

Death & Resurrection

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From Death, New Life

BY TOMMY DILLON

What do you do when a once-vibrant ministry that defined a parish's commitment to social ministry outlives the needs of the surrounding community and the resources of the parish to sustain it? That was the challenge facing Saint Aidan's, San Francisco, when Aidan's Way, our flagship ministry, had to face the reality that we as a community could no longer maintain this beloved program in the parish.

For more than a decade, Aidan's Way offered an after-school program for at-risk children, welcoming all faiths, races, and ethnicities. The goal of the program was to provide educational services in a loving atmosphere to neighborhood children for almost no cost to the families.

As the years progressed, many of those who were most passionate in our congregation about this ministry were lost through

death and grave illness. Those who were left, along with the paid director, were trying to make something survive that couldn't. We could no longer support the program financially, the volunteer pool shrunk to levels where we sometimes did not have a healthy adult-child ratio, and we discovered that we were no longer primarily serving neighborhood children. Instead, our ministry had become an inexpensive after-school alternative for families who could easily pay more than the \$25 cost per semester. As California regulations of childcare increased, we realized we could not afford neither the required renovations to our space to meet state standards nor the state's expectations of two full-time staff members and two years of advanced operating expenses in the bank.

During a meeting with the controller of the diocese, the Aidan's

Way Advisory Board and members of St. Aidan's Vestry, I felt with a heavy heart the responsibility of having to name the elephant in the room: that it was time for us to end our Aidan's Way ministry. In that moment, we all experienced a profound death. Some members of our congregation were very angry. Others were in denial. Still others looked to blame me or the diocese or the vestry. These are all normal parts of the grieving process.

But Resurrection existed for us, too. After we reached the decision to close that day, our group moved from a meeting room into our church. We joined hands and offered God thanks for this important ministry in the life of our church and the neighborhood. We gave thanks for all the children and their families who benefitted from the program. We asked God's Spirit to be with us to offer us inspiration as we looked for new ways to minister with children in our neighborhood. And from this liturgy we knew we could still provide a safe, loving place for children in new and exciting ways.

"When we realized we had to make other plans for these children, I was devastated," said Pam Wong, a longtime member of our parish and volunteer at Aidan's Way. "Initially, there was a great emptiness and I cried often and

hard. Time has helped soften my loss and now I can remember more fondly the gift I received from all of our children and their families. I can still do things with them. For example, right after the closure of Aidan's Way, I led a group of twelve children from the neighborhood in the most amazing dance for Pentecost, which was a moving and joyous time."

After more than six years of volunteering, Judy Bley, a member of the parish who volunteered weekly for the program, found it hard to adjust; she felt deeply for the parents and children who had relied on our program to provide a safe and enriching environment. "I see children as our future and received deep personal satisfaction in being a part of helping children to grow, achieve success in school work, and form lasting bonds. However, the reality was that our children came from far and wide and were not, for the most part, members of our surrounding community. It was not possible for us to maintain all of our financially draining programs."

As our neighborhood changed, we realized that what we were ultimately experiencing was the Holy Spirit inviting us to adapt and change as well. The Rev. Diana Wheeler, our parish deacon and Director of Aidan's Way,

reached out to Si, Se Puede, a program similar to Aidan's Way in our neighborhood, and she facilitated a joint venture between St. Aidan's, AmeriCorps, and the United Farm Workers, housed at the Vista del Monte Apartments just across the street from St. Aidan's.

We now have volunteers there on a weekly basis, our resident storyteller visits regularly, and our congregation has made a commitment to helping the children with their plot in the local community garden. All of this involves no capital expense of our parish, but it does commit our talent and time in new and liberating ways. If "in the midst of life, we are in death," we have found that the converse is also true. "This new adventure with our neighbors across the street helps us to never forget those people and things we will always love, but instead invites us to find meaning in them in new and powerful ways," said the Rev. David Stickley, our current parish deacon. "In many ways, we have experienced dying to self and living to Christ by being as fully alive as we possibly can to the community around us without the heavy encumbrance of program expense."

Since the closure of Aidan's Way, we have also offered two summer camps for children. We offered a

week of Spiritual Arts and Practical Arts, with a focus on non-violence for children in elementary school. As well, we helped to coordinate the Friends of God Summer Camp with two other parishes, where campers spent one week at St. Aidan's, one week at St. Gregory of Nyssa, and one week at Grace Cathedral focusing on different Godly Play stories. We welcomed volunteers and campers from seven local Episcopal Churches, along with children and staffers from Roman Catholic, Jewish, Unitarian, and non-religious backgrounds. The camp was very successful and is currently being planned for 2012, with another week planned at St. Aidan's.

Letting go of things dear to us is always difficult and this proved to be no exception. The Book of Common Prayer reminds us "In the midst of life, we are in death." While this may not exactly cheer us on our way, it does serve as a wonderfully poignant reminder that life is a process that must include letting go from time to time if we are to be born again from above, and filled with the life-giving love of the Spirit. This is not to say that the grieving process must end; if it did, it might mean that the love we let go of is also gone, and as a people of faith, we believe that love never dies. But, the people of St. Aidan's will

tell you: from a death comes new life. After all, resurrection is truly what we're all about.

The Rev. Tommy Dillon is rector at St. Aidan's Episcopal Church in San Francisco.

Resources

- *Finishing with Grace* by Linda Hilliard and Gretchen Switzer: <http://www.amazon.com/FINISHING-GRACE-Selling-Merging-Closing/dp/1609102843>
- Si Se Puede Learning Center: <http://www.idealists.org/view/nonprofit/KW3kHXgN2gW4/>
- St Aidan's Episcopal Church: www.saintaidan.org
- *When Steeples Cry* by Jaco Hamman: <http://www.christianbook.com/steeples-leading-congregations-through-loss-change/jaco-hamman/9780829816945/pd/816941>

Editor's Letter

Greetings.

Much has been written about the overall decline in mainline denominations. Tom Ehrich and others are calling for a 'new way of doing business' (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/healthy-practices/the-end-to-business-as-usual/>) – and throughout our church, congregational leaders struggle with the reality of declining membership, aging buildings, and limited financial resources.

This month, ECF Vital Practices shares stories of three different approaches to facing the potential 'death' of an existing way of being church and exploring ways to transform the underlying vitality into new ways of responding God's call. Our fourth article offers congregational leaders a model to help worshippers begin to explore ways to stretch their understanding of what God is calling us to do in the world.

Here's what you'll find:

■ In "From a Death, New Life," Tommy Dillon shares the story of how the congregation of Saint Aidan's, San Francisco made the decision to let a

beloved program die and the new life, and new relationships, that arose from having the courage to say 'goodbye' with dignity.

■ Cam Miller's "Dating the Presbyterians," (offered in both English and Español) explores the possibilities that emerged when a long established church in the community came knocking on the door, asking Trinity Episcopal, Buffalo, if it would entertain the idea of sharing its campus.

■ "Real Collaboration" by Greg Syler, offers a roadmap for congregations, deaneries, and dioceses to begin the conversation related to exploring what it means to be church today, opening ourselves up to new possibilities, and finding grace filled ways to let go.

■ In "Answering God's Call," Peyton Craighill outlines an approach designed to help congregations move from an associative to a missional church. Using familiar Scripture and symbols, Craighill invites us to consider Jesus' call for his disciples to go out into the world

and share the Good News.

■ "Remembering about God" by Stacy Sauls asks us to consider whether a long-ago decision to institutionalize the Church might in fact be contributing to what is widely seen as decline and if we instead, go back to our earliest roots as Christians, we might find the tools we need for Christianity to thrive.

■ "Of Dinosaurs & Discernment," by Lisa Towle begins the story of how the Episcopal Church Women in the Diocese of North Carolina are taking a serious look at their organization with an eye towards the future.

■ Thomas Brackett's retelling of the "Parable of the Lifesaving Station" (offered in both English and Español) invites us to take an honest look at our congregations asking ourselves where we fall on the continuum between serving as a missional church or a club?

Additionally, the *ECF Vital Practices* archives include a variety of articles, blogs, and other resources related to change. To access them look for our Topic

menu on each page and click on “Change.” To get you started, here are links to some of our Vital Practices blogs related to managing change:

- Changing the Scorecard by Nancy Davidge <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/changing-the-scorecard/>
- Charting a New Path by Richelle Thompson <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/charting-a-new-path-2/>
- The Little Church That Could by Anne Ditzler <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-little-church-that-could/>
- What to Do When a Ministry Outlasts a Church? by Peter Strimer <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/what-to-do-when-a-ministry-outlasts-a-church-2/>
- Why Stay the Same by Miguel Escobar <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/why-stay-the-same/>
- A Bible Study for Difficult Decisions by Jane Patterson and John Lewis <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/a-bible-study-for-difficult-decisions/>

[ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/spiritual-discernment/a-bible-study-for-difficult-decisions/](http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/spiritual-discernment/a-bible-study-for-difficult-decisions/)

- “Be Not Afraid” – Is Our Role Business or Faith? by Elizabeth M. Magill <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/be-not-afraid-is-our-role-business-or-faith-2/>
- Church Smackdown? Not in this Town by Richelle Thompson <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/church-smackdown-not-in-this-town-2/>
- Little Church, Big Mission by Anne Ditzler <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/little-church-big-mission/>
- Resurrection Leadership by Jeff W. Fisher <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/healthy-practices/resurrection-leadership/>
- Talkin’ About My Generation by Miguel Escobar <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/talkin-about-my-generation/>

I invite you to add to this content by sharing your stories and

resources of death and resurrection in the Your Turn section and by 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/>

Dating the Presbyterians

BY CAM MILLER

First, we learned how to rent and manage a parking lot. Then we learned how to lease large sections of our sprawling downtown campus. Then we sought to reduce expenses and perhaps make a little income, and at the same time help smaller congregations save money by paying us to do everything from answering their phones to producing their bulletins. Then we launched an effort to purchase unrelated commercial property to increase our income. Now we are “dating” a Presbyterian congregation that may one-day co-habitat with us in our buildings.

Trinity Church in Buffalo is a 175-year-old congregation with 125-year-old buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. It costs \$250,000 just to open our doors, and we do not have an endowment worth mentioning. We were once home to many of Buffalo’s wealthiest families but now we host a socio-economic diversity not found in most Episcopal congregations. Reading this description could lead one to assume Trinity is struggling to survive when, in fact, our attendance grew by 30% last year. Yet, while we are a congregation of more than 600 households, we would need to

become a megachurch to support our facilities and a vibrant program with contributions alone.

Beating the odds as an urban congregation in a poor rustbelt city is what inspired a downtown Presbyterian congregation to contact me at the end of 2010. Theirs is an even more massive structure, one that is configured far less suitably for the kind of leasing program we have developed (our tenants include The Urban League, Gay and Lesbian Youth Services, and a major medical group’s substance abuse program, in addition to a nearby insurance company that leases our seventy parking spaces). So their pastor and some of the lay leadership invited me to breakfast to explore my interest in a possible “arrangement.”

They impressed me with their foresight and courage. They have a couple million dollars left in their endowment, enough, they said, to do something really great in terms of outreach and program, but not enough to fix all the woes of their building. They did not want to go down with the ship and pour what remained of their resources into an endless black hole. Drive in any direction from Trinity, and

you will pass the empty carcass of a once thriving congregation. Magnificent buildings with stunning handcrafted work inside and out, boarded up and rotting like a giant fallen sycamore in the forest, dot the landscape of Buffalo. These Presbyterians had greater ambitions. They were looking for another congregation they could move in with, and partner with to do “cool Christian stuff” as they called it. We were one of two churches they approached because, by reputation, they told us, we had “figured it out.”

Within months, a group from Trinity’s vestry and members of their Session were talking and exchanging information. Then the local newspaper caught wind of the activity and published a front-page story. As it turns out, their leadership was ahead of their congregation, and the article came as an unpleasant surprise to many. So now they are doubling back to pick up the stragglers before continuing the conversation with us.

Trinity is just one of hundreds of urban congregations trying to make its way in a world in which changing culture and economies of scale require do-or-die gumption.

We have no idea whether or not we will become a new model of urban ingenuity – an Episcopal-Presbyterian community that functions like a hybrid or simply two congregations sharing space, or neither.

We do know the opportunity arose because of everything else we have been doing along the way to make our buildings pay for themselves so that our contributions can fund ministry, mission, and program. One thing does in fact, lead to another.

The Rev. R. Cameron (Cam)

Miller is rector at Trinity Episcopal Church in Buffalo, New York.

Resources

- *Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline* by Alice Mann: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=460>
- Church Collaboration: <http://churchcollaboration.com/default.html>
- *Cooperating Congregations: Portraits of Mission Strategies* by Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig and William O. Avery: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=546>

- *Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations* by Beth Ann Gaede, editor: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=610>
- Missional Church Mergers (Christianity Today): <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/september/missional-churchmergers.html>
- Top 10 Things You See in a Church Merger: http://churchcollaboration.com/Documents/Bandy_10_things_to_see_in_merger.pdf
- Trinity Episcopal Church: <http://www.trinitybuffalo.org/>
- WIVBTV news clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryKqUVYde-c>

Real Collaboration

BY GREG SYLER

Recently, I met a friend who had just wrapped up hosting a public policy conference on health care. She looked exhausted. “There’s too much siloed thinking,” she sighed, “and not enough collaboration.” Similarly, an Episcopal diocese currently in search of their next bishop is finding that “one challenge is to move beyond the walls of our congregations and buildings to find more collaborative regional missional strategies.”

Collaboration has about as much buzz as any buzzword seems to buzz these days. I’m excited to be part of a collaborative process in the Diocese of Washington looking at Region 6 in our diocese. Locals call it southern Maryland – 22 parishes in the old tobacco economy of lower Prince George’s, Charles, and St. Mary’s Counties. All but two of the congregations have graveyards and many date back to the earliest days of the nation. With the ability to commute easily into Washington, DC and a significant military base presence in the lower part of the peninsula, however, the region has changed dramatically since the latter half of the 20th century, making it the fastest growing

region in the state and one of the wealthiest in the nation. But the Episcopal Church, while enjoying the wave of the Baby Boom years, didn’t take into account the ways in which neighborhood lifestyles were shifting. Tobacco hasn’t been a cash crop for decades. People drive miles to go to their favorite restaurant (or church), but the mainline Christian churches act as if it’s 1955 all over again. Average Sunday attendance in southern Maryland is 75 and it’s an aging membership.

After years of talking about decline and change, our region started a conversation with our diocese. The point was simple: we need to change the way we do church or else there won’t be any church left. As smart as we were to see this, we were naïve to think that naming the elephant actually gets it out of the room. Neither the diocese nor the congregations were willing to change the institutional structure, nor were they imaginative enough to do so.

The idea of collaboration emerged. “We need to act as one Episcopal Church,” went the rallying cry of a well-attended

event one year ago. And so was born the Collaborative Ministries Exploration Group, a voluntary coalition of 25 lay and clergy leaders. We met often, shared table fellowship and our individual stories, and, over time, built a new community of people, most of whom are generally frustrated by talking about decline and inspired by the Holy Spirit to imagine what the Body of Christ can be.

That’s when we realized how much this conversation has changed and how much the Holy Spirit is changing us. For too long our focus has been on sustainability: how can we cut costs, retain membership, and/or increase giving to ensure that our congregation continues to exist as we’ve known it? When we gathered as a new, intentional, regional community and shared the stories of our personal faith and calls to ministry we realized that what was keeping us from growing was unquestioned allegiance to the (ironically congregational) Episcopal system that keeps clergy, lay leaders, and congregations separate and independent.

From the perspectives of a public

policy analyst, a diocese imagining new leadership and, now, a group of folks in southern Maryland, collaboration is about breaking through to the new. It isn't about keeping up the structures we've inherited. At its core, what's really happening in the Episcopal Church is that we're witnessing the hand of God transforming the residues of conventional Christianity into a robust, mission-minded fellowship who gathers in the name of His Son, Jesus. We should put a warning label on the word "collaboration": talking about collaboration without questioning the model which places ministry in the hands of the ordained and keeps neighborhood congregations separate is an ineffective band-aid and, in the end, won't get anyone any closer to the Body of Christ in the 21st century.

It's easy to say we need to act like one Episcopal Church. It's a lot harder to do: changing policy is too big and boring. We can, however, change the way the People of God do church, then expect the institution to change. In southern Maryland, we're setting out to develop the discipleship capacity of our membership, and if we want to do impactful work we've got to work together with other congregations. For too long, the Episcopal Church has allowed our gifts to depend entirely on local, neighborhood-based operations.

The truth is we have a unique way of understanding God and seeing Christ's hand at work in the world. We haven't shared that experience with our wider communities because we haven't figured out how to be church together, beyond the false dichotomy of ordained/lay, beyond the one-priest/one-parish model of deployment and pastoral care.

The Episcopal Church's institutional structure is changing, no matter what, and we're attempting to bring about positive structural changes by doing church together in new and different ways.

Here's a 10-point starter kit:

1. **Have an honest conversation with the vestry, clergy, and lay leaders of your congregation.** Don't try to solve issues; just name them. Often, people avoid this because they feel either (a) they need to have an answer or (b) it won't go anywhere. Talk anyway.
2. **Talk to your neighbor clergy and lay leaders, fellow Episcopalians and/or other neighbor congregations. Foster open relationships and have a frank conversation, together.** They're probably feeling just as confused and anxious and excited as you are.

3. **Invite your diocese to partner with you.** Don't tell them what you want fixed and how they should fix it. Let your diocesan leadership "listen in."

4. **Stop buying books and looking for the next great consultant, bishop, rector, or senior warden. Listen to what God is calling you** into, and what God is saying to your gathering. People are ready to do creative ministry, together.

5. **Imagine what might exist beyond the one-parish / one-priest model.** How can you ensure that present levels of ministry are continued? How might working as part of a team help grow ministry and your own awareness of God's redeeming hand at work in your community?

6. **Do ministry together.** Identify two or three areas of focus that, if you do them, will positively impact your community (your church community and wider community) in the Name of Christ. This could mean broadening a ministry that one congregation is doing but with insufficient impact, or creating ministries that do not yet exist.

7. **Resist false dichotomies.** Most of our current membership is, by and large, satisfied. Serving them with the Gospel should not stand

in the way of serving those not-yet touched by Christ.

8. Talk about “the Episcopal Church in so-and-so region/county/city”, and market your ministries accordingly. Be on guard against one congregation “inviting” its neighbors to participate in their functions. While you’re at it, use the phrase “our diocese”, not “the diocese.”

9. Affirm that weekly corporate worship in the local parish church is essential to the Body of Christ. This upholds a foundational Anglican principle, not only the importance of corporate worship but also the relevance of having a local clergyperson who is embedded in the culture of the parish(es).

10. Have fun. Seek the abundant life of which Jesus speaks (John 10:10). Find ministries that inspire, feed, and invigorate, not only those served but those serving.

The Rev. Greg Syler is rector of St. George’s in Valley Lee, Maryland. He co-chairs the Collaborative Ministries Exploration Group of Region 6 of the Diocese of Washington and is working with others to create a diocesan summer camp.

Resources

- Church Collaboration: <http://churchcollaboration.com/default.html>
- Cooperating Congregations: Portraits of Mission Strategies by Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig and William O. Avery: <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=546>

Answering God's Call

BY PEYTON G. CRAIGHILL

When a congregation makes a paradigm shift from an attractional model of ministry to a missional model, how will the shift influence its understanding and practice of worship?

Since in this article I have to be brief, I'll focus on one aspect of the answer – God's use of symbols in the liturgy as a way of transforming our lives. More specifically, I'll show how, by converting the meaning of traditional biblical symbols used in ritual actions, Jesus expressed his power to change the servant people of God from an attractional to a missional community. This process was not limited to the early Church; it's alive and well today. In fact, I'm going to introduce you to a method whereby you can serve God and his mission by involving yourself in this process!

I'll introduce you to this method by selecting a number of Gospel lessons used on Sunday mornings during Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter and asking five questions about them:

1. For each Gospel, what is its *central symbol*?

2. In biblical tradition before the coming of Christ, what was *the common interpretation* of this symbol?

3. By changing from an attractional to a missional interpretation, how did Jesus *transform the meaning* of the symbol?

4. How can the power of God's love working in the liturgy through that symbol *empower us in our daily life today* to share with God in his mission of love and justice in the world that he created and is still creating?

5. How can that symbol be *employed more transformatively* in the worship life of your congregation?

The Gospels

The baptism of Jesus – Mark 1:9-11

1. *Central symbol*– Baptism

2. *Traditional biblical interpretation* – Traditionally, Baptism was regarded as the way for converts to cleanse themselves from their Gentile uncleanness before entering into the Community of the

Covenant. Baptism was the attractional way for them to enter into the Jewish life of faith.

3. *Jesus' transformation of the meaning of Baptism* – For Jesus, Baptism was not an act of entering in but of sending out. Through Baptism, his Heavenly Father commissioned him as his Messiah and sent him out to proclaim the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Through Christ, Baptism became profoundly missional.

4. *Liturgical empowerment for us today for Christ's mission* – Baptism is the way we are attracted into Christ's Body. But it is also the way Christ commissions us to share in his mission in "all the world". Through the Baptismal Covenant, we take vows that engage us to serve God in all we do in every area of our daily lives.

5. *Becoming aware of the transforming power of this symbolic action* - The primary means is through baptismal catechesis both before and after Baptism, particularly with parents and godparents. But all of us are involved in baptismal living. In the rite, when

we vow to support those being baptized through renewing our own baptismal covenant, what could be more important than this act, individually and communally? But how do we, as a congregation, fulfill this vow? Does it not mean that we need to find ways to inspire, guide, and support each other in our service to Christ in our daily life missions? Where will we get the resources to fulfill this vow in our congregation?

Mount of Transfiguration – Mark 9:2-9

1. *Central symbol* – Holy Places shaping holy rituals.
2. *Traditional interpretation* – In Jewish tradition, three mountain sites were their holiest places – Mount Sinai, Mounts Ebal-Gerizim, and Mount Sinai. All three were attractive in meaning. The rites used on them were intended to separate the Jews out from the people surrounding them. Even Mount Zion was seen as a place where the nations of the world would be drawn to.
3. *Jesus' transformation of this symbol* – When Peter witnessed the sacred vision, he responded by wanting to erect three tabernacles to enshrine this wonderful vision. Jesus' response was the opposite. He led his disciples

down the mountain to heal an epileptic boy.

4. *Liturgical implications* – How can we make our holy places, not an enshrinement of the Sunday morning experience, but a location to renew our baptismal vows, sharing our lives with God in his mission in all we do, Monday through Sunday?

5. *Growing in awareness of the missional power of our places of worship* - All the elements of our liturgies – sermons, prayers, hymns, readings, visible symbols, etc. – can be used to make congregations aware that when they participate in worship, they're not isolating themselves from their Monday-through-Saturday lives; they're preparing themselves for serving God through mission in their daily life experiences. From time to time, the congregation can be instructed in the structure of the Eucharist as being basically missional.

I'm going to ask you use this model in ways that fit your congregation. To help you get started, I've identified other Gospel texts you might use and given you some hints at how to answer three of the five questions. The other two, you will have to work out yourself in the context of your congregation. Go on to select other Gospel

texts and find out how they transform the liturgy in missional ways.

Caesarea Philippi – Mark 8:27-38

1. *Central symbol* – The Messiah
2. *Traditional interpretation* – A triumphal figure
3. *Jesus' transformation* – The suffering servant and the way of the cross

Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem – Matthew 21:1-11

1. *Central symbol* – The animal Jesus rode on
2. *Traditional interpretation* – a warhorse
3. *Jesus' transformation* – a donkey, a humble work animal, used in peace

The Last Supper – Matthew 26:17-25

1. *Central symbol* – The sacred meal
2. *Traditional interpretation* – Liberation from Egypt to become the People of the Covenant
3. *Jesus' transformation* – The New Covenant, Foretaste of the Messianic Banquet

Peyton Craighill served as a missionary in Taiwan for 21 years. Until retirement, he served in a number of different ministries in the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

Remembering About God

BY STACY SAULS

Human memory is quite a remarkable phenomenon, both mysterious and complex, very basic to who we are as persons. We speak of one who has lost memory as being robbed and as “not there” anymore. Losing our memories is one of the things we fear most in life. Memories are essential to our identities.

Some of our memories are so powerful that to recall them makes the event itself real to us again. We experience the sights, sounds, and scents as if they existed in the present and not merely the past. That is the sense in which the New Testament uses the Greek word *anamnesis*, as in, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

These important words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” come to us from two sources in the New Testament, the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians and the Gospel of Luke. The words of Paul and Luke: Paul, who was the Church’s primary missionary carrying the remembrance of Christ, the presence of Christ, to the Gentiles, and Luke, who chronicled the work of Paul in the Book of Acts. The fundamental missionary activity

is remembering in the sense of *anamnesis*—not reminiscing and not telling, but acting, making present, being the hands and feet and vision and compassion of Christ in the world.

The first apostles set out to remember about God, to make Christ present in the world because it was essential to who they were. There have, however, been times when the Church has forgotten. When we do, we are not truly present. We are not ourselves. I believe we are living in a time when we are beginning to remember again who we are after a long, long time of having forgotten. It is an incredibly hopeful and exciting moment in which to live, this time of beginning to remember.

There are those who would tell us it is just the opposite: the Church has lost its way, we have sold out to our culture, and now is the time we have forgotten about God. Perhaps they are right, but I do not think so. I think the truth is that we are beginning to free ourselves of cultural dominance for the first time in a long time, a very long time.

To speak of the cultural captivity

of the Church as something new borders on willful ignorance; our cultural captivity did not begin with the liberal drift of mainline denominations in the 1960s. It began much longer ago. It began on October 28 in the year 312. On that day the Church, which had been growing steadily since its founding but which had suffered intermittent and sometimes severe persecution, forgot who it was and made a compromise with power.

The official story is that on that day 1,700 years ago the Emperor Constantine fought a decisive battle at the Milvian Bridge that made him the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. He attributed his victory to a vision of the cross appearing in a blazing light above the sun bearing this message: *In hoc signo vinces*, in this sign you will conquer, followed by a vision of the risen Christ instructing him to use that sign against his enemies.

That does not sound much like Jesus to me, but it does sound a lot like the Church.

Not too many years later Christianity, which had begun three centuries earlier in witness that

power was made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9), became the established religion of the Roman Empire, the epitome of power. From then until now, the Church, particularly the clergy, especially the bishops, became identified with power, prestige, and privilege. Today we are more democratic perhaps about how we distribute power and privilege, but they are power and privilege nonetheless. Instead of being the voice of truth to power, the Church justified the use of power in the name of God. Instead of being an instrument of peace, it perpetrated violence and preached the crusades. Instead of being the advocate of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, it became the defender of the established order. Instead of a posture of self-offering, it assumed a posture of self-protection. Bishops became princes. Pastoral cures became administrative units based on those of the Roman Empire, which happened to be called dioceses. The concept of jurisdiction replaced the concept of diakonia or service. And the imperial authorities insisted that the church, contrary to its nature up to that point, order itself for the good of civil society even though it had existed quite well without universal councils of any kind and certainly without the Vatican, the Curia, the so-called Instruments of Unity of the Anglican Communion, the Anglican Covenant, and General Convention.

In short, we forgot. We forgot about God. Our memory and our perspective became impaired by power, privilege, and prestige.

We are finding that power, privilege, and prestige are hard things to give up, but they are crumbling around us. The fact that they are crumbling appears to be decline, which has resulted in a great deal of anxiety and acting out by those still trying to cling to the Church that once was. We are no longer the established church nor the church of the establishment. As we are freed from the trappings of privilege, we have an unprecedented opportunity to remember about God, to make Christ present, to be who we really are. I think the world's salvation may be in that. I know ours is.

So what do bishops do when they are liberated from being princes of the Church? Might it mean they are free to be apostles again? Might it mean they are free to stop being Chief Executive Officers and start being Chief Missionary Officers? There is a big difference between the two.

It is not just bishops, of course. Few laypeople were baptized, or confirmed, or caught the fire of the Holy Spirit to do church work. The ministry of the laos, which is all of the baptized, lay and ordained is to change the

world. It is to proclaim the Gospel in the world by word and example. It is to tear down what is unjust and, more importantly and much more challengingly, to build what is just. It is to build the beloved community. It is to love and serve. It is to care for the poor and eliminate poverty. It is to feed the hungry and eliminate hunger. It is to clothe the naked and shelter the homeless and eliminate want. It is to heal the sick and defeat disease. It is to proclaim release to the captives and actually liberate them. It is restore sight to the blind and help light overcome the darkness. It is to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and, in God's time, to usher in the reign of our God.

What is happening all around us, I think, is one of the most hopeful moments the church has ever experienced, although it comes, as hope often does, in a fearful way. All around us the old way is crumbling. We are finding that difficult. We are finding that anxious. But it is fearful and difficult only when we fail to remember, to remember who we are, to remember about God.

The Constantinian Settlement is being reversed. And its demise will be hastened the more people, all of us, remember about God. There will be those all

around us who try, indeed who try desperately, to hang onto the way it used to be. It is futile. It is futile because God does not will the way things used to be. God wills the way things will be. What we have before us is an opportunity to participate with God in creating the way things will be. It is the most interesting, exciting, and spiritually rewarding time in the entire history of the Church. It is the opportunity to participate in the demise of Christendom so that Christendom might be replaced by Christ alone. And all of the boxes we have constructed for God to live in—sexist boxes, and racist boxes, and classist boxes, and imperialist boxes, and oppressive boxes, and myopic boxes, as comfortable as they may be, are going to have to go to make room for Christ himself. There is simply not room both for our boxes and Christ himself. It is something not even God can accomplish.

The Right Reverend Stacy Sauls
is the chief operating officer of The Episcopal Church. This article is excerpted from his remarks at the March 2012 Episcopal Communicators Conference.

Resources

- Battle of the Milvian Bridge: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Milvian_Bridge
- Constantine at the Milvian Bridge: <http://www.scriptoriumdaily.com/2010/10/28/constantine-at-the-milvian-bridge/>
- “Remembering About God:” plenary address to Episcopal Communicators Conference, March 2012 – complete text: <http://www.episcopalcommunicators.org/storage/Remembering%20God.pdf>
- “Remembering About God:” full address to Episcopal Communicators Conference, March 2012 - video transcript: <http://vimeo.com/kanuga/eccbishopsauls> or <http://episcopalcommunicators.square-space.com/2012-kanuga/?SSScrollPosition=100>

Of Dinosaurs & Discernment

BY LISA H. TOWLE

Years ago, a physician I knew had a cutout of a purple dinosaur on the outside of her office door. It wasn't the infamous Barney, but still, the dinosaur was cute and smiley. Its message, though, was serious. Above the head of the dinosaur, in big letters, was the word, EVOLVE. Below its feet were these words, OR DIE.

Change happens

It took decades of lobbying before women in the Episcopal Church were allowed to officially organize. General Convention authorized the Board of Missions to create the women's "auxiliary" to the Board of Missions 141 years ago. Today, the entity known as Episcopal Church Women is one of the largest ministries in the church. And while the ECW profile certainly varies from diocese to diocese it is in key respects a microcosm of the Episcopal Church. Generally speaking its health and ability to pivot can be used as a gauge to measure the health and dexterity of the whole.

A romp through history helps make the point. In the Diocese of North Carolina, where I live,

women who've chosen to affiliate with ECW have led. Now, as then, they continue to do what needs to be done, whether it's supporting the work of missionaries abroad or paying for a new church roof at home.

- It was a right and good thing in 1913 that the ECW in North Carolina created the Social Service Commission to work with prisons and state farms, and to monitor and encourage legislation of particular relevance to women and children. That legislation included adequate care for mentally ill children and minimum wage laws.

- It was a right and good thing when, in the 1970s, the diocesan ECW president – a woman then known as Scott Evans – spoke up in the face of heated opposition and encouraged women to actively support their sisters in Christ who sought to become priests in the Diocese of North Carolina. They did.

- It was a right and good thing that in 2007 the ECW stepped up and committed a minimum

of .07 percent of its annual income to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, particularly as those eight goals pertain to women and children. (And, as our bishop Michael Curry has pointed out, almost every goal pertains to women and children.)

- And it was a right and good thing that the ECW partnered with the diocese's MDG Committee and Episcopal Relief & Development to successfully meet the ambitious objectives of the diocese's NetsforLife anti-malaria campaign, which concluded in January 2012.

What is Our Future?

All to say, the past and present of the ECW has made a difference in this diocese and beyond. But what about our future? If we want a future that makes a difference – heck, if we want a future at all – the Episcopal Church Women, born into changing times, must shift again. And the shift will have to be seismic. This isn't about continuing to manage what's been, something so many in our church focus on. This is about leading; about

meeting people and need where they are, not where we think they should be; about being nimble enough to act thoughtfully and quickly. This will happen with God's help, of course, and hopefully with God's people acting with less insularity and more informed collaboration.

These big-picture conclusions were drawn from a long series of small events that came to a head in the spring of 2010. That's when I invited the presidents of the ECW boards in the dioceses of Western North Carolina and East Carolina to meet with me in Raleigh, in the Diocese of North Carolina. What was supposed to be a one-day meeting extended to two days. A conversation about our shared joys and challenges as the heads of ECW in our dioceses, and the plan to come up with a project we'd share statewide, veered into something much more to the core of things: What is our future? And who, on earth, will take us there?

Challenges

We hear common refrains from many members of ECW. They go something like this: "We can't recruit people to leadership positions anymore." Or, "Our programs aren't well attended." Or, "Look at my gray hair. Look

at my eyes. I'm getting old. I'm tired. I can't keep doing this, but I'm afraid to stop. Who will do this if I stop?" (Like I said, a microcosm of the church.)

Who will do this, indeed. Now to be fair, we're not alone. Certainly those involved in "women's ministries" outside the state of North Carolina have encountered similar laments in their dioceses; the subject comes up time and again in provincial and national meetings. But it's not just church folk hanging out with other church folk talking about churchy things. For example, I hear variations on these themes expressed quite frequently by people involved in the world of secular not-for-profits.

First Steps

We got down to the business of framing our discussion in March of 2011. That's when our respective boards of directors retreated for two days with Mary MacGregor, a member of the laity who focuses on leadership as Director of Evangelism and Congregational Development. In addition to all of her other gifts, Mary brought with her an in-depth understanding of ECW as she's intimately familiar with the ministry. Our time together was marked by prayers for guidance and discernment,

yet in the beginning it was difficult to resist the temptation to rush ahead and throw what have become standard answers to many church-related dilemmas -- More Millennials! More money! More technology! -- ahead of the hard but necessary basic questions.

Here, in no particular order, are some of them:

- What are we about, really?
- Do we now meet for the sake of meeting?
- Does our organizational structure need streamlining?
- Are our various ministries too varied?
- Is ECW relevant now that women have voice and vote at all levels of the church?
- Do we communicate in the most effective way the invitation to engage in worship, prayer, study, service, and fellowship?
- How can we transform lives in ways that matter in a broken and hurting world?
- What would happen if we just stopped all our fund-raising?

- What would Jesus say about all this?

Change is hard

Here we are in 2012. Everything is now on the table. An understanding has emerged. We must be willing to radically change. Nibbling around the edges of the issue, tweaking a few things here and there, won't work if the ministry is to be truly present. And so we are proceeding simultaneously on three fronts: We must learn from our past, we must take action for the present, and we must engage in active discernment about the future.

This evolution won't be easy; not everyone is going to be happy. For some, there's little energy for the effort involved in imagining a different future. For others, the sacred cows are just too sacred to touch. In fact, I've already been told, in essence, "why mess with success?" I get it, I do. I'm praying, though, that enough people will agree being part of a new day and a new way for ECW in North Carolina makes the journey forward worth taking.

***Lisa H. Towle** serves as president of the Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of North Carolina.*

Resources

- Episcopal Church Women: <http://ecwnational.org/twentytwelve/>
- Episcopal Church Women-North Carolina: <http://www.ecw-nc.org/> and [www.facebook.com/ecwnc /](http://www.facebook.com/ecwnc/)
- Evangelism and Congregational Development, Diocese of Texas: <http://www.epicenter.org/iona-center/>
- Resources for Organizational Change: <http://changeleadersnetwork.com/free-resources>

Parable of the Lifesaving Station

BY THOMAS BRACKETT

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for those who were lost. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and gave of their time, money, and effort to support its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on

life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club's decorations, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club's initiations were held. About this time a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split among the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station. So they did.

As the years went by, the new sta-

tion experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

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.”

This parable is a remarkably adept appraisal of the tendency of faith communities to turn insular and artificial. The reasons I find it so appealing (as the Episcopal Church Center's Officer for Church Planting and Ministry Redevelopment) follow: It was written by one of our own*, a past president of the House of Deputies to General Convention; it uses “parable” format to explore what is, as well as what might be; it skillfully critiques the tendency

of religious communities to move toward a “Club” mentality, and it asks us to evaluate the “real time” contribution of faith communities by the actual difference they make in the lives of their surrounding community.

In the parable, there is a moment when what was a lifesaving station turns into a Club. From there forward, the primary reason for joining that club was the benefit of membership. Previously, the primary motivation was that of serving the souls who normally would have been lost to shipwreck on that rocky seacoast. The impact of that shift is that, eventually, those rescued (now by independent contractors) were no longer welcomed into the clubhouse. They first had to be cleaned up and made respectable! Leaders across three denominations and two faiths (lay and ordained) tell me that this part of the parable sounds like a description of their home church.

Guidelines for follow-up conversations:

- How would you describe the purposes of the original lifesaving station?
- Why do you think that volunteers signed up to help with those purposes?

- At what point do you think that this lifesaving station first began moving away from its original identity and purpose?
- What might an outsider have noticed as a first sign of this move from Station to Club?
- What might have been the underlying reasons that caused the earliest volunteers to commit to the station’s mission?
- Once the station began functioning as a club, what was the primary benefit of membership?
- Whose taste and needs were represented in the decor of the new clubhouse?
- What makes it easier to start a new station down that proverbial coast, rather than turn the existing club around?
- At what point in the evolution from station to club would it be easier to turn the trend around?
- If you were to start a new crude little Lifesaving Station today, what would you do to prevent this shift from eventually happening?
- Who would you imagine to be

the most motivated volunteers in your newly forming station?

- What are the parallels you see between this parable and your own congregation’s history?
- If you think of the crude little lifesaving station as being one place on a continuum of possibilities and the exclusive club as occupying another spot on that continuum, where do you think your ministry is located?
- What is the significance of decommissioning one of the lifeboats and placing it on a liturgical stand as symbol of identity?
- Do you know of any other “means of grace” that have been decommissioned and then turned into symbols in our churches?
- What language does your local congregation use to talk about terms like “rocky sea coasts,” “shipwrecks,” being “lost,” “tirelessly searching” and “saved”?

The Rev. Thomas Brackett is The Episcopal Church Center’s Officer for Church Planting and Ministry Redevelopment.

*Dr. Theodore O. Wedel, former Canon of the National Cathedral wrote this parable in 1953.

Parábola del Puesto de Salvamento

POR THOMAS BRACKETT

En una costa marina peligrosa en la que frecuentemente había naufragios, había una vez un pequeño puesto de salvamento muy elemental. El edificio no era más que una choza y había un solo bote, pero un puñado de miembros dedicados vigilaba constantemente el mar y día y noche buscaban desinteresadamente náufragos perdidos en el mar. Algunos de los náufragos salvados y varios otros de zonas cercanas desearon ser parte del puesto y donaron su tiempo, dinero y esfuerzo para apoyar su labor. Se adquirieron nuevos botes y se capacitó a nuevo personal. El pequeño puesto de salvamento creció.

A algunos de los miembros del puesto de salvamento no les gustaba que el edificio fuera tan elemental y que estuviera tan mal equipado. Les parecía que se debería proporcionar un lugar más cómodo como primer refugio de aquellos salvados de las aguas. Reemplazaron los catres de emergencia por camas y pusieron mejores muebles en el edificio expandido.

Ahora el puesto de salvamento se había convertido en un punto de reunión popular para sus miembros y lo llenaron de hermosas decora-

ciones porque lo empleaban como una especie de club. En ese entonces había menos miembros interesados en participar en misiones de rescate, así que contrataron gente de afuera para que hiciera esa labor en los botes de salvamento. El motivo de salvamento perduró en las decoraciones del club y había un bote de salvamento litúrgico en la sala en la que se realizaban las ceremonias de iniciación del club. Alrededor de esa época un barco de gran tamaño naufragó cerca de la costa y el personal contratado trajo barcos llenos de gente con frío, empapada y semi-ahogada. Estaban sucios y enfermos. El hermoso nuevo club estaba en caos. Así que el comité de administración del edificio hizo instalar inmediatamente una caseta de duchas fuera del club en el que las víctimas de los naufragios podían ser limpiadas antes de que entraran al edificio.

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En la próxima reunión hubo una división entre los miembros del club. La mayoría de los miembros estaba a favor de suspender las actividades de salvamento del club por ser desagradables y un estorbo para la vida social normal del club. Algunos miembros insistieron en que el salvamento siguiera siendo su propósito principal y señalaron que todavía se llamaba puesto de salvamento. Pero finalmente perdieron la votación y les dijeron que si deseaban

salvar las vidas de los diversos tipos de gente que naufragaba en esas aguas deberían construir su propio puesto de salvamento. Y así lo hicieron.

Con el correr de los años, el nuevo puesto de salvamento pasó por los mismos cambios que habían ocurrido en el viejo. Se convirtió en un club y se fundó otro puesto de salvamento. La historia se seguía repitiendo y si uno visita la costa hoy en día puede ver un número de clubes exclusivos a lo largo de ella. Los naufragios son frecuentes en esas aguas, pero la mayoría de los naufragos se ahogan.

Esta parábola es una evaluación notablemente apta de la tendencia de las comunidades de fe en convertirse en algo insular y artificial. Los motivos por los que me atrae tanto (como el Funcionario de la Iglesia Episcopal a Cargo de Sembrar Iglesias y de Nuevo Desarrollo de Ministerios) son los siguientes: Fue redactado por uno de los nuestros*, un ex presidente de la Cámara de Diputados a la Convención General; emplea un formato de “parábola” para explorar tanto lo que es como lo que puede ser; critica diestramente la tendencia de las comunidades religiosas a evolucionar hacia una mentalidad de “club” y nos pide que evaluemos el aporte en “tiempo real” de las comunidades de fe

teniendo en consideración su impacto real en las vidas de las comunidades que las rodean.

En la parábola hay un momento en el que el puesto de salvamento se convierte en un club. De allí en adelante, el motivo principal para unirse a ese club es el beneficio de ser miembro. Anteriormente, el motivo principal era servir a las almas que de lo contrario se hubieran perdido en naufragios en esa costa rocosa. El impacto de ese cambio fue que, eventualmente, aquellos que fueron rescatados (ahora por contratistas independientes) ya no eran bienvenidos en la sede del club. ¡Primero había que limpiarlos y hacer que fueran respetables! Líderes de tres denominaciones y dos fes (laicos y ordenados) me dijeron que esta parte de la parábola suena como sus iglesias.

Guías para conversaciones de seguimiento:

- ¿Cómo describiría los propósitos del puesto de salvamento original?
- ¿Por qué le parece que había voluntarios dispuestos a ayudar con esos propósitos?
- ¿En qué momento cree que ese puesto de salvamento empezó a apartarse de su identidad y

propósito originales?

- ¿Qué podía notar alguien de afuera como el primer signo de la evolución de puesto a club?
- ¿Cuáles pueden haber sido los motivos subyacentes que causaron que los voluntarios iniciales se dedicaran a la misión del puesto?
- Una vez que el puesto empezó a funcionar como un club, ¿cuál fue el beneficio principal de estar afiliado a él?
- ¿El gusto y las necesidades de quiénes estaban representados en el decorado de la nueva sede del club?
- ¿Qué hace que sea más fácil iniciar un nuevo puesto en esa costa proverbial, en lugar de hacer que el club existente vuelva a su razón de ser original?
- ¿En qué punto de la evolución de puesto a club sería más fácil invertir la tendencia?
- Si hoy en día usted fuera a iniciar un pequeño puesto de salvataje elemental, ¿qué haría para prevenir que eventualmente ocurriera este cambio?
- ¿Quiénes le parece que serían los voluntarios más motivados

en el nuevo puesto que está creando?

- ¿Qué paralelos ve entre esta parábola y la historia de su propia feligresía?
- Si piensa en el pequeño puesto de salvamento elemental como un punto en un continuo de posibilidades y el club exclusivo como un punto que ocupa otro espacio en ese continuo, ¿dónde le parece que está situado su ministerio?
- ¿Cuál es el significado de retirar del servicio uno de los botes de salvamento y ponerlo en un pedestal litúrgico como un símbolo de identidad?
- ¿Sabe usted sobre otros “medios de gracia” que fueron retirados de servicio y después convertidos en símbolos en nuestras iglesias?
- ¿Qué palabras emplea su feligresía local para hablar sobre cosas como “costas marinas rocosas”, “naufragios”, estar “perdido”, “buscar incansablemente” y “salvado”?

*El Dr. Theodore O. Wedel, ex canónigo de la Catedral de Washington, DC, redactó esta parábola. Ordenado como sacerdote episcopal en 1931, fue presidente durante un tiempo de la Cámara de Diputados de la Iglesia Episcopal. Redactó esta parábola en 1953.

Thomas Brackett es el
*Funcionario de la Iglesia
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Ministerios.*

Cortejados por los Presbiterianos

BY CAM MILLER

Primero aprendimos a alquilar y administrar un parqueo. Después aprendimos a alquilar grandes partes de nuestro extenso campus en el centro de la ciudad. Después tratamos de reducir expensas y tal vez ganar un poco de dinero y a la vez ayudar a las feligresías más pequeñas a ahorrar dinero pagándonos para que hiciéramos todo por ellas, desde contestar sus teléfonos hasta preparar sus boletines. Después lanzamos un esfuerzo para comprar propiedades comerciales no relacionadas para aumentar nuestros ingresos. Ahora estamos siendo “cortejados” por una feligresía presbiteriana que tal vez algún día cohabitará con nosotros en nuestros edificios.

Trinity Church, de Buffalo, es una feligresía de 175 años de antigüedad con edificios de 125 años inscritos en el Registro Nacional de Lugares Históricos. Cuesta \$250,000 simplemente abrir nuestras puertas y no tenemos un legado que valga la pena mencionar. En el pasado muchas de las familias más adineradas de Buffalo eran miembros de nuestra iglesia, pero ahora somos anfitriones de una diversidad socioeconómica que no se ve en la mayoría de las

feligresías episcopales. Leer esta descripción podría hacer que uno supusiera que Trinity está luchando por sobrevivir, pero en realidad el año pasado nuestra asistencia aumentó un 30%. Sin embargo, si bien somos una feligresía de más de 600 familias, tendríamos que convertirnos en una iglesia gigantesca para costear nuestras instalaciones y un programa dinámico con sólo los aportes de los feligreses.

Sobrevivir como feligresía urbana en una ciudad pobre en decadencia fue lo que inspiró a una feligresía presbiteriana local a ponerse en contacto conmigo a fines de 2010. El edificio de ellos es todavía más grande que el nuestro y, además, está configurado de manera tal que es menos apto para el tipo de programa de alquileres que tenemos nosotros (nuestros inquilinos incluyen la Liga Urbana, los Servicios para Jóvenes Gay y Lesbianas y un importante programa médico de tratamiento de grupo de la drogadicción y el alcoholismo, además de una compañía de seguros cercana que alquila nuestros setenta espacios de parqueo). Así que su pastor y alguien del liderazgo laico me invitaron a desayunar para explorar mi interés

en un posible “arreglo”. Me impresionaron con su previsión y coraje. Les quedan un par de millones de dólares en su legado, suficiente, dijeron, para hacer algo realmente bueno en términos de extensión y programas, pero no suficiente para reparar todos el deterioro de su edificio. No querían hundirse con el barco y poner lo que quedaba de sus recursos en un agujero negro sin fondo.

Si uno maneja en cualquier dirección desde Trinity, pasa el almacén vacío de lo que solía ser un lugar floreciente. Edificios señoriales con extraordinarios detalles labrados a mano adentro y afuera, abandonados y pudriéndose como un sicómoro gigantesco caído en el bosque, salpican el panorama de Buffalo. Estos presbiterianos tenían grandes ambiciones. Estaban buscando otra feligresía con la que se pudieran mudar y asociarse para hacer “cosas cristianas de onda”, como lo llamaron. Nosotros éramos una de las dos iglesias con las que se pusieron en contacto, por nuestra fama, nos dijeron, “de haberlo hecho funcionar”.

En cuestión de meses, un grupo de la junta parroquial de Trinity y

miembros de su Sesión estaban hablando e intercambiando información. Después el diario local se enteró de la actividad y publicó una nota en primera plana. Como resultó ser, su liderazgo estaba muy a la vanguardia de su feligresía y el artículo fue una sorpresa desagradable para muchos. Así que ahora se están esforzando en recoger a los rezagados antes de continuar nuestras conversaciones con nosotros. Trinity es sólo una de cientos de feligresías urbanas que luchan por abrirse paso en un mundo en el que las culturas cambiantes y las economías de escala requieren agallas y un gran sentido común para sobrevivir en ellas. No tenemos idea si nos convertiremos o no en un nuevo modelo de ingeniosidad urbana: una comunidad Episcopal-Presbiteriana que funciona como un híbrido o simplemente dos feligresías que comparten un espacio... o ninguna de las dos cosas.

Lo que sí sabemos es que la oportunidad surgió a causa de todas las demás cosas que hemos estado haciendo para hacer que nuestros edificios se pagaran a sí mismos, para poder costear ministerio, misión y programa. De verdad que una cosa lleva a la otra.

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