

Caring for Each Other

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Tone Matters

BY SCOTT GUNN

A few years ago, I nearly lost one of the best lay leaders in the parish I was then serving. This leader and I had worked together well for several months. In the midst of a critical project, we exchanged a long chain of emails. In response to one of them, I wrote a one-sentence note: "Can't it be done faster?" He replied with what seemed like a blistering email in which he said he was working as fast as possible and offered his resignation if I wasn't happy with his leadership.

Fortunately, I had a good sense to follow the rule about letting some time pass before replying. The next morning I re-read our email exchange. I could see how he might have thought I wasn't happy with him. I had misinterpreted his brevity with license to be terse. After a carefully crafted apology and clarification, our productive email exchange resumed. The next time we saw each other in church, we shared

mutual apologies.

Crisis averted? Yes. Lesson learned? I hope so.

The trick with communication, especially in a parish with so many kinds of personalities and numerous volunteers, is to strike the right tone. Email might be the trickiest medium, but the challenge is there in all communication. I've developed a few principles that I try to remember with my communication in all media.

Gratitude Matters

It's easy to feel that we are being taken for granted, or even to act as if we are taking others for granted. Nearly every email I send to someone in parish ministry ends with a thank you for something. "Thank you for your leadership." "I am grateful for your faithful service." Writing this helps me maintain my sense of gratitude, and expressing it lets

people know that their ministry matters.

Along those lines, I try not to start emails with “the business” of the note. Starting with “I hope you are well” or “It was good to speak with you yesterday” keeps the work anchored in relationship. These beginnings and grateful endings avoid the problem of one-sentence emails, so easily misconstrued.

Pleasant beginnings and endings are necessary in spoken conversation and other media too. It’s just less tempting to cut them out when you’re looking someone in the eye. Starting and ending carefully is polite, and it’s good Christian practice to treat others with care.

Context is Everything

It seems that there are more and more ways to communicate with each passing year. Just when we’ve mastered email, along comes Facebook. Then Twitter. Who knows what is next? While we’re listing ways to communicate, let’s not forget the telephone or the increasingly rare handwritten note.

Terse writing is lousy on email, but it’s essential on Twitter. Flip remarks seem out of place in a handwritten note, but they’re

almost essential on social media. What you say in the pulpit will probably be different than what gets said in the coffee shop. Common sense will help here, but it is vital to remember the audience and the medium.

Staying on Message and on Mission

Every one of our messages in the church should express our mission. When I ask the Altar Guild to take on a task, it’s an opportunity to talk about how important worship is in our life together. Our treasurer can use every vestry meeting to talk about how we are living our mission with our budget and our financial generosity. There is no “business” apart from the mission of the church. The mission is our business. Period. Staying focused on mission will help us craft better messages. And a mission context will help our hearers be inspired and grateful to be involved.

Get a Second Opinion – From Yourself if Necessary

Getting the right tone in our communication is tricky. What seems funny to me may be snarky to someone else. Another writer’s quick note might seem rude to me. One obvious fix is to either ask someone else to have a look at what we’ve written or to listen to

what we’re about to say. A good alternative to asking someone else is to sit on something for a few hours and read it with a fresh eye. This extra step can save embarrassment and preserve good relationships. And that brings us to the last principle.

Practice Reconciliation

Inevitably we’ll get it wrong. Words come out differently than we had intended. We misunderstand someone’s meaning. Being ready to apologize, or to share our hurt feelings, can make a world of difference. The church is a great place to practice our reconciliation skills. With time – and hard-won lessons – we can learn to use the right tone to get our message across.

Scott Gunn is an Episcopal priest and in his own words, a “certified technophile.” Resident in the Diocese of Rhode Island, he serves on the Diocesan Council, various diocesan committees, and as the Province I representative to the Episcopal News Service Advisory Committee. His blog, “Seven whole days” is found at <http://www.sevenwholedays.org/>.

Editor's Letter

Our congregational life is a common life, complete with the joys and challenges that come from being in relationship. As congregational leaders, our role involves managing the sometimes 'sticky wickets' of relationship that hamper our work of building the beloved community.

The May/June issue of *Vestry Papers* explores the theme Caring for Each Other. We share resources and articles offering ways to model mutual respect and care among congregational leaders (lay and ordained, volunteer and paid) and the community as a whole.

Here's what you'll find in this issue of *Vestry Papers*:

- Email and social media have changed how many of us communicate with each other. In "Tone Matters," Scott Gunn looks at how the casual nature of this media can create opportunities for hurt feelings and offers steps you can take to minimize misunderstandings and create an environment of truthfulness and love.
- The regular flow of congregational life often includes people impacted by addiction and codependency. "So You Think You Don't Know One" by Chilton Knudsen looks at the impact these issues can have on a congregation, identifying patterns and symptoms to watch for as well as a call to mindfulness that can open the way to healing and a renewal of congregational health.
- There's a correlation between highly functioning, fruitful vestries and a culture of respect, caring, and transparency. In "No More Parking Lot Conversations," Nancy Davidge and Mary MacGregor explore ways congregational leaders can encourage a culture of mutual respect.
- Caring for each other includes treating people fairly. When it comes to our church employees, both clergy and lay, our commitment to being 'fair' often runs up against budget realities. "Valuing Lay Employees" introduces readers to the church-wide lay employee pension system mandated at the 2009 General Convention and the resources developed by the Church Pension Fund to help congregations and church institutions discern how best to implement this benefit.
- In "The Importance of Being... Barnabas," Charles Robertson reminds us of the gifts new pledging members may bring to our congregations and challenges us to evaluate our 'welcome' programs by looking at them through the eyes of the newcomer.
- "Transforming Churches: From Growth to Sustainability," by Peter Lane offers 'the next chapter' in the story of the growth of Chicago's Church of St. Paul & The Redeemer which was recently featured in the Episcopal Church's Transforming Churches: Changing the World video series.
- "Let's Paint the Doors Red," by Paul Bresnahan shares the story of La Iglesia San Pedro - St. Peter's Church - a historic congregation brought to new life by the intentional engagement of the vestry, a new priest-in-charge, and a request

from the Bishop that they open their doors to a Spanish speaking congregation looking for a new home.

- “Misión de Unión e Integración: Episcopales Unidos en La Fe y en La Práctica Cristiana” by Daniel Velez-Rivera, who serves as co-priest with Paul Bresnahan at San Pedro - St. Peter’s, describes how the congregation formed a bilingual house of worship where everyone feels welcome.
- “Introducing the Denominational Health Plan” offers congregational leaders basic information and resources related to the resolution passed at the 2009 General Convention calling for a Church-wide program of health care benefit plans requiring equal access to and

funding of health care plans for eligible clergy and lay employees.

As always, I invite you to share your “Caring for Each Other” resources in the Your Turn section, by participating in VP Talks, and/or posting comments related to our articles, blog posts, or other content.

Working on this issue, I’ve developed a heightened awareness of the ways I interact with others and the intentional and unintentional messages I send with every action and communication. I invite you to join me in this intentional mindfulness.

Faithfully,

NANCY DAVIDGE
Editor, *ECF Vital Practices*

So You Think You Don't Know One...

BY CHILTON KNUDSEN

Perhaps this story sounds familiar...

Father K was called to his new ministry as rector of St M's. During his first few weeks, he bumped into a "wall" of secrecy about financial issues in the congregation and learned that the Search Committee had not been entirely open with him about past financial matters.

As he continued to minister with this congregation, he heard vague reports of other surprising and delicate historical issues regarding a previous rector. It seemed to him that this congregation held many secrets about their past. Finally, someone told him that this previous rector was mysteriously and suddenly assigned to a small mission congregation in a remote region of the diocese. As people began to open up to their new rector, he learned more about the previous rector's behavior patterns. People whispered about "a drinking problem." Fr. K was at a loss about what to do to help the congregation move forward, to break the culture of secrecy, and begin to heal.

Addicted people worship and work within every congregation.

Addiction is like divorce, joblessness, and parenthood: Not every congregant experiences these issues, but at any given moment, some portion of the congregation is entering into, moving through, or emerging from them. In every congregation will be found active addicts, recovering addicts, families/friends of addicts, and potential addicts. The wisdom of Family Systems Theory sheds important light on how a congregation is affected by all of the human experiences that happen to its members, including the experience of addiction.

Many congregations promote health and recovery for people affected by addiction or the addiction of a loved one. Clear vision, appropriately open communication, and participation in community-wide programs of prevention and recovery (for example, educational events, 12-step programs, support groups, early-intervention programs) are common in such congregations. Usually the bulletin boards, tract racks, prayers of intercession, and weekly calendars of these congregations reflect a firm compassion and

hopeful tone about addiction and recovery.

Unfortunately, the opposite kind of congregational culture is also evident in communities of faith. Through shaming or denial or gossiping, the issue of addiction is pushed out of sight. Significant energy may be spent in keeping secrets, both about present and historical realities. Often, these congregations of denial/shame are carrying secrets about addiction in a prominent congregants' family, a church employee, or a member of the clergy or clergy family. Sometimes, the fact of addiction may itself not historically be verifiable, but the impact of addiction is unmistakable.

As a family system, a congregation will carry within its core identity (its DNA, if you will) tenacious patterns of denial, abuse of power, secrecy, and dysfunctional communication. These patterns are comparable to those of the "codependent family" of an addict. Some of these patterns and symptoms are:

- Indirect communication ("triangling") as the "norm"
- Lack of transparency, secret-

keeping (about many matters in *congregational life*)

- Isolation, including refusal to participate in community/denominational life
- The absence of clarity about roles and responsibilities in church governance
- Frequent scapegoating, gossiping, favoritism
- A culture of manipulation and power-struggling
- Tolerance for inappropriate behavior (for example: tantrums, dishonesty, snooping)
- Excessive care-taking and assuming of responsibility for others
- Idolization or demonization of clergy and/or leaders
- Denial of important congregational realities (e.g., attendance patterns, finances) rather than facing them
- Image-obsession, relating to buildings, reputation, or prominence of congregation
- In-group mentality, cliques, and barriers to integrating new people into leadership
- An atmosphere (often observed by visitors) of dread or gloom or negativity
- Disproportionate attention to internal matters as opposed to outreach and mission
- Patterns of ignoring or suppressing new ideas and new possibilities
- Projections and assumptions about other people's motives, with no "check-it-out" patterns

- Lack of programming for spiritual nurture and Christian Formation for all ages
- Chronic tensions and conflicts which are not acknowledged and dealt with
- Unrealistic expectations or unfair critical attitudes towards clergy and other leaders
- Resistance to congregational ministry reviews, program evaluations, long-range planning
- Failure to hold one another accountable for responsibilities assumed

Sound like a church you know?

To one degree or another, all congregations manifest some of these symptoms (as indeed, all congregations are influenced by the health or unhealth of its members), but codependent congregations manifest them more often and more intensely. We are speaking of a continuum on the "congregational wellness" spectrum. We believe that congregations are called, as the Body of Christ, to move into ever-greater health and joy, no matter the vantage point from which they begin. You don't have to be sick to get better. We are people of resurrection. We can live in hope.

In times of congregational anxiety (transition in leadership, financial difficulties, building programs, tensions within the community, denominational controversy, exposures of financial malfeasance), pat-

terns of codependent behavior that may have lain dormant can be re-kindled with surprising intensity. These moments of anxiety present fertile opportunities for congregations to reflect courageously on the quality of their life together. Indeed, these moments of anxiety are times when change is especially possible. When life is in flux, when things that were are no more, when current patterns cannot be sustained, new life is made possible.

What does this new life look like?

Once again, drawing on the wisdom of addiction recovery, new life depends on:

- Truth-telling (without scapegoating)
- Reaching out beyond the congregation: to community, denominational leadership, external resources
- Entering a time of self-examination, in the form of reviews, leadership development, planning, discernment
- Offering programs of spiritual nurture and a norm about full participation in them
- Owning/acknowledging the congregation's REAL story, in all its complexity
- Building new processes for communication, conflict resolution, norm development, governance
- Clarifying and communicating about, roles/responsibilities, and expectations of one another

- Evaluating current policies and practices, and adopting of new ones
- Adopting of methods of assuring accountability and mutual responsibility

Congregations CAN change and grow in health, joy, and fruitfulness. Just as addicts can become sober and clean, congregations can find health and wholeness in the bold determination to be ever more whole, as they accept the truth, turn to new practices and adopt new ways of living together.

Chilton Knudsen is the retired Bishop of the Diocese of Maine. She was Pastoral Care Officer in the Diocese of Chicago and worked with clergy and congregations in crisis. Her writing includes *Pastoral Care for Congregations in the Aftermath of Sexual Misconduct and, with Nancy Van Dyke Platt, So You Think You Don't Know One? Addiction and Recovery in Clergy and Congregations* (Morehouse Publishing, 2010).

No More Parking Lot Conversations

BY NANCY DAVIDGE

Working with congregations as a bishop's staff member involved in congregational development, one of the persistent behaviors Mary McGregor, (director of leadership development in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas), has witnessed among vestry members is their reluctance to speak up about lingering concerns in the course of their meetings.

While there are many reasons for this reluctance, including not wanting to rock the boat or appear disrespectful, this silence forces issues to go underground only to surface in parking lot conversations.

Clandestine meetings, parking lot conversations, closely guarded incendiary emails are always destructive.

Earlier this year ECF Vital Practices invited Mary to share strategies congregational leaders can use to encourage a culture of respect and transparency. During her VP Talk she held up the 'Fruit of the Spirit' as a model of behavior to replace side or 'parking lot' conversations that can foster mistrust and mean-spiritedness in

our interactions with one another.

Drawing on her experience working with over 80 vestries and bishop's committees, Mary notes a direct correlation between highly functioning and fruitful vestries and a group culture of respect, caring, and transparency with sensitivity, all grounded in a foundation of understanding that vestries are faith groups that are unique.

Mary believes, "Vestries are groups of people who feel called to support and lead Christian communities. Central to the purpose of Christian communities is the gathering of people to worship and serve God and to live as Jesus taught us to live. These teachings call for behavior that is sometimes very challenging for us. I think they are best expressed in what Paul referred to in Galatians as 'Fruit of the Spirit'."

Understanding Fruit of the Spirit as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit expressed in how we live and interact with others, Mary believes people in faith communities have unspoken expectations that their leaders will model the

this behavior, which Paul defines as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

"There is an old saying, 'as the leader goes so goes the group,'" shares Mary. "Another is, 'the behavior of the group will never rise to a higher standard than the behavior of its leaders'. Churches have a responsibility to model Christ like behaviors and when we don't, we pay a heavy price. The Fruit of the Spirit is often counter to our human nature. It is much easier to be impatient, unloving, demanding, insensitive, and fearful. Church leaders are called to a very high standard of interaction with each other. This must be intentional work with a high degree of mutual accountability."

Many times, people participating in these 'parking lot' behaviors are unaware of how harmful they can be. Mary explains, "Our church leaders need to be sensitive to how they communicate and the power of their words in our faith community contexts. Like families, we are relational systems. Relationships can be fragile. People can be built up or torn down with words.

“We are called to be sensitive and thoughtful. That doesn’t mean we can’t speak the truth. It is in how we go about doing it. I think one of the reasons why conversations go out to parking lots or become clandestine is because we haven’t learned how to be sensitive and thoughtful in sharing our opinions.”

Creating a safe environment for members to openly share ideas and concerns is critical in building a culture of mutual respect. Often this means leaders need to learn to cede control and embrace a culture of shared decision making.

For many leaders control is a human need. Being afraid of what shared decision making might lead to, they create a system where decisions are made by a few. This can lead to behind the scenes meetings, teaming up on others, and strategic collusion.

These behaviors represent not only poor leadership but, as Mary observes, they also “cut the legs off, pull the rug out from under others who thought they were empowered to have voices in the decision making process. This is incredibly demoralizing and this kind of behavior discourages really good leaders from being a part of vestries and other decision making groups.” It can also cre-

ate a level of anxiety in a group so high that people don’t want to speak up because they feel they won’t be heard or will be disrespected. This can create a vicious circle of behavior, driving the good leaders away and into parking lot conversations.

What can congregational leaders do to encourage healthy patterns of communication?

- First, recognize that as leaders in Christian community, we are called to teach and model a higher standard of communication.
- Call out unhealthy behaviors when you see it or experience it as a leader in a congregation, taking the time to do so in a caring way.
- Establish a culture of listening and caring through the use of covenants, norms, clear ministry descriptions, and holding people accountable.
- Take the time to learn together how to be a faithful leader, which might include Bible study, prayer, and sharing appreciations and regrets.
- Evaluate your congregation’s health using 12 Marks of Healthy Church Behavior and its related assessment tool.

(<http://www.epicenter.org/12-marks-of-healthy-church-behavior/>)

- Recognize and empower healthy spiritual leaders by placing them in positions of authority and influence.
- Practice patience and persistence, allowing time for new behaviors to become the norm.

Our responsibility as congregational leaders includes modeling an expectation of healthy behavior and respect for both the individual and the community, no matter what the circumstance. God has called us into leadership and has empowered us to act in a manner befitting that call.

***Nancy Davidge** is the Editor of ECF Vital Practices. This article is based on the transcript of the January 25, 2011 VP Talk, “No More Parking Lot Conversations” with Mary MacGregor, Director of Leadership Development in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.*

Resources

- Leader Development Resources: <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/leadership-development-resources/>
- 12 Marks of Healthy Church

Behavior: <http://www.epicenter.org/12-marks-of-healthy-church-behavior/>

- ECF Vital Practices VP Talks:
<http://www.ecfvp.org/talks/>

Valuing Lay Employees

A CONVERSATION WITH PATTIE CHRISTENSEN

In July 2009, the 76th General Convention passed Resolution A138, establishing the Lay Employee Pension System (LPS), a Church-wide system for eligible lay employees (those scheduled for at least 1,000 hours of compensated work annually). ECF Vital Practices invited Pattie Christensen, assistant vice president, the Church Pension Group, to provide information about the LPS to our readers.

ECF Vital Practices (ECFVP): Why is it important that the Episcopal Church set up a church-wide pension system for lay employees?

Church Pension Fund (CPF): Resolution A138 speaks to social justice issues around adequate benefits for the Church's lay employees. The Church has long made the provision of pensions for eligible clergy mandatory, and for the past 30 years has encouraged providing them for lay employees. In addition to our Clergy Pension plan, we offer both a lay defined benefit pension plan (since 1980), and a lay defined contribution pension plan (since 1992).

Over the past 30 years, various

General Convention resolutions called upon church employers to provide pension benefits to lay employees. Through Resolution A138 and its associated canon, the Church put more substance into this sentiment by canonically requiring compliance with the Lay Employee Pension System by January 1, 2013.

While cost concerns around providing this benefit are real, so is the need of lay employees to have adequate pensions. The work 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.

ECFVP: What, specifically, does this resolution require?

CPF: That all lay employees scheduled for at least 1,000 hours of compensated work annually for any domestic diocese, parish, mission, or other ecclesiastical organization or body subject to the authority of the Episcopal Church be enrolled in a pension plan that is either administered or authorized by the Church Pension Fund.

ECFVP: What types of pension plans does the Church Pension Fund (CPF) offer?

CPF: We sponsor plans for both clergy and lay employees. The Clergy Pension Plan is a defined benefit plan that provides eligible Episcopal clergy with pension benefits.

For lay employees, CPF sponsors both a defined contribution plan and a defined benefit plan. The defined contribution plan is more popular since it has a lower contribution base for employers and it allows employees to make pre-tax contributions of their own. It also offers employees portability should they move from one Church employer to another.

ECFVP: What are the required employer contributions?

CPF: Employer contributions vary by plan. If a defined contribution plan is selected, the employer must contribute at least 5% of the employee's compensation as defined by the plan. In addition, if an eligible employee contributes a portion of his/her compensation, the employer must match on a

dollar-for-dollar basis, the amount the employee contributes, up to 4% of the employee's compensation.

If a defined benefit plan is selected, the employer assessment will be at least 9% of the employee's compensation.

The Comparative Plan Highlights (http://download.cpg.org/pensions/publications/lay/pdf/laypension_compare.pdf) offers a 'side by side' comparison to help congregations and other church-related employers determine which plan best meets their needs.

ECFVP: How much will it cost a congregation or institution to comply?

CPF: The estimated average annual cost to provide a lay pension benefit for eligible lay employees who currently do not have this benefit ranges from \$12 to \$34 per pledging unit per year, depending on the size of the congregation or institution. The average annual cost across the Church is approximately \$20 per pledging unit. (2)

We've developed a pension contribution calculator (http://download.cpg.org/pensions/publications/lay/pdf/Lay_Pension_Calculator.pdf) and instructions (http://download.cpg.org/pensions/publications/lay/pdf/Instructions_Pension_Calculator.pdf) to help employers determine the cost in total and per pledging unit.

ECFVP: What's the timetable for getting started and what resources are available?

CPF: Implementation is already underway on a Province-by-Province (regional) basis, with lots of support provided for employers. Congregations and other employers receive informational mailings, and can participate in webinars and on-demand tutorials through the Church Pension Group website (<http://www.cpg.org/productsservices/laypensionplans.cfm>).

These resources are designed to help employers understand the lay employee pension system, evaluate the options available to them, and access enrollment materials and forms. We also have staff available to answer questions.

ECFVP: Is it possible for congregations or other employers to adopt a lay employee pension plan earlier than 2013?

CPF: Yes. Church employers can

adopt a CPF-sponsored lay pension plan now or at any time before the January 1, 2013 compliance date. To adopt CPF's Lay Defined Contribution Plan, an employer can simply sign an adoption agreement. While an employer doesn't have to start making employer contributions until January 1, 2013, employees can start saving immediately via payroll deductions. Employers interested in adopting the Lay Defined Benefit Plan should call us at 800.936.7349.

ECFVP: How is CPF helping employers make sure they are in compliance with this Resolution?

CPF: To help make compliance as easy as possible, CPF has designed an online registration tool that helps identify the covered population of employers and employees.

Rollout of the first phase of the CPG Registration System – called the Institution Roster – began in April. It's designed to help confirm and collect relevant information about Church employers in each diocese who need to comply. The second phase – called the Employee Roster – will be rolled out later and will help confirm and collect information about employees. Together, these two rosters will give Church employ-

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ers the information they need for compliance.

ECFVP: Where can congregational leaders go for additional information?

CPF: Additional information is available at the Lay Pensions Resource Center (<http://www.cpg.org/productservices/lay-pensionplans.cfm>), or by emailing CPF staff at layplans@cpg.org

Pattie Christensen is Assistant Vice President, the Church Pension Fund and a member of the team responsible for implementing Resolution A138, the Church-wide Lay Pension System. She is responsible for educating employers and employees about the lay plans available through the Church Pension Fund, plus any asset transfers from previous plan providers into the Episcopal Church Lay Employees' Defined Contribution Plan.

The Church Pension Fund (CPF) was established by the 1913 General Convention and by an act of the New York State Legislature in 1914. CPF, together with its affiliates – Church Life Insurance Corporation, the Church Insurance Companies, the Episcopal Church

Medical Trust, and Church Publishing Incorporated – are known as the Church Pension Group (CPG). CPG provides comprehensive, cost-effective retirement, health, and life insurance benefits to the Episcopal Church, its clergy and lay employees, and property and casualty insurance and risk management services to Episcopal churches and institutions. The core values that guide the Church Pension Fund in fulfilling its mission are compassion, fiscal stewardship, mutual respect, service, and adaptability.

Resources

- Lay Pensions Resource Center <http://www.cpg.org/productservices/laypensionplans.cfm>
- Lay Employee Pension Plan Highlights and FAQs http://download.cpg.org/pensions/publications/lay/pdf/faqs_a138.pdf
- Resolution A138: <http://www.cpg.org/clients/layemployees/a138.cfm>

Footnotes

1. The assessment rate for the Episcopal Church Lay Employees'

Retirement Plan is set and periodically reviewed by the Church Pension Fund's Board of Trustees. The Church Pension Fund reserves the right to change the assessment rate for the Episcopal Church Lay Employees' Retirement Plan at any time and without prior notice.

2 Statistics derived from the Comprehensive Lay Employee Study, September 2008.

The Importance of Being...Barnabas

BY CHARLES ROBERTSON

I am speaking here of that often overlooked hero in the New Testament book of Acts.

Barnabas enters the scene at the end of Acts 4 as a new pledging member from Cyprus, a long way from Jerusalem. He apparently displays such impressive people skills that those in charge soon nickname him “son of encouragement,” a description that Barnabas takes to heart. The next time we encounter him in Acts, he is vouching for Paul before the dubious apostles. The third time he appears is even more noteworthy: the apostles send Barnabas to check out the new community of believers emerging in Antioch. He gladly complies...but immediately drafts Paul as his apprentice. There in Antioch, unfettered from the expectations in the Jerusalem church and the baggage of previous apostolic success, Barnabas and Paul initiate new and exciting practices and, as Acts puts it, “it was in Antioch that they were first called Christians.”

We need to be Barnabas today!

Successful businesses often say that their greatest assets are their

customers, while churches often forget to take such a view when it comes to the newcomers and visitors in their midst. Similarly, healthy businesses appreciate that past successes do not guarantee future success, and in fact can get in the way if they cling to what has always been done. Churches, on the other hand, often appear to be shackled to some notion of a previous golden age, real or imagined.

If we as church leaders are to be earnest about anything in our mission today, it should be the recruitment and retention of new members—no, of new future leaders—knowing that to do so will indeed mean change in some way or another for us all. In other words, we need to learn to be Barnabas, or at least find the Barnabases in our congregations.

It begins with awareness on our part as leaders: awareness of how our church looks and feels through the eyes of a visitor, a potential new member.

As vestry members, we can assign ourselves an exercise or “field trip,” imagining ourselves as a visitor to our congregation. We start

where a seeker might start...with our website and print ads. Are they appealing, inviting? Do they tell seekers how much we want them to come check us out, and offer clear information about how to do so? Or are they full of inside-speak and material that is indecipherable to anyone outside the existing system? Call and listen to our after-hours phone message. Is it warm and enthusiastic, or flat and uninterested? Again, these are just the entry points.

Each member of the vestry should come to the next meeting prepared to discuss this initial homework. We might also invite a “mystery church shopper” or two who can report not only on these entry points, but also on what he or she found upon actually coming to a weekend service. What does the parking lot and outside grounds say to a visitor? Are there “first-time visitor” spaces? Is there adequate signage to help someone find their way to the sanctuary, the nursery, the restrooms, and the parish hall? Is there a team of “ambassadors”—not simply greeters—who are outside and ready to welcome the seeker, and prepared to do whatever possible to

make that first visit a memorable one? In the service, are visitors welcomed, not called to stand up and be embarrassed, but perhaps just raising a hand and being truly welcomed? And at the start of the service, not halfway through, so that members nearby can be ready to assist as needed?

The “mystery shopper” can help us understand the first-timer’s experience, but that is just the beginning. It is important for the church office to take the welcome cards that visitors fill out and create a checklist for the coming months after that visit, not to measure what the newcomer does, but what we do for them. A personal call from the clergy, a formal letter of welcome from the vestry—these are important things. But so is sending visitors’ names to the vestry members on Monday, so that they can include them in their weekly prayers. It is important to offer information sessions for those who want to learn more, and to consider having a new member commissioning twice a year during the service.

Most importantly, we want to track how we do in incorporating newcomers into the life and leadership of the parish, so that they truly become new members of our extended family and future leaders themselves. It is important

for wardens and vestry to model Barnabas behavior by having us invite recent newcomers into the life of the Church. Ask them bring a plate of cookies to a function, and then thank them for doing so. Ask a member of the congregation to invite the newcomer to lunch to learn more about their gifts and their passions. As you build the relationship, help the newcomer discern how they can make a difference in Christ’s name in both the church and the community.

In our congregation, we make sure that every committee, every guild, every ad hoc event team, is encouraged to include not simply long-termers but also new members in their work. And as the leadership team, we study our progress with new members during every vestry meeting, just as we do with our financial reports. We are stewards not simply of our finances and buildings, but also of our members, new and old alike.

Churches whose leaders take such principles seriously will grow... in spiritual depth and numerically as well. It is not magic, but rather intentionality, that is at work. When we as leaders collectively become earnest about being Barnabas, then we begin to see growth and, yes, change as well. We begin to move from the familiar environs of our Jerusalem into

the uncharted, but wonderful possibilities of Antioch.

The Rev. Canon C. K. Robertson, PhD is Canon to the Presiding Bishop, a Fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation, and author of many books and articles, including *Transforming Stewardship and A Dangerous Dozen: 12 Christians Who Threatened the Status Quo But Taught Us to Live Like Jesus*.

Transforming Churches: From Growth to Sustainability

BY PETER LANE

“St. Paul & the Redeemer is growing because we are really clear about what we are about and that is welcoming everybody to this community: orthodox believer or skeptic, gay or straight, black or white, rich or poor, everyone is welcome to eat at God’s table.” Those are the first words out of my mouth in Episcopal Church Center’s video (<http://www.sp-r.org/welcoming/sprnationalvideo.htm>) about how St. Paul & the Redeemer grew so dramatically during the 12 years when Jim Steen was rector, growth for which he was the energizing catalyst. Jim, still a friend and off to new adventures, no longer works here. Thankfully he left SPR in great shape. Radical reinvention would be foolish; so would resting on our laurels. My work is to sustain the vitality by strengthening core commitments and taking good risks.

To sustain the vitality of SPR we must continue to strengthen our core commitments: liturgy, children, and music. Great congregations are not made by fantastic innovations but by the momentum gained by pushing strengths day in and day out. SPR is most

itself when gathered around God’s table celebrating the Eucharist. Compelling liturgy is the most important welcome we can provide which means our liturgies need constant attention. Let me give a recent example. The 9:15 and 11:15 am liturgies used to be identical. Sometimes the 11:15 felt like “9:15 light.” It needed some punch. Aware of how young people were so intrigued by the ancient practices of the church, we remade the 11:15 am liturgy by adding incense, chant, a chasuble, and a more contemplative spirit. It has given it an identity and we found it attracted new graduate students into the community. Our latest effort is having the clergy memorize more of the Eucharistic prayer to make it feel less rote.

SPR is as a place where children and their parents feel at home. We have wonderful programming for children and yet there are many areas for improvement and growth. Let me give a recent example. A few years ago we had a wonderful Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program for preschoolers and needed to figure out how to scale it up to serve elementary school. We

learned how difficult it would be to get enough teachers trained, so we changed to Godly Play, also an outstanding program and one that allows us to train teachers more quickly. The commitment of the teachers has increased. The number of children has increased along with their joy and wonder.

SPR worships God with beautiful, diverse, well-done, joyful music. A quick tour through the archives of our local paper makes clear that exceptional music has been a part of every boom in our 150-year history. We are blessed with an outstanding leader of song in Dent Davidson. And still, to expand the welcome we must bring disciplined attention. Attraction isn’t enough; we need to invite people into the music program. Children’s choir must have enough rigor that parents choose it for their children. But most importantly we need joy.

A wonderfully vibrant church has called me to be rector. Sustaining that vitality requires incremental improvements in our core commitments. The centrifugal momentum slowly created will, I hope, ensure that what has driven growth over the last decade will

That won't be enough. The idea that dramatic growth is followed by stability is a fairy tale. And so the leadership of this parish must take good risks, reinventing before decline.

SPR's current risk is to put more resources into community engagement (outreach/service/justice). We did this in order to more closely follow our vision of modeling the radical hospitality of Jesus and because it was identified in a parish survey as a need. We hired Ray Massenburg, a priest who had lived and worked and studied urban neighborhoods, to help. He brought the food pantry from the basement to the chapel and welcomed those of us who are hungry not just for food but also for relationship. We joined a community organizing coalition. We threw our energy behind a new neighborhood group formed to support the local school.

This new focus comes with risk. We allocated resources to community engagement that could have gone to liturgy, music, and children. We put energy into outreach when there was also need for building meaningful relational groupings and strengthening young adult programming. Traction has not been immediate. In some ways we overstepped in advocating for structural change

in ways that did not fit our core passions nor for which we had the resources to be exceptional. But we are finding new areas of strength. We have redefined our outreach programs in the midst of growth that we might live out more fully the story we feel called to tell about ourselves. I think it will expand the welcome.

All are welcome at SPR. Sustaining that vitality will require a focus on strengthening our core commitments and a few well-considered risks that allow us to redefine and extend the welcome. If all goes well perhaps another video showing our vitality will be made in 2025. I wonder if my successor will be asked to write about it?

The Rev. Peter Lane was called as rector of St. Paul & the Redeemer in 2009 after having served as assistant rector, then associate rector, since 2007. The Church is located in the Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood of Chicago.

Resources

- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: <http://www.cgsusa.org/>
- Godly Play: <http://www.godly-playfoundation.org/newsite/>

Main.php

- Transforming Churches, Changing the World video series: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/109389_ENG_HTML.htm
- St. Paul & The Redeemer video: <http://www.sp-r.org/welcoming/sprnationalvideo.htm>

Footnotes

1. See Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing our Faith*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997) or Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008)*
2. See "Congregational Life Cycle" at www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/EPC101.ppt
3. *The Church Assessment Tool*. See: holycowconsulting.com/churches
4. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

Let's Paint the Doors Red!

BY PAUL BRESNAHAN

It was January, 2007. My wife and I had moved back to Massachusetts, after serving many years at St. Marks Episcopal Church in St. Albans, West Virginia. My plan was to retire; serving a small, historic, part-time congregation was my way to ease into retirement.

Nothing is as simple as it first appears. The congregation was in a state of programmatic and physical disrepair. Finances were in freefall. There was no real sense of mission. The church was in steep decline and deeply conflicted. I quickly discovered there was no way to take my "ease" so instead the parish leadership and I took some strong transformational steps.

And today?

The result of our efforts, and the underlying expressions of mutual love, respect, and affection has been nothing less than stunning. Iglesia San Pedro-St. Peter's Church is now an increasingly viable and vital congregation. The transformation has been astounding. And more than all that, not only is the Spanish congregation

growing, so is the Anglo congregation. We are excited and humbled by all this and are delighted to tell our story.

Here's what we did:

Mission

We gave the church a mission. We knew that Jesus embraced the outcast and the marginalized. So we embraced the teachings of Jesus. We studied the passages about the Cleansing of the Temple and the passage in Isaiah from which the proclamation came (Isaiah 56:7) and we gave the church a simple mission mandate to be "A House of Prayer for ALL People". We believe that folk are folk whatever race, ethnicity, class, gender, or orientation. The mission statement resonated deeply with the congregation since its history embraced civil rights, and it was among the first congregations to be intentionally inclusive.

Conflict Management

Churches in decline often have a self-destructive streak. As the shrinking community shrivels up and becomes more and more

anemic, people look for someone to blame. The music program was becoming a cause of concern; it appeared a staff change was needed. Things came to a head during the 2008 Annual Meeting when there was an explosion of anger and frustration. Several families left.

At a critical vestry meeting we asked each member to articulate where they stood with the church's leadership. It was not a matter of simply firing an organist. It was more a matter of hiring someone who could engage a diverse congregation. Not only were we racially diverse, the St. Peter's congregation was increasingly becoming home to former Roman Catholics, divorced folk, members of the LGBT community, and interestingly enough, people who are mentally challenged. We were becoming a "House of Prayer for ALL People" in very surprising ways.

Mass Media

Salem is fortunate to have a daily newspaper. We send them all kinds of stories and "photo ops." At our 275th Anniversary celebration, we invited the Governor of

Massachusetts to occupy the Governor's Pew. To our knowledge, no governor of the Commonwealth had sat there since the American Revolution. The Governor accepted our invitation and the story was on the front page of the paper.

We painted the doors of the church bright red and proclaimed our mission: more photos, more press, and another front-page article!

Vitality and Outreach

Over time, the congregation once again began to take its mission beyond our red doors. We feed people who are homeless; in the winter, we put winter coats on people who couldn't afford them; and we became a center for gay and lesbian youth, providing space for their annual dinner-dance and fundraiser.

"A House of Prayer for ALL People" comes to mean BILINGUAL too!

In 2009, as I entered the third and "final" year of my contract, the Bishop asked us if St. Peter's would be willing to receive a Spanish speaking congregation. The congregation was housed in a situation that was not quite working out and was looking for a new

home. Without thinking too much about it we simply said "yes." We were truly excited.

Affection, Joy, and Energy

The first meeting of our two congregations was amazing. Take a rather traditional Episcopal Church and add amplified guitar, maracas, drums, and Latin rhythms. Give it a strong Spanish accent, translate the service into both Spanish and English, alternate the readings and read common prayers in both languages simultaneously, and the result is affection, joy, and raw energy. We came to life on the very first Sunday we worshipped together.

Clergy Relationship

If there is stress and strain in this critical relationship, nothing else is possible. If there is affection, joy, and energy in that relationship, everything becomes possible. Padre Daniel and I were instant friends, and established frequent and honest communication. Both of us have a sense of humor and embrace pastoral incongruity with the laughter it deserves. We are both high-energy individuals and divided responsibility easily and intuitively. It is a joy to work with one another.

The Critical Value of a

Consultant

As it turns out, our new Organist and Music Director is also a highly skilled, unemployed, middle-management individual who had worked for the phone company. He has an innate sense of what it takes to transition a congregation from what we were to what we were becoming. He had managed hundreds of transitions in his secular job. Now it was time to manage us in this one. We immediately put him to work. He brought our office up-to-date with state of the art technology and networking. He planned and executed an expansion of the office to incorporate the new priest and his staff.

Worship in Three Languages

Parallel Development. With a smile, we proclaim that we worship in three languages. At 8:00 am we worship in Elizabethan English, at 10:00 am in Contemporary English, and at noon in Spanish. Thus we develop along in all three languages in parallel tracks. Those tracks intersect at the Fall Launch, The Annual Meeting, Holy Week, and at the Founder's Day Picnic with combined worship.

Power Sharing

From the outset the clergy rela-

tionship was collegial and not hierarchal. The congregation elected representatives from the Spanish congregation to serve on the vestry at the outset, and continues to extend leadership opportunities to our Hispanic members with the recent election of a junior warden from the Spanish congregation. Membership and leadership in the Altar Guild and all other integral components of church operation are fully shared by all three worship groups within our congregation.

Diocesan Support

None of this expansion would have been possible without the Diocese of Massachusetts. While the St. Peter's budget included my salary, the Diocese paid Padre Daniel's. We had a deacon, a Micah intern (<http://www.diomass.org/content/young-adult-intern-programs>), and a seminarian all provided to us by the Diocese. During this time, women's ministry and youth ministry were expanding rapidly. St. Peter's has become the "place to be" for inner city youth. Teen pregnancy prevention and an after school drop-in center have become enormously successful and supported by funding from local city budgets and private foundations.

***The Rev. Paul Bresnahan** is co-priest-in-charge at San Pedro-St. Peter's Church in Salem, Massachusetts and author of Everything You Need To Know about Sex in order to Get to Heaven. A vigorous community activist, Bresnahan believes that spirituality, worship, and the search for justice are all part of the same truth: that there is room in God's heart for ALL.*

Misión de Unión e Integración

POR DANIEL VÉLEZ RIVERA

La misión que me tracé mucho antes de ser sacerdote fue la de ayudar a establecer, expandir y sostener ministerios hispanos/latinos en la Iglesia Episcopal. Cuando visité la Iglesia Episcopal por primera vez fue una congregación angloparlante y yo era el único hispano. Poco después invité a mis amigos hispanos bilingües a conocer y compartir el tesoro que había hallado. Con el correr del tiempo fui conociendo congregaciones episcopales en la diócesis de Massachusetts con ministerios hispanos y me sentí en casa, porque podía alabar a Dios en mi propia lengua.

Aprendí como laico lo que ofrezco como sacerdote: un hogar espiritual hospitalario y lleno de vida. Mi visión como sacerdote es integrar comunidades de lenguas y culturas diversas en una sola congregación en la que compartimos el espacio sagrado, la liturgia y la misión cristiana, y a la vez creamos intimidad espiritual en Cristo Jesús. De ahí parte mi visión teológica sobre las comunidades cristianas bilingües, que es la de tener solidaridad espiritual, esperanza y amor al compartir la misión que nos enseñó Jesucristo

y mantener esas características hermosas que nos distinguen como criaturas hechas en la imagen infinita de Dios.

La congregación que abrió sus puertas al ministerio hispano que ahora radica en St. Peter's - San Pedro en Salem, Massachusetts, fue Grace Church, la Iglesia de Gracia. Nos referimos a Grace como nuestra iglesia "incubadora" porque nos albergó y sostuvo en nuestros comienzos. Después de tres años, el período exploratorio que nos trazamos para determinar si esta aventura sagrada se realizaría o no, nos mudamos a nuestro hogar permanente en San Pedro. ¡El bebé caminó!

Antes de unirnos a la congregación de San Pedro, esos feligreses y su sacerdote habían determinado que deseaban y necesitaban una nueva identidad, porque San Pedro era una pequeña congregación con poca presencia en la comunidad y poca vida dentro de sus cuatro paredes. La mayor parte de los feligreses de San Pedro deseaban integrar la comunidad hispana vecina, pero carecían de recursos financieros y de un sacerdote bilingüe. La visión y la fe de nuestro obispo

diocesano de lanzar un nuevo ministerio hispano y trasladarlo a un hogar permanente tras haber determinado nuestra viabilidad permitió que los que buscábamos un nuevo hogar lo encontráramos y que San Pedro tuviera otra oportunidad de vida. Es importante mencionar el deseo y la voluntad que tuvo San Pedro de abrir sus puertas e integrarse de lleno a la comunidad episcopal hispano-hablante, así como el proceso de preparación y diálogo de los latinos antes de mudarnos a San Pedro. En las reuniones previas al traslado nos trazamos el objetivo de la integración y no de ocupar el espacio como agregados. Así fue como la nueva congregación de San Pedro - St. Peter's formuló una visión y misión sagrada común: ser una casa de oración para TODOS (Isaías 56:7) y expandir su presencia y misión en Salem.

Los que han establecido ministerios hispanos conocen las bendiciones y los desafíos de la integración. No es fácil crear una nueva identidad episcopal bilingüe y multicultural porque somos seres humanos y tendemos a ser reacios a los cambios. Nos obstante, para crecer espiritualmente necesitamos tener

la flexibilidad y paciencia necesarias para poder aceptar el proceso de adaptación y cambio. Las cartas de San Pablo afirman lo difícil que fue la transformación espiritual de las comunidades en Corintio, Éfeso, Roma y Tesalónica al convertirse. Si bien lo deseaban, tuvieron que sacrificarse en el proceso de transformar sus identidades en Cristo, ¡pero sabemos que con Dios todo es posible!

Las bendiciones y los desafíos siguen ocurriendo en nuestras comunidades y en la Iglesia San Pedro al explorar nuestra nueva identidad. Entre las bendiciones que hemos vivido en San Pedro están la celebración anual de nuestro Santo Patrón, en la que jóvenes anglos y latinos ofrecen una presentación bailable de música latina para el deleite de todos; la reunión mensual de las Damas Episcopales (ECW), en la que comparten sus platos típicos y planifican sus eventos; la distribución de pañales para las madres pobres en la comunidad, en la que participan unidos anglo e hispanoparlantes; y las reuniones de la junta parroquial, llenas de paciencia, dignidad y respeto mutuo para traducir al español y al inglés lo que se está compartiendo. Esos son momentos de alegría y también de sacrificio, porque no siempre es cómodo, pero sí es necesario para compenetrarnos del todo como comunidad

de fe. He observado que las actividades de índole social impulsan la integración comunitaria, porque todos estamos más relajados y tenemos la oportunidad de conocernos como seres humanos diferentes pero unidos. Los desafíos incluyen los aspectos financieros de la vida comunitaria, el reguero que a veces dejan los niños y jóvenes que antes de nuestra llegada no formaban parte de la feligresía y las quejas de feligreses (anglos y latinos) sobre lo largo de las misas bilingües que celebramos con la intención de compenetrarnos.

Los factores que contribuyeron a la transformación de San Pedro incluyeron la visión, la preparación, el deseo, el fervor espiritual y el compromiso de ambas partes de adoptar una cultura y una teología de unión en Cristo. Vivimos nuestra misión y visión cada día al mirarnos a los ojos y reconocer el ser espiritual en el otro, al saludarnos dentro y fuera de la iglesia y al darnos tiempo para explorar juntos una nueva manera de ser una Iglesia Episcopal bilingüe y multicultural.

No cabe duda de que los miembros de nuestras congregaciones Episcopales en comunidades donde viven latinos que desean que sus ministerios de alcance sigan siendo únicamente de índole social aportan mucho a sus comu-

nidades. Sin embargo, les invito a explorar la transformación espiritual y sacramental que proveen las misiones pastorales y litúrgicas en español si su congregación desea ir más allá de lo que le resulta cómodo y familiar. Ser una casa de oración para todos requiere abrirse a lo desconocido y a lo ajeno; no es fácil, pero es una manera de abrir las puertas de la Iglesia Episcopal a inmigrantes deseosos de formar parte de una comunidad sacramental inclusiva y diversa que integra a todas las personas con amor.

El Padre Daniel Vélez Rivera
es cosacerdote a cargo de la congregación bilingüe y multicultural de la Iglesia San Pedro - St. Peter's en Salem, Massachusetts, junto con el Padre Paul Bresnahan.

Resources

- Para más información sobre Ministerios Latinos/Hispanos puede comunicarse con el Padre Anthony Guillén, Misionero Hispano (aguillen@episcopalchurch.org)
- Para información sobre transformación congregacional comuníquese con el Padre Thomas Brackett (tbrackett@episcopalchurch.org)

- Vea la página de internet del Ministerio Latino/Hispanos de la Iglesia Episcopal: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/109405_ENG_HTM.htm
- Donde encontrará la visión estratégica de la Iglesia Episcopal en español: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Vision_Estrategica_7-09.pdf
- Participe de la próxima conferencia de ministerios Hispanos Nuevo Amanecer en el Centro Kanuga, Hendersonville, NC, en agosto 2012.

The Denominational Health Plan

A conversation with Laurie Kazilionis

In July 2009, the 76th General Convention passed Resolution A177, establishing the Denominational Health Plan (DHP), a Church-wide program of health care benefit plans requiring equal access to and funding of health care plans for eligible clergy and lay employees (those scheduled for at least 1,500 hours of compensated work annually) by January 1, 2013. The Episcopal Church Medical Trust is charged with leading this effort; ECF Vital Practices invited Laurie Kazilionis, Vice President, Client Relations, The Episcopal Church Medical Trust, to provide information on this program and the timetable for implementation.

ECF Vital Practices (ECFVP):
What was the impetus for a church-wide program of health care benefits for lay employees?

Episcopal Church Medical Trust (ECMT): I believe the General Convention saw it as a social justice issue. The support and dedication of lay employees make many ministries possible. The Episcopal Church, with its commitment to social justice, recognizes the need for its lay employ-

ees to have adequate health care benefits. Currently, some lay employees do not have access to health care benefits, and others have a higher cost share than clergy for the same benefits.

Resolution A177 (<http://www.cpg.org/productservices/ResolutionA177.cfm>) requires that a cost-sharing policy be established by each diocese, and that it be the same for eligible clergy and lay employees. Compliance with the DHP is canonically required no later than January 1, 2013, thus assuring the Church's eligible lay employees of the safety net of health care benefits.

While cost concerns around this initiative are real, providing adequate healthcare benefits is not only necessary, it's the right thing to do.

ECFVP: What do Resolution A177 and its associated canon require of Church employers?

ECMT: Church employers are required to provide all eligible clergy and lay employees with equal access to and parity of funding for health care benefits, and these ben-

efits are to be provided through the Medical Trust. Under the terms of this resolution, an eligible employee is someone who is scheduled for at least 1,500 hours of compensated work annually for any domestic diocese, parish, mission, or other ecclesiastical organization or body subject to the authority of the Church.

ECFVP: What is the role of the diocese?

ECMT: Each diocese is the primary partner in implementing the DHP. They continue to exercise autonomy and choice related to the DHP and:

- decide whether institutions under its authority (schools, social service agencies, etc) are required to participate;
- determine a cost-sharing policy that is the same for eligible clergy and lay employees;
- decide whether health care benefits must be offered to domestic partners;
- determine annually which Medical Trust health plan(s) will be offered in that diocese;

- communicate plan options to congregational and institutional employers in its diocese.

ECFVP: What are the cost implications of compliance?

ECMT: Overall impact on an individual diocese or congregation will vary. Factors such as current uniformity of clergy and lay contributions, level of health plan coverage currently offered, percentage of the eligible population already enrolled in the DHP, demographic profile of the eligible population not yet enrolled in the DHP, and decisions made by each diocese under the DHP, as well as other local factors, all play a part in determining cost.

ECFVP: Does the DHP provide any cost-savings?

ECMT: Several key objectives of the DHP are to contain costs, effect savings, and make the continued provision of health care benefits sustainable. The ability to buy health care benefits collectively rather than per-diocese or per-congregation means savings for the Church since larger groups yield lower unit costs. Since 2009, the Medical Trust has experienced material cost savings through economies-of-scale purchasing, and the optimization of provider and prescription drug discounts. These savings have been directly shared

with the Church through lower annual premium increases in 2010 and 2011. We expect such savings to continue and grow as we move toward full implementation.

ECFVP: What's the plan for implementation?

ECMT: Implementation is already underway. The Medical Trust's team of Regional Relationship Specialists are partnering and consulting with dioceses and institutions to assist them in creating individualized implementation plans to accommodate actual local conditions and identify opportunities to realize optimal savings while continuing to provide access to high quality benefits.

The DHP Resource Center at www.cpg.org/dhp has a lot of information to help dioceses, congregations, and institutions learn more.

ECFVP: And the implementation schedule?

ECMT: Individual dioceses are at different stages of implementation. Some are just forming committees and others are completing their decision-making. Since each diocese will require a customized plan, the Regional Relationship Specialists will be working with all dioceses over the next 18

months to complete implementation no later than January 1, 2013. To find out where your diocese is in the process, please contact your diocesan office.

ECFVP: Can dioceses enroll in the DHP now?

ECMT: Yes. Any group can adopt a Medical Trust health plan prior to the DHP deadline, and may choose to comply with the parity and equal access regulations of Resolution A177 now or later — but in no case later than January 1, 2013.

ECFVP: What's the process for enrolling? Have you set up a registration system for dioceses and employers?

ECMT: To help make compliance as easy as possible, we have designed an online registration tool that helps employers identify the covered population of employers and employees.

The first phase of the CPG Registration System – called **the Institution Roster** – began rolling out to diocesan administrators in April. It helps confirm and collect relevant information about Church employers in each diocese who need to comply. It helps confirm and collect relevant information about Church employers in

in each diocese who need to comply.

The second phase – called **the Employee Roster** – rolls out later and will help confirm and collect information about employees. Together, these two rosters will give Church employers the information they need for compliance.

ECFVP: Where can congregational leaders go for additional information?

ECMT: They can visit the DHP Resource Center at <http://www.cpg.org/dhp>, contact us at 800.480.9967, Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 8:00pm ET (excluding holidays), or by email at dhpinfo@cpg.org.

Laurie Kazilionis leads the Medical Trust's Client Relations team and, in addition to other responsibilities, is responsible for the implementation of the Denominational Health Plan. Prior to joining the Medical Trust in May 2005, she served for 12 years as the Director of Finance for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. She is a trustee of Camp Bishopswood, an Episcopal camp in Hope, Maine.

The Episcopal Church Medical Trust (ECMT) is affiliated with the Church Pension Fund, and is the sponsor of health plans that have

served the Episcopal Church for over 30 years. The Medical Trust exclusively serves the dioceses, parishes, missionary districts, seminaries, schools, and other bodies subject to the authority of The Episcopal Church, and is very familiar with the unique needs of Episcopal employees, churches, and institutions, offering customized health care solutions to meet those needs. It exists solely to provide the Church with access to quality, affordable health care benefits and outstanding service in a fiscally responsible and sustainable manner.

Resources

- Denominational Health Plan Resource Center http://www.cpg.org/productsservices/dhp_approved.cfm
- Denominational Health Plan FAQs http://download.cpg.org/healthcare/publications/pdf/DHP_FAQs.pdf

Footnotes

1 The Medical Trust offers a variety of comprehensive health plans through world-class provider networks. Not all plans are available in every location.