

Congregations

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

FALL 2004

What Does "Ministry" Mean?

REDEFINING LAY VOCATION



ORVIDAS

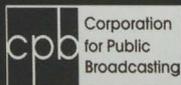
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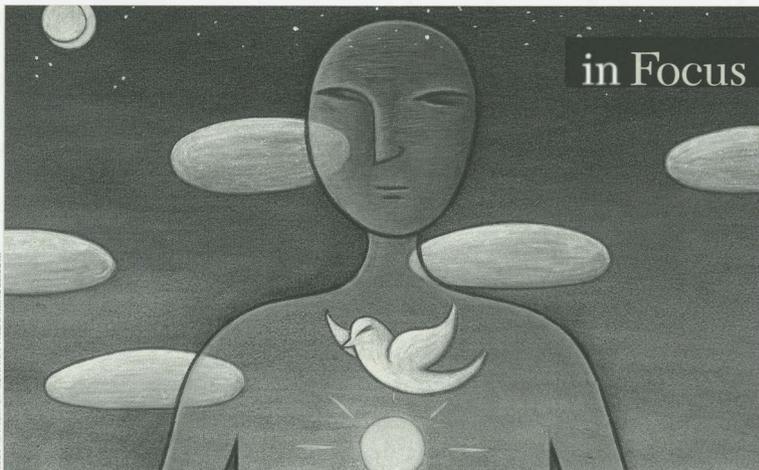
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Lay Vocation



in Focus

A Ministry of All

Kathryn Palen, Alban's acting director of consulting and education, offers three powerful ways that a ministry of all can become a reality

page 22

10 Living from the Inside Out

Pastor and consultant *Howard E. Friend* demonstrates how a change in metaphor, along with a targeted small-group strategy, can transform the role of the laity

14 Calling All Believers

Professor *Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook* describes the success of the concept of baptismal ministry in several northeastern parishes

18 Sacred Journeys

Alban senior research associate *Anne Van Dusen* showcases All Saints Pasadena's excellent lay-inspired and lay-led spiritual program

27 Making Sundays Relevant to Mondays

Pastor *Sharon Wilson* shares what she learned in her "Take Your Minister to Work" program

6 Proclaiming Passion

Professor *Kenda Creasy Dean* describes the issues and challenges of contemporary youth ministry

31 Expressive Communalism

Professors *Richard W. Flory* and *Donald E. Miller* say that the post-boomer generations fall into two categories: cultural reappropriators and cultural innovators

COLUMNS

5 The Leading Edge

Alban Institute president *James P. Wind* says that reading the signals that people in the pews are sending is a critical part of ministry today

42 Ask Alban

Consultant *Terry Foland* describes when *not* to do a congregational survey

DEPARTMENTS

3 From the Editor

36 Reviews

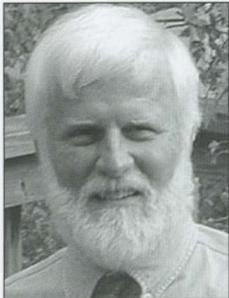
41 Learn More

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Kenda Creasy Dean

Rev. Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean is an associate professor of youth, church, and culture and the director of the Tennent School of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. An ordained United Methodist minister, she is the author of *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Eerdmans, 2004) (see the review on page 38 in this issue) and the co-author of *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul-Tending for Youth Ministry* (Upper Room Books, 1998). Active in youth ministry nationally and locally, Dr. Dean is a frequent preacher, speaker, and theologian with youth and youthworkers. **Page 6**



Howard E. Friend

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Kathryn Palen

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Dr. Donald E. Miller is professor of religion and sociology at the University of Southern California and executive director of USC's Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He is the author/editor of seven books, including *Armenia: Portraits of Survival and Hope* (University of California Press, 2003); *GenX Religion* (Routledge, 2000), co-authored with Richard Flory; and *Reinventing American Protestantism* (University of California Press, 1997). He currently is writing a book on global Pentecostalism based on interviews and observations in 20 developing countries. **Page 31**

Rev. Kathryn Palen is acting director of consulting and education at the Alban Institute. An ordained American Baptist minister, she has served congregations in Kentucky and Washington, D.C., and has worked for academic institutions and a national denominational agency. She has extensive teaching and training experience at national, regional, and local levels and is completing a doctor of ministry degree in spirituality. **Page 22**



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“Who Are the Ministers?”



Congregations

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In my faith tradition, it is not uncommon for leaders, when discussing the church's ministry, to refer to a question from the catechism: “Q. Who are the ministers of the Church? A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.” “See,” they say, “lay persons are listed first.” Yes, but it was probably an ordained person who was leading that dialogue and who would then proceed to send us into the world in pursuit of our “ministry.” Which leads us to the question on the cover of this issue: What does “ministry” mean? We hope that the articles included here provide food for thought on this central question.

Several of the writers in this issue have a serious commitment to the notion of “the ministry of all” or “baptismal ministry,” believing that all are called to serve and that all—not just clergy—are ministers. Kathryn Palen, the author of this issue's “In Focus” (“A Ministry of All,” page 22) says that the obstacles to living into this idea are not to be taken lightly: our expectations, our language, and our congregational structures all contribute to preserving the status quo of minister as authority and lay person as follower. Howard Friend adds, in “Living from the Inside Out” (page 10), that congregations are stuck in old metaphors and that the legacy of pastor as “hub of the wheel—primary source of vision and mission, principal architect of structure and procedure, atop the power pyramid—may still be the norm.” But there is good news, too. In his consulting work, Friend has found congregations to be open to recasting their metaphors and transforming their congregations, and this is happening all over the country.

All Saints Church in Pasadena, California, is just one showcase for how lay leaders can imagine, create, initiate, and follow through on their ideas for church programs. As Anne Van Dusen describes in “Sacred Journeys” (page 18), All Saints is alive with lay initiatives (more than 60 in all) that have continued to bless the congregation and its surroundings. In the opposite corner of the country, the Border Parish—comprising three congregations in Quebec, Vermont, and New Hampshire—operates from the conviction that all the baptized are ministers. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook details the lives of these remarkable congregations in “Calling All Believers” (page 14). As you can see, there is much to celebrate and much to consider.

Also in this issue, we have two articles that explore the critical area of ministry to post-boomer generations. Kenda Creasy Dean says that youth today are “dying for something to live for,” and that too often worship and education aimed at youth falls short of this need (“Proclaiming Passion,” page 6). Richard Flory and Donald Miller, in “Expressive Communalism” (page 31), say that there are two fundamental ways that post-boomers get their religious needs met: through cultural reappropriation and cultural innovation. Their conclusions, based on interviews with approximately 100 post-boomers from 10 diverse congregations, are fascinating and timely.

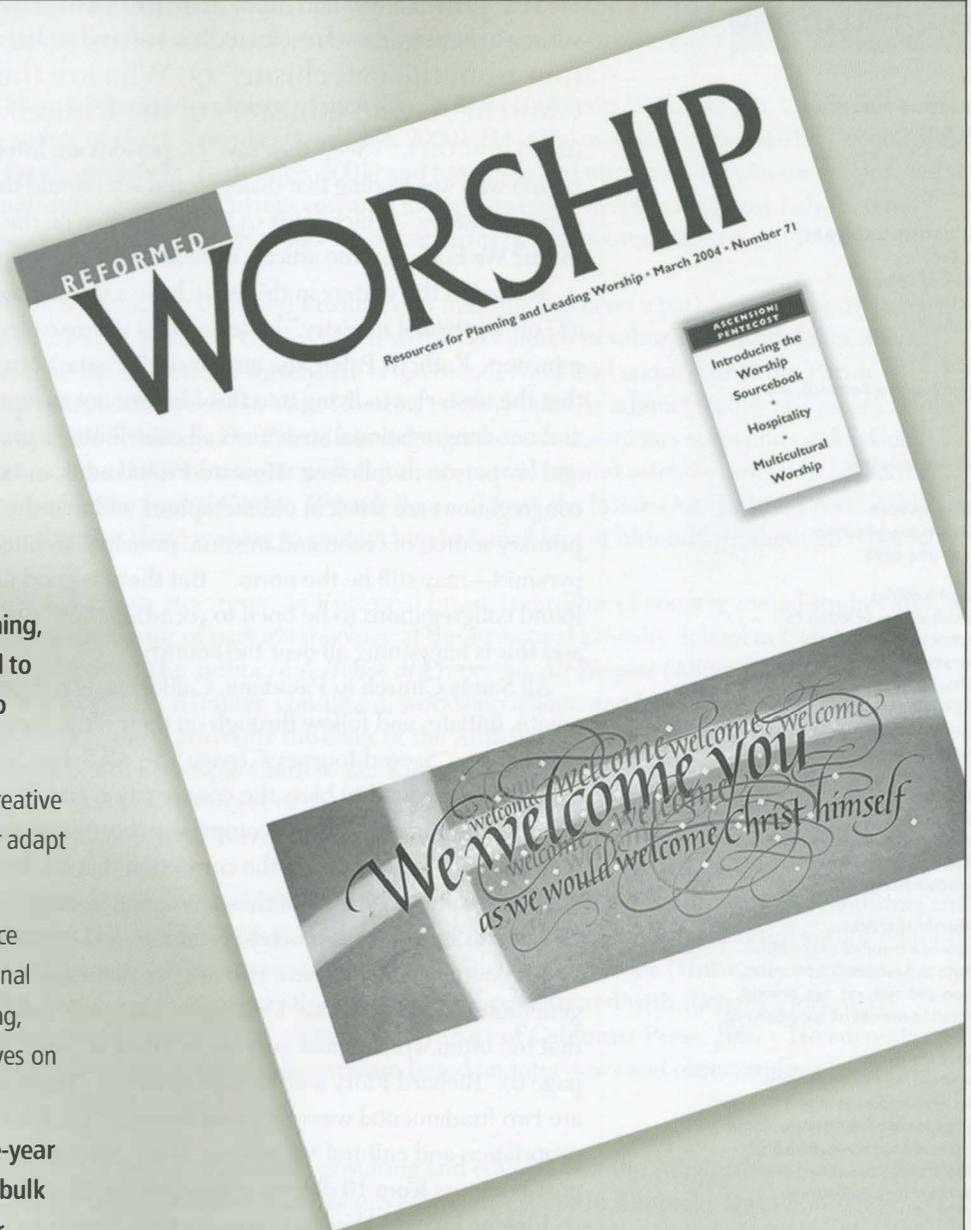
Finally, I would like to express my deep thanks to Lisa Kinney Colburn, not only for her years of service at the helm of this magazine but for agreeing to work behind the scenes to get this issue to you as well. I hope we will be able to introduce you to a new editor soon.

In faith,

Richard Bass
Director of Publishing
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Reading the People in the Pews

In my parish ministry days, preaching and leading worship were central elements in a weekly rhythm. I found that those leadership roles gave me a distinct vantage point from which to view the congregation. From pulpit or communion table I could see the people and watch their behavior. I observed members weeping quietly, others sitting on the edge of their seats and nodding in agreement. Some sang at the top of their lungs; others closed the new hymnal in disgust. Some sat with arms crossed in judgment; others looked out the window. Still others nodded off.

All sorts of signals were sent in my direction. What did they mean? Were they meant for me at all? Like many colleagues, I played mental games trying to interpret the signals. Tears—did they signal the death of a loved one, a fracture in the family, a job loss? Arms folded in judgment—did they signal disagreement with something I had said? Or were they left over from a testy congregational meeting? Were those folded arms defensive barriers erected against a threatening world? The worshiper gazing out the window—was she bored, pursuing her own spiritual journey, or trapped in the pressures of her to-do list?

Interpreting the Signals

I knew the signals were important, but they were not easily read. I made it a priority to follow up—to step down from my exalted vantage point and draw closer to people, to engage the signal-senders in conversation, to learn what was going on in their minds and lives. The rest of my work week was often spent trying to get a clearer reading of the people who sent ambiguous messages. Like most pastors, I learned that it was risky to attempt interpretation alone—I needed more information, especially from the signal-senders themselves.

I found myself wishing for an easier way to read people's minds. Was there a magic truth serum I could sneak into the church coffee? Or a microchip I could implant that would abet mind-reading? So far no magic technology has come to my aid. But I do know that members will talk, given encouragement and opportunity. And I have discovered that many of them think carefully about their vocations and the ministry of their congregations.

Some even write about their church experience. Diana Butler Bass, a gifted writer, has written a book that lets readers in on what may be going on in the minds of

some laity. Her book is what Walker Percy would call "a message in a bottle" from a realm of consciousness that often seems distant and unknowable.

Broken We Kneel: Reflections on Faith & Citizenship (Jossey-Bass, 2004) is a spiritual lament, written by a member thinking deeply about the mission and character of her congregation and denomination. Because she dares to write down her reflections on her faith journey, she gives us a window into the thought world of the people in our congregations. Certainly not every church member thinks the ways she does. Many do not let the rest of us in on what they think.

Letting Us In on the Message

But Bass lets us in. In fact, she is spending her reflective space wrestling with the soul of the Christian church. One moment she is considering the aftermath of 9/11. Then she is worrying that many, perhaps most, American congregations are furthering a revival of American civil religion rather than offering prophetic criticism as this nation drifts into triumphalism, the temptations of empire, hyperpatriotism, and saber-rattling. Drawing upon St. Augustine's teaching about the City of Man and the City of God, she challenges congregations to examine their calling in the world. When she talks about Osama bin Laden with her five-year-old daughter and teaches the child about forgiveness and praying for one's enemies, she invites all congregants to examine their responses to evil—are they responses of fear and power, or of faith and discipleship? When Bass ponders two favorite hymns of post-9/11 America, "God Bless America" and "Amazing Grace," she

takes us into the confusion of church and state and shows how it is manifested in our worship services and public ceremonies. Almost in one breath we sing about a generic American religion and a particular Protestant faith. She challenges us to know the difference between homeland security (a national quest that is an impossible dream) and the household of God's peace (a world-transforming reality).

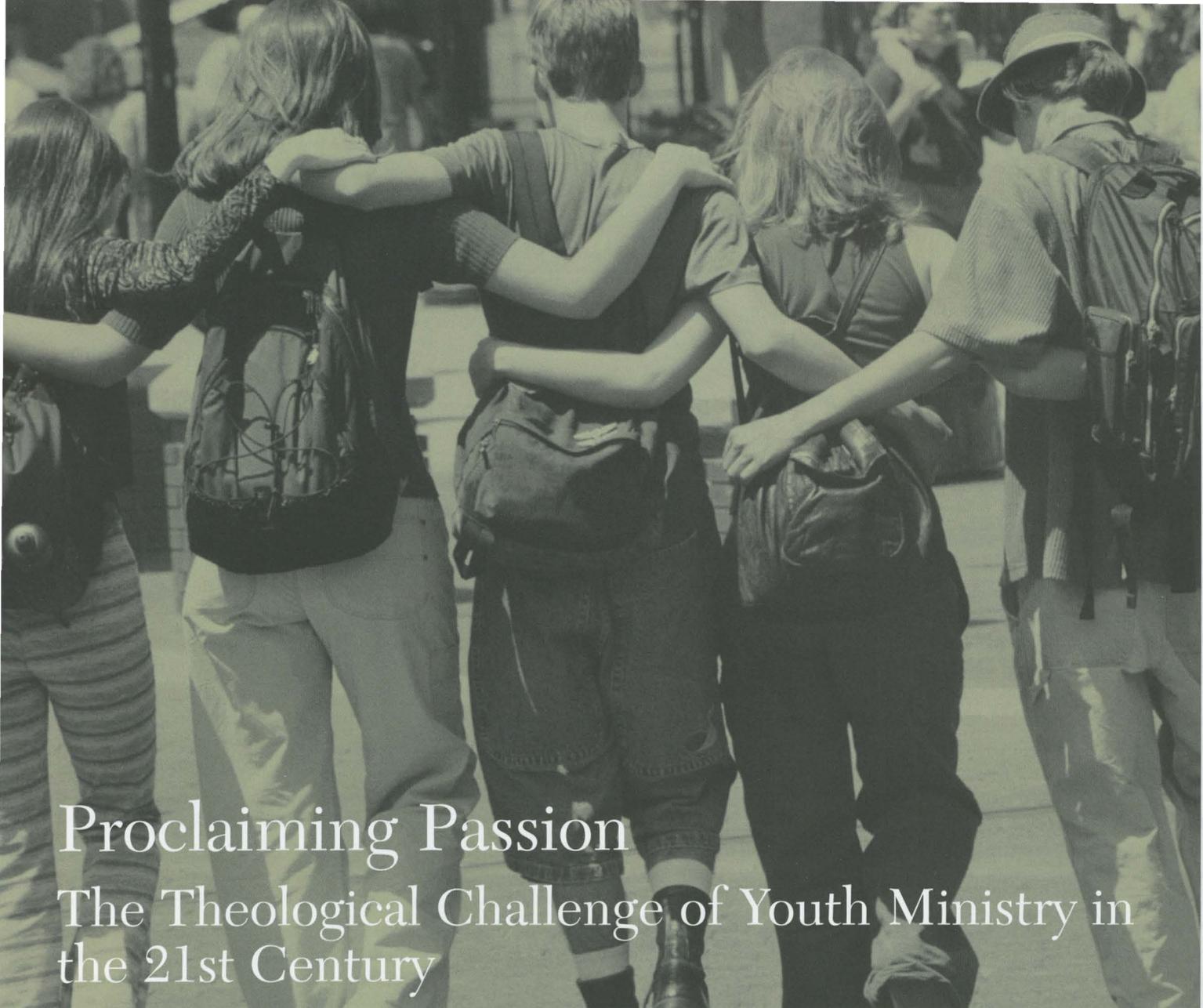
As I read, I found myself questioning our sometimes facile, stereotypical readings of worshipers. Maybe they are not day-dreaming, schedule-planning, or turning inward. Maybe they are engaged in life-and-death arguments about the meaning of faith, about the great questions of our time, about the possibility of hope in an anxious time, about their vocations in the world. Maybe they are searching for a way to help their congregations seize the great opportunity for ministry that came in the wake of 9/11. Maybe they already know that larger possibilities await our congregations in this historical moment—larger than any yet widely articulated.

Bass reminds us of a world of belief and doubt in struggle. Her book is an invitation—no, a demand—that we find ways to enter the thought worlds of the people of God. She reminds us that great struggles are taking place in the minds and hearts of those who frequent congregations. Those who lead must find ways to read these lives, minds, and hearts. We must help the people we serve to give expression to their reflections. We must be prepared to listen, to read, and to engage the questions they are working on and the perceptions they are developing. In so doing we may receive important signals about who we are and what we are called to do.

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind

is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including the Alban Institute special report on leadership.





Proclaiming Passion

The Theological Challenge of Youth Ministry in the 21st Century

KENDA CREASY DEAN

Teenagers are heat-seeking missiles. They're drawn to fire. They yearn for experiences that will channel their passions. And by and large they are not detecting many signs of life in the church.

CUYLER BLACK, youth pastor, in *Fellowship Magazine*, June 2001'

Someone once told me that every adult is a junior high kid with wrinkles. If that is true—and so far I'd say it's a pretty fair assessment—then youth ministry is never really just about “ministry with youth.” It is about ministry, about being the church in which young people are called to play an irreplaceable and irrepressible part both now and throughout their adulthood.

Youth ministry—ministry by, with, and for people who hover between the onset of puberty and the enduring commitments of adulthood—is ministry with people who are searching for something, for *someone*, “to die for,” to use developmental theorist Erik Erikson's haunting phrase.² They are looking for a

truth worthy of their suffering, a love worthy of a lifetime and not just a Sunday night. In short, they are searching for passion, even (maybe especially) in church. Young people will not seek a God who settles for less. If we're honest, neither will we.

Dying for Something to Live For

Following the Littleton shootings, where Cassie Bernall was killed after reportedly confessing her belief in God, a stark question flooded Internet chat rooms and bulletin boards: “Would *you* die for your faith?” A Florida girl's response on an Internet bulletin board typified hundreds of others: “I haven't totally pledged all of my being to God. When I heard [Cassie Bernall's] story I realized she gave up everything. She DIED for Him . . . Would I have done the same?”³

The Columbine story took place at the nexus of *passion*: the twisted passions of two lonely boys who perceived they had

nothing to live for, but also the holy passion of faith—the virtue of fidelity, “a disciplined devotion,”⁴ as Erikson called it, the strength of having something “to die for.” When young people ask, “Would *you* die for your faith?” what they really want to know is, “Is Christianity worth it? Is it worth staking a life on, and not just a Sunday night? Because if it’s not—if God isn’t worth *dying* for—I’m outta here.”

But listen closely. Behind these youthful ultimatums is a plea: “Please, *please* tell me it’s true. True love is always worth dying for. Please tell me I’m worth dying for. Please tell me someone loves me this much—that God won’t let go, even if the Titanic sinks, even if the library explodes, even if the towers fall, even if the world ends. Please show me a God who loves me passionately—and who is worth loving passionately in return. Because if Jesus isn’t worth dying for, then he’s not worth living for either.”

The Heresy of Wholesomeness

Meanwhile, back in the church basement, youth groups play games like this:

SPARROW FLIGHT

Players crouch down and grab their ankles, remaining in this hunched position throughout the game. If they let go of their ankles, they’re eliminated. Participants hop around holding their ankles and moving their elbows (wings) like a bird. The goal is to knock over other players without losing their balance. If they’re knocked over, they’re eliminated. The last person “standing” is the winner. . . . This is a fun game to watch as well as to play.⁵

This game appeared in a youth ministry magazine I received the week of September 11, 2001—the week that made every silly game we had ever played in the name of youth ministry look laughably out of touch. Even gifted teachers—the ones who can root metaphors out of silly games like truffles, evoking an intuitive grasp of a larger truth—tread a fine line between the trite and true in youth ministry. Fun is good; triviality is deadly. The word “fun” originates in the word “fool”—but, for Christians, this means rejoicing in the “foolishness” of a God (I Corinthians 1:25) who took human form, lived as a poor man, and died as a criminal—and then, with the wink that saved the world, rose again, vanquishing death forever.

It’s a far cry from “Sparrow Flight.” No wonder intense interest in spirituality fails to translate into a vibrant church life for most adolescents. In Protestant traditions that practice confirmation, more than half of those confirmed as adolescents leave the church by age 17. Girls tend to exit congregational life around 14 or 15, boys somewhat sooner. Today, about half of North American adolescents say they attend religious services weekly. (Only two in five adults say the same.) Some denominations flatly cite their “inability to retain young people” as a chief factor in their decline. Meanwhile, youth pastors practice disap-

pearing acts of their own. Over one-third of full-time youth ministers stay in ministry one year or less.

By now, the adolescent exodus from churches across a broad theological spectrum has become normative in American church life. We scatter blame on everything from budget cuts to training deficits to demographic cycles, yet beneath these issues lies a more disturbing question, the question of theological credibility: Does the church placate adolescents with pizza and youth groups, or do we offer a God worthy of their passion, a God who satisfies their deepest longings and delivers them from their most profound dreads? Does the church anesthetize young people (and their parents) with wholesome activities, or do we challenge them to a holy ministry? Can any of us tell the difference?

Complicating Factors in Contemporary Youth Ministry

Two issues exacerbate the tendency to focus youth ministry on psychology or sociology rather than on theology. The first is the blurry nature of adolescence itself. Whereas postwar America invented the term “teenager” to designate semi-grownups who, as columnist Walter Kirn put it, live “in a developmental buffer zone somewhere between childish innocence and adult experience,” adolescence today extends significantly beyond these parameters. Social scientists traditionally demarcate adolescence as the period between the onset of puberty and financial independence—that is, until the Internet made millionaires out of teenage day-traders and business prodigies who proved that financial independence and maturity possess no inherent link. Outside the U.S., the term “youth” commonly applies to anyone under thirty; in some cultures, the term applies to all unmarried persons, regardless of age. In 2003, the National Opinion Research Center reported that most Americans believe that the average age at which one becomes fully adult is 26. Meanwhile, the age of menarche in girls continues to plummet. In a 1997 *Pediatrics* study, the average age was 9.7 for Caucasian girls, and 8.1 for African-American girls. Most of these girls are in third grade.

With this prolonged adolescence—which now comes in three stages: early, middle, and late—came a broadened role for youth ministry. Campus and young adult ministries, for example, now fall under the adolescent rubric, as do “tween” ministries (for older elementary school students, 10 and 11 years old). As churches now address issues related to identity formation later and later in the life cycle, they can no longer afford to exile young people to one corner (usually the basement) of the congregation. In short, prolonged adolescence requires a more nuanced—and more intentionally and theologically trained—ministry with young people, since “adolescence” so defined now constitutes a substantial portion of the congregation with pastoral needs.

A further hurdle is learning to navigate the shifting sands of culture, as the tectonic plates of modernity give way to a post-modern landscape. Young people have always served as barometers of the human condition, “acting out,” acutely, what it means

Postmodern young people tend to value casual relationships over programs, communities over institutions, mystery and fluidity more than certainty, particularity over universality, and personal experience over external authority.

to be human in their particular moment in history. As one educator put it, there are no so-called “youth problems” that are not, in fact, *human* problems found among all age groups, “now come to roost among the young.” As a result, the signature assumptions of global culture—radical pluralism, a heightened awareness of risk, and a view of life as a journey in which the self is continually “under construction”—are writ large across the experience of contemporary youth. As one young person told me, “Adolescence is, like, you know, the human condition on steroids.”

At the same time, the human condition confronting postmodern teenagers rests on different assumptions than it did 50 years ago. Postmodern young people tend to value casual relationships over programs, communities over institutions, mystery and fluidity more than certainty, particularity over universality, and personal experience over external authority. While churches vary in the degree of their ability—or willingness—to acknowledge these changing assumptions, adolescents tend to view postmodernity as friendly to spiritual interests as the line between the sacred and profane becomes increasingly blurred.

Worshiping at the Church of Benign Positive Regard

What is at issue for youth ministry in this increasingly complex landscape is not conversion; young people convert as a matter of course, with or without the church. What is at stake is discernment: To what, or to whom, will adolescents be converted? The problem with youth ministry in a postmodern culture is that young people are inundated with opportunities to convert, but have few theological tools to discern among them. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela won passionate followers, but so did Adolf Hitler and Osama bin Laden. Clearly, adolescent passion can be co-opted by evil as well as won by God—and by any number of deities in between. Despite the grim statistics on church involvement, the results of a 1999 Gallup poll suggest that a staggering 95 percent of American adolescents believe in God—they just don’t believe God matters. According to the 2004 National Study of Youth and Religion, far from being hostile toward

religion, these teenagers mirror to a high degree their parents’ attitudes toward faith, which the study characterized as “benign positive regard.”⁶

Perhaps that is the root of the problem. Parents pass on to their children their passions, not “benign positive regard.” In a world overwhelmed by choices, the smiling detachment of “benign positive regard” is understandable, but spiritually irresponsible. “Benign positive regard” provides the basis for neither identity nor faith. Erikson, for example, believed identity formation requires young people’s commitment to an “ideology,” a word Erikson used for a governing belief system that gives a meaningful framework to our disparate experience. The Church of “Benign Positive Regard,” on the other hand, is too timid to offer such a framework. It suggests assent rather than inspires commitment. As one teenager, extremely active in her Presbyterian youth group and a regular church attendee, told the interviewer for the National Study of Youth and Religion, “God is nice, but doesn’t really do anything.”

Replacing Positive Regard with Passion

Incredibly, in spite of our unenviable track record with teenagers, something often goes right in youth ministry, and legions of clergy, professional church staff, and Christian activists point to the encouraging presence of a youth minister during their teenage years as a decisive factor in their faith and vocational choices. Over time, this has proved significant. As these young people became adults they carried their youthful ecclesial imaginations with them. They did not simply imagine youth ministry, they imagined the *church*—and in so doing they subtly expanded the reach of youth ministry beyond teenagers themselves. By the late 20th century it had become evident that teenagers were capable of conceiving ministry in ways that extended far beyond the youth room. When young people gathered for worship and ministry with their peers, often in settings segregated from the congregation at large, they self-consciously “did church” differently than their elders. As a result, youth ministry consistently challenged dominant ecclesiologies in American Protestantism by embodying alternative images of the church.

For example, many visible leaders of today’s “alternative” congregations—where pastors intentionally refashion styles of worship, patterns of polity, and forms of nurture to attract baby boomers and their progeny—admit strong roots in youth ministry. A quick scan through their proliferating publications shows that, by and large, these leaders simply adapted their visions (and methods) of youth ministry to address the adults these youth inevitably became. A 1994 report to the Lilly Endowment conceded, “What has become clear . . . is that youth ministry is ultimately about something much more than youth ministry. . . . These [Christian youth] movements are redrawing the ecclesial map of the United States.”⁷ And they are redrawing it to include churches where young people like to worship.

A New Map for Youth Ministry

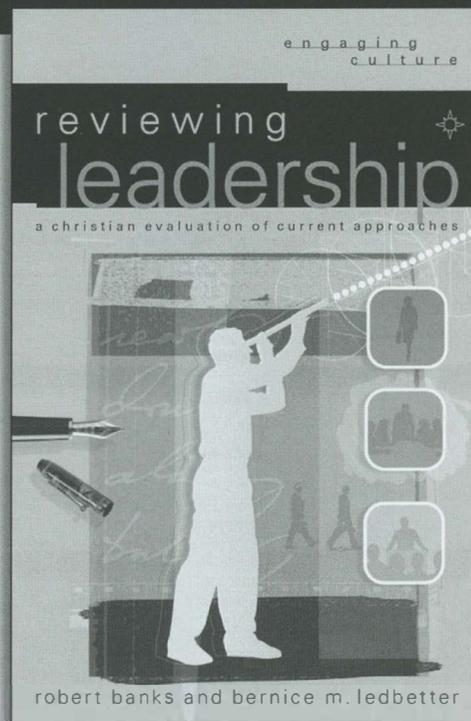
The effect of this new “ecclesial map” has yet to be evaluated. On the one hand, it promises a new sense of vocation for youth ministry, and a theological sense of direction as youth ministry becomes more than a platform for placating teenagers. Indeed, youth ministry’s great potential may lie in its ability to reimagine the church on behalf of the wider Christian community, in which God has called young people to play an irrepressible and irreplaceable part.

On the other hand, treating youth ministry as a laboratory for the future church has risks, not the least of which is *hubris* and the possibility that it promises more than it can deliver. Will adolescents be able to reimagine the church in ways that are any less jaded than adults? Or will youth ministry’s expanded vocation on behalf of the church lead to a loss of focus—an abandonment of the church’s mission with young people themselves, returning youth ministry to the “stepping stone” status it has so earnestly tried to shake? The verdict will be for another generation to decide. What we can ascertain is that youth ministry is no longer just about youth—for if the predicament of adolescents is intimately linked to the predicament of the church, then the transformation of one implies the transformation of both. ♦

NOTES

1. Cuyler Black, “Jesus, Britney and Thermodynamics,” *Fellowship Magazine*, June 2001, n.p. Black is a youth minister in Ridgefield, Connecticut.
2. Erik H. Erikson, *Youth Identity and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 233.
3. David van Biema, “A Surge of Teen Spirit,” *Time*, May 31, 1999, 58. Cassie’s “yes” actually may have belonged to classmate Valeen Schnurr, who escaped the shootings alive. But all of this was quickly beside the point; adolescents themselves circulated “The Cassie Bernall story” by e-mail, making it urban myth within hours, long before the media (who were presumably busy checking sources) reported it.
4. Erik H. Erikson, *Youth Identity and Crisis*, 233.
5. Les Christie, “Hot Games,” *Group* (September 10, 2001), 27. Let me detour long enough to insert a caveat to that last line: If a game is fun to watch as well as to play, the fun had better not depend on standing by and laughing at a few unwitting people made to look ridiculous. Every youth group is full of phantom members who came—and left—when they realized the group’s “fun” quotient depended on being laughed at. Most self-respecting teenagers observe these antics and ask themselves two questions we ought to ask as well: (1) If they made that person look ridiculous this week, will I be next? and (2) What does this have to do with Jesus?
6. The findings of this study are still tentative; the project will be reported in full by Christian Smith, principal investigator, in a book later this year.
7. Ronald White, “History of Youth Ministry Project” (unpublished mid-project report submitted to Lilly Endowment, Indianapolis, Indiana, August 20, 1994), 7.

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Living from the Inside Out

Lay Vocation in Principle and Practice

HOWARD E. FRIEND

I enjoy nothing more than conducting retreats for church leadership teams, usually on a Friday evening and all day Saturday. Leaders who call to schedule such events typically want to renew and revitalize their congregations. They're ready, they insist, to focus on a clear vision, to set compelling goals, and to make bold plans. I warn them that my approach demands a willingness to risk the unfamiliar, an openness to fresh ways of thinking, and nothing short of relentless courage. I tell them this retreat may stand them on their heads, and that clergy and laity alike may find themselves radically challenged. "Okay," they say. Frankly, they have no idea of what is in store! It will take the whole weekend to get it—if we're lucky.

At the heart of my work is a vigorous commitment to the role of laity. The apostolic church had no professionalized ministry until early in the second century, and no entrenched hierarchy until Constantine. The church of Acts and of Paul's letters is built on the foundation of lay vocation. Among the first books I read in seminary nearly 40 years ago was *Theology of the Laity* by Heinrich Kramer, still a classic. One could have reasonably predicted that, four decades later, laypeople would have claimed their rightful place of leadership, authority, and influence. Sad to say, they have not.

Full Plates, New Callings

Early on, usually in the first hour of a retreat, I post a banner reading **DISCERNMENT BEFORE DECISION-MAKING**. “In the interest of full disclosure,” I caution, “I ought to post a warning label: ‘This event could be dangerous to organizational convenience.’” Participants’ curiosity edges toward confusion when I try to clarify my meaning by saying, “Expect some ‘good news’ resignations.”

I proceed to a definition of leaders: “the people with the fullest plates.” Nods and smiles suggest that I am onto something. When I ask how all that stuff got onto people’s plates, I get predictable answers: “I was appointed/assigned.” Or, “In a weak moment, I was recruited.” Some admit—without real enthusiasm, supposing someone had to do it, and seeing no raised hands—“I volunteered.” For too many church leaders, what began as joyful service has morphed into duty and obligation. The nods have lost their smiles. “So few of us do all the work,” they moan—a familiar story.

Then I invite leaders to “set aside” that full plate (not dump it, just put it aside) and ponder that to which they sense God may be calling them. I suggest that they assess the gifts for serving and loving God has given them, or that life and experience have honed. They need to seek clarity as to what focused purpose the Spirit may be stirring in them. What yields a sense of passion, delight, and joy? What, if their plate were not so full, would they love to be doing to serve the church? This exploration, halting and awkward at first, soon becomes animated and illuminating. I invite each leader to begin drafting a personal mission statement. Then I suggest that participants revisit the plates they set aside—with permission, even encouragement, to remove whatever does not align with their emerging sense of call, gift, purpose, and passion. Then, in no rush, they may prayerfully add to the plate only those tasks so aligned.

The total group reflection that follows radiates vitality. Someone wonders, “What if we asked everyone to

think about these things? Wouldn’t serving be more rewarding, indeed more faithful?” I challenge them, as leaders, consciously to lead this shift from one paradigm to a new one of discerning and serving in the church. A first taste of transformational change!

Now the warning label makes sense. “Some ‘good news’ resignations may be in order,” I repeat, evoking fresh smiles from most leaders, and perhaps glances of chagrin from pastors and board chairs. The majority of leaders with whom I have worked confess that no one ever asked them to wonder what their calling and gifts were, or what passion they were ready to release. Ah, “lay vocation”—not merely generically motivating or more effectively recruiting laity, but inviting people to discernment as the basis for serving.

Sometimes I can see in leaders’ faces, hear in their tone of voice, sense in their heightened attentiveness a new dignity, a deepening confidence, a true lay vocation—internalized, experienced, and celebrated. I am convinced that at the heart of congregational faithfulness, church renewal, revitalization, or reinvention must be people who are invited, challenged, and equipped to know themselves as called and gifted. Sadly, in perhaps the vast majority of churches, this outcome would represent a monumental shift. But I believe it is only the starting point.

Changing the Metaphor

A certain Presbyterian congregation, having increased its mission allocation in the annual budget, decided to inspire its members to more hands-on, personal involvement in mission outreach—the theme of its Friday evening and Saturday retreat.¹ Discernment of call and gift had already become a cornerstone principle and practice in the parish. Increasingly, congregational leaders and those on their ministry teams served out of a conscious desire to hear their call and claim their gifts, with discernment of vocation as the basis for serving and leading. That was the approach of this mission outreach committee.

The leaders carefully chose three mission options and promoted them vigorously. Year one yielded disappointing results. The second year, undaunted, they prayerfully chose different projects, promoting them even more creatively. Again, disappointment ensued. A newer committee member offered this critique:

We’re trying to be an airline. What if we became an airport instead? We’re trying to get people to fly our airline to our destinations—limited planes, limited routes—as if they were customers. What if we changed the metaphor? An airport instead of an airline. We’d provide a safe place for optimum numbers of takeoffs and landings, large planes and small, to endless destinations. Instead of pilots, we’d become air traffic controllers.

This man was thinking out of the box. He had taken another taste, maybe a hefty bite, of transformational, paradigm-shifting change.

In year three, leaders still offered an option or two, but they focused on inviting members to pray for discernment, to hear how God was calling them to “make love concrete in the world,” to live out their own mission calling. As individuals began to sense a calling, even partially formed, they were encouraged to submit a mini-profile to the church newsletter, to write it on a Post-it note to be placed on the “mission wall” in the community room, even to offer a brief invitation during worship service announcements. The mission outreach committee resisted the temptation to create mission projects themselves as ideas came forward, but rather “got beside” circles of folk with common callings, encouraging them to carry their own projects forward.

A first mission group formed around a ministry to AIDS patients. Then a second team organized to collect and distribute blankets, together with meals cooked in Crock-Pots, to Philadelphia’s homeless from the back of an old van. A third new group carpooled each Thursday morning to Chester, a small, depressed, predominantly African-American city a half-hour

away, for community Bible study and an urban gardening project. A fourth, more ambitious project would coordinate the construction of low-cost homes in Ludlow, Philadelphia's most depressed neighborhood. Five years later that congregation of just under 300 members had 15 thriving mission groups, circles of three to a dozen volunteers sponsoring mission work in and around Philadelphia and in three foreign countries.

People began not only to call mission groups to life, but to affirm lay ministries

staples—a Sunday morning forum, a morning and an evening Bible study, an occasional seminar. But they focused their efforts on inviting people to reflect prayerfully and deeply on what programs, small groups, issue- or theme-oriented seminars they wanted—and were willing to help convene.

Serendipitously, some church members who lived on the same street converged just after dark one evening under a streetlight—one person jogging, a couple out for a stroll, another couple

was unlikely. At least the growth strategies it had pursued to date had borne little fruit. Members decided that an emphasis on the quality of church life might be more promising, and that developing small groups was a place to start. At that point they had no small groups. But they had managed to convene a three-person small-groups task force.

I proposed a modest first step, which the participants assured me would not work; but since they presented no alternatives, we pressed on. "Put a little questionnaire in the church bulletin for a Sunday or two, and include it as a tear-out with a return address in the newsletter," I suggested. One comment captured the group consensus: "We won't get more than a handful of responses." Task force members listed five possibilities, generically defined, and left space for suggestions. To their surprise and mine, they collected eight or 10 names for five of their six suggestions. "Good news," one member observed, almost reluctantly. "Guess we need to get to work to plan and promote those groups."

"Bad idea," I said firmly. They looked bewildered. I put forth an option: "Call a 'convening caucus' for each of the groups. Maybe before and after church, each in turn, over the next three Sundays." Not fully persuaded, they concurred. Again, to their surprise and mine, more people than expected, more than had signed up by questionnaire, turned up at each of those five gatherings. As chairs were added to the circle at the first of the five, the task force member poised to convene the group leaned over and whispered, "I guess now we need to get to work to plan and promote some groups."

"Bad idea," I repeated, evoking renewed bewilderment. I encouraged him to keep to the plan we had conceived, to follow the agenda and ask the questions we had framed. He invited the group, first in circles of three, to discuss:

- ◆ What are you looking for that brought you to this meeting?
- ◆ What kind of group did you have in mind?
- ◆ What format do you think might work?

If pastors no longer want to name the vision or set the goals or announce the plans—but rather empower the laity as partners in this foundational work—they must become process leaders who enable the laity to see a vision, set goals, and plan ministries.

discerned and lived out beyond the church. Bill coached in a Saturday morning soccer league, and Sarah tutored after school at a community center. Ben slept two nights a week at a center-city homeless shelter, and Mary served as a hospice volunteer. Mission ministry enlarged its embrace to celebrate all acts of loving service.

Lay-initiated Education

This "new metaphor" was contagious, infecting the adult education committee. That group's strategy of using questionnaires to determine adult program offerings, as logical as it seemed, had yielded only minimal success:

- ◆ "They said they wanted a couples group, but only two couples showed up."
- ◆ "We thought they'd love a progressive dinner, but we only had a handful."
- ◆ "We paid good money to bring in a popular speaker, but we filled only half the seats."

These plaintive reports were part of an old story. The next year lay leaders tried the new approach. They offered some

walking their dog. One man, thinking out loud, wondered whether people were interested in gathering in one another's homes for Bible study and prayer. A house church formed, word got out, and within a month two more groups formed in other neighborhoods.

Charlie, a new member, noticed that other church members boarded his commuter train each morning. "I was wondering if I might not invite them on, say, a Thursday morning, to come an hour early for Bible study and sharing over breakfast at the Villanova Diner," he said to the adult education chair. Her empowering reply was "How can I help you do that?" Within a week the commuters had pushed together two tables in the back room of the diner, and were eating bagels and poring over a parable from Matthew.

A Small-Group Strategy

Virtually all church-growth and renewal literature affirms the importance of small groups. A languishing, barely-holding-its-own church in an established neighborhood came to the reluctant but timely conclusion that rapid numerical growth

- ◆ How often and where did you think we might meet?
- ◆ What topics or themes might be addressed?

The conversations among the threesomes were lively. It was hard to reconvene the full circle. The leader artfully encouraged the groups to share their thoughts, which he jotted on newsprint. The clarity and energy seemed promising. Still another task force member leaned over and whispered, “Certainly now it is time to plan and promote the groups.” His wary look anticipated my now familiar answer.

“Bad idea,” I responded. The head of our team dutifully asked the last, most pivotal question: “Who among you, maybe a team of two or three, would be willing to convene this group?” An awkward, seemingly endless silence followed. But anxious task force members resisted the temptation to take on that role themselves. Finally, a woman said she’d love to, and another quickly joined her. Now I nodded to the relieved and smiling faces of the team: this group is ready to go.

The other four gatherings followed a delightfully similar course. A critical mass of folk assembled, easy consensus emerged on hopes and expectations for the group, and a convener team materialized. That church went from zero small groups to five in less than a month. Six years later, four of the five groups are going strong. The small-group task force did not decide on a selection of small groups to offer. They did not merely collect the names of those expressing interest, and then offer the groups. They resisted taking over the process when they had more specific and concrete data on what people wanted. They inspired response; they encouraged, offered resources, and empowered the formation of groups. Each group “belonged” to its members.

One that convened was a couples group, with Jim and Ann among the participants. Inevitably, some Friday evening when the group is to meet, Jim will come home weary from work, only to find Ann exhausted as well. Jim’s first

words, had the task force planned and promoted the couples group, might have been, “Ann, I’m tired; let’s skip that couples group tonight,” and Ann would have nodded agreement. But tired as they are, Jim and Ann wouldn’t think of missing their couples group.

The Pastor’s Role

A singularly embarrassing vignette from a weekend retreat where I—as pastor of the church—was a participant may offer insight into the pastor’s proper role.² Our congregational leaders, led by an invited consultant, were working in subgroups at the Saturday morning session. I had left the room to make a phone call and was returning to join my threesome.

As I started to open the door, I heard a younger lay leader say, “I don’t know why we are doing this, because Howard’s gonna do what he damn well pleases anyway!” Embarrassed and hurt, I pushed the door shut and took a deep breath, uncertain what to do next. I took another deep breath, opened the door, and leaned over to whisper into the young leader’s ear, “When the small groups report back, I want you to share that comment.” He resisted, no doubt embarrassed as well. But he shared his reflection, which was met by nods of clear, if awkward and self-conscious, agreement.

The consultant responded artfully. We had identified, he suggested, a critical issue in a commitment to lay vocation in the church—that of authority. We were at the cusp of transition between being a pastor-centered church and becoming a program-centered church. The whole process of making decisions, clarifying roles and role interfaces, taking responsibility, and accepting accountability needed radical redefinition. Through the next year—and it was often difficult, if not downright painful for us all—we worked together to craft a covenant of partnership in ministry.

George Barna, speaking at Eastern Baptist Seminary, offered this telling commentary on clergy and leadership. Clergy were asked to rank 10 areas of

responsibility and competence in the role of being a parish pastor in three ways—first, assessing the importance of that role; second, assessing their present level of competence; and third, indicating where they place their continuing education emphasis. Leadership ranked eighth of 10 in each category.

The legacy of pastor as benevolent dictator, as hub of the wheel—primary source of vision and mission, principal architect of structure and procedure, atop the power pyramid—may still be the norm. Embodying authority and being authoritarian are radically different roles. Many pastors blur that distinction. On the other hand, younger pastors, announcing their readiness to relinquish such prerogatives, become passive, distant, and uninvolved. If clergy domination engenders resentment, clergy passivity spawns chaos. If pastors no longer want to name the vision or set the goals or announce the plans—but rather empower the laity as partners in this foundational work—they must become process leaders who enable the laity to see a vision, set goals, and plan ministries. Walking neither ahead nor behind, they are challenged to walk beside.

Living Out Lay Vocation

I write not to offer a foolproof, step-by-step program for congregational renewal. It is an invitation to an adventure, an approach, an exploration. It is not a series of tactics, but a set of principles and values to be named and cultivated. Lay vocation must be claimed and celebrated as biblical mandate before it becomes a strategic plan. As jazz virtuoso Charlie Parker put it, “If it’s not in your heart, then it’s not in your horn.” Lay vocation is lived from the inside out. Be it, and then live it out. It is more journey than destination. ◆

NOTES

1. For more details, see *Recovering the Sacred Center: Church Renewal from the Inside Out* (Judson Press, 1998), 87–93.
2. See *Recovering the Sacred Center*, 116.



Calling All Believers

Celebrating the Gifts of Baptismal Ministry

SHERYL A. KUJAWA-HOLBROOK

The Border Parish comprises three small congregations—All Saints Anglican Church in Hereford, Quebec; St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Canaan, Vermont; and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Colebrook, New Hampshire. The members have prayed and studied together for 30 years. Marilyn Neary, vicar of St. Stephen's, says that ministry in the remote region has survived "because we have tried to live fully into our baptismal vows." When the relationship began in the early 20th century, none of the three congregations could attract or retain seminary-trained clergy for long. When seminary-trained priests could be found, they were often newly ordained and served for only a short time. "I guess you could say that we grew into shared ministry because of benign neglect," Neary says. "But we came to the realization that we all share in the ministry here because we are all ministers."¹

The organization of the Border Parish, Neary explains, now consists of an administrative team of laity and clergy who "pray, study, and do the deeds of Christ in the community." None of the leaders of the Border Parish have formal seminary training; those who are clergy were "called out" of their congregations and ordained and trained locally. The congregations have a shared worship schedule, participate ecumenically, and share the

hosting of educational and social events. While the parish is based on a “baptismal ministry” model, it also preserves and affirms the individual identities and strengths of each congregation. “You can have sheep and cows in the same pasture, and it won’t overgraze the field,” Neary observes.

The Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, works in partnership with the dioceses of northern New England—Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont—to support baptismal ministry in the region. The Pastoral Excellence Project of the Episcopal Divinity School, funded through the Lilly Endowment, seeks to nurture, sustain, and provide education and training for laity and clergy in areas traditionally underserved by their denominations and seminaries, and often challenged by the need to spread limited resources over vast geographical areas. In these contexts, the affirmation of baptismal ministry within congregations has not only stretched resources, but has revitalized congregations through a renewed sense of their vocation in their communities and the world. Further, the affirmation of the ministry of all the baptized has moved congregations from traditional, hierarchical, “clergy know best” models of religious leadership into a way of being that values the gifts of the whole community.

Ministry Rooted in Mutuality

The concept of baptismal ministry is based in Scripture and the practice of the early church. Also known as “shared ministry,” “mutual ministry,” “total common ministry,” and the “ministry of the baptized,” it has been concerned over the past 30 years with how the “clerically-centered model of congregational life and mission increasingly limits both ministry delivery and the sacramental life of the church.”² Kevin Thew Forrester, ministry development coordinator in the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan, defines baptismal ministry as “a way of talking about how we live in a community of brothers and

sisters where leadership is no longer structured around a hierarchy of those of greater or lesser importance, but around the mutual nurturing of the gifts of all members of the community.”³ Forrester suggests that Jesus proclaimed an alternative kind of community rooted in mutuality and human freedom. A baptismally grounded church is one where ministry is not the prerogative only of the ordained, but one in which all members of the congregation have the opportunity to identify their gifts and to form them into ministry for the church and the world. “To be baptized is to become one who accepts the call to serve others,” Forrester says. “Baptism and ministry are two sides of the same coin. . . . Whether it be preaching, healing, teaching, parenthood, nursing, public service, or the arts, these ministries are the unfolding of our baptismal ministry.”⁴

Nancy Moore, coordinator of the Pastoral Excellence Program in Central

region as “leader, coach, and spiritual midwife—bringing something into life that needs life.” Baptismal ministry can, at first, “really be a hard sell,” she says, “especially if the people don’t believe that ministry is about them.”

More than Financial Motives

Central Maine is an economically depressed area, and none of the three churches there could support full-time clergy leadership, but Nancy Moore stresses that the growing sense of baptismal ministry in the congregation is positive and not simply a response to financial problems. “Economic failure is not a punishment here,” says Moore. “The fact that we are doing all that a church should be doing and that we are self-sufficient is something positive.” Moore tells of an encounter in a local furniture store where she ran into Janet, a member of Church of the Messiah in

A baptismally grounded church is one where ministry is not the prerogative only of the ordained, but one in which all members of the congregation have the opportunity to identify their gifts and to form them into ministry for the church and the world.

Maine and vicar of three congregations there, affirms the impact that a renewed sense of baptismal ministry can have on a congregation. “If I was trying to do ministry in a more traditional model, I probably would be overworked and frantic with three churches; but pastoral care could be done here without me,” says Moore. “We have people here who really take care of each other. But I then have to let go of the need to know everything and control what is going on.” Moore’s experience in Central Maine, like that of the Border Parish, suggests that each congregation evolves according to its own process, and that baptismal ministry moves members to “love one another so we can love the community.” Moore sees her role in the

Dexter, Maine. The owner of the store knows that Moore is a priest, and asked Janet, “Oh, do you go to her church?” Janet smiled at the store owner and replied, “No, she comes to my church.”

Immanuel Church in Bellows Falls, Vermont, is another congregation revitalized through baptismal ministry development. Victor Horvath was ordained an Episcopal priest as part of the ministry discernment process of the congregation. He believes that baptismal ministry “gently challenges a church to reframe its own vision of itself and its priorities.” “In the old model it was fairly easy to subtly pressure people to turn up for some committee or another to ‘do more for the church,’” he says. “In this model, if we truly believe

what we say, we are called to respect an individual's sense of balance and call, and that in turn causes the church to look at its balance and call. Are we willing as a community to let go of aspects of our common life we once held dear—like weeding the garden or making the coffee—in order to support members of the community in answering God's call to spend time with spouses, visit relatives, or read to their children?" Horvath believes that reclaiming baptismal ministry in a congregation requires a deliberate process of discernment of individuals' gifts for ministry and sense of calling. "As individuals, once we recognize life as gift and call, how do we then use those gifts and respond to the call to build and support the community of faith?" he asks.

Redefining Ministry

Immanuel Church has about 50 members. Although the congregation has an elegant building, like many congregations in former mill towns throughout New England, Immanuel experienced a long period of decline. An endowment was left to the congregation in the 1950s, so there was enough money to keep the doors open. But by the 1980s Immanuel was a congregation without much sense of shared ministry or identity. A clergy leader in the early 1990s attempted some lay ministry development, but those modest efforts ceased with the dissolution of that pastoral relationship. Rather than immediately sending a replacement, the diocesan bishop challenged the congregation members first to discern their own gifts for ministry.⁵

Beginning in 1995, members of Immanuel Church entered into an intensive process that redefined ministry as the calling of all baptized persons, in the church and in the world. "I lived the first 48 years of my life thinking that ministry was 'church stuff,'" says Victor Horvath. "But what I did at work, or at home, or on weekends came nowhere near to being thought of as ministry. Baptismal

ministry, as we have talked it and preached it here, changed all that in a radical way." A canon pastor was called in 1995 to support the baptismal ministry discernment process. Two years later, a group of interested parishioners called the "Map Makers Group" reflected on the parish-identified issues of identity, communication, commitment to God, spirituality, and church attendance. During this discernment process, "the time had arrived to be a gathered ministering community rather than a community gathered around a minister," Horvath said. After another year of study and discernment, the Map Makers both "recognized that 98 percent of ministry takes place in the world through the activity of every parishioner" and wanted to explore further "what it would be like to affirm and support those with gifts for more church-based ministries, such as education, stewardship, diaconate, and priestly ministry."⁶

Identifying Leadership Gifts

Soon Immanuel Church began to identify members of the congregation for spiritual leadership. The gifts of each member were considered by the whole congregation in the areas of stewardship ministry, education ministry, ecumenical ministry, preacher, deacon, and priest. Parish-wide educational efforts, including newsletter articles, a summer preaching series, and an Advent series were offered. A covenant group was formed, composed of those who responded positively to the invitation for specific ministries; it began a three-year period of study. Those called to the ministries of deacon and priest began the diocesan ordination process. On the Eve of Pentecost in 2003 the covenant group was commissioned and ordained as the ministry support team for Immanuel Church, Bellows Falls.⁷

Although baptismal ministry is often linked with financial concerns, the Immanuel congregation proves that the benefits extend beyond this need. "We come to the understanding of the ministry of all the baptized not out of a

need to save money, but because of the simple reason that it is our baptism that calls each of us to ministry," the congregation reports. "Money is not an issue for us—the way we carry out Christ's ministry in and to the world is."⁸

Carole Wageman, co-chair of the commission on ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, and author of *Report on Baptismal Ministry in Vermont*, is impressed by the palpable sense of empowerment and interconnectedness evident in the congregation of Immanuel Church and others that have chosen a baptismal ministry model. The personal growth of parishioners who did not see themselves as ministers and "yet are growing into the ministry is a poignant reminder of the gifts lived out in faithfulness by the early Christian church," she writes.⁹

Demographics Not a Liability

Baptismal ministry is a central theme in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. The diocese is made up of many small, rural congregations. There are relatively few full-time clergy in the diocese; many congregations are served by part-time, bivocational, or locally trained clergy. Rather than see these demographics as a liability, the diocese uses the opportunity to affirm the ministry of the baptized. "Ministry is the life work of all the people of God. Ministry happens in our gatherings as the church and in the day-to-day living of our lives," says Thomas Clark Ely, bishop of the diocese.¹⁰ He believes that "baptismal ministry helps take us beyond the realm of the church gathered (as important as that is) and more deeply into the realm of the church dispersed, living out its dynamic discipleship in the marketplace of people's lives—at home, school, work, and community involvement." Ely also asserts that congregations striving to live more fully into baptismal ministry are more likely to be focused on "mission" rather than "maintenance."

Baptismal ministry holds up the primary reason for the church's existence. Though congregations embrace

baptismal ministry for different reasons, all enter into intentional processes of prayer and study. “We pray and study in order to do the deeds of Christ in the community,” says Marilyn Neary. As members of a congregation discern their gifts and their call, the study of Scripture encourages members of the congregation to hear God’s voice as it reflects on every aspect of daily life. Through study, prayer, and life in community, the shared nature of God’s call to ministry is brought forth in a dynamic vision of the interaction between the church and the world. The congregation rediscovers the gospel and Jesus’ teaching about ministry and the call of the baptized to work for the restoration of human community and wholeness.

Congregations that embrace baptismal ministry also face challenges. The need to develop the ministries within the congregation persists as a result of turnover. “We have learned that to raise up people from the pew,” says Marilyn Neary of the Border Parish, “you have to live here a while to get a sense of what it is really like. We don’t know who the ‘third generation’ is yet, but we are always on the lookout.” Victor Horvath feels that it might be time to “re-ignite that vision of life as blessing and call” at Immanuel Church, where new parishioners have not yet participated in the ministry discernment process. “So we’re reminding ourselves to preach and teach the basics again,” said Horvath.

Resistance and Challenges

Despite the benefits of baptismal ministry to a congregation, many remain resistant to change and suffer from low expectations. “I have had such a clear vision of the importance of the ministry of all the baptized for so long that I forget that it’s a new—and kind of weird—concept to most people,” says Nancy Moore. “It takes a tremendous amount of energy just to be patient as people discover that I’m not crazy or lazy when I ask them to consider their own ministries. It is also a challenge to get people to drive to attend a meeting,

training, or even just an opportunity for fellowship with one another.” Susan Ohlidal, the pastoral enrichment coordinator in the Diocese of Vermont, speaks of the feeling that “we always have to repeat the same message in new ways.” Ohlidal says she sometimes wonders if congregations “are so steeped in the tradition of priest-centered parish life and hierarchical leadership models” that they have difficulty embracing other models.

Baptismal ministry also challenges theological education. It suggests the need for educational models that are accessible to a wider audience than traditional and expensive residential seminary degrees. Congregations interested in exploring baptismal ministry often cite the need for more education and training. “If theological schools took baptismal ministry seriously, theological education would be more grounded, locally astute, culturally diverse, as well as widespread among laity and clergy,” says Fredrica Harris Thompsett, a faculty member at the Episcopal Divinity School and co-director of the Pastoral Excellence Project there. Thompsett believes that theological education should not be “hoarded or parceled out among elite populations.”

She sees the need for more clergy who “hold up, represent, and remind us all of the priesthood of all God’s people.” ♦

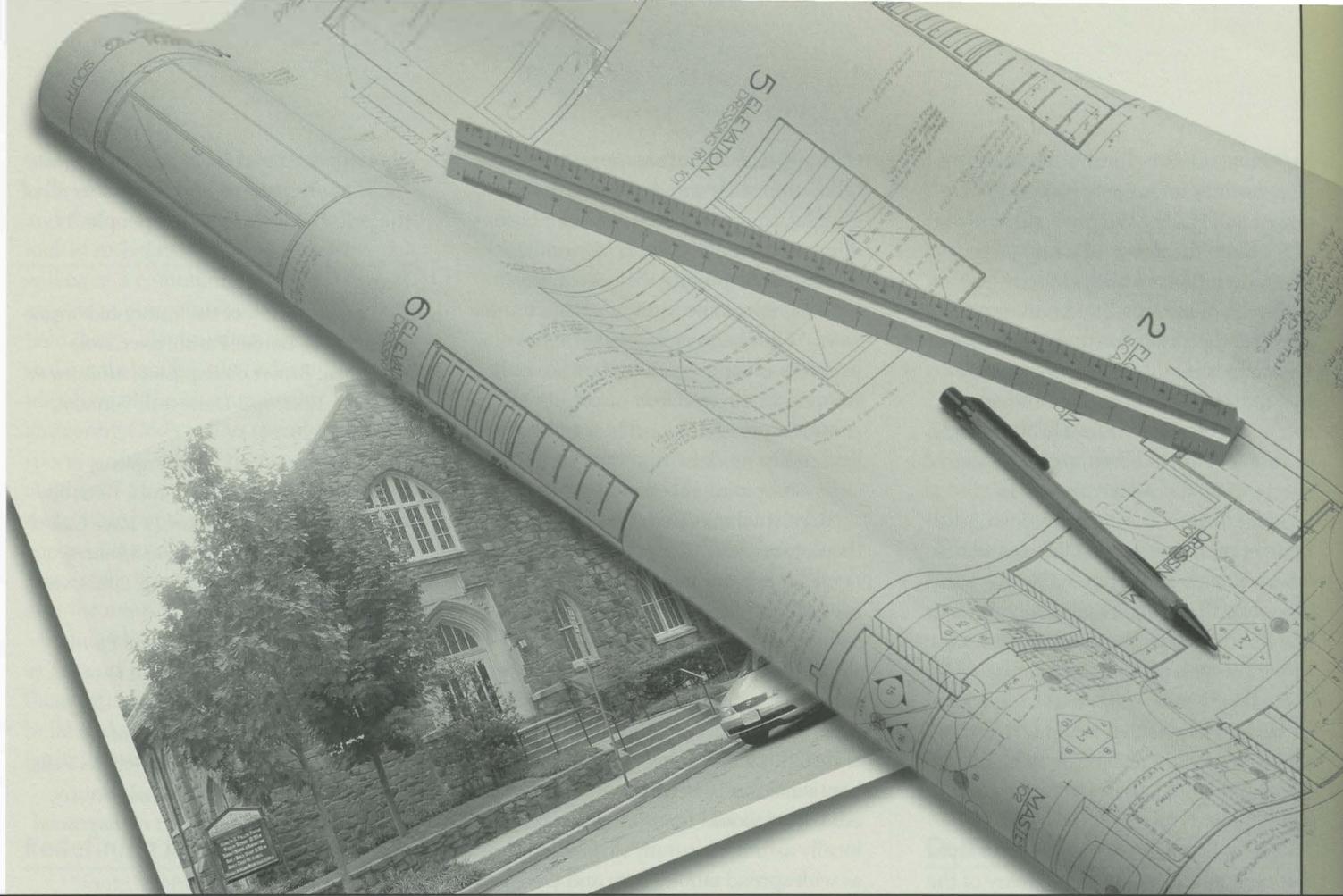
NOTES

1. For an overview of the history and organization of the Border Parish, see Carole Wageman, *Report on Baptismal Ministry in Vermont*, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, May 2003, 20–24.
2. Wesley Frensdorff, “The Captivity of Sacraments,” *The Witness*, April 1992, 5.
3. Kevin L. Thew Forrester, “*I Have Called You Friends*”: *An Invitation to Ministry* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003), viii.
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5. See the document “Immanuel Parish: A Brief History of the Covenant Group/Ministry Support Team: How We Got to Where We Are.” For a synopsis of the history of Immanuel Church, Bellows Falls, Vermont, in regard to baptismal ministry, see Carole Wageman, *Report on Baptismal Ministry in Vermont*, 12–18.
6. “Immanuel Parish: A Brief History.”
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FIVE COMPONENTS FOR DEVELOPING BAPTISMAL MINISTRY

From the Diocesan Ministry Support Team, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

1. **Discerning God’s call.** Listen prayerfully and reflect together on where God is leading us in our baptismal calling to participate ever more fully in God’s reconciling mission to the world in Jesus Christ.
2. **Self-assessment.** Honestly evaluate resources, strengths, limitations, opportunities, and organizational structure.
3. **Planning.** Name clear shared vision, mission, and purpose; set priorities; clarify mutual expectations; and identify next steps.
4. **Local ownership/commitment.** Participate in the discovery of gifts and resources to enable the entire local faith community more fully to become what God desires and is calling members to be and do. This process leads to a claiming of abundance and an embracing of power that is unleashed by the exercise of mutual responsibility and interdependence.
 - **evaluation.** Provide for ongoing spiritual formation, education, and training, using the variety of resources available to identify and develop ministry; and establish appropriate structures for mission and decision-making.



Sacred Journeys

A Lay-led Discovery of God through Spiritual Practice

ANNE VAN DUSEN

It happened one morning during the sermon. Joe Duggan, a church leader participating in an initiative exploring ways to incorporate recent confirmands into the ongoing life of the parish, suddenly knew what he wanted to provide for them: a program that would help them discover how God is calling them to service through their everyday lives. He would call it “Sacred Journeys.” Duggan knew that confirmation marked a significant step in these confirmands’ faith journeys and that they were eager to be engaged. He also knew that unless they were connected quickly, their enthusiasm would dissipate or be redirected elsewhere.

Duggan doubts that simply reading a book or attending a committee meeting would have led to his inspiration, instead attributing it to being an active participant in parish life. “Sacred Journeys wouldn’t have come to me without my engagement in the regular worship life at All Saints,” he says. “It wasn’t a separate idea; it came out of my total experience.”

To flesh out the concept of Sacred Journeys, Duggan teamed up with other parishioners. One of them was Bob Cornell, a former Zen Buddhist monk. Cornell knew how the discipline of spiritual practice turned his faith into a way of life, how it transformed Buddhism from an idea into a daily experience. He was concerned that Christianity presented grace as a concept but didn’t provide the spiritual tools needed to access or experience it. You wouldn’t expect a concert pianist to play beautifully without practicing hours of scales and études, or an all-star football player to complete a touchdown pass without sweating through grueling field drills, so it was unrealistic, Cornell reasoned, to expect that simply reading or

thinking about Christianity would lead to living life as a Christian.

Cornell's passion was to see a rigorous framework for spiritual formation take root within All Saints, a progressive, inclusive Episcopal Church (www.allsaints-pas.org). Cornell wanted to help people answer the question, "What do I have to do to be open to grace?" He wanted the program to be evangelical, not in any Bible-thumping way but in the profound sense of being opened to God's presence, God's work, and God's mystery. An intellectual experience wasn't enough; the experience needed to incorporate daily practice to equip participants to find and welcome that presence in their everyday lives.

When Sacred Journeys finally launched, Duggan's idea turned out to be more than the vocational discernment program he had initially imagined. Described as a process rather than a program, Sacred Journeys emphasizes regular prayer or meditation, group support, and experiencing life as a laboratory.

Sacred Journeys explores four basic elements of whole spirituality: practice, inquiry, community, and service. Practice refers to a daily set of focused activities that align one with God's love in the moment and throughout the day. Inquiry refers to the insight provided through "contemplative engagement with great writings, teachers, and experience." Community is being part of a committed group of seekers "willing to witness the divine insight in one's own life and the lives of others" and to find compassion and forgiveness and/or acceptance of the "other stuff." Service refers to acting "wisely in all things big and small." Sacred Journeys equips people to experience, moment by moment, the presence of God through relationships, work, recreation, and spiritual practice. It also encourages people to listen for God's calling into ministry and service to others.

How It Works

The process starts with a six- to nine-week course that explores the four elements of spiritual practice, reviews the process' fundamental objectives, and introduces

the small group concept. At each session, the emphasis is on teaching about the practice, giving participants the opportunity to experience it, and, most importantly, showing how the practice relates to everyday life. To ground the practice's tangible realities, participants consider how their lives might change if they engaged in the practice for 15 minutes each day. Going a step further, they imagine what things would be like if everyone at All Saints—or society at large—practiced that same discipline.

The sessions are fairly structured. Each opens with music and prayer. After refreshments and logistics, conclusions from the last session and assumptions about the current session are reviewed. A spiritual practice is introduced, along with an exercise to try it out. (These range from yoga to centering prayer to Examination of Conscience, a form of simple prayer developed by St. Ignatius.)

A facilitated small group session follows to discuss what did and didn't work. Though not mandatory, participants are invited to do assigned journal exercises. They are encouraged to note lecture ideas which, when presented, elicit a strong reaction; which ring true and which do they find annoying? This awareness helps pinpoint areas that participants may want to explore further.

Once participants complete the introductory sessions, they may choose to continue in one of three small groups, each with a different emphasis: study and reflection, spiritual practice and healing, and discernment of vocation.

The Study/Practice Group focuses on developing a rule of life that includes daily spiritual practice. Scripture and other spiritual texts are used in a "nondogmatic exploration of what it means to be a follower of the way of Jesus in the 21st century . . . Hearts, minds, and bodies are engaged in the practices of the group."

The Community (Way of the Heart) Group "uses the foundational practice of heart-centered listening to explore how spirituality is manifest in relationship to others." Case studies from spiritual communities such as the Catholic Workers, Quakers, and engaged Buddhists provide examples of communal

work and worship. The group incorporates aspects of these communities as they select and serve in a community service project.

The Service Group supports members in discernment of their vocation. All members of the church, be they lay or ordained, are called to ministry in all aspects of life. This group focuses on the themes of vocation and God's call: listening, discerning, and committing to and meeting the challenges presented by a call.

Sacred Journeys is not a process to be taken lightly. Throughout the experience, members are asked to commit to attending all sessions, assuming a regular daily practice, and to "listening and speaking from the heart." Participants commit to the continuing small groups in three-month intervals. Now in its third year, some of the small groups have continued to meet; others have disbanded.

Flexibility is Key to Success

Anne Peterson, senior associate for leadership and incorporation at All Saints, explains that the program didn't progress as first envisioned. All Saints provides incorporation programs through its Covenant Series. The Covenant I program is intended for newcomers preparing for membership or baptism. It includes an introduction to the small group experience and writing spiritual biographies. Covenant II focuses on church teachings and what they mean in an individual's life. It leads to confirmation. The parish was originally looking for a Covenant III program to augment the Covenant I and II programs. Covenant I and II are "past and present tense" programs focused on helping the participant address "How did I get here? Where I am now? This is what I believe." Covenant III would be a "future tense" program centered on "Where am I going?" and "How am I going to get there?"

The first group of Sacred Journeys participants was very diverse and brought a confused set of goals. Some wanted to focus on spiritual practice while others were expecting a Covenant III experience or personal discernment. Some participants hadn't completed the prerequisite Covenant I or II classes. One of the

program's strengths is that it honors flexibility and diversity. Duggan and Cornell adapted their original concept to accommodate the participants' different expectations. The result was a series of introductory sessions for all participants followed by three different small groups for further exploration.

"Sacred Journeys would not be a ministry open to new leaders, flexible in its programming, unless it was organically structured, 'organic' in its grassroots development from within the congregation, its crossing the boundaries between parish ministries, and its being connected to the core of the parish's mission," says Duggan.

Sacred Journeys didn't end up being All Saints' Covenant III program, but that doesn't seem to matter. The church will find another way to meet that need.

A Practical Theology: Lay-Led Programs Don't Just Happen

Sacred Journeys is inspired, created, and managed by lay leaders. It may seem remarkable that such a program exists, but it is just one of more than 60 lay initiatives offered at All Saints Church. "All Saints is constantly giving the message about the sin of clericalism," says Rector J. Edwin Bacon, Jr. "We emphasize the importance of baptism as both a rite of inclusion and of ordination. Through baptism, everyone is initiated and ordained into the priesthood of Christ. Lay folks are just as powerful as deacons, priests, and bishops." He reinforces that theological grounding every chance he gets—in sermons, small group training, weekly announcements, incorporation classes, and in as many other places and ways as he can.

Those theological words translate to an image Bacon offers as an example of practical theology: thirty brightly covered tables displayed on the church's front lawn after each week's services. Staffed only by laypeople, these tables invite parishioners into various forms of ministry. Each week a different ministry is given prominence. This ministry is mentioned in the liturgy, and a descriptive flyer about it is attached to the worship leaflet. The day a particular ministry is featured, its table is given a prominent place on the lawn. "That table image," says Bacon, "is totally dependent on the creativity and prayer life, the courage, and the imagination of laypeople. When All Saints was founded, there were no lay ministries. Twelve people got together with a priest, a prayer book, a Bible, and bread and wine."

People come to All Saints from a variety of faith traditions and experiences. Some are ardent evangelicals while others are agnostics. Disenfranchised Roman Catholics worship with former Baptists. Few are cradle Episcopalians. All Saints expects much from its members and shares much of the responsibility for ministry. This leads to a creative, enlivened congregation where inspiration and initiative are rewarded with the opportunity to implement ideas into ministry. Consequently, many creative people are drawn to the church, further enriching the diversity and initiative of the congregation. "Membership at All Saints is not a spectator sport," says Bacon. "We encourage people to assume responsibility and ownership of ministry. We live out the idea of two or three gathered in Christ's name in small groups. All Saints is 'small-groupified.'"

PREPARING FOR LAY MINISTRY

All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California is just one example of a congregation that has embraced lay ministry. The following guidelines, drawn from recent Alban research, will help you think about lay ministry in your congregation. The full report is available through the Congregational Resource Guide (www.congregationalresources.org).

- ◆ **Know your own point of view.** Identify your style of leadership, your own beliefs, and your tolerance for chaos.
- ◆ **Know your congregation's point of view.** How does it understand the role of laypeople and ministry? What expectations of clergy do your members have?
- ◆ **Know where you are.** What education must you do and with whom do you need to do it—with governing bodies, staff members, the congregation?
- ◆ **Don't try to be all things to all people.** Authenticity is essential to success, so identify your strengths and weaknesses, and be sure your plans are consistent with your vision.
- ◆ **Have a clear framework for making decisions.** A solid plan will do much to avoid future confusion and misunderstanding.
- ◆ **Be bold.** Use your own prayer time to discern lay ministry.
- ◆ **Test your motivations.** Are you embracing lay ministry simply because it's "right" or because you feel pressured to do so? Be clear about your motivation.
- ◆ **Lay-led doesn't mean less planned or less intentional.** Be sure the passion, skills, and know-how are in place.
- ◆ **Things don't always go as planned.** The evolution of lay ministry is likely to be messy. Embrace that evolution, and support the organic development of your congregation's lay ministry efforts.
- ◆ **Take commitment seriously.** Lay ministry doesn't mean lazy ministry; sometimes it takes more effort to support lay initiatives.

Lay Ministry is More Than an Idea

To offer Sacred Journeys, Duggan first discussed the idea with Rusty Harding, All Saints' director of incorporation, who oversees programs that welcome and integrate members into parish life. Harding and Duggan discovered that they had been thinking along similar lines, and Harding shepherded Sacred Journeys through the process of becoming a new ministry.

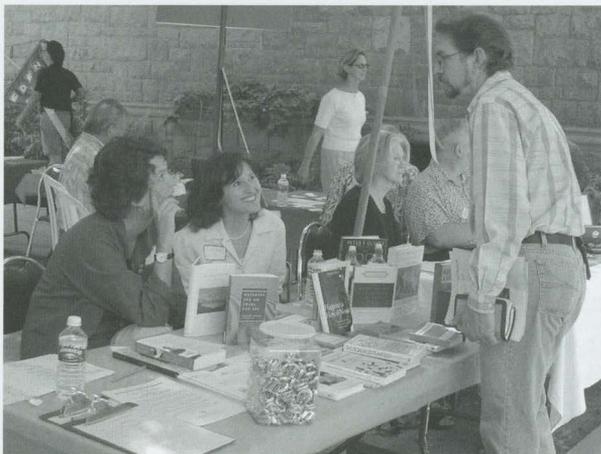
All Saints takes its commitment to lay ministry seriously. In the three years since Sacred Journeys was initiated, the parish has put a rigorous review and approval process for new ministry initiatives in place. The proposed ministry must be presented to a staff member by at least two parishioners. If acceptable, the staff member helps the lay leaders develop a working plan (including a mission statement, objectives, action steps, and budget requirements) which is presented to the management staff. Once approved by management, the ministry may move forward.

The lay initiative proposal is considered in the context of the All Saints mission statement, foundational values and current strategic plan, which are available for review on the parish Web site. Leaders proposing ideas must be pledging members and be vetted through the small group office. They must complete leader training and be approved to serve. Bacon concedes that the process can be demanding, but is not so rigid that there aren't some ministries that haven't been through the process: "We don't have any desire to create a 'ministry' police." Creative ideas and initiative seem to take precedence.

Creative Chaos

Harding describes the inherent tension that All Saints experiences between traditional Episcopal hierarchical structures and bottom-up leadership that emerges from the laity. At All Saints, there are different interpretations of these structures and different concepts of the term "ministry." The staff and parishioners live together with this tension as committed members of the All Saints community.

The All Saints culture is affectionately described as "creative chaos." "God created the world from chaos," Bacon says. "Chaos is necessary for creativity to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. Chaos theory tells us that there is order in chaos. If you hang in through the chaos, wonderful things take place. I'd rather err on the side of chaos rather than order." Some people thrive in this environment, and others leave, seeking



Laypeople are invited into various ministries after Sunday worship at All Saints.

a smaller, more structured environment. "That's fine," Bacon says, "My interest is in promoting the journey of faith, which sometimes takes people to different places."

It's not that All Saints doesn't recognize the value of quiet or spiritual practice. It actively promotes participation in meditative small groups and developing personal prayer disciplines. Developing a daily practice of stillness, listening in quiet for what one hungers for, is important and necessary work. That work is not viewed as the responsibility of the church but of the individual supported by the church.

Bacon and other staff leaders know peripherally about the Sacred Journeys program. "I've known about it since its inception," Bacon says. "I touched bases with the leaders at certain developmental points, offering them my encouragement. It's a perfect example of how two inspired folks felt authorized to take up their lay ministry. It has borne great fruit."

Getting Started

For congregational leaders thinking about doing more to support and encourage lay ministry in their congregations, Bacon recommends starting with discovering

the practical theology of your own faith community (see the box on page 20). Learn about the history of your congregation, he suggests, and try to find examples of lay leaders assuming responsibility and authority. Refer to those examples again and again in sermons, worship, and education opportunities. Reinforce those examples with new teaching.

He also recommends developing a good training process for lay leaders and selecting leaders carefully. Be sure you can trust them—really trust them—to establish healthy boundaries in groups and manage those taking too much airtime. Train them to know the legal guidelines and your congregational policies for sexual and other misconduct.

Empower leaders so that they are equipped to lead, but not in a controlling way. Once this is done, communications and expectations are clarified, making it easier for staff members and lay leaders to work together. Lay leaders are supported when they raise an issue or present a new idea. Those charged with authority can release their anxiety and stay calm through the confusion, trusting that the Holy Spirit works through chaos.

Finally, when hiring staff people, Bacon recommends putting them through an arduous interview process. Have them interview with the laypeople they will be leading. Embody your vision in all that you do.

He also suggests ministers be aware of congregational biases and preconceptions that could impede lay ministry, many of which are related to lay pastoral care. Most parishioners want or expect a 'real' minister to visit them when they are ill, in the hospital, or during a similar pastoral emergency. While recognizing that people do not intentionally hold onto old models of pastoral care, All Saints is always in the process of reminding its members that lay ministry can, at times, be best expressed through pastoral care. Healing and solace offered by laypeople may more closely resemble the hands and feet of Christ. Infusing this message and exploring hidden biases or expectations before the pastoral crisis makes lay pastoral care—and other forms of lay ministry—easier to implement. ♦



A Ministry of All

The headline read “Lay Ministry Is at a Dead End.” I took a deep breath before reading the accompanying article. This was not how I had expected to begin my participation at a national convocation of people working in the area of lay ministry.

I had arrived at the event excited about spending a weekend with others who shared an interest in the ministry of the laity. My excitement also involved representing the Alban Institute, which has explored this issue for 30 years. But my arrival was met with questions about an article that was making the rounds: Had I seen it? What did I think about it?

When I finally tracked down the provocatively titled article, I discovered that it had been written by Loren Mead, Alban’s founder and long-time president. Initially, it felt as though someone had pricked the balloon of my

Kathryn Palen suggests how lay ministry can be rediscovered and redefined

excitement with a pin. Although the balloon didn’t pop, it did begin to deflate. But, as I read the article, I realized that Loren had captured some of the questions, concerns, and issues with which I had been struggling in regard to lay ministry. He began with a question about the viability of lay ministry as a genuine goal for religious institutions. After all, he noted, not much has changed

“on the ground” since the 1950s, when the pioneering works on lay ministry were written.

Loren voiced his sense that the religious community has been coming at lay ministry from the wrong direction. “We act as if another book, or another program, or another experiment, or another process will somehow do it,” he explained, adding that simply continuing to do the same old things will not produce new results. The problem, he said, is not simply one of programs or processes. Rather, it is a systemic issue. “Anything we do to enhance lay ministry causes a reaction in the system that negates what we do,” he contended. “The system is self-correcting. And it self-corrects back to the same old clergy-centered sense of ministry that we are trying to get away from.”

Obstacles to Living Fully into Ministry

As I continued to reflect on Loren’s article, I realized that what he described as a dead end, I had been thinking of as a series of obstacles: obstacles that keep all people from entering fully into the ministry to which they are called; obstacles that stop individuals from claiming and using their gifts in response to God’s call; obstacles that stop congregations from being communities that help people discern and live out their call—both within those faith communities and in the larger world.

I have to admit that I was surprised by the biblical story that emerged for me as I thought about those obstacles. It was the story of the Apostle Paul. As I reflected on what keeps people from fully living into ministry, I thought of how Paul struggled against obstacles to be accepted by some as a minister.

In working with groups around the issue of lay ministry—or what I've come to call the “ministry of all”—I developed a guided meditation based on Paul's struggles (see the box below). The meditation invites participants to imagine the obstacles that might block individuals within their congregations from living fully as ministers. It has been fascinating to listen to the obstacles that emerge for people during that experience. My sense of those obstacles also has developed as I have worked with groups, been in conversation with individuals, and read the works of others.

What do I see as obstacles to the ministry of all? One of those obstacles is language. I have moved away from talking about “lay ministry”

for that very reason. The language we often use within congregations makes a marked distinction between clergy and laity. In contemporary usage, we define *clergy* as the body of people who are ordained for religious service and *laity* as all those persons who are not members of a given profession or other specialized field. That distinction does not appear in the New Testament. *Laos*, from which we derive “laity,” referred to the “people” and was one of the general terms used for Christians. *Kleros*, from which we derive “clergy,” referred to the “lot” or “inheritance” that all believers received through Christ. By the fourth century, however, the church had adopted a secular model for thinking about itself. In the Greco-Roman world, *kleros* referred to municipal administrators and *laos* to the people who were ruled. As that distinction grew within the church, *kleros* became associated with the sacred and *laos* with the secular.

The language that had so much promise in its New Testament usage may well be too

layered with centuries of misuse to be helpful today. While the “ministry of all” is far from a perfect alternative, perhaps it at least moves us in a helpful direction.

Another obstacle involves expectations. Our congregations are filled with expectations. Clergy have expectations of themselves: *I should be good at everything. Since I'm the professional, I'm ultimately responsible. I'm needed by people, so I can't disappoint them. If I opt not to do certain things, perhaps others will think I'm lazy.*

Laity have expectations of clergy: *They are the ones who do “real” ministry. They have the skills and knowledge to handle every situation. They somehow are different, so we can expect more of them than we do of ourselves.*

Laypeople's expectations of themselves run from being “just” a layperson to being the judge of a clergyperson's ministry. Clergy may expect laypeople to be administrative leaders, organizational volunteers, personal supporters, or needy spectators.

Until congregations help their members—clergy and lay—explore and renegotiate their expectations in healthy and liberating ways, those expectations will continue to serve as an obstacle to the ministry of all.

Other obstacles include congregational structures that support a two-tier system that encourages an unhealthy dependency on the clergy; questions of leadership and authority that result in unclear roles and potential conflict; and issues of accountability that diminish a faith community's ability to work together as one body.

Although I believe we must address each of those obstacles if we are to live into the ministry of all, I think there are two obstacles that present an even greater challenge. First, I believe many people within congregations operate with a vision of ministry that is too limited. For some of us, that limited vision results in our viewing ministry as something best done by professionals. For others, it means limiting ministry to that which is done within the confines—or, at the very least, through the sponsorship—of the church.

This obstacle can leave people with a sense of inferiority and isolation as they travel their faith journey. It seems odd that in traditions that historically have empha-

Guided Meditation: Obstacles to the Ministry of All

I imagine that you are walking along a wooded path. You are enjoying the journey and feeling confident about your progress. Then you find your way blocked by a large wooden fence. You notice a gate, but when you try to open it you discover that it's locked. You can hear people talking on the other side of the fence, but even though you keep knocking on the gate and calling to them, no one seems to hear. The obstacle remains in front of you. It keeps you from where you thought your journey was leading you. It divides you from the others who have found their way to the other side of the fence.

As you stand outside the locked gate, can you hear Paul? Can you hear him ask, “Am I not an apostle?” His voice sounds pained—as if he, too, has been locked out. Can you see Paul standing at that locked gate? Listen as he calls out, “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through revelation of Jesus Christ.” He, too, is knocking at the gate as he cries, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and God's grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God, that is with me.” As Paul turns to find another path to follow, he softly adds, “We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”

Now imagine your congregation. Can you picture anyone who may be standing at a locked gate, knocking and calling out? Can you see other obstacles that block the path of individuals within your congregation?

And now imagine yourself taking a key and unfastening the locked gate. Imagine yourself welcoming people through that gate. Imagine yourself offering your hand to help people who are struggling to step over or around other obstacles. Imagine yourself walking as a companion with those people—as together you travel your journey.

sized the “priesthood of all believers” there has emerged a sense that certain experiences and expressions of faith are more highly valued or acceptable than others. This limited vision also keeps people from recognizing and celebrating the ministry they do within their families, in their workplaces, within their communities, or at their schools.

Second, we live compartmentalized lives. What we do on Sunday isn’t connected with what we do in the rest of our lives—and that compartmentalization impacts clergy as well as laity.

One of the important people in my life is Sr. Barbara Schmitz, a Benedictine sister who lives and works in a monastery in Ferdinand, Indiana. For about a year, Sr. Barbara was my spiritual director. We would get together every three or four weeks and talk about what was happening in my life—the joys I experienced in my ministry, books I was reading, things about which I was worried, my hopes and dreams for the future. Sometime during each of those conversations, after I had talked and talked and talked, Sr. Barbara would ask, “And where is God in all of this for you?” She was the only person who asked me to connect the various compartments of my life into a whole.

How are we to overcome the obstacles of a limited vision of ministry and of compartmentalized lives? What are things that we can do—indeed, must do—if we are to live into a vision of the ministry of all?

To overcome these challenges will require more than a systemic change—which I agree with Loren Mead is needed. Overcoming these obstacles to the ministry of all calls for a cultural shift in our congregations. At least three things can help us make that shift: do theology, practice spirituality, and tell stories.

Do Theology

In one of the congregations I served, we began a class on “thinking theologically.” Each week we explored a specific theological question or issue. I’ll never forget one particular Sunday morning. We were in the middle of a fairly intense discussion when a class member pushed his chair back, slapped his palms on the table, and

demanding, “Why has no one ever asked me to think about these questions before?” The young man was a successful attorney. He had grown up in the church and attended a denominationally affiliated college. He had served in a number of leadership roles in his current congregation, including a term as board chair.

As we talked later, he explained that his “doing” of theology—being more intentional about identifying the important questions in his life and exploring how his answers to those questions might shape his beliefs and actions—was providing a new framework for him. He was beginning to see how the various aspects of his life could connect in meaningful ways. He also was recognizing that what he did—both within and outside the congregation—was in some way ministry.

The theologian John Cobb has argued that Mainline Protestant congregations have experienced decline because their members have stopped taking responsibility for their theology. We have moved to a place where we rely on professionals to do that work and where theology has become disconnected from our daily lives.

Congregations can help individuals reclaim the responsibility of doing theology. Preaching and liturgy can offer avenues for people to enter into theological inquiry. Small groups can provide time and space for individuals to ask hard questions. Leaders can help others reflect theologically on specific situations by guiding them through questions such as: Where is God present for me in this situation? What questions does this situation raise about my beliefs? What can I learn about myself and about God through this situation?

Practice Spirituality

When I was in college, there was a spiritual-life organization on campus. As a freshman, I attended some of the meetings. I even signed up for one of the small groups on prayer. The leaders of this organization laid out a plan that was supposed to work for everyone—a specific way to read the Bible, specific ways to pray, specific ways to do just about everything. The problem was that those specific ways didn’t seem to work

for me. And, at that point in my life, the only solution I could come up with was that there was something wrong with me. Imagine how those self-doubts blocked my seeing myself as being able to claim any type of ministry.

Since that time, I’ve come to understand spirituality differently, to define it as the lived experience and expression of our faith. It is both personal and communal.

If spirituality is the lived experience of our faith, then we can’t insist that it be a one-size-fits-all approach to spiritual life. The way in which I experience and express my faith may not be the same way in which you experience and express your faith. Each of us must find ways in which to live out our faith that are personally meaningful and authentic.

And yet spirituality calls us back into the context of our faith community. This communal aspect of spirituality provides us with a framework of tradition and understanding. It provides us with an ongoing reminder that the faith we experience and express calls us to something larger and richer than our own needs and desires. And it provides us with traveling companions for our spiritual journey.

Congregations can provide opportunities through which people may explore their own sense of spirituality and try on a variety of experiences and practices. These opportunities can encourage individuals to experiment with and expand their experiences and expressions of faith; to make connections within their own lives, their faith community, and the world; and to discover a spirituality that is enlivening and empowering. The result may well be the tumbling of obstacles that prevent people from claiming their own place in the ministry of all.

Tell Stories

The power of story has reemerged as a topic for consideration—thanks in large part to the work of Howard Gardner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Gardner has sparked thinking about the importance of narrative, especially for leaders.

In Gardner’s definition of story, there must be a protagonist, goals, obstacles, and an ultimate resolution. He explains that story is a “more encompassing, realistic,

enveloping thing” than a message or vision or slogan. The telling of a new story asks an individual to “put aside or reject the story you have grown up with, believed in, internalized and seen yourself as a character in.”² Stories can help bring about such shifts or changes in our lives both individually and corporately as congregations.

I grew up in a household filled with my mother’s stories. Because of the stories she told about her childhood, I constructed a world of magic and wonder for her. The games she played, the people she knew, and the things she did seemed more exciting than almost anything else I could imagine. It was only as I grew older that I realized how truly poor my mother was as a child. Her stories transformed her Depression-impo­verished childhood into a world of wonderful memories and adventures.

That’s part of the power of story. Stories in their purest form help us create new worlds. Not worlds of escape or denial, but worlds in which the best and truest parts of our lives and the lives of others find a place to take root, grow strong, and blossom. In these new worlds, we can celebrate and draw strength from the positive energy of life. Nurtured by the stories that create these worlds, we can dare to dream, dare to take flight.

Stories also provide us with a context for how we live and interpret our lives. ●ur Jewish sisters and brothers understand the importance of this aspect of storytelling. With care and intentionality, they tell stories around their religious observances as a powerful way of explaining what they are doing and why.

Stories also connect us with other people. Think about the stories your family has shared around the dining room table. In and of themselves, those stories really hold no significance. It’s the connection they provide that makes them so important. What you do and what I do become what we do. The stories stitch us together.

For all of those reasons, telling our stories and hearing other people’s stories can help us live into a vision of the ministry of all. Those stories can help us imagine new possibilities for ourselves and others. They can infuse what we do with new meaning so that we are able to see it as ministry. They can connect our individual

efforts into a powerful ministry of all.

I agree with Loren Mead that it’s a fallacy to hope that if we keep doing the same old things, somehow we won’t get the same old results. But perhaps as we remove the obstacles that exist, we will discover a new way that will lead us into realizing the power and promise of the ministry of all. ♦

NOTES

1. Loren Mead, *LayNet*, Winter 2004 (Vol. 15, No. 1), 7.
2. Howard Gardner is quoted by Edward Prewitt in “Getting from Oranges to Apples” in the online publication *CIO Magazine* (April 1, 2004).



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body

mind

spirit

Making Sundays Relevant to Mondays

SHARON WILSON

When I asked my supervisor a question about funerals during my student ministry placement, he picked up the phone and arranged for me to spend a day with the local funeral director. As a new ordinand visiting a family a few years later, I was told that the father's occupation was "bull man." My queries about what this entailed led to a day trekking from farm to farm with this gentleman to witness how cattle are artificially inseminated. Beware the questions you ask!

These experiences gave credence to the sage advice given to me last year by publisher Gregory Pierce, one of many individuals I spoke with during a sabbatical exploring people's relationship between work and faith. When I asked him how a pastor could gain the skills and understanding to better communicate faith to working people, he replied, "Go to work with a parishioner every month." In that one sentence he had put his finger on the sense of disconnect I had been experiencing in my lively suburban congregation. I wanted a more intimate understanding of the working world experienced by my church members and didn't know how to get it. When members of my church told me after hearing my sermon that they had enjoyed it but could not apply it at work, I realized that my effectiveness as a communicator of the faith was being compromised.

This concerned me enough to try to do something about it. I invited a dozen church members to a focus group and was surprised to learn that they had no expectation that worship would relate to their work lives, a sentiment affirmed in the literature. Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton write in *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, "There are very few good books on the spirituality of work. It is not a spirituality that is preached from the pulpit very often."¹

Because the members of my focus group had become resigned to the church's inability to help them connect their faith to their work, it was only after a significant discussion that they were able to disclose issues in their workplaces that concerned them. As we explored them as a group, the sharing moved from practical advice to a more spiritual exchange. Slowly the group was able to acknowledge that there might be a connection between faith and work.

What followed from this tentative start has been a five-year pilgrimage into the land of work outside the church. As a result of this journey, I have come to the conclusion that worship, education, and pastoral care in our congregations can and must address the real issues of the workplace. Steve Jacobsen set out this thesis in his book *Hearts to God, Hands to Work*.² At a time when studies show increases in the percentage of people identifying themselves as "spiritual" and 94 percent of Americans are saying they believe in God,³ the church has an increasing responsibility to identify the issues of the workplace and enable people to carry their faith with them 24/7. Too often, faith has been relegated to selective use at certain times of the week.

Now, one doesn't wake up one morning and decide, "Today my ministry is going to be relevant to the working people of my congregation." For a start, I suspect most ministers would say that it already *is* relevant. My reality, however, is that my last non-church job was driving a truck for a computer company and before that for a major steel manufacturer. I have been out of the regular workforce for more

than 20 years. To bridge this obvious gap, I embarked on a strategy to learn about the contemporary working world. I held several focus groups and read everything I could find on the faith at work movement. This led to the creation of spirituality@work, an inter-faith group that met five times a year to provide people of faith with a forum in which to discuss workplace issues.

This exploration was greatly expanded when I received a study grant from the Louisville Institute in 2002. The grant allowed me to devote eight weeks to visiting with people working in a variety of fields and locations. I was able to connect with academics, business people, chaplains, clergy, and students across North America. What I encountered everywhere I went was a yearning for a faith that matters in the work world and a sense of sad resignation that our churches don't seem to be providing support for this experience. I returned to congregational life with a pledge to do what I could to listen to the concerns of my parishioners and to respond to them as faithfully as possible.

Three Initiatives

Three initiatives emerged from this time: a breakfast Bible study group; the "Take Your Minister to Work" program, in which I took Gregory Pierce's advice to go to work with my parishioners; and a Lenten series on work issues.

Most churches offer Bible study, and this tradition of study still works for some people. However, it often fails to recognize changes in the workplace that have a huge impact on family life. The transition from one-income to two-income households and the move away from clearly defined working hours have drastically changed how families function. Cell phones and other technologies keep some people on call at all hours. Evenings and weekends have become premium family time and household chore time. I need only think of my local grocery store, which is now open seven days a week, and until 11:00 p.m. on six of those days, to see how much things

have changed. In acknowledgement of these changes, we included a small survey in our Sunday bulletin asking when it would be most convenient to offer Bible study. The answer was 7:00 a.m. on a weekday. We now have people attending who would never have considered an evening or weekend group and are unavailable for a daytime program.

Greg Pierce, whose wise advice I mentioned at the beginning of this article, deserves all the credit for our Take Your Minister to Work program. His insistence that going out into the workplace with parishioners was the only way for church leaders to comprehend what was on the minds and in the hearts of working people was the inspiration for my resolution to spend one day each month with one of my church members in his or her workplace. And so it was that the Take Your Minister to Work program was born.

What followed has been a revelation for all of us. First, we had to learn the logistics of getting me into the parishioners' workplaces. I have signed more waivers and confidentiality forms than you can imagine! But I have been more than compensated for all of this preparatory activity by the insight I've gained from these experiences. I have spent time with a security guard, an elementary school vice principal, the director of a residential facility for troubled teens, a programmer for a religious broadcasting network, a special education teacher, a speech language pathologist, a federal civil servant, and a medical laboratory technician. I have been moved by the skills of these people and their dedication to the work they do. I have listened as they have described the stresses and strains they face in their workplaces and at home as these two spheres of life connect and collide. Greg Pierce held before me the challenge to minister to the guy in the tollbooth on Interstate 94. Nothing could have been more powerful or energizing.

My Lenten series on work issues had its basis in my sabbatical interviews, during which I asked respondents to suggest five sermon topics they would like to hear in their places of worship.

The list I compiled from their responses is long, but the similarities in their answers tell the story of what people want and need to hear from our pulpits and in our church education programs. Among the topics most often mentioned were:

- ◆ Greed.
- ◆ Who am I?
- ◆ What am I here for?
- ◆ I am more than my job!
- ◆ What does it mean to have a vocation?
- ◆ What are the promises of faith?
- ◆ Struggle and decision-making.
- ◆ I'm vulnerable.
- ◆ How do I choose between right and wrong?
- ◆ What values do I need to live a good life?
- ◆ What will it cost me to live by my values?

Even before the Enron and Martha Stewart scandals, many, many people were asking themselves about the meaning of their lives and their work, and they have been searching for God in the midst of this confusion. This is where the church needs to be, not on the sidelines, not isolated or insulated from this world but engaged in it, in dialogue with it, proclaiming the Gospel and promising grace.

In my own church, my teammate in ministry, Rev. Dr. Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, and I decided to explore how the Lenten lections spoke to the topics on my sabbatical list of requested sermon themes. Once we had found suitable matches, we reflected on the format of the sermon. Instead of the usual all-at-once style, we decided to break the sermon into two segments. In the first, we named the problem, the confession, or the woe. This was followed by extinguishing a candle. We then spoke about how the hope of our faith addressed the problem or woe we had named. The response of the congregation was remarkable. A real buzz erupted after worship. People talked to their partners

and neighbors about the sermon, and stories about work were shared in the coffee hour and by e-mail. If there was ever any doubt about the value of this strategy, our questions were answered unequivocally. (Outlines of these sermons can be found on Alban's Web site at www.alban.org/ShowArticle.asp?ID=248.)

A Call to Action

I have suggested that Sunday worship can and should address the real issues of the workplace. I am convinced that church leaders need to intentionally connect with people on workplace issues. Given that people are not inclined to volunteer this information, the onus is on

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church leaders to ask. Church leaders must show that they care, and seek to understand what really matters to people.

It is imperative that preaching dares to explore the real issues of peoples' lives. There is a hunger for meaning and a deep desire to name clearly the values that arise from Scripture and the traditions of our faith that can inform daily life. There is a need for directness and specificity in this kind of preaching.

One need look no further than the nearest bookstore to conclude that spirituality is a hot topic in contemporary society, and there is no doubt that spirituality at work is a popular subset of the genre. In my sabbatical I came to the conclusion that the church needs to wade into this discussion immediately, particularly since secular, feel-good spirituality is a far louder voice in our culture. Business schools and medical schools are eager to talk about ethics, balance, and spirituality, but the church and seminary community seems to be less interested in doing so. My work in a variety of groups suggests that people want to know in clear terms what the values of the faith are so that they can have some measure to use in the world.

As Corinne McLaughlin, executive director of the Center for Visionary Leadership, said in her address to the American Management Association in 1998, "Growing numbers of business people want their spirituality to be more than just faith and belief—they want it to be practical and applied. They want to bring their whole selves to work—body, mind and spirit."

Globalization and technology are reshaping our world, introducing great benefits and—at the same time—imposing new challenges. The church needs to proclaim the Gospel in this environment with confidence and with a deep understanding of the context. The work of the church must be informed by the community it serves, and that includes where we work. What you get when you take your minister to work is someone who can be more sensitive and authentic in sharing the faith and equipping believers for service to the world. ♦

NOTES

1. Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth A. Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 48.

2. Steven Jacobsen, *Hearts to God, Hands to Work: Connecting Spirituality and Work* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute), x.

3. Robert A. Emmons and Cheryl A. Crumpler, "Religion and spirituality? The roles of sanctification and the concept of God," in *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1999), 17–24.

Heard any good Martians lately?

In Princeton, 2004 was the year of the 17-year cicada emergence. The background noise created by millions of these creatures makes for quite a din, something like an unending siren going off in the distance. A remarkable number of people say it sounds like Martians landing. Interestingly, no one asks when the last time was that anyone heard a Martian landing.

The D.Min. (Prin.) asks that kind of question—not about Martians exactly, but about all sorts of strange and unexamined assumptions we have about ministry. Do we really know, or are we assuming? Can we make a case for why we do what we do in ministry, or are we hoping no one will ask? Through what sort of lens does each of us look at ministry, and do we know it is a lens?

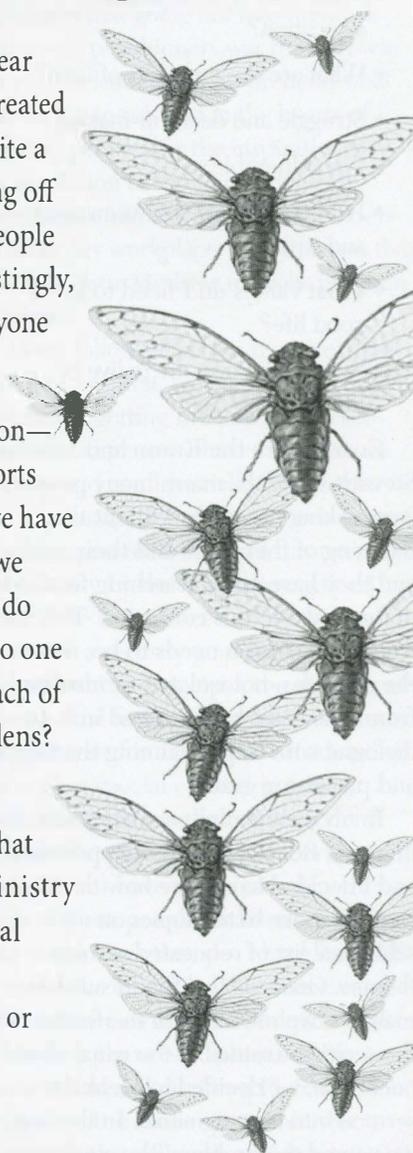
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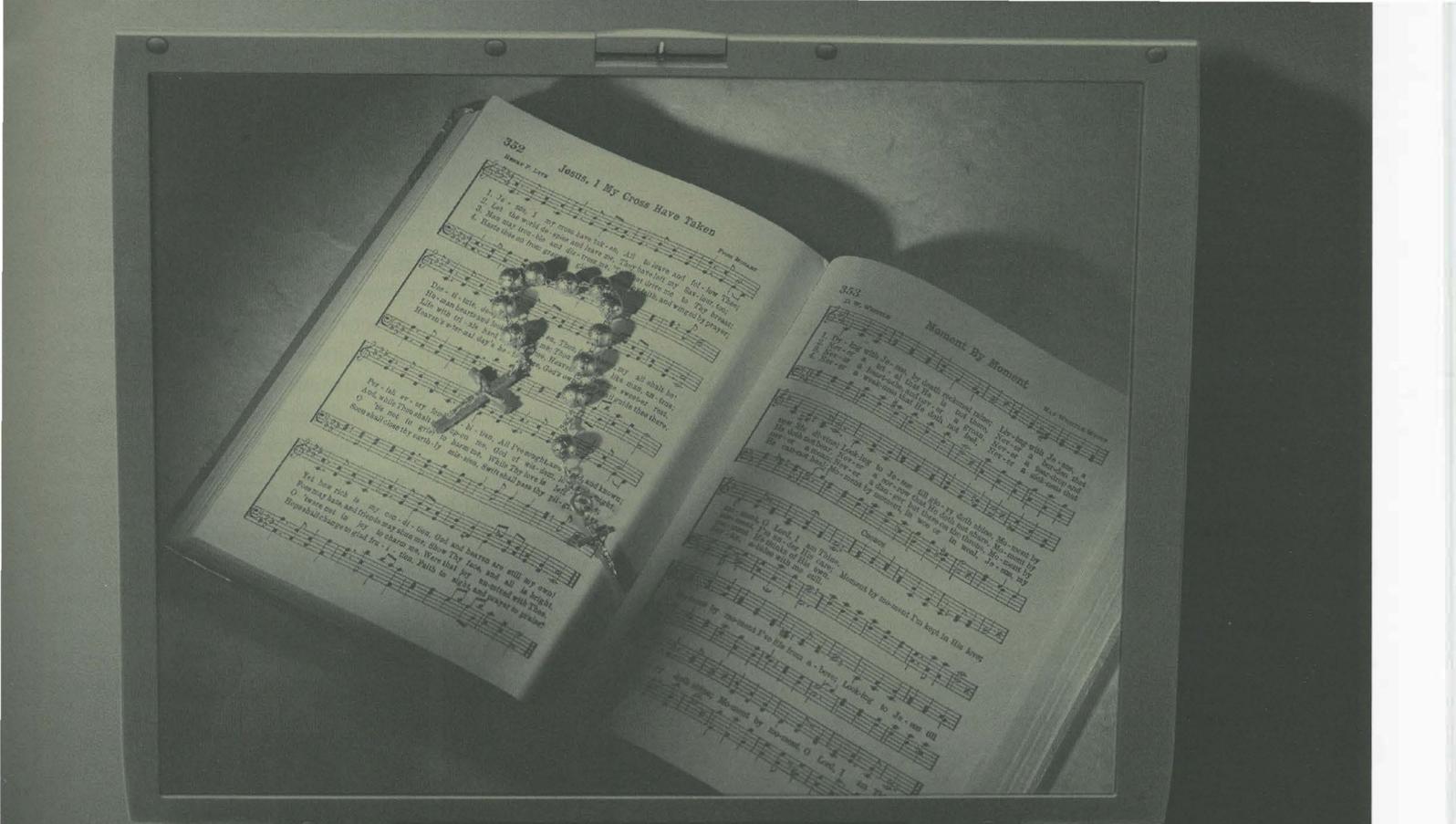
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Expressive Communalism

The Embodied Spirituality of the Post-boomer Generations

RICHARD W. FLORY & DONALD E. MILLER

Today we are bombarded with visual symbols virtually every minute of the day. Our relationship to technology is far more interactive than it once was, and the ease of access created by modern technology has created a global market culture. The children of baby boomers, the “post-boomers,” have come of age and had their consciousnesses shaped within this cultural context—about their identities, what they believe, what counts as valid knowledge, and who or what has authentic cultural authority.

This has significant implications for religion, especially for those age groups that have “native” digital knowledge. Despite the fact that they live in a symbolically saturated culture, post-boomers, particularly within large segments of Christianity, have had as their primary religious experience a symbolically impoverished environment. Churches look like warehouses with little, if any, religious imagery. “Worship” is organized around passive audiences that might raise their hands in praise to God but rarely interact with each other or the sacred in any

form other than a sterile, cognitive recognition of the Other. In contrast, we have found that there are many within the post-boomer generations who are actively seeking religious experience in different ways from their parents’ generation, from reinvigorating ancient symbols and rituals within their own religious traditions to borrowing from other traditions, and even creating their own rituals and symbols in the service of an embodied spiritual experience.

We came to this conclusion after conducting research involving site visits to 10 diverse congregations and interviews with approximately 100 post-boomers from those churches. Our findings suggest that post-boomers represent a new religious type, what we are calling “expressive communalism,” in which spiritual experience and fulfillment are sought in community and through various expressive forms of spirituality, both private and public. We have classified these individuals into two groups: “cultural reappropriators” and “cultural innovators.”

Cultural reappropriators are post-boomers who are discovering the liturgical traditions—such as the Anglican, Orthodox, and Catholic churches—and are reappropriating ancient rituals and symbols in their quest for spiritual experience and expres-

The level of commitment needed to maintain the spiritual regimen recommended by these churches is quite high, but it is the young people themselves who are seeking out this sort of regimen.

sion. Cultural innovators are those post-boomers who are using digital technology, more traditional forms of artistic expression, and other visual media to create a religious experience that uses all of their senses. In the process, these young people are reinventing rituals and symbols within their own context, often outside of established institutional settings. In each of these groups, post-boomers are rediscovering and creating new ways of experiencing the sacred that are rooted in both ancient practice and modern concern and desire.

Cultural Reappropriators

Our first group, cultural reappropriators, are converts, either from other nonliturgical forms of Christianity or from a nonexistent or lapsed faith commitment. The primary characteristics of this group are an attraction to the visual and ritualistic elements of liturgical churches, a desire for a connection to a larger history of Christianity than what they had previously known, a desire for a small religious community, a commitment to a strict spiritual regimen, and a desire for “religious absolutes” and a set social structure.

Attraction to Ritual and the Visual

The attraction to the visual and ritualistic elements of the liturgical churches is at least partly self-evident in that these traditions have historically provided visual links to Christian teachings—what one Episcopal priest we interviewed termed “audio-visual aids to understanding the gospel”—from stained glass, icons, and incense, to kneeling, genuflecting and kissing icons and priests’ garments. All of these elements were identified as being partially responsible for attracting the young people we interviewed to these traditions.

At the Episcopal Church of the Blessed Sacrament in suburban Orange County, California, the rector, Father David Baumann, was curious as to why over two dozen college students from a nearby evangelical Christian college had, over the past few years, descended upon his church, making it their spiritual home. He identifies Blessed Sacrament as an “Anglo-Catholic, high-mass-on-Sunday church,” and seemed genuinely amazed that young people from Baptist, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and other similar backgrounds, none with any experience in liturgical churches, would throw themselves so completely into parish life,

transforming themselves and the church in the process.

According to Father Baumann, when he asked the students what had attracted them to the church and why they had remained, they gave remarkably similar answers. Overwhelmingly, these students—all between the ages of 18 and 23—said what they found at Blessed Sacrament was a combination of a Christian tradition that, through its liturgy, demonstrated a connection to a much larger history than their evangelical churches, and that the liturgy itself allowed them to experience God in ways they had never imagined. David, a college senior, told us that Blessed Sacrament “provides an atmosphere for me to worship God using my whole being—body, soul, and mind. The liturgical style helps me to focus on my soul and mind by also engaging my body. This allows me to focus on God and remember his holiness in a real and meaningful way.”

Emily, a college sophomore, said she had considered attending an Episcopal church because she was dissatisfied with the “God-is-my-teddy bear/best-friend mentality of many evangelical churches.” Rebecca, also a sophomore, echoed that sentiment. “I began looking into more liturgical styles of worship [because I] was fed up with the seeker-friendly Willow Creek movement, and remembering a missions trip to Russia, I looked into the Orthodox Church and other liturgical styles.”

A Foundation in History

Virtually everyone we interviewed, regardless of the liturgical tradition in which they were now active, emphasized the importance of being a part of a church that, as a part of its identity, traced its history to the apostolic era. The most commonly mentioned benefits of being a part of this history were a sense of connection to the saints of the past and a feeling of continuity, belonging, and a connection to a historically rooted tradition in an otherwise transient culture.

A Close-Knit Community

The desire for a small community—a place within which they are known, are active, and to which they are responsible—is another consistent desire of these young people.

Micah Snell, who attends Blessed Sacrament, said he and his wife were not looking for the sort of large church that could promote and support almost any activity, but one that provided “the sense of family... and a sense of belonging.”

Benny Wisenan expressed in more spiritual terms his appreciation for the small community the church provides: “In the Orthodox Church I have this sense that the whole community is helping me with my salvation. They pray for me. The saints intercede for me. We come to the liturgy all together in communion. It’s not about works, but we’re all interceding for each other, so I feel like I’m not alone.”

The Call to Commitment

The level of commitment needed to maintain the spiritual regimen recommended by these churches is quite high, but it is the young people themselves who are seeking out this sort of regimen. In fact, among the converts to Orthodoxy that we

interviewed, the congregation, which meets for various services three to four times per week, has become the primary focus of their lives. These individuals have also sought out their priests as spiritual mentors, who then impose certain regimens, such as prayer, reading of sacred literature, and confession.

A Structured Faith

The desire for a set social structure and religious “absolutes” within the context of the visual and embodied spiritual elements that these churches provide was also almost universal in our interviews. Father Baumann reported that the young converts in his church are saying, “We want absolute truth. We want the basic gospel. We don’t want to be entertained, we want to be challenged. We want to be called to sanctity. We want to be challenged to the moral life. We want to learn how to pray.” Some of these young people—both clergy and members—are bothered by the postmodern practices they have witnessed in some megachurches.

These churches are intentionally small so as to facilitate a greater sense of community through more intensive face-to-face interaction. One leader told us that if his congregation grew beyond the 250 mark, the church would split and form two separate congregations.

For Father Josiah, the 30-year-old priest of St. Andrews Orthodox Church in Riverside, California, this was a large part of his decision to convert from the mainline Presbyterian denomination in which he was raised. “Mainline churches have all gone through radical, radical change, redefining what they believe constantly,” he said. “How could you do that? Does Christianity change? Does doctrine change? And if doctrine changes, how do you know that anything you believe is true? The Orthodox faith has produced a culture that’s substantial. It’s not perfect by any means, but what we haven’t done is altered our doctrine. They’re not up for grabs.”

Cultural Innovators

While cultural reappropriators put a high value on tradition, the other group of post-boomer spiritual seekers we identified—the cultural innovators—are expressing their desire for a more embodied faith by creating new traditions. Although these individuals and congregations do not necessarily innovate theologically, they exhibit an ever-evolving approach to religious and spiritual

beliefs and practices. They are continually innovating in terms of their responses to the larger culture, and are constantly introducing new and various forms of ritual and symbol into their worship services and religious and community life.

One of the most striking things about the space occupied by these groups is their emphasis on the visual representation and expression of the sacred. This can take traditionally religious forms, such as crosses or icons, but more typical are paintings, computer-generated visual effects, photographs, and 3-D images that, in many cases, are expressions of spiritual seeking or experience created during a worship service, or beforehand to be used in the service.

In contrast to the megachurch model that has been the dominant form in the U.S. for the past 30 years, these churches are intentionally small so as to facilitate a greater sense of community through more intensive face-to-face interaction. Their desire is not to grow for the sake of growing but to limit their size so that they can in some way create the type of religious and spiritual community that promotes a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. One leader told us that if his congregation grew beyond the 250 mark, the church would split and form two separate congregations.

Both the ministerial staff and lay participants of these groups consistently expressed disinterest in the institutional/organizational demands that larger churches must support. Most of these groups do not own any physical plant. Instead, some rent or lease a building, or rent a room that they can use one or two days per week. These churches pursue these arrangements by design; they are not interested in owning real estate, building large institutional settings for their churches, or having, as Karen Ward, pastor of the recently planted Apostles Church in Seattle, termed it, “a staff of thousands.”

Thus, the Apostles Church meets in “microchurches” in various homes in Seattle throughout the week, and then comes together each Saturday evening for a “mass gathering” of worship, sharing, and a common meal. As with the congregation size, generally the staff is small, typically consisting of a lead person and perhaps one support person. Although the lead person may, from the outside, appear to function as a pastor, this is not necessarily the term by which he or she is known, nor do these individuals necessarily conceive of themselves as “the person in charge.” Rather, these leaders often operate as facilitators of both the congregation’s religious experience for any given meeting and the overall direction of the group.

This makes for a relatively noninstitutionalized and nonhierarchical authority structure for the community. This is not to say that these churches do not have elders, deacons, or other spiritual leaders, but they are organized based on what they conceive of as spiritual gifts rather than the requirements of the organization. For example, Apostles Church describes its leadership this way: “Church of the Apostles is a community led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). We take seriously our birthing as children of God (by water and the spirit), and our royal priesthood (as disciples of Jesus Christ). Within a body of believers, God always provides those who have the *charisms* (gifts) of tending, nurturing,

During the worship service, there are likely many things taking place simultaneously, each of which emphasizes and requires the interactive and physical, rather than the passive and (primarily) cognitive.

teaching and guiding.” Following this explanation is a listing of several persons in the church, all of whom, with the exception of the pastor, are laypersons in the congregation.

The embodiment of the spiritual also characterizes cultural innovator congregations. This takes two primary forms. The first is in the worship service, and the second is in how the members of the congregation conceive of living out their religious commitments within the surrounding community and culture.

During the worship service, there are likely many things taking place simultaneously, each of which emphasizes and requires the interactive and physical, rather than the passive and (primarily) cognitive. These might take the form of music and singing, or opportunities for personal expression of the religious experience, such as painting, prayer stations, or sharing in small groups. While there is an order and structure to the service, the emphasis is on both personal experience and expressing that experience to others within the community.

For most of these groups, however, their conception of living out their religious commitments has not been limited to having religious and spiritual experiences and sharing them with each other. Rather, they have all, in one way or another, conceived of their responsibility to live out their beliefs in the context of the surrounding community.

While cultural innovator congregations share the characteristics described above, their expression can take quite different forms, as can be seen in the examples of two California churches we categorized as innovators—the Bridge Communities in Ventura and Grace Brethren Church in Long Beach.

The Bridge Communities

When entering the worship service at the Bridge Communities, one is struck by all the various activities that are going on simultaneously, yet all organized around worship and building community. There are digitally produced images projected on multiple walls of the space, the congregation might be singing, and several members might be painting at easels set up around the room. Members are seated at round tables, so people look at each other rather than facing the front of the room all the time. During the service there is an extended sharing time in which the people exchange names, thoughts, concerns, and prayer requests with the others at the table, which inevitably results in a shared prayer. There is also a time of teaching—usually not

longer than about 30 minutes—followed by more singing, the sharing of a meal, and an opportunity for socializing.

The Bridge Communities also operate what they call “Bridge-Aid,” which includes several separate components, all oriented toward helping others in the community and demonstrating the Bridge’s commitment to the city. For example, at the beginning of each school year, Bridge members are encouraged to donate school supplies, which are later distributed to needy children. Each Thursday evening the Bridge is a presence in the downtown park, where members play music, provide meals, and play with the neighborhood children. On the first Tuesday of each month, several people from the Bridge spend the evening doing laundry with and for the city’s homeless.

All of these programs exist only because members of the church had a desire and commitment to initiate, organize, and maintain them over the long term. “Everything is volunteer collaboration because there’s just so much authenticity,” said Justin, a 30-year-old financial planner and one of the organizers of the homeless laundry ministry. “I’ve never [previously] been part of something that wasn’t so focused on bringing people into the church but bringing the church to the people.”

Grace Brethren Church

At Grace Brethren Church we find a much different institutional context than at the Bridge, but the emphasis on embodiment takes place in a similar manner. Grace is a much older and larger church than the Bridge, with a larger pastoral staff and a much more established congregational base. In addition, it is in a fairly conservative evangelical denomination that has always prized itself on an emphasis on Bible teaching and a literal interpretation of the Bible. Over the past three years, however, a vital and growing post-boomer population has established itself at the church, much of it around the church’s new vision for community and arts development as a vital part of its identity.

Grace has been able to take advantage of some of the elements of its own denominational identity that are appealing to the more visually and experientially oriented post-boomer generations. One example is the church’s celebration of communion. Historically, the denomination has celebrated communion quarterly in a dedicated service in which a re-creation of the last supper takes place. It includes the sharing of food, the washing of feet, and the taking of the bread and cup. Traditionally, the congregation was split by gender for this ritual, and seating was relatively random. In recent years, however, the ceremony has been changed. It now takes place only at Easter, and the congregation is not split into groups of men and women. Instead, families and friends sit together so they can share the experience with their loved ones. Rather than a ritual undertaken out of a sense of duty to church tradition, this new form of the ritual has served to make the communion service more alive for participants. John Tubera, the director of artistic development for the church and the staff member who is largely responsible for reconfiguring the communion service, notes that the young people in the church “resonate with the multiple sensory experience” of the communion, in particular because

the three elements of the service—breaking bread together, washing each others' feet, and taking the bread and cup—tangibly represent the incarnation of Christ and what it means for them to be Christian. Through these embodied acts with each other they are able to demonstrate love toward each other, serve each other, and perhaps reconcile strained relationships.

Within the last two years, Grace has also reconceived itself as a church that pursues its mission to serve the city of Long Beach. This is represented in many different ministry programs, the most important of which are the church's new social justice ministry, "Hope for Long Beach," and the development of an extensive arts program. Each of these efforts is intended to "renew the culture" of Long Beach, and both programs are radically innovative within the context of the historic denominational affiliation and identity of the church. They are also "organic" initiatives growing out of the concerns, interests, and desires of the post-boomer community at the church.

Although these programs have been initiated and pursued on a somewhat larger scale than the similar programs at the Bridge, the impetus and intent are the same. Like the Bridge, Grace has made a conscious decision to have as its guiding vision a commitment to being a part of the life and culture of its host city. Thus, the church organizes art shows of the work of contemporary artists who may or may not be Christians, but the theme of whose art in some way resonates with matters of faith. Recently, for example, the church mounted a photographic exhibit of the large Cambodian community in Long Beach. The opening was simultaneously a celebration of the Cambodian community and the photographic exhibit itself. The church's intent in producing the exhibition was to demonstrate an openness and welcoming attitude to the Cambodian community, while not downplaying the church's Christian commitments in the process. The event enabled them to interact with a community with whom they otherwise would have had little contact, and allowed them to welcome the Cambodian community to participate in and with the church.

Reaching Out to Post-boomers

What might these findings mean for congregations as they attempt to provide greater involvement opportunities to the post-boomers within their churches? Based on our observations, the congregations that seem to be best serving the religious needs and demands of the post-boomer generations are those that combine the following characteristics as an authentic part of their identity and congregational life:

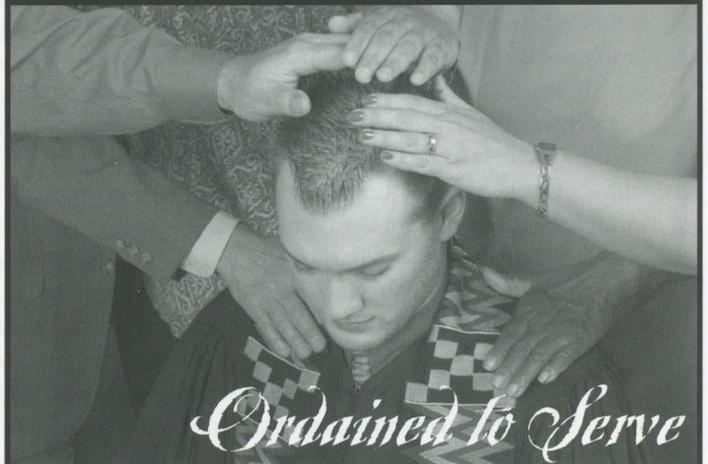
- ◆ An embodiment of the religious experience, both physically—through rituals such as kneeling, genuflecting, or washing feet—and socially through a welcoming and caring religious community.
- ◆ An ability and willingness to place the particular congregation within the larger history of Christianity, in turn giving members a sense of where they fit into both the congregation and the larger story of Christianity.

- ◆ A culturally committed and adaptive relationship to the surrounding world, centered within the core of the church's host communities and using the creative skills of its members in its interactions with the larger community.
- ◆ A recognition of the importance of artistic expression—whether musical, visual, or through some other medium—to the spiritual journey of post-boomers.
- ◆ The development of enabling and facilitating organizational structures that provide a framework of encouragement and direction within which post-boomers can pursue their spiritually driven passions, whether through service to others or via creative expression.

We believe that the particular Christian tradition of a congregation is irrelevant to whether or not these elements can be incorporated within the life of the church. What is important is that the church be true to its history and traditions while understanding the changed cultural landscape out of which these elements have emerged. In the process they will be more successful at incorporating post-boomers into the life of the church, and increase the likelihood of vibrant congregations throughout the next generations. ◆

The research for this article was supported by a grant from the Louisville Institute.

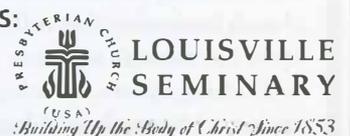
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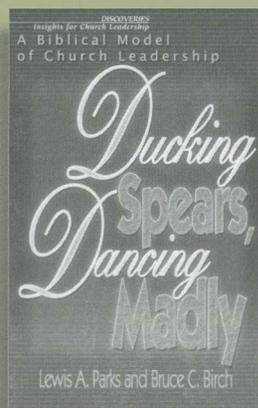


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Ducking Spears, Dancing Madly

A BIBLICAL MODEL OF CHURCH
LEADERSHIP

Lewis A. Parks and Bruce C. Birch
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004



review book

Little prepares church leaders for what they must do on a daily basis: dance madly and duck spears. Within a congregation, a leader finds many pressing problems, many spears hurled in his or her direction, and few simple solutions. Not surprisingly, church leaders often turn for answers to secular leadership, with its familiar buzzwords and simplistic formulas. Drawing upon the secular, many church leaders find themselves guilty of promoting inane parables, self-serving eisegesis, and arrogant declarations of scriptural irrelevance. Church leaders too often ignore the good news of a God who directs the drama of salvation history. Authors Parks and Birch call this complacent leadership style “Church Leadership Lite.” They propose that, if we are to have reform and revival in the church today, we must have strong church leadership that reflectively draws upon the church’s scripture and theology.

Ducking Spears, Dancing Madly explores 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel as a model for church leadership. Lewis Parks and Bruce Birch are both eminently

qualified to undertake this endeavor. Birch is the dean and professor of Old Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary, and Parks is a 30-year veteran of church leadership and Wesley’s associate dean for church leadership development.

The books of Samuel open in the midst of a leadership crisis, and leadership is a central theme. Birch and Parks point out that the leaders in the Samuel story, Saul and David in particular, are presented with an unyielding realism. They also are ultimately subject to providence and accountable to God. Consequently, the books incessantly raise questions about God. “Who ultimately calls leaders and coaxes them toward their futures? Who finally judges leaders when they err and holds them to account when they repent? From whom do leaders receive their visions for a just society and their inspirations for compassion? . . . Why should leaders keep marching forward when the fight looks so hopeless?” (p. 26) Modern church leaders would do well to ask themselves such questions, questions that assume the Divine is an ultimate, guiding presence.

In much the same vein as Shelp and Sunderland’s *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, Birch and Parks offer several scriptural models of leadership. Samuel listens to God and heeds God’s call. Saul, wrecked with envy and fear, turns away from God and meets his demise. David is set apart for leadership and turns to God for strength. The same David, consumed with lust, takes Bathsheba and sends her husband to be killed. Absalom ignores God and rebels against his father. David sheds his private tears in public and has to face the consequence to his kingdom. Stories of greed, dishonesty, and anger abound, but these sentiments do not have the final word. Without God, the leader gives in to temptation. While giving in to temptations such as envy and fear, the leader turns away from God and loses providential guidance. Birch and Parks stress that the books of Samuel teach that surely the leader is

human, but only God is ultimate.

Thoughtful and engaging, this book will appeal to church leaders or laity grappling with leadership issues. The authors assume that strong leadership steeped in Scripture and theology is essential for church reform. This assumption has tremendous merit; however, some discussion about preparing the laity for scripturally rooted ministry could be valuable. Additionally, Birch and Parks briefly touch upon a ministerial role they call “vocation of apologetics.” Equipped with Scripture and theology, the church leader is to defend the relevance of the Christian faith in the secular world. With any luck, someday Parks and Birch, with their profound scriptural knowledge and leadership experience, will elaborate on church outreach to secular society through Christian apologetics. *Ducking Spears, Dancing Madly* is well-written and insightful, and I highly recommend it.

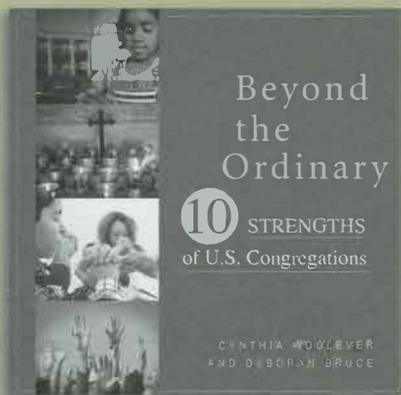
PROF. AMANDA MOORE

Hendrix College
Conway, Arkansas

Beyond the Ordinary

10 STRENGTHS OF U.S.
CONGREGATIONS

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce
Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2004



review book

Dragnet's Sgt. Joe Friday used to ask for "just the facts," but are facts enough? This is important to consider whenever we read in that broad and amorphous area of congregational studies. Congregational studies are action-oriented, applied with the hope of helping congregations address problems with sound decisions. But congregational studies always leave us with a problem: When is it *description* and when does it become *prescription*?

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce will be familiar to many readers because of their work with the monumental U.S. Congregational Life Survey, "the largest survey of worshipers in America ever conducted" (p. 123). It worked with more than 300,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations. That's a lot of facts! Understandably, the study attracted much interest. (The authors previously wrote about it in *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations: Who's Going Where and Why* [2002].)

Here, Woolever and Bruce examine ten areas where exceptional congrega-

tions show strengths: spiritual growth, meaningful worship, congregational participation, sense of belonging, caring for children and youth, focusing on community, sharing faith, welcoming new people, empowering leadership, and forward vision. These strengths are part of a congregation's (often unconscious) dynamics and have implications for how the church behaves and believes.

They insist that all congregations have *some* strengths. That is refreshing at a time of so much bad news about church life, but I do wonder whether that assertion is a little naïve. While the remark may be true, it overlooks the apparent crisis in so much of church life today. Nevertheless, their point is well taken that the best way to growth and health is to focus on strengths and build from there (an insight that is now belatedly being implemented in psychology).

There are many surprises here. The authors are clear that there is no one "trump card" that guarantees vitality and growth. (Some alleged trump cards include congregational size, worship style, leadership, and mission orientation—all posed as the solution to a congregation's woes.) Rather, strengths must work together. And most strengths, even in combination, do not necessarily lead to congregational growth. In fact, strong spiritual growth, community focus, and faith sharing often lead to declining numbers!

I liked how the authors debunked common misperceptions, such as the notion that spiritual growth happens more through private devotions, large congregations have the strongest worship, children and youth are valued in most congregations, and so on.

I also appreciated that, in each chapter, they look at that particular strength in relation to other strengths, connection with congregational size, interaction with a congregation's theology, and implications for growth. They also briefly theologized on the importance of each strength.

Of special interest to readers will be how theology interacts with these realities. Conservative Protestant and histori-

cally black churches tend to be firmer than other traditions in nine out of ten strengths. Mainline Protestants tend to excel in only one area: focusing on community. There is plenty of descriptive material to ponder here.

This book makes for fascinating reading. I recommend it not just for pastors alone but for church leaders to ponder and discuss together. The point is not to compare and contrast one's congregation with those that are "beyond the ordinary." Rather, the ideas here can help people know and understand in order to move beyond the "knowing-doing gap." The authors hope this book will spark courageous conversations that could lead to helpful changes and fruitful actions. If they are right, they have collated more facts than Sgt. Friday could ever have used, or perhaps even wanted, but they do not just resolve some past crime ("What killed the church?"). Instead, they make possible new directions for church life.

REV. DR. ARTHUR PAUL BOERS

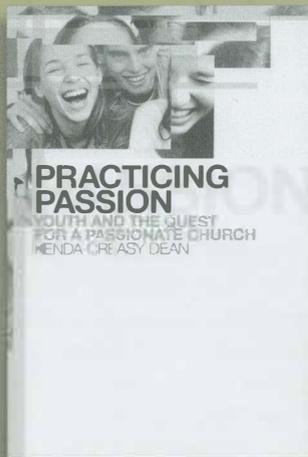
Author, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior*
Elkhart, Indiana

Practicing Passion

YOUTH AND THE QUEST FOR A
PASSIONATE CHURCH

Kenda Creasy Dean

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004



review book

This somewhat unique book explores contemporary adolescence in America with a view toward challenging the church to acknowledge, understand, and utilize the deep passions of youth as both a focal point of youth ministry and as a core set of issues that even the “adult” Church needs to embrace and from which they can learn. Adolescents are viewed by the author, an associate professor and director of the Tennent School of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, as possessing all of the attributes that the Early Church and passionate Christianity across time possessed, albeit sometimes focused in different (and sadly unfulfilling) directions. She argues that “young people reveal society’s fault lines, including violence, despair, technological dependence, and poverty, precisely because they are so sensitive to the tremors of culture” (p. 11). At the same time, they are beautifully poised to understand, be challenged by, and

respond to the gospel in its many manifestations and ramifications.

Three units within the book take up issues surrounding shared passions, dimensions of passion, and practicing passion. The author describes poignantly the very deep passions adolescents experience, partly as a function of biology but also as a function of culture, spirituality, and interpersonal relationships. She reveals sound knowledge of contemporary research across a range of disciplines that bear on adolescent development. She goes on to portray Jesus as a distinct “man of passion” who gave his life in a passionate act, thereby setting before youth a call and a challenge for a commitment equally as strong and vibrant. She tellingly describes the search of youth for fidelity (“if it stays, it must be true”), transcendence (“if it feels good, it must be God”), and communion (“if it’s sex, it must be love”) and through a combination of vignettes, statistics, and exposition demonstrates how each of these impulses are at their core right but in their lived experience frequently misguided and disappointing.

Creasy Dean powerfully shapes these varied streams of contemporary adolescent culture into a plea for the church to organize its ministry and message to youth around Christian practices, exhortation, pilgrimage, and spiritual friendship—making it clear first and foremost that adolescents are amateur theologians and that theology itself could do with a strong dose of the “spirit” of adolescence. This book is a definite keeper for youth ministers and those who work with them, church leaders locally and beyond, seminarians and “professional” theologians, parents, and all who want to better understand how adolescents and the Christian life are an ideal intersection—even though we all have much work to do to realize its grand vision and well-articulated aims.

DR. DENNIS W. CHEEK

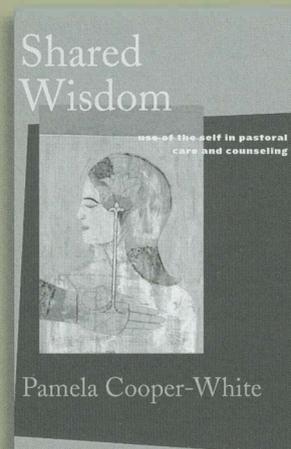
John Templeton Foundation
Radnor, Pennsylvania

Shared Wisdom

USE OF THE SELF IN PASTORAL
CARE AND COUNSELING

Pamela Cooper-White

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004



review book

This is not an easy book to read, but it is worth the effort. The author, who is associate professor of Pastoral Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, participates in a broad movement found in the church today, in which a hierarchical approach to life and ministry is replaced with a more egalitarian one. In this case the setting is counseling. As the author states in the preface, “The book will lead the reader through a method of pastoral assessment and theological reflection that makes use of the pastoral caregiver’s own self as a primary tool for discernment and praxis. This method will involve several dimensions: prayerful contemplation; an examination of what is happening in one’s own thoughts, feelings, impulses, and experiences; and theological reflection, leading to a deeper assessment of the needs of the other and ultimately a pastoral praxis that is based on the shared wisdom of both partners in the pastoral relationship.”

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which explores the historical development of the concepts of transference and countertransference. Cooper-White makes it clear that she works with a “totalist” definition of countertransference, where the word refers to “the sum total of thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and bodily sensations, conscious and unconscious, that may arise in the pastoral caregiver in relation to any person who has come for help.” She also develops a relational paradigm for therapy that seeks to narrow the gap between the helper and the helpee.

What Cooper-White is getting at is made even clearer in the second part of the book, which is built upon four fictional case studies. In each of these incidents, the counselor responds at a deep emotional level to the person he or she is trying to help, and makes a mess of things, including crossing boundaries that should not be crossed. The author then replays the event using her approach of pastoral assessment and theological reflection, and shows how these strong emotions can help the counselor connect with the other person in a healthy way. One theme that is constant in her presentation is the need for those who engage in counseling to have some form of supervision—a place where the counselor can share what is going on and receive feedback. Included in this supervision is an exploration of the unconscious. In keeping with the relational paradigm, there is an emphasis upon empathy. Empathy is understood not as sympathy but as understanding the counselee in complex, multiple, and even contradictory ways.

The third part of the book is a single chapter that deals with God in relation. Based in part on recent theologies that emphasize the relational nature of the Trinity both within itself and to us, this chapter looks to our experience of the transcendent as relational as setting an example for how we are to live and thrive.

This book is useful for pastoral counselors and any member of the clergy who does counseling—or any therapist, for that matter.

REV. GERALD A. BUTLER

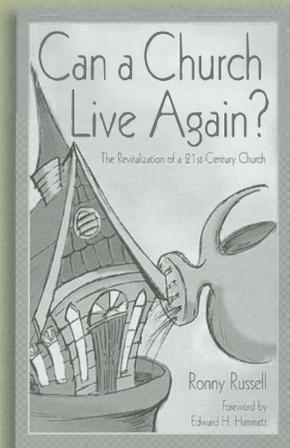
Eureka Presbyterian Church
Eureka, Illinois

Can a Church Live Again?

THE REVITALIZATION OF A 21ST
CENTURY CHURCH

Ronny Russell

Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2004



review book

The purpose of this book is to tell a story: the story of an established church that

experienced the plight of spiritual stagnation, of a long-tenured pastor’s honest evaluation of the roles of clergy and laity, and of the subsequent journey the church made from being program-based to ministry-based. Through this story, pastor Ronny Russell offers hope to others who are considering such a transition, as well as insights and practical advice for those who have already embarked on a similar journey.

Russell’s is both a personal story and a congregational story that invites readers to reflect upon their own experiences and questions about the current roles of the church, clergy, and laity. Russell is open and honest about his struggles and the hard work required to pastor a congregation through such a transition. He does not present his church’s story, or himself, as the model for how to make the transition. Instead, he offers what he has learned—through both the mistakes and the progress he has made—in an honest, open manner in this well-organized text.

Following personal revelations about his need for a redefinition of the pastoral role, Russell tells the story of how his personal challenge intersected with the congregational challenge. For example, the pastor often struggles with the need to fill the role of priest and, at the same time, offer a prophetic voice. These differing roles can often be in conflict within the congregation, but communities of faith need both. Russell suggests meeting the congregation’s prophetic need by using outside prophets, such as the prophet-in-person or the prophet-in-paperback. For the clergy leader, he recommends the prophetic voice of a collegial support group.

Russell makes good use of biblical images, stories, characters, and themes. For instance, the Exodus story and wilderness theme are used as a backdrop for understanding the context of transitioning churches, and for leading congregations through change. Russell also returns again and again to the idea of “stirring the waters,” taken from the story of the crippled man waiting by the waters at Bethesda. He reminds the reader that “left undisturbed, waters return to their original placid state. They must be stirred again and again” to ready people for change. Weekly publications, committee meetings, and preaching are means through which the pastor can stir the waters, he says.

Russell believes change for the church is inevitable in the years ahead, and that churches will fall into one of four categories: churches that refuse change, those that resist change, those that embrace change, and new churches. From a state of “holy discontent”—a spirit-led unsettledness—to the application of the principles of wing-walking for navigating church change, Russell unfolds his answer to the burning question that frames the book: Can a church live again? He firmly believes there is much hope for the church to be effective, thriving, and responsive in the 21st century. However, he cautions those who embark on this journey of moving from a program-based church to a ministry-based church not to expect instant results.

Does one need yet another book about congregational change? For those of us who do not have all the answers—whether we are clergy leaders or laity—the personal experience of a fellow traveler is always welcome.

REV. C. FRANKLIN GRANGER

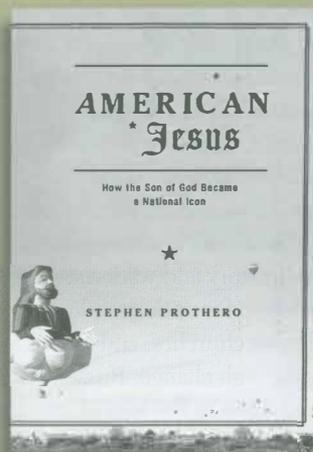
First Baptist Church
Athens, Georgia

American Jesus

HOW THE SON OF GOD BECAME A NATIONAL ICON

Stephen Prothero

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003



review book

“Though this may be difficult to believe, Jesus has not always been a household name, even in Christian households.” So says Stephen Prothero in his sweeping survey of American religious life, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. And, indeed, it is hard to believe—especially in a year when a movie about the final hours and death of Jesus set box office records across the nation. Prothero ably shows how and why Jesus in America went from *The Man Nobody Knows* (a 1925 title by Bruce Barton that Prothero refers to often) to the man every American—Christian or not—knows.

Prothero, chairman of Boston University’s religion department, has a lively, engaging writing style. This is good, because he covers a lot of religious history in this book, from colonial America to today. This could make for deadly dull reading. His gift to the reader is using the background of the

developing American consciousness of Jesus as a way to tell the intriguingly complex story of American religious life. While, as Prothero says, “the country boasts a sprawling spiritual marketplace, where religious shoppers can choose among all the world’s great religions, and from a huge menu of offerings inside each . . . all this religious diversity should not obscure the fact that the United States now boasts more Christians than any other country in world history.” This majority of Christians forces us all—regardless of faith—to consider Jesus in ways that are not necessary in other countries.

American Jesus is divided into two sections: Resurrections and Reincarnation. The first is a chronological exploration of the “reawakenings of Jesus among Christian insiders, especially white Protestants.” It moves from Jesus as Thomas Jefferson’s enlightened sage to today’s Jesus as superstar. In less than 200 pages, Prothero takes the reader on a tour of fairly orthodox American religious life—from colonial Christianity to Willow Creek Community Church and everything in between, including revivalists like Billy Sunday, who “crisscrossed the nation, converting Americans to [a] scrappy Jesus” and the Jesus People of the 1970s, who offered the “Jesus trip” to young people.

Reincarnation is how Prothero poses the “rebirths of Jesus in outsider communities.” His list of these “outsider communities” includes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the black church, and the American experiences of Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. These incarnations of Jesus in faiths other than orthodox Christianity should not be surprising, says Prothero, because “this is the American way.” The section opens with Jesus as “Mormon Elder Brother” in this “new religion for a new nation.” Prothero talks about the evolution of Jesus in Mormon thought, culture, and hymnody. Then it’s on to Jesus as “Black Moses” in the Civil Rights movement and the reincarnation of Jesus as the Prophet Muhammad.

Next, Prothero offers an overview of Rabbi Jesus: Jesus among American Jews, and the shifting views of Jesus chronologically and theologically among branches of American Judaism. He shows how it came to be that “everyone now knows that Jesus was a good Jewish boy.” Jesus as yogi comes next, with Prothero’s examination of Jesus’ reincarnation in oriental religions. I found this chapter most enlightening because I admit to not being well schooled in Eastern religion. I think many readers will find this look at American Hinduism’s and Buddhism’s take on Jesus helpful.

Prothero, ever the good professor, also includes a timeline of Jesus in America from colonial times to the present, and a detailed bibliography for deeper reading. Prothero’s focus is on a quest of a cultural Jesus, not a Christology. He maintains that “to see how Americans of all stripes have cast the man from Nazareth in their own image is to examine, through the looking glass, the kaleidoscopic character of American culture.” It is a fascinating view.

J. BRENT BILL

Indianapolis Center for Congregations
Indianapolis, Indiana

RESOURCES ON LAY VOCATION FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Centered Life. www.centeredlife.org. Asserting that humanity's task is "to care for God's creation and share the gospel of Christ," Centered Life helps individuals and congregations to discern and live their callings. Congregations that join Centered Life complete a seven-phase process to help them support their members with doing God's work.

Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life. www.dailylifeministry.org. The Coalition is an ecumenical organization of "partners of Christ working together to mobilize God's people for mission and ministry in God's world." To fulfill its purpose, the Coalition provides opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to teach and learn about daily life ministries. Members include congregations, judicatories, and independent organizations.

Current Focus: Lay Ministry. www.congregationalresources.org/LayMin/Home.asp. "Lay ministry" can refer to everything from motivating volunteers to a fundamental reconsideration of church structure. In this Web site, Anne Van Dusen explores different aspects of lay ministry and shows how each translates into practice. Also featured are annotated resources, denominational links, and opportunities to provide feedback.

Greene, Mark. **Supporting Christians at Work: A Practical Guide for Busy Clergy** (New York: Episcopal Church and ELCA, 2003). This short booklet (a 90-minute read) explores the role of clergy in the lives of both church and unchurched workers. Included are scriptural references, an examination of the obstacles to workplace ministry, and examples of new roles to motivate and inspire clergy. Assessment surveys and a resource bibliography are also showcased.

Mallory, Sue. **The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives** (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001). Asserting that pastors are to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry," *The Equipping Church* relays the process that lay minister Sue Mallory and her team followed in developing a church culture and system for supporting

lay ministry. This book identifies processes that must be tailored to each church's culture and vision. From the same author and publisher: *The Equipping Church Guidebook* (2001).

Ministry in Daily Life. jardigitalworks.com/mdll. Cohosted by the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), this site links to a wealth of Web sites, newsletters, articles, group study materials, bibliographies, workshops, and more—all focused on helping people "who want their Christian faith to be alive and an integral part of their week Sunday to Monday, not just Sundays."

Moots, Paul. **Becoming Barnabas: The Ministry of Encouragement** (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2004). *Becoming Barnabas* takes an obscure character in Scripture and crafts around his actions an entire way to do ministry. Paul Moots explores Barnabas' generosity, his willingness to collaborate, and his ability to forgive as essential to the work of the church. This book encourages opening leadership opportunities to the entire congregation.

Snow, Luther K. **The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts** (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2004). Luther Snow shows congregations a way to identify and be empowered by their assets. In Part 1, Snow presents a "quick and simple" exercise in asset mapping. Part 2 details the "how" of asset mapping and walks the potential leader through the steps. Part 3 explores how asset mapping reinforces positive congregational cycles.

Trumbauer, Jean M. **Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living** (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998). Unlike manuals with similar themes, *Created and Called* explains how our gifts are more than our most visible talents and skills: they include our interests, motivations, styles, values, hopes, and vulnerabilities. Jean Trumbauer helps us to recognize and integrate our gifts and apply them to needs in the church and the community. From the same author and publisher: *Sharing the Ministry: A Practical Guide for Transforming Volunteers into Ministers* (1999).

When *Not* To Do a Congregational Survey

Q: Our church is experiencing conflict between the pastor and several lay members. Should we conduct a congregation-wide survey to evaluate the pastor?

A: Now is probably not a good time for a congregation-wide survey to evaluate the pastor. Let me offer several comments to suggest why not.

A survey conducted at this time probably would include many loaded questions designed to highlight the minister's faults, rather than focusing on questions that could provide constructive feedback and suggestions for how the pastor might improve his or her quality of ministry in this congregation.

Surveys also are often limited to objective yes/no or multiple-choice questions, or questions calling for one- or two-word answers. Such instruments severely restrict the possible responses of those surveyed. A survey does not invite a healthy conversation in which there is give-and-take and the possibility that people may change their understanding and perspectives on an issue.

Further, a survey tends to solidify views and opinions, rather than opening up the possibility of genuine dialogue in which interests and concerns can be freely expressed without hardening into virtually unchangeable positions.

A Better Way

A better course of action might be to structure open conversations between the pastor and those laypeople engaged in the conflict. If there is a pastor-parish relations committee, that group might well set up and manage the conversations. If there is no such committee, the

conversations might be conducted by the personnel committee or perhaps the executive committee of the congregation's policy-setting board.

This also may be a good time to call on an objective third party, such as a denominational staff member or a church consultant, to help structure the situation for objectivity and neutral listening to the principals and the issues of the conflict. Such a consultant can be effective only if fully trusted by all of the principals, and must be a person who understands how church volunteer systems work. For example, one dynamic often at work in conflict between pastors and lay leaders is the pastor's dual role as a church employee "supervised" by the volunteer lay leaders, and at the same time the "CEO" of the church organization. Complicating this mix is the belief that pastors are "called by God" to specific ministry opportunities with their primary loyalty to this "higher calling."

Evaluation is best done on a regular schedule, with specific objectives identified and verifiable criteria negotiated as to what the evaluation will provide to the pastor and the lay leaders of the church. To be most effective, evaluation of ministry should be done with the recognition that ministry is a partnership between the pastor and the laity, with the respective responsibilities of the clergy leader and the lay members clearly delineated. Evaluation can then provide feedback on the effectiveness of the partnership and not just on the pastor.

Surveys are useful tools for a variety of situations, but they are seldom helpful as a way to find healthy solutions to conflict between a congregation's pastors and its lay leaders.

Suggested Alban Resources

I would like to suggest four Alban resources that may be helpful as you seek to do a constructive evaluation of your situation:

- ♦ Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry: Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregations* (1992).
- ♦ Erwin Berry, *The Alban Personnel Handbook for Congregations* (1999).
- ♦ William Chris Hobgood, *Welcoming Resistance: A Path to Faithful Ministry* (2001).
- ♦ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (1999).

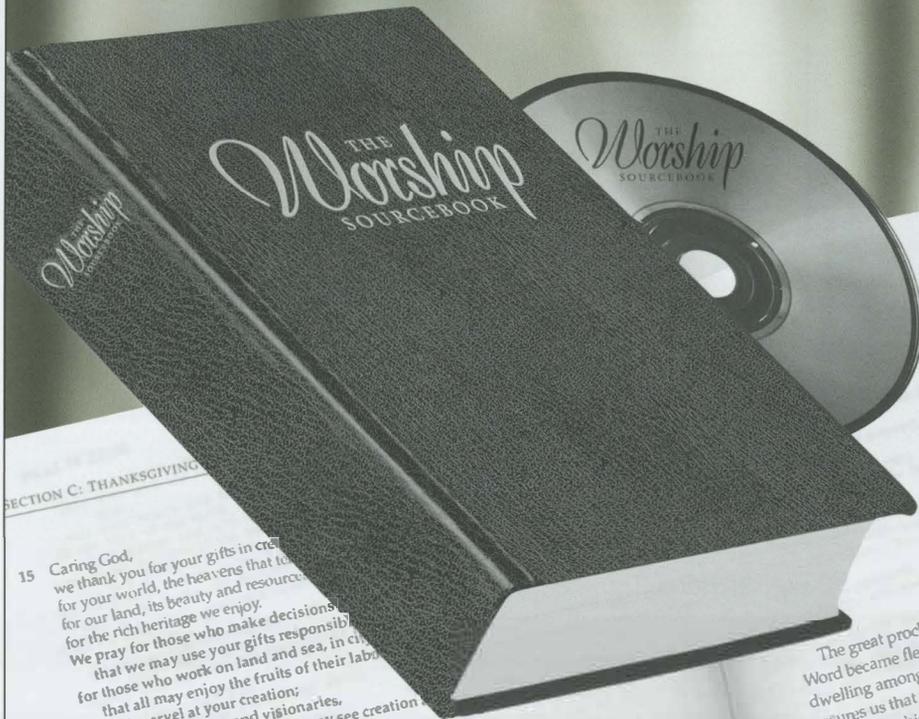


Rev. Terry Foland has been a consultant for the Alban Institute since 1992. He is an experienced trainer and administrator who advises congregations and religious organizations in the areas of conflict management, clergy transition, and congregational revitalization. Prior to joining Alban, he served as an area minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

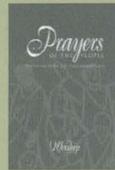
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SECTION D
ADVENT

The great proclamation "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14) assures us that God has entered into human history through the incarnation of the Son. The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God's actions—past, present, and future. In Advent we hear the prophecies of the Messiah's coming as addressed to us—people who wait for the second coming. In Advent we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way Advent highlights for us the larger story of God's redemptive plan.

A deliberate tension must be built into our practice of the Advent season. Christ has come, and yet not all things have reached completion. While we remember Israel's waiting and hoping and we give thanks for Christ's birth,

we also anticipate his second coming at the end of time. For this reason Advent began as a penitential season, a time for discipline and intentional repentance in the confident expectation and hope of Christ's coming again.

The Advent season includes four Sundays preceding Christmas. Worship on these Sundays should be designed to help people see the tension

SECTION D
ADVENT

- D.1.1 Greeting
- D.1.3 Greeting
- D.1.4 Opening Response
- D.2 Confession and Assurance
- D.2.1 Call to Confession
- D.2.2 Prayers of Confession
- D.2.4 Assurance of Pardon
- D.3 Proclaiming the Word
- D.3.1 Prayers for Illumination
- D.3.6 Profession of Our Church's Faith
- D.4 Prayers of the People
- D.4.4 Complete Model Outlines and Prayers
- D.4.5 Prayers on Pastorally Challenging Topics
- D.5 Offering
- D.5.2 Offering Prayers
- D.6 The Lord's Supper
- D.6.2 Prayer of Thanksgiving
- D.6.5 Response of Praise and Prayer
- D.9 Closing of Worship
- D.9.1 Sending

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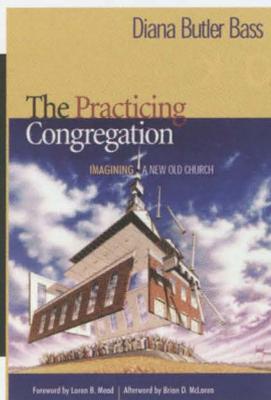
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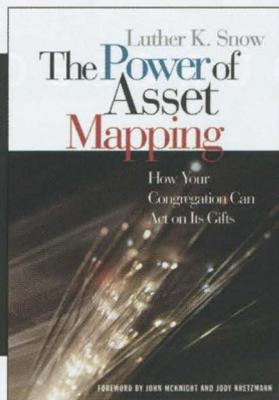
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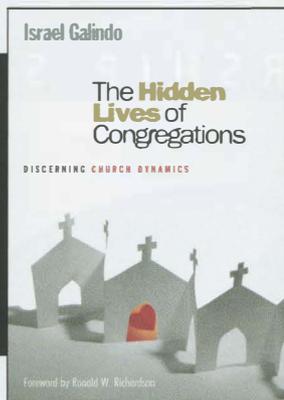
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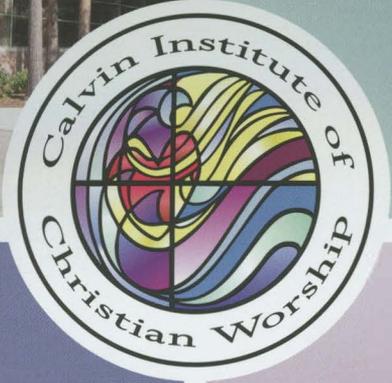
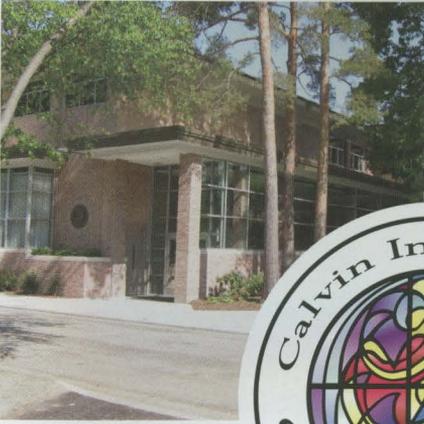
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- [Worship Grants](#)
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More presenters on the website. Conference brochure will be posted there in the fall.

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CONGREGATIONS is a quarterly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith membership organization founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. Our mission is to provide clergy and lay leaders with practical, research-based information and ideas for effective ministry as they grapple with an ever-changing environment.

The Alban Institute serves leaders – both ordained and lay – across the denominational spectrum through consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing, and research. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

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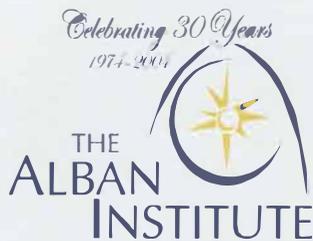
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