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Trinit-E News



Our Mission

*In and through Christ, to
restore people to unity
with God and each other
(2 Cor. 5:14-21)*

The Future of the Episcopal Church: Being “poised for growth” is not growth

by
Matt Marino

Old joke: “What do you call a leader with no followers?” Punchline:
“Someone taking a walk.”

With General Convention just around the corner there is much talk in Episcopal clergy circles of internal restructuring schemes for our national church office. Interestingly, no one outside our tribe has ever asked me about our “structure issue.” When I speak with other clergy they ask about another issue: “What are you guys doing about your *leadership* issue?” They see us as having a pressing problem that most of us do not seem to be able to see: *A significant number of our “leaders” don’t have many followers.*

The numerical decline of the American mainline has left the offices of the historic denominations in a state of continual “restructuring” (a.k.a. “downsizing”). These efforts cost piles of money, take years to enact, and generally leave us with more of the ineffective same. There is a reality instinctively understood by independent churches: churches are neither planted nor grown from *national* headquarters but by *local* leaders and their *local* followers. Church planters know the leadership equation:

Talent + Preparation + Opportunity + Expectations + Effort = Results

Or as Scott Haas the planter of Substance, a Minneapolis church exploding with millennial generation parishioners says, “The right person, at the right time, in the right location, with the right methods, with the right inner circle of leaders, equals success.”

Our results stare us in the face: In numeric decline for thirty years, we are now in numeric freefall. Episcopal churches have lost *a quarter of our Sunday attendance over the past decade: [823,000-623,000 per week from 2003-2013](#)*. And, lest you believe the [rhetoric our decline has bottomed out](#), in 2013, the last year we have statistics for, the decline was 2.6%, an increase over the 10 year average of 2.4%. Conclusion, we have shrunk, are

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(Future, Cont.)

shrinking, and the rate of our decline is accelerating. To make matters worse, this summer our General Convention will contemplate new rounds of canonical and prayer book revisions that threaten to marginalize whole groups of parishioners, threatening yet another slow trickle from our churches. And, as if we have not had enough bad news, we are about to enter what church statistician Lovett Weems calls “the tsunami of death” as our builder generation attendance core become, paraphrasing St. Paul, “absent in the body to be at home with the Lord” over the next decade.

So, If our results do not “equal success,” where in the equation are we falling short? Is it the right people? The right location? The right methods? or the right inner circle? Because our leaders have been telling us for a decade that the Episcopal Church is “poised for growth.”

And, although the first half of this post might seem to indicate otherwise, I actually believe them.

I do believe that with our inner-city locations, historic buildings, broadly creedal ancient-future faith, communities shaped in daily immersion in the scriptures and weekly sacramental worship, our willingness to form communities that help one another strive for personal holiness with grace toward others, of agreeing to pray together rather than agreeing to sign the same doctrinal statements, that **we really are poised for growth.**

You should know, however, that I myself was once poised. I was a freshman in high school. It was in the swimming unit of second hour Physical Ed. I was poised on the end of the high dive. Every sinew of my skinny body twitched in readiness to propel myself off that board. However, fear won out over the desire to impress the girls below. Fear and the awareness that I did not know how to dive – I lacked diving talent and preparation. So I turned around and slunk down the steps of the board to the jeers of my pre-sensitivity era friends. The point: Being “poised” to do something doesn’t get it done. One still needs talent + preparation + expectations + effort in order to go get the results that *opportunity* leaves us “poised” to achieve.

Will we [Seize Our Episcopal Moment](#)?

Will we turn it around? As “The seed that grows on its own” parable (Mark 4:26-29) taught us this past Sunday, the kingdom *will* keep growing. Last year, for instance, the Sunday attendance of 10 American churches grew by 2000 people or more. But we will only reap the harvest into *our* churches if we cast the seeds of the Word of God and wield the sickle to bring in the harvest. We will have to overcome our hesitation at using the God given tools of evangelism and discipleship if we are to bring in the harvest God has prepared. The kingdom is growing. God sees to that. But I see a potential pitfall in our (much needed) restructuring efforts: That of staying in the shed “sharpening” the tools to create what has been referred to as a “leaner, meaner, more responsive instrument.” But then never using it.

Will we seize our Episcopal moment and join God’s harvest? Or will we leave it to others?

St. Anne, grandmother of Jesus

Though never mentioned in the Bible, St. Anne (or Ann) is traditionally known as the mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus. Her name comes from the Hebrew *Hannah*, meaning “grace.” Legend holds that she believed herself barren until finally, after 20 years of marriage, she gave birth to the baby who would become Jesus’ mother. As the story goes, Anne later had two more daughters, Mary Cleopas and Mary Salome, each of whom gave birth to boys who came to be followers of their cousin Jesus: James the Younger and James the Elder, Simon, Jude and John the Evangelist.

Statues and pictures of Anne often show her teaching Mary to read. Others show her with both her oldest daughter and her grandson Jesus. Commemorated on July 26, Anne is considered the patron saint of grandmothers. In some parts of the world, Roman Catholics consider her their grandmother, too.

PRAYERS

Please Pray For:

Georgia, Frances and Bob, Ara May, Glen, Ellen and Wayne, Nancy, Cathy and Barry, Jeanette, Ed, Judy, Frances, Fr. Roy, Rose and B.G., Ana, for members of Morgan City Police Department, those serving in the Armed Forces of the United States of America; our partners in mission at the Deaneries of Copan and Maya in Honduras and our sister parish Cristo Salvador; and our prayer partners in the Anglican Diocese of Tohoku, Japan; and the Anglican Diocese of Lango, Uganda.



JULY ANNIVERSARIES

15—Irving and Elizabeth Blatt
19—Lisa and Charles Parsiola



JULY BIRTHDAYS

04 Cathy Broussard
10 Roger Busbice
10 Kristen Carline
11 Patrice Rogers
12 Mike Swiber
13 Eli Lodrigue
15 Natalie Kinchen
16 Joyce Baker
18 Nicholas McSpadden
27 Carly Coats

Ministry Schedule July 2015

	July 5	July 12	July 19	July 26	August 2
CELEBRANT/ Officiant	Fr. Travers	Fr. Walter Baer	Fr. Travers	Fr. Doug	Fr. Travers
PREACHER	"	"	"	"	"
SERVER(S)	Tim C	Tim C	Sean D Austin B	Currie S	Tim C
CHALICE	Tim C	Tim C	John S	David W	Tim C
LECTOR	Mary H	Roger B	Irving B	Jane W	Judy W
INTERCESSOR	Lisa P	Judy W	Elizabeth B	Judy W	Lisa P
GREETERS	Ray K Peggy C	Debi B Doug O	Drew M Ben M	Ray K Ed B	Ray K Peggy C
ALTAR GUILD	Mary H	Cathy B	Judy W Jennie R	Jane W Fr. Roy	Mary H
VOD	Tim C	Veeder B	Barry B	Peggy C	Roger B

Is the sign of the cross to Roman Catholic for Protestants? This is an excerpt from Joel Miller's most recent article on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (In my humble opinion one of the finest theologians ever.)

[Letters and Papers from Prison](#), I was surprised to discover Dietrich Bonhoeffer used the sign of the cross in his daily prayers. "I've found that following Luther's instruction to 'make the sign of the cross' at our morning and evening prayers is . . . most useful," he said in one letter. "There is something objective about it. . . ."

Growing up evangelical, I always understood signing oneself to be empty superstition. It was something Catholics did, not Protestants. And yet here's a famous Protestant pastor and theologian comforting himself with the sign while imprisoned.

Not to mention Martin Luther instructing every Lutheran since his own day to "bless yourself with the holy cross," [as he says](#) in his Small Catechism. Owing to my ignorance, this was also a surprise. But in fact the German Reformer [directed the sign's use](#) not only for morning and evening prayer, but also for baptisms and ordinations.

Adding to my curiosity, in the same letter Bonhoeffer cautioned, "[D]on't suppose we go in very much for symbolism here!" And also said this: "[M]y fear and distrust of religiosity have become greater than ever here." According to my upbringing, the sign of the cross was *nothing but* symbolism and religiosity. Yet Bonhoeffer signs himself. Why?

Spirituality is physical

To begin with, signing oneself is more than mere symbolism. It is, as Bonhoeffer said, "objective." There is something tangible and actual about tracing the points of the cross over one's body. It goes back to something covered in C.S. Lewis' [The Screwtape Letters](#). Christians, the senior demon informs the junior, "can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers, for they constantly forget . . . that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls."

What we do physically affects us spiritually. Whether it's lowering our gaze, raising our hands, bending our knee, or crossing ourselves, physical actions have a qualitative, spiritual effect.

Next, signing oneself is more than mere religiosity. It's communion with God. At bottom, the act of faithfully signing the cross is an act of prayer, one that is physical, a remembrance, a benediction, a collect that gathers every trial, worry, and fear and consigns it to the care of Christ. It can also be used to express gratitude at a meal, joy at a blessed occurrence, repentance in a moment of sin, resistance in a moment of temptation, and faith when undertaking any task (with emphasis on *any*).

It's always been this way in the church. "At every forward step and movement," Tertullian wrote in the year 204, "at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign [of the cross]."

Declaring our true identity

This is not some superstitious innovation of the Middle Ages or the empty religiosity Bonhoeffer opposed. It's a foundational aspect of Christian identity. Making the sign of the cross says to yourself (and anyone watching) that you belong to Jesus, that you belong to God. When faced with temptation, wrestling with a bad attitude, or feeling grateful for the mercies of God, is there anything better?

Identifying as Christian by using the sign of the cross is a physical and demonstrative way to communicate our reliance on God and our identity in Christ.

Today I make the sign of the cross when I pray, when I'm tempted, when I drive, when I walk, when I'm thankful, when I face something horrible or difficult. It didn't come naturally at first. I felt very self-aware and hesitant. But the more I did it, the more I came to cherish—even need—to cross myself. For any believer, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, such a confession is the furthest thing from superstition. It's a helpful step toward serious devotion.

Christ bore the cross for every needful thing in our lives, and we demonstrably acknowledge as much in its sign. Bonhoeffer said the sign of the cross was objective, "and that is what is particularly badly needed here."



**Rest eternal grant to Elizabeth, O Lord;
And let light perpetual shine upon her**

**Our dear Elizabeth Romero passed away on
Monday, June 29. Her memorial service
will be October 3 at 1 pm at Trinity.**

July 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Alcoholics Anonymous 8 p.m.	2	3 Alcoholics Anonymous 6 p.m.	4
5 Holy Eucharist 9:30 Fr. Travers Pot Luck Luncheon	6	7	8 Alcoholics Anonymous 8 p.m. Holy Eucharist 6 pm	9	10 Alcoholics Anonymous 6 p.m.	11
12 Holy Eucharist 9:30 Fr. Walter Baer	13 Vestry 6 pm	14 Fr. Doug on vacation from July 12 — July 25	15 Alcoholics Anonymous 8 p.m.	16	17 Alcoholics Anonymous 6 p.m.	18
19 Holy Eucharist 9:30 Fr. Travers	20	21	22 Alcoholics Anonymous 8 p.m. 6 pm Eucharist cancelled	23	24 Alcoholics Anonymous 6 p.m. BBQ BASH	25
26 Holy Eucharist 9:30 Fr. Doug	27	28	29 Alcoholics Anonymous 8 p.m.	30	31 Alcoholics Anonymous 6 p.m.	

Trinity Episcopal Church

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PHONE:
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„Sunday Services
9:30 AM

Fr. Doug Lasiter, Rector

Our Vision

Recognizing that we are all one in Christ, Trinity Episcopal Church is an embracing family, growing spiritually, and joyfully serving the community; a home that comforts the spirit; a place where people's gifts for ministry are identified, nourished, and shared; and place of learning where disciples are formed.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.trinitymcla.org

www.facebook.com/trinitymcla

IN HIM AND
THROUGH FAITH IN HIM
WE MAY APPROACH GOD
WITH FREEDOM
AND CONFIDENCE.

EPHESIANS 3:12, NIV

