

VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations

Transforming Attitudes about Ministry

by William F. Dopp

Our attitudes often dictate what kind of people we become. Likewise, our attitudes as communities of faith dictate what kinds of congregations we become. Here are two good examples.

While traveling to Uganda via England in the summer of 2000, my wife and I had the good fortune to attend the Sunday Eucharist at St. John the Baptist Church in the Kensington section of London.

The sign in front of the church said, "High Mass: 11:00 a.m." We showed up about five minutes early and were the only people in church. At 11:00, a few others entered. The bells rang and a few more entered. The clergy and altar party processed. Counting everyone, there were twelve people. The

service was fine and the sermon fair, but I came away depressed at seeing only twelve people in a 500-seat church.

A week later we were in Kisoro, Uganda, for the Jubilee Celebration of the Diocese of Muhabura at St. Andrew's Cathedral in a remote part of east Africa. I was privileged to take part in the Sunday worship. A procession of more than 150 clergy and lay leaders marched from the diocesan offices down the street to the cathedral. At the door of the 800-seat church, a crowd waited for a liturgy which included the blessing of the church by the Archbishop of Uganda. Then the procession marched to an outdoor area where more

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From the Editor: In 1999, Cornerstone and the Episcopal Church Foundation released a landmark study, the Zacchaeus Project. Exploring the nature of identity and vocation in the Episcopal Church, the study remains the largest of its kind among Protestant denominations. From that work has sprung new research: the Emmaus Project, a national look at leadership and vitality in Episcopal congregations. We are grateful to project directors Bill Sachs and Tom Holland for giving us a first look at their new findings.

Marks of Vitality

by William L. Sachs

When the risen Christ appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) their destination and their lives suddenly changed. Two millennia later the risen Christ still appears to his followers. The vivid experience of his presence alters their journeys as well. Not only are their lives made whole, their congregations are transformed. Today numerous Episcopalians

discover the Emmaus road anew. The result is an unexpected burst of local vitality.

Soon after its Zacchaeus Project concluded, the Episcopal Church Foundation began its Emmaus Project. We determined to identify the sources of the vitality we had discovered in our Zacchaeus work. We believed that certain patterns of vitality could surface and

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FOUNDATION

What makes a diocese or congregation thrive? Here we explore new research and firsthand experiences as church leaders explore what is involved in developing vigorous communities of faith.

*This Issue:
Best Practices
of Ministry*



Marks of Vitality

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could be linked to consistent forms of leadership in congregations and beyond. We wondered, what makes a congregation thrive? Broadly we concluded there must be a vivid sense of the risen Christ, and an appreciative response. What happens when a church responds to a new sense of being led by Christ?

So far the Emmaus Project has involved interviews with focus groups in nearly forty congregations in five dioceses. In addition we have spent time with the bishops and staffs of these dioceses and attended major diocesan events. We have also organized workshops on church life and leadership attended by dozens of people. Assessing what we have found, we are pleased to learn that the Zacchaeus Project's findings are being extended. Our understanding of what makes a congregation thrive now has greater definition.

Worship, Pastoral Care and Education

"I remember when the diocese wanted to close this church. We couldn't get ten people out on a Sunday," recalled an older lay leader in one congregation. "Then the bishop sent us a new priest. He preached and he taught and he visited. And we began to grow." Clearly one mark of a thriving Episcopal church is capable guidance by clergy. The basis of church life lies in worship, pastoral care, and education. These tasks establish the foundation of the congregation's life. They must be faithfully sustained and energetically linked to the contours of local life.

Of course, local challenges can vary. One of the foremost marks of congregational vitality is the ability of ordained and lay leaders to formulate a mutually agreeable assessment of local demands and appropriate leadership styles. Yet certain consistent marks of congregational vitality readily appear, including:

- ✚ Ongoing development of leadership skills and the cultivation of new lay leaders.
- ✚ Regular, honest, affirmative forms of mutual ministry assessment. Regular forms of program review and long-range planning are included. These reviews

stress the positive but do not deny or avoid attention to differences or tensions. Vital congregations look honestly at themselves.

- ✚ Life-giving connections to other parishes and to the diocese, and effective linkages to other groups that afford resources for the congregation's basic tasks such as worship, education, and pastoral care. Examples include Education for Ministry (EFM), Disciples of Christ in Community (DOCC) and Stephen Ministries. Vital congregations consistently are linked beyond themselves.
- ✚ Ongoing attention to ways of integrating spiritual energies and questions into program life. Vital congregations consistently seek to embrace their members' needs and energies.
- ✚ Sustained attention to the question of mission, i.e., what is the mission of this congregation, locally and beyond? How can the congregation grow, in numbers and in quality of common life, and in its service to others outside the congregation? We find that vital congregations enthusiastically look beyond themselves and ask how they can grow.
- ✚ Last, vital congregations find ways to utilize conflict. They are able to face it honestly and to learn from it.

The Episcopal Church Foundation invites your contribution to the conversation on vitality and the leadership needed to encourage it. We look forward to meeting you on the Emmaus Road!

An Episcopal priest with thirty years experience in parish ministry, the Rev. Dr. William L. Sachs is the Director of Research for the Episcopal Church Foundation. His latest book, Restoring the Ties that Bind, is co-authored with Tom Holland (see next article) and is scheduled for publication by Church Publishing early next year.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, page 291

Characteristics of Effective Congregational Leaders and Teams

by Thomas P. Holland

The issues of leadership that were often raised in the Zacchaeus Project discussions led to initiation of the Emmaus Project. Named for the man who got up in a tree to get a better view of Jesus, the Zacchaeus Project involved focus groups at over 250 congregations, including about 2000 participants in nine diverse dioceses.

The Emmaus Project picks up on the biblical theme that “we have met Jesus on the road,” and that encounter has turned us in a new direction. That direction examines leadership practices in congregations in four additional judicatories, seeking to learn more about what makes for effective leaders and teamwork in carrying out the mission of the church.

A clear sense of mission

The first thing we have found is the importance of a clear sense of mission or vocation, a shared sense of being called by God to some form of service or ministry. Local leaders take the initiative, articulate issues, and invite open discussion of them.

When the matter was ambiguous or not clearly defined in the minds of those who cared about it, a phase of group discernment and clarification was necessary. “We reflected together and prayed about what was facing us, what gifts we had to use, who we are,

and what was God calling us to do and be,” explained one respondent. Drawing upon such considerations, they came to agree on a shared vocation, purpose or mission that set forth their intentions for the future.

No superficial conclusions

When differences in values and intentions arose, effective leaders facilitated thoughtful adaptive work on them by the group rather than settling for easy and superficial conclusions. Later success depended on making sure all views were heard and respected and that the concluding statement of mission was acceptable and motivating to all.

Tasks follow defined mission

With a sense of shared mission in place, teams moved to identify the particular tasks needed to be done to accomplish their intentions. “We set out what we wanted to accomplish and what evidence of success would look like,” explained another respondent. “Then we set clear work assignments and timetables, based on the various talents and gifts of participants. There were some gaps, so we knew we would have to recruit other volunteers to join us.”

Specifying tasks, allocating them to people for implementation, and devising ways to
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*Preach the Gospel
everywhere you go—
and if you must,
use words.*

—St. Augustine

Editor's Note

In the course of working on this issue, one word kept popping up: mission. Thriving congregations and dioceses, whether large or small, seem to find ways of thinking outside of themselves, of working outside their own boundaries. Perhaps faith communities are like people — they need to be engaged outside of themselves if they are to flourish.

Currently the groundwork is being laid in Johannesburg, South Africa, for an international research project that will explore the major patterns of spirituality and leadership that give rise to mission in the Anglican Communion. Sponsored by the Episcopal Church Foundation and seed-funded by Fieldstead and Company

of California, the project, known as (Global Anglicanism Project), will examine ministry dynamics in four provinces of the Anglican Communion including Africa, where some 53% of all Anglicans now live.

We think there is much to learn, for as Bill Dopp's piece points out, there is a tremendous amount of vigorous ministry in the African Church, as well as other sites in the Anglican Communion. We look forward to sharing findings with you as things progress.

—Lindsay Freeman

Next Issue: Discernment and Decision Making



Personal Reflections on Leadership Challenges

by Charles E. Jenkins

Rabbi Edwin H. Friedman long ago helped me realize my limited capacity for facilitating change in persons, systems, congregations and Dioceses that are not motivated to change. In a conversation one afternoon Ed Friedman wondered aloud about “the good people of the world who are burning out trying to change the unmotivated.”

In my attempts to motivate the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana not simply to make superficial and perhaps easy adjustments, but to do more and go deeper — to change the way this small, relatively poor diocese relates to the world and to the larger church — I have described the challenge at the level of our “diocesan DNA.”

Focusing beyond survival

Shall we, can we, by Divine Grace change the DNA of the Diocese of Louisiana from that of a declining church very much concerned with ourselves, our survival, and our “issues,” to a missionary church focused beyond ourselves?

The first challenge was to convince Episcopalians in Louisiana of the greater risk — in remaining as we were — rather than launching out into the unknown as a missionary diocese. This was not terribly difficult, since by some measures, namely that of Sunday attendance, we had apparently achieved during the Decade of Evangelism the honor of being the fastest declining diocese in the Episcopal Church!

Money follows mission

To frame the risk we began to describe the potential, in the very least, as “failing forward.”

Perhaps the best example of risking “failing forward” has involved the construction of the new Episcopal Chapel of the Holy Comforter to serve the communities of Southern University, New Orleans, and the University of New Orleans. A parish Church of the Holy Comforter was closing. They, and we as a diocese, committed to partner a new collegiate ministry.

To help build the new chapel and fund the ministry to these communities, I called upon one of our leading lay persons in Baton Rouge to ask for a contribution to our capital campaign. He asked, “Bishop, how many

Episcopalians do you have at Southern University, New Orleans?” I replied, “None, that I know of. That is the point. We are not here as a chaplain to Episcopalians but as a missionary presence in two university communities.” The gent gave a nice gift. Money follows mission.

Walking in grace and trusting God is a spiritual truth into which we continue to grow. An early realization of our need to grow in grace — and God’s faithfulness to us — was the attempt to gather our diocesan family together for a Rally Day: a time of worship, prayer, learning, encouragement, sharing and fellowship.

Only a few registrations

The goal was set that if we could get 750 Episcopalians together in Louisiana we would have done a good work. Many said it couldn’t be done. Bishop Michael Marshall was booked to come over from England as our keynote speaker. St. Martin’s School was reserved, lunch boxes were ordered, and all the details in place, but few were registered.

Friends and advisors called to urge me to cancel, for this rally was going to be a flop. As my wife Louise and I made our way out to suburban New Orleans that day we got caught behind a line of buses. I urged Louise to get past this slow traffic so we could arrive early.

As we began passing the buses I looked up to see faces that I recognized. These were Louisianan Episcopalians making their way to St. Martin’s! I don’t know exactly how many showed up, perhaps 1014 or so. But most noticeable was the powerful presence of God in that place — a power and an effect far beyond that which I could have made to happen or even planned.

I believe this rally was a good example of God working in this church, and the church walking in and by grace.

From maintenance to mission

The challenges are many, and how this transformation effort shall mature is not as clear to me as I would hope. If the way forward were as clear as I want, little faith would be required to continue the journey

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My mentor in the House of Bishops, the Rt. Rev. Claude Payne, Bishop of Texas, has been more than generous in allowing me to borrow freely (some jokingly say “steal”) from his experience and expertise in transformation efforts. I highly recommend Bishop Payne’s book, Reclaiming the Great Commission, (Jossey-Bass, New York, 2000). I have also been guided by the thinking of John Kotter, Leading Change, (Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1996).
—Charles E. Jenkins

Effective Congregational Leaders

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coordinate efforts and communicate progress are essential components for effective action. Effective leaders made sure that everyone understood what was expected, how the work made use of their gifts, and how they linked to the group's overall vocation, goals and commitments.

Differentiating lay and clergy roles

Often these groups had worked on differentiating lay and clergy roles to ensure that responsibilities and expectations were understood by all. In many cases, the sense of organizational structure was horizontal or collegial, rather than vertical, with clergy and judicatory leaders seen as expert resources rather than controllers.

Recognizing they also needed resources from beyond themselves, many developed networks of relationships with a variety of sources, from judicatory staff and leaders of other congregations to national para-church organizations (such as the Alban Institute, Listening Hearts Ministries, the Alpha program, the Willow Creek Association, Stephen Ministry, Total Ministry Development, Cursillo, and others). Learning materials, program ideas, speakers, and mutual support and encouragement were among the resources exchanged in these networks.

Taking problems back to the group

As implementation of their work proceeded, leaders maintained regular contact with all participants. They looked for ways to recognize and celebrate successes. Recognizing that movement and change often can provoke anxiety, leaders listened appreciatively to concerns and supported initiative, creativity and innovation in dealing with challenges.

And rather than trying to fix the inevitable problems along the way, good leaders

took them back to the group for prayerful consideration and for exploration of mutually acceptable solutions. This helped avoid slipping into blaming or scapegoating individuals when things got difficult.

Leaders are renewed

Along the way, leaders monitored the impacts of the projects with the intended beneficiaries as well as upon the group itself. They helped their teams grow in effectiveness by identifying successes and barriers, gaps needing attention, and possible steps for improving their efforts. And in the course of these tasks, they found renewed commitment to their work, recognizing themselves and others as living out their gifts and values through their ministry, being connected to their religious community, deepening spiritually, and evoking the gifts and ministries of others.

"At its core," reflected one senior respondent, "learning to lead is a shared process of formation. It includes attending to the development of others' skills and spirituality as well as our own, understanding their motivations and concerns, empowering them, encouraging them to stretch, take risks, stay faithful to the mission, and learn from attending to the results of our efforts together."

Thomas P. Holland, Ph.D., is Professor of Social Work and Director of the Institute for Nonprofit Organizations at the University of Georgia. A member and former warden of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Athens, Georgia, he is the author of Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations: A Handbook for Trustees, Presidents and Church Leaders (Jossey-Bass, 2000) and numerous other publications.



With over 350,000 congregations gathering weekly for worship, fellowship, and mission-oriented outreach, churches, as formative institutions in the lives of their members, are the largest and most important community grouping in the fabric of American society.

—The Zacchaeus Project

Personal Reflections

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from maintenance to mission. But I do have clarity about the triumph of Divine Love. God who became flesh in the person of Jesus has triumphed over death.

And as we grow into the image and likeness of Christ we find our lives grounded in, and enabled by, that same powerful love which raised Jesus to new life — our joy, our hope, our transformation.

Bishop of Louisiana since 1998, the Rt. Rev. Charles E. Jenkins and the fifty-four parishes of his diocese are raising \$7-9 million to build a youth conference center, provide seed money for three new congregations and expand campus ministry.



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Transforming Attitudes

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than 5000 people were waiting. The worship had to be held outside because of the crowd.

Proclaiming the Good News

I was struck by the contrast. The first church we visited said it was dedicated to the "Preservation of Holy Worship." The second proclaimed, "Jesus is our living hope."

I do not mean to say that St. John the Baptist is typical of the Church of England, nor do I mean that the beauty of holiness is unimportant. The real issue, however, is this: St. John's reason for being is to preserve the past.

The mission of the Cathedral in Kisoro is to proclaim the good news of God in Christ.

This experience is somewhat of a parable illustrating the changing nature of the church. Some in the church are clinging to the past while others are moving into the future.

Missionary outposts

Congregations that have learned to think beyond their own walls and reach out doing the work of the Body of Christ are growing. The ones that think of themselves as chapels for a chosen few are sadly dwindling away. Bishop Claude Payne of Texas has stated again and again in his book, *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, that our congregations must think of themselves as missionary outposts in order to be effective.

We are faced with a simple question. What must we do to be relevant and true to our faith to a world seeking a spiritual connection in this new century? The answer is that we must be transformed into disciples willing to take risks and to be bold for Christ. A new attitude must be formed: we must look outward rather than inward, acting as missionaries in our own communities.

We must be transformed into disciples willing to take risks and to be bold for Christ.

I offered this concept in a sermon recently and a woman came up after church and asked quite sincerely, "Does this mean we will not be Episcopalians any more?" I was taken aback, but I understood.

Yes, we will still be Episcopalians. In fact we can offer our tradition to people who are desperately seeking a spiritual home. We offer a unique combination of a liturgical

expression of the faith with a reformed theology. We cannot keep this a secret.

Vestry members these days have begun to look at ways to rethink their ministries. Many dioceses have begun to offer programs in congregational development that are reshaping congregations into missionary outposts. The Percept organization offers a program called ReVision, which helps a congregation define where it ought to be in its ministry.

Forming a new attitude

Here are some things a vestry might do to form a new attitude, thus making its congregation more effective:

- ✚ Prayerfully develop an attitude of looking at challenges as opportunities.
- ✚ With a "can-do" attitude, begin the process of focusing ministry efforts beyond your doors. Learn to think of your community before yourselves.
- ✚ Study the demographics of your community and of your congregation.
- ✚ Create an action plan to close the demographic gap, offering new ministries and developing leadership and support for the programs. Communicate to both the members of the congregation and the community. Show others your joy.
- ✚ Begin ministries that will make a difference in people's lives. Become an active part of your community.
- ✚ Develop a process of evaluation of the programs and make necessary adjustments. When necessary, return to Step One.

An attitude built on faith and directed to discipleship will transform an individual person. Collectively, it will transform a congregation into the living Body of Christ that I encountered in Kisoro, Uganda. An African priest told me, "A positive attitude is an outward sign of one's faith." That faithful attitude was evident in Uganda and it can be evident in your congregation as well.

The Rev. Canon Dr. William F. Dopp is the Missioner for Communications and Financial Development for the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego. He leads a program called "The Season of Transformation," designed for congregational development.