



Vital Practices

for leading congregations

Mission: the heartbeat of the church

IN THIS ISSUE:

All Church Vestry

Managing Staff: 7 Things to Consider

Lessons from Babylon

Providing Pensions to Your Lay Employees

All Church Vestry

BY REBECCA HENDRICKS

The Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon provide the option of an all-church vestry. It's a good fit for our rural diocese, which covers 69,000 square miles of agricultural and timber land and has its own registered cattle brand. Over 2,600 Episcopalians in 22 parishes call this place home. Most of our parishes are small and far-flung. The vast, wide-open space speaks to our souls in quiet and profound ways. I suspect it's the same for those living in other rural dioceses.

Our parish of St. James, Milton-Freewater is small and includes mostly older members who share the numerous ministries necessary to parish life. About ten years ago, it became increasingly difficult to find members who would commit to serve on the vestry. We fit the requirements of our diocesan Canon XV, Section 5 regarding vestries:

(a) Congregations with fewer than forty (40) adult members and wishing to dispense with the organization of a vestry may elect to conduct its affairs at meetings of the congregation. Such meetings shall exercise the full responsibility and authority of a vestry as set forth in Section 1 and 4 of this Canon and as hereinafter provided. (The full text may be viewed on our diocesan website at www.episdioeo.org.) Strict qualifications must be met before a person is admitted to the lending program. Once admitted, regular attendance, punctual payments, and inscrutable records are a must.

We decided that an all-church vestry would be worth a try. The results were amazing and we've never looked back!

The structure we use for our all-church vestry is similar to a

a regular vestry. We usually meet monthly as needed. We find it best for us to meet right after Sunday worship for no longer than an hour. Of course, we all bring refreshments! The agenda, meeting minutes, and financial reports are now provided to parishioners by email prior to the meetings, with hard copies available. We have an active group of committees that report to the larger group.

The biggest difference we've noticed with an all-church vestry is the involvement of each parishioner. Everyone is invited to participate, and we include guests or visitors, as well as members. Our attendance is excellent. Each person has the opportunity to speak and each opinion is valued. Even though we may have varying perspectives, differences are respected and we are able to reach consensus. This is reflective of the Benedictine model of shared wisdom. After adopting an all-church vestry, we no longer hear complaints from members that they aren't informed of issues or their opinions aren't solicited. Instead, we see a high degree of ownership in the parish and a strong sense of belonging to the Body of Christ.

Several other parishes in our diocese are using an all-church vestry model. Chester Markley of

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in Enterprise, Oregon reports:

"St. Patrick's had an all member vestry when I started attending in January 2003. I think that having all members serve on the vestry helps each member feel more of a part of the church. They are part of any decision making as well as able to voice their opinion as to how it operates and how they feel. This brings us all closer together as we get to know and understand each other on a more personal basis. This then leads us to being a stronger congregation."

We also see other options. Beth Spell from St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Canyon City, Oregon notes:

"We do not have an all-church vestry. We have a vestry that does not have a junior or senior warden. We have divided up those job responsibilities among the members of the vestry."

From St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Lakeview, Oregon, the Rev. Rich Landrith writes:

"Yes we are one of those all-church vestry parishes. It works quite well for us. We try to meet monthly with a potluck after church services on Sunday. Some months we are too busy or have nothing pertinent to discuss so we

are very flexible with these meetings. We find this format a very enjoyable way to do the business of the church and, of course, the food is always great; so good that we sometimes invent reasons to meet!!"

The past several years have been transitional for many parishes including ours. Letting go of old models allows us to stop thinking about what don't have or can't do. Our vestry model has changed, and so has our clergy model. We've slowly stopped focusing on our need to "grow" which reflected the underlying fear that our parish might disappear altogether. Instead we've learned to in God and let the Holy Spirit lead. By focusing on discerning our mission, we continue to find new ways to respond to God's call to be the Church in our local and global community. And gradually, new members are joining us.

The Rev. Rebecca Hendricks
is rector at St. James' Episcopal Church, Milton-Freewater, Oregon.

Resources

- Anglican/Episcopal Rural Churches, a Facebook group for members of rural or small congregations who wish to share common concerns and ideas: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/241592609198266/>

- Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon: <http://www.episdioeo.org/index.htm>
- Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon Constitutions and Canons; click on Canons 2010 and scroll to Canon XV, Section 5, page 26: http://www.episdioeo.org/G/g-constitution_canons.html
- Small Churches – Big Ideas: <http://www.vts.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=139979>
- St. James, Milton-Freewater, Oregon: http://www.episdioeo.org/A/C/au-findParish_St_James_Milton-Freewater.html
- Total Ministry – A different way of “doing church:” <http://totalministry.org/extlink.html>

Editor's Letter

Happy New Year!

If, as Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori says, "Mission is the heartbeat of the church, then the vestry is the life-giving oxygen that keeps the heartbeat on a steady course. Our focus for this month and next is "Real Basics for Vestries," offering strategies for congregations looking to try different ways of addressing familiar challenges.

Here's what we you'll find in this issue:

- With recent Episcopal Church data showing median Sunday attendance at 65, and almost 300 of the churches' approximately 7,000 congregations reporting an average Sunday attendance (ASA) of 10 or less, some small congregations can no longer support the traditional vestry model of governance. In "All-Church Vestry," Rebecca Hendricks provides a look at a different model, the vestry of the whole, being used in a number of small churches in the Diocese of East Oregon.
- Recognizing that the parish administrator is often the per-

son who keeps the day-to-day aspects of a congregation running smoothly, Jeremy Sierra shares "Managing Staff: 7 Things To Consider" as it relates to providing a good working environment for key staff.

- In "Lessons from Babylon," Christopher Johnson offers a strategy as old as Jeremiah for moving out of the comfort zone of 'the good old days' and learning how to navigate our changing world using the resources already present in our communities.
- An update from the Church Pension Fund, "Providing Pensions to Your Lay Employees" by Pattie Christensen and Michael Macdonald, to help vestries with plans for adding their qualified lay employees to The Episcopal Church's lay pension plan no later than January 2013.
- "At the End of the Day," by Mary Parmer provides an introduction to the Diocese of Texas' Newcomer Ministry Project and its rich array of resources for

congregations. Welcoming the stranger well continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of our ministries and this project, piloted at St. Francis in Houston, provides both a roadmap and an array of resources.

- In "Google+ (Jesus+You)=Vital Practices" Greg Troxell invites you to take a look at and try out the free resources available through Google+ including Google+ Hangouts. Greg's enthusiasm for this new social media resource has spilled over to the team at ECF Vital Practices; we are partnering with him to introduce Hangouts to you by inviting you to come and hangout with us later this month.
- "A Snapshot of our Urban Neighborhood" by Anna Olson, tells the story of how a congregation with most of its members – and its entire vestry – now living in the suburbs, has begun to move off of the church property and begin to reconnect with the surrounding neighborhood.

- Laurie Kazilionis' "Parity in Healthcare" offers information and resources to help vestries as they prepare for the addition of their qualified lay employees to The Episcopal Church's denominational health plan by January 2013.

Additionally, the *ECF Vital Practices* archives include a variety of articles, blogs, and other resources related to vestries. To access them look for our Topic menu on each page and click on "Vestry." To get you started, here are links to some of our more popular Vestry Papers articles relating to real basics for vestries:

- Vestry101: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/issue/vestry-101/>
- Vestry Meetings: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/issue/vestry-meetings/>
- Vestry Orientation: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/issue/vestry-orientation/>
- Buildings and Grounds: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/>

[issue/buildings-and-grounds/](#)

- Financial Planning: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/issue/financial-planning/>

Over the next two months, ECF Vital Practices will be adding to this content with additional Vestry Papers articles as well as related Vital Posts, VP Talks, and Tools. I also invite you to use the Topics index on each page of the site to find other resources related to the ministry of the vestry including past Vestry Papers articles, blog posts, and the many resources found in our Your Turn and Tools sections.

I invite you to add to this content by sharing your healthy practices in the Your Turn section and by participating in VP Talks and/or posting comments related to our articles, blog posts, or other content.

Faithfully,
Nancy

NANCY DAVIDGE
Editor, *ECF Vital Practices*

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

Managing Staff: 7 Things to Consider

BY JEREMIAH SIERRA

Churches are often full of secrets. Nothing sinister, just quirks you wouldn't notice unless you spent a lot of time sitting at the receptionist's desk or in the parish administrators' office. Things like remembering to give the gate a thud to get it to shut on rainy days or that an old man comes by to ask for money every few days. Or, perhaps it is the carefully passed on advice from the previous administrator sharing how to get the choir director to choose the music in time to print the Sunday leaflet.

Vestries are usually very familiar with what goes on in the community, but may not be as familiar with the challenges parish administrators face every day as they work to keep the church running smoothly. I've been on the administrative staff of a couple of Episcopal churches, and have some recommendations related to how a vestry can support their parish administrator:

1) Share what's going on in the church. While this sounds basic, just as in other aspects of our lives, we don't always remember to share information with everyone who needs to know. To do his or

her job well, the administrator should know about every event scheduled at the church, from the vestry meetings and choir rehearsals, to when the handyman is stopping by or flowers are going to be delivered. As a fellow church administrator said to me, "The parish administrator is a traffic cop to prevent potential collisions."

Forgetting to tell the administrator about a meeting or delivery isn't just frustrating to the administrator. We've all heard stories where a group is expecting to use a space only to find that another activity has been scheduled for the same space at the same time. Who wouldn't be frustrated to find out at the last minute that someone is scheduled to clean the sanctuary at the same time as the choir rehearsal? These mix-ups are easily prevented by having a central point – often the parish administrator – for handling all scheduling.

2) Help the parish administrator feel connected to the spiritual side of the church. Often, the administrative staff does not attend the church where they work; to do so can confuse work and worship (for example, when parishioners

want to discuss typos in the service bulletin during coffee hour). If this is the case in your faith community, it may be helpful to offer the administrator an orientation – and periodic updates – related to the vision of the church and how his or her role relates to that vision. Making an effort to introduce the administrator to church leaders who may not visit during business hours is another way to build connections between the administrative staff and members of the worshipping community.

3) Establish clear reporting relationships. In the course of his/her role, the parish administrator often has a variety of individuals making requests, and sometimes demands. Ultimately, the rector is the parish administrator's boss. With requests coming from vestry, staff, the rector, and others in the worship community, too many people (or even two people) acting as the supervisor will make it difficult for the administrator to function. The rector and administrator should establish priorities and use them to guide choices and establish boundaries when requests and demands threaten to interfere with the expected workflow.

4) Build time for dealing with interruptions into the workday.

The parish administrator is constantly being interrupted. Every day is filled with ringing phones, conversations with visitors, pleas for help from homeless men and women, and last minute requests. While these interruptions are part of the job and to be expected, they also have an effect on the administrator's ability to get things done. If the vestry members are aware of this, they can take this into account when they make requests for reports to be copied or phone calls to be made, as well as understand why last minute requests can't always be accommodated.

5) Support the parish administrator when they need to say 'no.' The most effective administrators work on a schedule: pay the bills on Monday, print the bulletins on Thursday, etc. Recognizing and understanding that in order to keep up with their schedule, the administrator sometimes has to say "no," or, at least, "Can this wait?" can help keep the church office running smoothly. When making requests, the vestry should try to respect the administrator's schedule, just as the administrator respects the vestry's schedule. Of course, some things may end up being last minute, but whenever possible giving the administrator plenty of time to prepare for mailings, special bulletins, and other large tasks

that come up throughout the year, keeps everyone happier.

6) Provide up-to-date equipment in the office.

The quality of office equipment makes a big difference in how efficiently the office runs. A copier that is constantly jamming can make an otherwise easy task grueling, and a slow computer can make creating the service leaflet maddening. Updating equipment and software may not seem like a high priority, especially if budgets are tight, but it is worth the expense. Invest a little extra in software and equipment, and your administrator will love you, and will be much less tempted to throw his or her computer out the window.

7) Offer comprehensive job descriptions for all administrative positions. This means having a clear and realistic job description. If half of the job is "other tasks as assigned" it can quickly become unwieldy and difficult to prioritize. Another church administrator suggested to me an excellent exercise: occasionally comparing the original job description with what the administrator is actually doing. This way, everyone is aware of the scope and number of tasks the job actually entails. The administrator's job may change over time, of course, but everyone should be aware and up front about the change. This also means commu-

nicating honestly and clearly when things are not going well for any reason. It's tempting to always be nice, especially in a church, but avoiding difficult conversations usually just ends up allowing frustration and confusion to build up.

Your parish administrator may have things to add. Communication is at the heart of the job of parish administration, so give the parish administrator a chance to talk to you about the job and, in turn, tell him or her about the church and why you are a part of it. When the vestry communicates often and clearly with the parish administrator, he or she can keep everyone informed, help the church run smoothly, and do the important work of building the kingdom of God.

*Jeremiah (Jeremy) Sierra has a degree in creative writing from The New School, and seven years of administrative experience, much of it serving as parish administrator for Episcopal churches. He is also editor and cofounder of *Episcorific* and contributes to the *Huffington Post*.*

Resources

- Parish administrator job descriptions (courtesy of the Consortium of Endowed Parishes and Calvary Church, Memphis):

<http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/sample-job-descriptions-parish-administrator/>

- The Administrative Space: <http://www.churchextension.org/planning/upload/TheAdministrativeSpace.pdf>
- Buying the Right Stuff: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/070_tech02_buying_sb.cfm ■ Episcopal Community Services: <http://www.episcopalcommunity.org/>
- Managing the Church Office: http://www.resourceministries.net/articles_details.php?articlesID=18 ■ Harvesters: <http://www.harvesters.org/>
- Managing the Church Office: An Ever-Changing Challenge: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/052_off.cfm
- Organizing and Arranging the Church Office: <http://www.religiousproductnews.com/articles/2011-January/Feature-Articles/Organizing-and-Arranging-the-Church-Office.htm>
- Practical Church Computer Policies: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/070_tech06_comptpol_sb.cfm
- Selecting Church Management Software: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/070_tech03_software_sb.cfm

Lessons from Babylon

BY CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:7)

These words can easily serve as a congregation's biblical understanding for its motivation to develop tools focused on Asset-Based Community Development. The prophet Jeremiah wrote these words to the people of Israel during their time of exile in Babylon. They were longing for the good old days in Jerusalem when community life seemed secure and their access to God clear and predictable. But those days were in the past and the landscape had changed dramatically – they were in an unknown land surrounded by strangers they were not interested in associating with. And Jeremiah tells them that they need to pray for this city they have found themselves in. Jeremiah tells them that in fact their very welfare is tied to the welfare of that city – and that alone should be cause for prayer.

For many of our Episcopal congregations today the language of Asset Based Community

Development is as foreign as was the language of Babylon for the Israelites. If we are to hear Jeremiah's words for us today we will hear that the very welfare of our congregations is dependent upon our willingness to actively pray for our neighborhood communities, upon our willingness to actively seek to nurture the welfare of our neighborhood communities. We need not fear the new language, but rather embrace the new language as an opportunity to enter into the very relationships that will secure our welfare.

What is Asset Based Community Development?

Trainer Mike Green teaches that Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is “a powerful approach focused on discovering and mobilizing the resources that are already present in a community.” So what is this powerful approach and how does it work?

In its most basic context ABCD is both an attitude and a process. ABCD is an attitude that supports our Baptismal Covenant claim to seek to serve Christ in all people and to respect the dignity of every human being. It is an attitude that believes that everyone has gifts to

offer and is committed to discovering those gifts and putting them to work for the common good. Believing that every community is filled with treasures, ABCD is an attitude that reinforces every community's capacity to act on its own behalf even if it lacks all the capacity necessary to accomplish that which it is seeking. This attitude is not focused on reinforcing the dependency of people who are needy as an acceptable basis for measuring human dignity, but rather it is inclusive and reinforces the interdependency of the community as essential for a healthy functioning humanity. This is a very similar approach as taken when the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the body and its many parts all working for the common good as the basis of how we are to live together as Christian communities of faith (1 Corinthians 12).

ABCD is a process that brings the varied members of a community together for the purpose of identifying gifts (capacity to act) and mutual interests of concern (motivation to act), and then sets out to link those gifts together in service to interests of mutual

concern. Collaboration is a critical key to negotiating this process successfully. Failure to collaborate often results in an imbalance of power that inadequately represents the gifts and interests of a few while denying the gifts and interests of many. The result of such an imbalanced process is an unhealthy and unsustainable relationship. Looking again to Paul, he addresses this need for balance in these words; "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance." (2 Corinthians 8:13-14)

The simplest approach to ABCD that I can suggest is to invite interested members of the congregation to pair up and join in an informal conversation that begins with the question, "Tell me a little about your gifts." And then just listen. At first blush this is an intimidating question, but once the ice of humility is broken the conversation becomes a hum as people exchange their gifts with one another. Then invite the participants to report back about their experience and listen to their enthusiasm. And the process grows from there.

The relational tools of ABCD are

a natural partner in support of our Christian covenant to love our neighbor as ourselves. Practiced together our congregations can bring the language of faith to bear as we pray for the welfare of our neighbors and as we labor along side of each other in common mission. And as we labor together, just maybe our hearts will burn within us as we encounter Jesus laboring in our midst.

The Rev. Christopher Johnson
is the Social and Economic Justice Officer for The Episcopal Church Center. Email him at: cjohnson@episcopalchurch.org

Resources - Videos

- ABCD in Action: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcnqtNANWVw&feature=related>
- Mike Green on ABCD in Action: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwaFx4WorRs>
- Interview with Peter Block, author of *Community: The Structure of Belonging*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwahGcEiAr0>

Resources - Books

- Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*: <http://www.scottlondon.com/reviews/block.html>

- Green, Mike. *When People Care Enough to Act: ABCD in Action*: <http://www.mike-green.org/publications.php>
- Linthicum, Robert C. *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities*: http://books.google.com/books/about/Building_a_People_of_Power.html?id=gPV5UvqIj08C
- Mead, Loren B. *More Than Numbers: The Way Churches Grow*: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=794>
- Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*: <http://www.christianbook.com/missional-joining-god-in-the-neighborhood/alan-roxburgh/9780801072314/pdf/072314>
- Snow, Luther, K. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=956>

Resources - VP Talk

- *Embracing Giftedness*: <http://www.ecfvp.org/talks/>

Providing Pensions to Lay Employees

BY PATTIE CHRISTENSEN AND MICHAEL MACDONALD

The Episcopal Church has encouraged congregations and other institutions to provide pension benefits to lay employees for decades. And in 2009, the 76th General Convention made it a matter of canonical law.

Resolution A138 and its associated canon require that lay employees “who are scheduled to work a minimum of 1,000 hours annually for any domestic diocese, parish, mission, or other ecclesiastical organization or body subject to the authority of the Church” be provided with pension benefits, and named the Church Pension Fund (CPF) as the administrator of the Lay Employee Pension System (LPS). Read more. (<https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/understand/resolutions/>)

The deadline for implementing the LPS in your congregation is January 1, 2013.

With the deadline swiftly approaching, here are some tips and tools to enable vestry members, treasurers, and administrators to support their congregation’s compliance with the resolution.

Understanding your obligations under Resolution A138:

Watch this brief video tutorial to learn more about what the resolution requires and to determine if you have eligible employees. (https://cpg.adobeconnect.com/_a235918/lpsunderstand/)

What if you already have a lay pension plan in place?

Unless an employer is currently sponsoring a lay employee defined benefit plan or the employer is a school using a TIAA-CREF pension plan, the employer must adopt a CPF-sponsored lay pension plan. There are several reasons for this:

- Having a single church wide lay pension plan administrator helps ensure portability of participation and pension benefits if an employee moves from one Church employer to another.
- The selection and monitoring of the investment managers in CPF’s lay defined contribution plan are undertaken by the same CPF departments responsible for the management of the Clergy Pension Plan assets. Read more. (<https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/defined-contribution-plan/>)

org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/defined-contribution-plan/)

Understanding the financial impact of compliance on your budget:

Use this simple Pension Contribution Calculator to find out how much it will cost to provide pension benefits for your eligible employees. There is one specifically designed for congregations, and another specifically designed for schools.

Typically, employers find that the cost of providing lay employee pension benefits is not as expensive as they had thought. For example, providing a pension benefit for an eligible lay employee earning \$36,000 annually in a congregation with 100 pledge units requires an increase of less than \$1 per week per pledge unit.

Download a fundraising letter you can use to encourage parishioners to increase their pledges to cover the cost of providing lay pensions. (Use the Pension Contribution Calculator, and then insert the resulting amounts to customize the letter for your congregation.)

The benefits of adopting now, paying later:

Do something nice for your congregation's employees today, without it costing you anything until next January. If you adopt CPF's lay defined contribution plan today, your congregation's employees can start saving for their retirement immediately, and you can postpone making employer contributions until the implementation deadline. Download an adoption agreement.

Questions? One-on-one assistance is always available:

- Call (800) 936-7349, Monday – Friday, 8:30am – 8:00pm ET, to speak to a CPF representative.
- Email us at layplans@cpg.org

Pattie Christensen and Michael Macdonald are both vice presidents at *The Church Pension Fund*.

Resources

- CPF's Lay Pensions Resource Center: <https://www.cpg.org/redirects/lay-pensions/>
- Adoption Agreement – download a PDF from the Forms & Publications column: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/overview/>

- Defined Contribution Plan: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/defined-contribution-plan/>
- Download a detailed Highlights brochure from the Forms & Publications column: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/overview/>
- Fundraising Letter Template: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/evaluate/>
- Pension Contribution Calculator: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/retirement/pensions-lay-employees/evaluate/>
- Relevant canons: <https://www.cpg.org/global/about-us/canons/>

At the End of the Day...

BY MARY PARMER

Cultivating new practices of invitation, welcome, and connection that are rooted and grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ will transform our congregations ... this is the heart of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas' Newcomer Ministry Project.

Imagine what would happen if the clergy and laity of the Episcopal Church lived into the idea that we are a part of salvation history and God's mission in the world. Imagine if we overcame our fear of invitation, if we obeyed Jesus' gospel mandate to see and welcome the stranger into our midst, and if we cultivated the sacred act of listening. Compelling stories emerge from congregations around our diocese that take these imaginings seriously, and one by one they experience transformation.

The Diocese of Texas is doing more than responding: They are now piloting their Newcomer Ministry Project at St. Francis Episcopal Church in Houston. This congregation recently began using the assessment tools to evaluate their invitation, welcome, and connection processes. They began to see the school on their campus and the families and students as their

biggest mission field. Only 10 percent of the students' families were members of the church; and, within six months of refocused effort, an additional 10 percent had joined the church or were attending regularly.

The Newcomer Ministry Project's primary objective was the creation of tangible materials for congregations to use in the development of effective newcomer ministry. These are now available on the diocesan website (<http://www.epicenter.org/newcomer>), and congregational coaches have been trained to assist locally with implementation of the ministry.

Complacency around newcomer ministry is the greatest challenge for Episcopal congregations today, and it might be our prevailing sin. We think of ourselves as a "friendly community" when in reality we are a "community of friends." Observe, if you will, any average Sunday morning coffee hour and you will see people talking primarily with friends, not the stranger in the room.

Action is another serious challenge. At the end of the day, our actions

speak louder than our words. It is not what we say, teach or preach—it is what we do! At the end of the day, did we see Christ in the newcomers who walked in our doors? More importantly, did they see Christ in us?

Although there are no magic pills for turning around flat or declining church membership, failure to address the essentials of newcomer ministry will keep the revolving back door spinning in our congregations. These broad essentials make up the Newcomer Ministry Project and include: Invitation, Welcome, and Connection. (<http://www.epicenter.org/three-essential-elements-of-newcomer-ministry/>)

Invitation, a.k.a. Evangelism

This is not only about inviting people into a relationship with you and your congregation, it is also about inviting them into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Bishop Claude Payne emphasizes the need for congregations to embrace evangelism as fundamental to their ministry in his book, *Reclaiming the Great Commission*. "Evangelism is not a program. It is an ethos," he says.

David Gortner expands this thought in his recent book, *Transforming Evangelism*, “Evangelism is not a programmatic effort ... It is a willful, joyful, spiritual discipline of seeing and naming the Holy Spirit at work in ourselves and those we encounter—giving voice to our own grace-filled experiences, and helping others find their voice.”

Welcome, a.k.a. Ministry of Hospitality

The gospel tells us that welcoming the stranger is welcoming Jesus. Jesus modeled for us a new way of seeing people—the way of love, compassion and forgiveness. Christine Pohl quotes Jean Vanier in her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, “Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive ... A community which refuses to welcome—whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors—is dying spiritually.”

Connection, a.k.a. Assimilation

Connection is having an intentional process for connecting the newcomer, giving them an opportunity to share their story, discerning their giftedness, and encouraging them in their journey of faith. The sacred act of listening is critical, and Henri Nouwen speaks of this in *Bread for the Journey*. “Listening is paying full attention to others

and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves.”

At the end of the day, our choices make us who we are. When we choose to live into our sacred calling to be fully engaged in living out God’s transformative mission of hospitality to the world, we will be transformed. May God give us all the desire to make that choice.

Mary Parmer is project consultant for the Newcomer Ministry Project, a ministry of the Diocese of Texas.

Resources

Newcomer Ministry Project Resources

- Newcomer Ministry Project Core Values: <http://www.epicenter.org/newcomer-ministry-project-core-values/>
- Three Essential Elements of Newcomer Ministry: <http://www.epicenter.org/three-essential-elements-of-newcomer-ministry/>
- Project Resources, including: <http://www.epicenter.org/>

[newcomer/](http://www.epicenter.org/newcomer/)

- Newcomer Ministry Project Overview
- Newcomer Front Door Evangelism
- Newcomer Instructions for Assessment
- Newcomer High Level Assessment
- Newcomer INVITATION Check List
- Newcomer WELCOME Check List
- Newcomer CONNECTION Check List
- Newcomer Church-School Check List
- Newcomer Tool Kit, including: <http://www.epicenter.org/newcomer/>
- Get Connected
- Welcome Card
- Visitor & Member Form
- Sample Flow Chart
- Welcome Audit for Churches
- The Mystery Worshipers
- Welcoming Article
- Connection/Liturgy, including: <http://www.epicenter.org/newcomer/>
- Welcome Rite for Newcomers
- Liturgy of Belonging
- Sample Job Description

Bibliography

- *Bread for the Journey* by Henri Nouwen: <http://www.amazon.com/Bread-Journey-Daybook-Wisdom-Faith/dp/0060663766>
- *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* by Christine Pohl: <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=480554>
- *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations* by Bishop Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley: <http://www.amazon.com/Reclaiming-Great-Commission-Denominations-Congregations/dp/0787952680>
- *Transforming Evangelism* by David Gortner: <https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=3269>

Google+ (Jesus+You)=Vital Practices

BY GREG TROXELL

The Internet experienced another massive shift when on June 28, 2011 Vic Gundotra announced the launch of Google+ a.k.a. G+, google-plus. (<https://plus.google.com/>).

During the last seven years many churches have integrated social media resources such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Foursquare, and blogging into their communication and community building strategy. Each of these tools helps to create a well-rounded communication strategy. Social media reaches not only youth and college aged adults but those who are 30, 50, and 60+.

If you belong to a church that is not yet using these free tools, this latest advance [Google+] should cause a faith quake resulting in social and administrative changes. Social networks are here to stay and it's time to use them. Social networking is built on the motivational felt need for humans to connect and belong to a caring community. Social media allows us to strengthen our commitment to being a vital congregation with meaningful worship, a caring community, enriching discipleship, responsible stewardship, and significant outreach.

At All Saints' in Carmel, California (www.allsaintscarmel.org) social media has helped us reach these groups and foster further engagement, dialog, and connection. In addition to these platforms we have been using Google programs extensively. They have helped our staff and congregational leaders become more efficient, connected, and effective at collaborating. Google products are free and work well whether using Windows, Apple, or a smart phone.

The moment Google unleashed G+ for organizations we launched our own profile at All Saints and have been pleased with what we are discovering in G+.

Google+ Hangouts

G+ has many of the features some have come to enjoy in Facebook and the two giants are fueling many competitive improvements and a market niche for each. The native integration between gmail contacts, email, calendar, Google docs, and YouTube makes G+ very user friendly. Even more exciting to me is the inclusion of G+ group videoconference technology, what G+ calls a hangout. Hangouts

allow any member to commence a group video conference/call with up to ten people, all for free.

No doubt you've used a speaker-phone during a vestry meeting, or perhaps for a telephone interview of an applicant for a job opening. Adding video is a nice touch to these standard communication tools. Video allows people to see nonverbal communication and increases attentiveness. While gmail has provided free 1:1 video calls, G+ Hangouts open a new realm of possibilities. I've used hangouts to:

- Join a staff meeting when I was out of town
- Convene a mentoring/small group conversation with 5 others
- Set up a congregation hangout (video chat room)
- Network with a group of Episcopalians that share a common interest
- Hold interfaith conversations

- Enjoy a video chat with three of my children who attend different colleges on the East Coast

G+ Hangouts are designed to foster engaging dialogue and connection. The technology (<http://support.google.com/plus/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1216376>) is minimal, giving almost ubiquitous and easy access to anyone with high speed internet (cable, fiber, wifi, mobile, satellite, fixed-wireless) in suburban and metropolitan areas as well as for those living in what are considered underserved communities and rural farmland and deserts.

Cost Saving Advantages

Some Episcopal Provinces are subscribed to Adobe Connect, paying for access and using conference call technology that adds additional charges for toll-free calls. Other offices use subscription based Go-to-Meeting/Webinar which has limited interactive features and is set up for unidirectional dispensation of information and knowledge. Since G+ is free and offers integrated holistic communication solutions, I suspect that it may satisfy the needs and goals of vestry and finance teams alike.

Why Bother

The incessant development of more and more social networks

may be exhausting to some. Those who are not so geeky may ask, "Why bother?" Beyond the cost savings, ease of access, and lifelong learning advantages, G+ also offers another venue for our church to be present, witness, and meet the world.

For comparison sake I'd like to invite you to consider the behavior of the larger Church in the United States. We have more than 217 denominations, nearly 335,000 congregations, each is committed to proclaiming the Gospel while appealing to different spiritual appetites and convictions of people and still only 40% say they attend church each week. Still we plant more churches and offer two or three distinctively unique worship and liturgical experiences during the week. We do this because we want to reach people, serving them in love, and sharing with them the good news of Jesus Christ.

We are a tribal people and these social networks, like our various styles of worship, allow people in different circles to connect with our churches and include members in the responsibility of evangelism, encouragement, and discipleship. Sure it will still be important for people to meet face to face, but in between meetings and for those who can't

drive or convene with the rest of the group, G+ Hangouts allow us to stay connected and learn from one another.

G+ hangouts could be used by our seminaries, churches and diocesan centers to offer:

- Online classes
- Mini conferences
- Mentoring
- Meetings
- Check-ins
- Distance learning communities

ECF Vital Practices Hangouts

ECF Vital Practices is piloting a series of Google + Hangouts beginning February 2012. Working in partnership, the ECF Vital Practices team and I will offer technical sessions to help people throughout the church become familiar with the technology. Additionally, I and other congregational leaders, in collaboration with ECF Vital Practices, will offer a variety of hangouts to foster an interactive learning community for Episcopalians interested in shaping the future vitality of the church.

My own passion for ministry will be the focus of the hangouts I lead, reflecting my own ministry across a variety of settings and roles. The objective is to engage in dialogue and cultivate a learning community across the church on each subject. I invite you to join me and connect so that we might consider partnering to create even more hangouts that also reflect your strengths, vocation, skills and ministry. (<http://gplus.to/gtroxell>)

Greg Troxell is the parish administrator at All Saints Episcopal Church in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California www.allsaintscarmel.org. He also serves on the Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of El Camino Real and has led seminars in California, Virginia, and abroad on vocational discernment and strategic planning for churches and other ecumenical para-church organizations. Visit Greg on Google+ (<http://gplus.to/gtroxell>)

Resources

- Google Support: <http://support.google.com/>
- Google+ Resources: <http://mashable.com/2011/07/16/google-plus-resources/>
- Google+ Hangouts on Air: A live

broadcast feature with recording to YouTube launched for some users: <http://google-plus.com/3587/google-hangouts-on-air-a-live-broadcast-feature-with-recording-to-youtube-launched-for-some-users/>

- Hangout from YouTube and watch videos with your friends or family straight from any YouTube video: <http://google-plus.com/911/hangout-from-youtube-and-watch-videos-with-your-friends-or-family-straight-from-any-youtube-video/>
- Five Free Tools for Recording Google+ Hangouts: <http://mashable.com/2011/08/05/google-plus-record-hangouts/>
- Google+ Hangouts: 4 Creative Ways People Are Using Group Video Chat: <http://mashable.com/2011/07/28/google-plus-hangouts/>
- Google+ Hangouts: going beyond the status update: <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/12/google-hangouts-going-beyond-status.html>
- Is Google+ Really a Social Media Game Changer?: <http://mashable.com/2011/12/14/google-plus-changes-everything/>

Footnotes

- [i] Google blog announcing G+ <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/06/introducing-google-project-real-life.html>
- [ii] The Emotional Spectrum, was developed to guide the relevant proclamation on the gospel in emergent ministry and pastoral situations. Download the chart: <http://www.box.com/shared/3j45vx5mpk>
- [iii] The Emotional Spectrum, was developed to guide the relevant proclamation on the gospel in emergent ministry and pastoral situations. Download the chart: <http://www.box.com/shared/3j45vx5mpk>
- [iv] Statistics provided by: http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#attend
- [v] Seth Godin: <http://www.sethgodin.com/sg/>

A Snapshot of our Urban Neighborhood

BY ANNA OLSON

The hardest thing to see is what is in front of your eyes.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

St. Mary's Mariposa (<http://stmarys-la.org/lang/en>) is a 104-year-old congregation in a densely populated urban neighborhood of Los Angeles. It started as a neighborhood church - specifically an outreach to the large Japanese immigrant population that lived in the neighborhood prior to World War II. The neighborhood, which includes a lot of rental housing, has changed continuously over the century of St. Mary's existence, always housing many new immigrants. The current population is mostly Latino and Korean.

Most of St. Mary's long-time members, some of whose families have been in the church for several generations, and including the entire Vestry, now live in more suburban areas of greater LA, and spend little time in the St. Mary's neighborhood other than on church property.

Seeking to reconnect with its neighborhood, St. Mary's has made significant strides by starting a service in Spanish, as well as by hosting a Head Start preschool program.

The photo project was designed to give the Vestry the opportunity to take a closer look at our neighborhood. It was not intended to lead directly into strategic planning, but rather to shift our perspective and open our eyes to creative possibilities and creative ways of looking for God at work in our neighborhood and God's call to us as a parish.

We did this in the context of a one-day Vestry retreat. People arrived around 9:00 am and shared some breakfast snacks. Because of a fun run scheduled near the church that day, many of us had already seen more of our neighborhood than we had planned on by the time we got around roadblocks and made it to church! Even that frustrating adventure was made a little easier by knowing that our mission for the day was to see the neighborhood with new eyes.

We read Romans 12 together and had a brief reflection using the mutual invitation (http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-05_Kaleidoscope_newsletter_final.pdf) process. The rector offered a short reflection about the call to

“weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.”

We then headed out in groups of 2-4, each group with a camera. The groups were invited to make their own routes, take about an hour, not stray too far, and take pictures of anything they found interesting along the way. A couple of people who had lived in the neighborhood as children were encouraged to show their groups their former homes and/or any sites they remembered, and to note what was there now. The groups were invited to pay particular attention to things that were beautiful, ugly, surprising, or poignant. We reminded one another that God is already at work in our neighborhood, and that we are invited into that work.

As the groups returned, someone was available to load their photos onto the computer. The groups were then invited to take a few moments of silence in the sanctuary to pray and reflect on the experience. As they returned to the parish hall, people helped themselves to a potluck lunch, and chatted informally about what they had seen.

ment of State and the Once the photos were all loaded (organized into albums by group) and most of lunch had been consumed, each group was invited to narrate its own slide show. The formats varied. Some groups chose just a selected few sites to photograph. Others had taken many pictures along the way, documenting pretty much everything they saw. Some people had chosen themes, and photographed things that fit into those themes. The diversity of approach kept it interesting.

The Vestry then sat as a group, with the slideshow playing silently on endless repeat. We talked about themes that had emerged, things that had surprised us, questions that arose from what we had seen. We talked about follow-up steps to learn more about the surrounding community, and made plans to share the pictures and reflections with the rest of the congregation.

For the congregational slideshow, the photos were organized to illustrate five or six themes that the Vestry identified. The audience included several people who currently live in the neighborhood, and a number of people who had lived there over the years. The discussion was lively, and we learned a number of

things from both the newcomers and the old-timers.

Since our retreat last fall, the Vestry has continued to discern ways to invite engagement between the congregation and the neighborhood, beginning with prayer and Bible study. This experience led us to questions related to our neighborhood. Our follow up has included:

- Look at demographic data from our immediate neighborhood. Using the resource [healthycity.org](http://www.healthycity.org/), (<http://www.healthycity.org/>) we discovered a couple of significant things:
 - o The Korean population in our immediate area was larger than we had thought, and in fact is growing as the majority Latino population shrinks. This corrected a misperception among many in the congregation that Koreatown was primarily a business district without many local Korean residents. This information has prompted intentional conversations related to possibilities for outreach to our Korean neighbors.
 - o Income levels in our neighborhood suggest that many of the families we reach out to will be struggling with basic survival issues. We will need to take this into account to make realistic

projections related to congregational stewardship and to think about ways the skills that members with limited household incomes have had to cultivate can be used in service to the congregation. This information has prompted intentional conversations related to outreach to our Korean neighbors.

- Planning to learn more about the resources already available in our neighborhood. For example, we had floated the idea that a gym might be a great use of some vacant property connected to the church. On the walk, one of the teams stumbled upon an open gym in the local park, only about a block from the church.
- Actively addressing the steps we need to take to begin to develop new congregational leaders from among the members living in the neighborhood. One of the fruits of this discussion was a commitment to developing leaders for service on the Vestry from among the new members of the parish who live in the neighborhood currently.

I'm happy to report that at our 2012 Annual Meeting, the congregation elected a young, bilingual Latina woman from the neighborhood to the Vestry.

With this important step, the Vestry continues on its journey to prepare and include new congregational leaders from among the local members and to move forward in the process of becoming (one again) a neighborhood church.

Anna Olson is the rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, California.

Resources

- Demographic Data: <http://www.healthycity.org/>
- Demographics - St. Mary's Neighborhood: <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/a-snapshot-of-our-urban-neighborhood-vestry-retreat/>
- Mutual Invitation Process: http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-05_Kaleidoscope_newsletter_final.pdf
- Photo Project Outline: <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/a-snapshot-of-our-urban-neighborhood-vestry-retreat/>
- Example of a Neighborhood Slideshow – Bedford Avenue: <http://blog.bmwguggenheim-lab.org/2011/09/local-worlds-a-bedford-avenue-slideshow/>

Parity in Healthcare

BY LAURIE KAZILIONIS

Honoring its commitment to social justice as it relates to church employees, in 2009 the Episcopal Church's 76th General Convention voted to require equal access to and funding of health care plans for eligible clergy and lay employees by January 1, 2013. The resulting Denominational Health Plan (DHP) is a Church-wide program of healthcare benefit plans established via Resolution A177 and its associated canon. The DHP is administered by the Church Pension Fund (CPF), with benefits provided through the Episcopal Church Medical Trust (the Medical Trust). Read more about the Canon here: <https://www.cpg.org/global/about-us/canons>.

The Spirit behind Resolution A177

This resolution speaks to social justice issues around adequate benefits for the Church's lay employees. While cost concerns around this initiative are real, so is the need for lay employees to have adequate healthcare benefits. The support and dedication of lay employees make many ministries possible, and providing them with adequate benefits is not only necessary, it's the right thing to do.

What is Required?

Resolution A177 requires that all domestic dioceses, parishes, missions, and other ecclesiastical organizations or bodies subject to the authority of the Episcopal Church enroll eligible clergy and lay employees who are scheduled to work at least 1,500 compensated hours per year in a healthcare plan through the Medical Trust. Employees with coverage from an approved source may opt out of the DHP.

Each diocese needs to establish, on a diocesan-wide basis, the minimum required employer cost-share policy for medical benefits: the same for clergy and lay. Each diocese will also determine if their other institutions and schools must participate and if domestic partners may be covered.

What is the Timeline?

The resolution calls for the DHP implementation to be completed by January 1, 2013. With this date swiftly approaching, here are some tips and tools to enable vestry members, treasurers, and administrators to support their congregations' compliance with the resolution.

- What does the resolution require? Read it here: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/>
- Do you have eligible employees? Find the answer here: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/who-is-eligible/>
- What does "parity" mean in the context of the DHP, and how does it work? Parity refers to the requirement that the diocesan policy regarding employer cost-sharing must be the same for all eligible clergy and lay employees scheduled to work at least 1,500 compensated hours per year. Read more here: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/focus-on-parity/>

How are Dioceses and Parishes Approaching DHP implementation?

Many solutions have been devel-

developed around the church. First, employee data gathering and careful financial analysis needs to occur for each diocese and parish to understand the impact of implementation. Most dioceses are considering modest employee cost-sharing policies to balance clergy and lay benefits. Some dioceses are using High Deductible Health Plans with associated Health Savings Accounts for all eligible employees as a way to reach parity, while others have established a comprehensive base policy and offered employees the option to buy a higher tier plan and pay the difference. Each diocese and parish is unique in its individual needs. The Medical Trust team is available to assist and consult.

The DHP implementation team is available to answer your questions. For additional information or assistance, please email us at DHPinfo@cpg.org, or call your Regional Relationship Specialist. Click here for a list: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/regional-relationship-specialists/>

Laurie Kazilionis is vice president of client relations for the Episcopal Church Medical Trust.

Resources

- Church Canons Related to Denominational Health Plan: <https://www.cpg.org/global/about-us/canons>
- DHP Requirements: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/>
- DHP Tutorials and Resources: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/>
- DHP Frequently Asked Questions: http://download.cpg.org/healthcare/publications/pdf/DHP_FAQs.pdf
- Eligibility: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/who-is-eligible/>
- Parity: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/understand/focus-on-parity/>
- Read the October 2010 *Vestry Papers* Interview with the Church Pension Fund's implementation leader, Laurie Kazilionis: <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/caring-for-each-other/introducing-the-denominational-health-plan/>
- Regional Relationship Specialists: <https://www.cpg.org/administrators/insurance/health-and-wellness/denominational-health-plan/regional-relationship-specialists/>