledge of the United States, they have nothing to eat and are afraid to leave the farms in search of food.

We will not be able to solve the problem of farm workers in America by saying that only the “documented” are free to work because it wouldn’t address the problems of the undocumented workers; instead those without documentation would be left jobless. Undocumented domestic workers are in a similar predicament; they’re not paid fair salaries and if they voice their complaints they’re threatened or simply fired.

The undocumented are very hard working people and they know how to work with their hands. If farm work is unavailable, they can find domestic work as painters and landscapers, but because they don’t understand the US legal system they tend to live in complete isolation and can never get ahead. However, we have found that those who are given opportunities to learn English begin to integrate and eventually prosper and succeed.

The people we serve have almost nothing and need basic things, like food, so that is mostly what we give them—an irony for those who sow the fields and pick the crops. We also try to teach them that they should not be afraid of their surroundings, however the fear that they can be removed or deported at any time is very real. Since the recent presidential election we have seen a rise in their fear. For instance, they now only go to the supermarket at night and stay under the cover of the farms during the day. People are afraid and think that there is no safe place. This is why our presence is so necessary.

An invisible community

We do not evangelize or undertake our discipleship as other churches do; instead we provide services as part of our social aid. Our clients only have Sundays free, so we have to be creative with our pastoral care. We educate them so they we can reduce their fear. The people we help tell others about our services. Our clients have no access to our web or Facebook pages so everything we do is communicated through word of mouth, which is why it is so necessary for us to be present on the farms, otherwise we would lose touch with our clients and they would stop using our services. We are in constant contact with other organizations so we can build a network and keep each other informed. We are now seeing

that migrants who come back year after year know about our services, they visit us when they return and they tell others about what we do.

The sad truth is that farm workers are an invisible population. People think that crops are picked by machines and that organic fruits and vegetables grow in beautiful gardens. The reality is that the farmers are worked like machines, racing to manually fill their buckets. Consumers don't know what is truly behind the fruits and vegetables they buy in stores. Human rights laws are continually broken and never strengthened.

We keep on helping and making people aware. We hold dialogue sessions with workers and monthly meals to ask them what they need most. I do not want to give them what I think they need. I remember that because tobacco workers tend to get very wet. They told us needed raincoats, so we gave them raincoats but they weren't adequate. When they wore them they found that they were easily torn. When I asked them how they were doing they did not initially want to tell me that their raincoats weren't holding up. However, as a result of our continued dialogue someone finally had the courage to speak up and when we listened to them they understood that they were part of a community and that collectively they can achieve much more than they can on their own.

Currently nobody knows exactly how American farms employ undocumented workers but we do know that they can employ anywhere from 8 to 100 laborers. When we have our annual festival we get about 3,000 people. Last year we continued our mission of delivering direct services, welfare aid, education, and pastoral care to close to 3,500 farm workers in the North Carolina counties of Johnson, Harnett and Sampson. We consider it our mission. As part of the Episcopal Church, we are committed to following the example of Jesus who served the poor, the needy, and the marginalized, and who not only taught them to fish, but also gave them fishes.

Juan Carabaña, Ph.D, is a native of Spain, a molecular biologist, and a longtime member and current senior warden of El Buen Pastor Episcopal Church, Durham, NC. He was as a researcher at Duke

University Department of Immunology and at UNC Chapel Hill Department of Ophthalmology. In El Buen Pastor, he is a Latino Girl Scouts group co-director, youth director, and develops leadership and educational programs to strengthen the Latino community and improve their quality of life in Durham. He is married, has three children, and enjoys spending time with his family, the great outdoors, and playing soccer.

Resources

- [Episcopal Farmworker Ministry](#) website
- [I'll Go With You](#) by Ema Rosero-Nordalm, Vestry Papers, November 2013
- [Saying 'Yes'](#) by Holly Zook, Vestry Papers, November 2013
- [Harvesters BackSnack Ministry](#) by Fran Wheeler, Vestry Papers, November 2011

El Ministerio con trabajadores agrícolas – el Discipulado en acción

Juan Carabaña

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

El padre Antonio Rojas, mejor conocido como el padre Tony, es una leyenda entre la gente. Desde 1998 ha estado ayudando, yendo a los campos y llevando la misa a los/las campesinos/as marginados/as. Este ministerio no lo empezó el padre Tony, sino una mujer que llevaba ropa al campo, pero él fue el misionero. Yo me enteré del programa cuando siendo parte de la Iglesia Episcopal El Buen Pastor llevé a un grupo de jóvenes al Ministerio Episcopal de los Trabajadores Agrícolas. Tras haber visto que había una necesidad incumplida en la ciudad de Durham para la población latina, comencé a ayudar en lo que podía. Cuando surgió el puesto de coordinador de programas para ese ministerio, pensé que me gustaría probarlo por sólo un año, pero todavía sigo aquí, ayudando a la comunidad.

Aislamiento y miedo

Hay diferentes clases de trabajadores agrícolas. Debido a que sólo un 12 por ciento de ellos tiene visa de trabajo, están sujetos a abusos de los contratistas, amplificadas por el hecho de que están limitados a permanecer en las fincas. El 50 al 70 por ciento de esos trabajadores son indocumentados y van de estado en estado en busca de trabajo. Estas familias cobran lo que les den, el trabajo es agotador, alquilan viviendas en condiciones deplorables, viven en la miseria y no tienen contacto con la comunidad que los rodea. A veces, por desconocer este país, pasan hambre y no se atreven a salir de donde están.

No vamos a poder solucionar el problema de los trabajadores agrícolas en este país. Y si se solucionara y sólo pudieran trabajar los documentados, todos los indocumentados quedarían sin trabajo. Algo similar ocurre con los/as trabajadores/as domésticos. Los/as que no están dispuestos/as a pagar un sueldo justo no tienen ningún problema en tomar indocumentados/as. Y si causan problemas, como son indocumentados/as, se les amenaza o simplemente se les despide.

Estos/as trabajadores/as agrícolas indocumentados/as son muy trabajadores/as. Saben hacer trabajo manual. Si no hay trabajo agrícola, pueden ser empleados/as domésticos, pintores/as y jardineros/as. Pero como no entienden el sistema de EE UU, no salen adelante y viven aislados/as. Pero los/as que se empiezan a integrar y a aprender inglés, prosperan y triunfan.

Aunque el dicho dice que es mejor enseñarle a alguien a pescar que darle un pescado, parte de los programas que ofrecemos es darles el pescado. La gente que servimos tiene poco y nada. Necesitan comida, necesitan lo básico y eso es lo que les damos. No tiene sentido que aquellos que siembran los campos y levantan las cosechas no tengan qué comer. También tratamos de enseñarles que no tienen que tenerle miedo a su entorno, pero miedo de que en cualquier momento se les pueda expulsar o deportar es real. Después de las elecciones, todas las personas que viven en el campo están dejando de

salir. Van a comprar al supermercado en la noche. La gente está asustada y piensa que no hay ningún lugar seguro. Es por eso que nuestra presencia es muy necesaria.

Una comunidad invisible

La manera en que evangelizamos y hacemos discipulado no es como lo hacen las iglesias, porque lo hacemos como parte de la asistencia social. Nuestros clientes sólo tienen libre los domingos, así que tenemos que ser creativos con el cuidado pastoral. Los instruimos para que no vivan atemorizados. La gente viene aquí buscando trabajo, buscando una mejor vida para sus hijos e hijas. Las personas a las que ayudamos hacen correr la voz sobre nuestros servicios. Nuestros clientes no ven nuestra página web ni nuestra página de Facebook. En otras palabras, hacen correr la voz de boca a boca. Esto nos causa problemas si no podemos ir a ciertos campos, porque si no estamos en contacto con nuestros clientes ellos dejan de usar nuestros servicios. Siempre estamos en contacto con otras organizaciones para que nos podamos ayudar entre nosotros a mantenerlos/as informados/as. Los/as que regresan cada año saben sobre nuestra ayuda, nos visitan cuando regresan y les dicen a otros/as sobre nuestros servicios.

La triste realidad es que los trabajadores agrícolas son una población invisible. La gente piensa que las frutas se cosechan a máquina, que las frutas y las verduras orgánicas están en granjas bonitas, pero todo es como una fábrica en la que hay que trabajar con rapidez para llenar cubetas. Nadie sabe cómo viven, qué hay detrás de las frutas que compramos en las tiendas. Hay leyes que no se cumplen ni refuerzan.

Nosotros seguimos ayudando y concientizando a los demás. Hemos tenido sesiones de diálogos con los/as trabajadores/as y comidas mensuales para preguntarles qué necesitan. Yo no les quiero proporcionar lo que yo pienso que necesitan. Pero también es necesario que ellos confíen en nosotros y eso toma tiempo. Recuerdo que debido a que los/as trabajadores/as del tabaco necesitan usar impermeables porque se mojan mucho, repartimos impermeables. Ellos me agradecieron muchos los impermeables, pero cuando los usaron se rompieron. Cuando les pregunté cómo les iba con ellos, me

daban las gracias y no me decían que se les habían roto. Por fin alguien tuvo el valor de decirme que se les habían roto. Estas sesiones de diálogo nos ayudan mucho, porque los trabajadores no solo nos dicen qué necesitan sino que pueden ver que forman una comunidad y que unidos pueden lograr más que solos.

Hoy en día nadie sabe exactamente cuántos campos hay. Pero cada campo puede tener de 8 a 100 personas. Cuando tenemos nuestro festival anual pueden venir hasta 3,000 personas. El año pasado continuamos nuestra misión de prestar servicios directos, asistencia social, educación y atención pastoral a casi 3,500 trabajadores agrícolas en los condados de Johnson, Harnett y Sampson en Carolina del Norte. Como parte de la Iglesia Episcopal, estamos comprometidos a seguir el ejemplo de Jesús, que sirvió a la gente pobre, necesitada y marginada, y que además de enseñarles a pescar les entregó pescados.

Juan Carabaña, Ph.D, es nativo de España, biólogo molecular, y miembro y guardián mayor de la Iglesia Episcopal El Buen Pastor en Durham, NC. Fue investigador en el Departamento de Inmunología de la Universidad de Duke y en el Departamento de Oftalmología de UNC Chapel Hill. En El Buen Pastor, es codirector del grupo de Girl Scouts Latinas, director juvenil, y desarrolla programas de liderazgo y educación para fortalecer a la comunidad latina y mejorar su calidad de vida en Durham. Está casado, tiene tres hijos, y disfruta pasar tiempo con su familia, el aire libre, y jugar fútbol.

Recursos

- [Episcopal Farmworker Ministry website](#)
- [Acompañamiento Pastoral a Visitas Médicas](#) por Ema Rosero-Nordalm
- [Comunidades Latinas y la Reforma Migratoria](#) por Ema Rosero-Nordalm