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THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

OUR SYNOD — 2023 — Part II

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

On Wednesday, 19 April 2023, the Convocation of the West opened its Convocational Synod. During the section on “Old Business”, we started discussing our proposed Identity and Mission statement. This statement was a working document last year. So we started with the statement itself. Although the discussion was lively, no changes of substance were proposed, though grammatical and visual amendments were made. The decision was to keep the statement as is with these slight alterations. Therefore, the Identity and Mission of the Convocation of the West is to be “a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.” Our Mission and Vision and our Values and Commitments are as follows:

OUR MISSION & VISION

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith...

- Making disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Bearing fruit in every good work.
- And increasing in the knowledge and love of God.

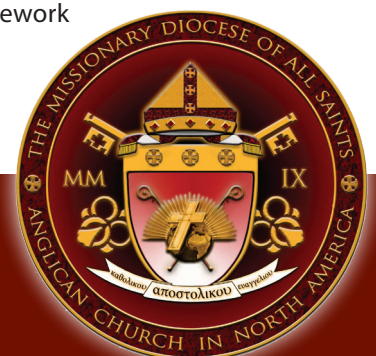
OUR VALUES/COMMITMENTS

Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are committed to:

- Glorifying God in thought, word, and deed.
- Passing on the ancient Christian faith as it has been delivered through the Anglican tradition.
- Cultivating and equipping the whole people of God for the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.

But then our next task was to set goals for the next year. It soon became apparent that this discussion would take a long time. It also was apparent that people needed time to think about this. Therefore, this part of the discussion was adjourned till the next day. This permitted us time to move on to new business and the plethora of proposals and motions, of which I wrote about last time.

The next day, in the afternoon, the Synod was reconvened. Using the framework used by Trinity on the Border Mission as our jumping off point, we attempted to set



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

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some goals for the coming year. Several parameters, however, were also put into place. The first was that our goals had to be quantifiable. They also had to be set up as short term and long-term goals. And, finally, they had to be adaptable to the realities that uniquely exist at each of our churches. We also decided to make this part of our document a “working document”, meaning that, this year we will try to work with it, noting what we want to keep, what we want to change, and what we want to eliminate.

The goals we set were for the next year and for five years. They were set for the priests, for the deacons and for the laity. And they were set with the idea that they are both worthwhile goals and that they were reasonable, though the long term, five year goals may have to be adjusted next year. But all the goals are hinged on each church adopting a “Rule of Life”.

A Rule of Life would be something like the Rule of Life created by orders of the faithful. Franciscans have one Rule of Life; the Benedictines have another; and the Dominicans have yet another. They are not that different from each other, but they involve more than what an average parishioner could do. Therefore, when Trinity on the Border adopted a “Rule of Life”, they modified the Benedictine Rule. It includes things like hospitality, helpfulness, humility, stewardship, and devotion to the historical Christian life. Trinity on the Border’s Rule was used as an example at our meeting and many of the Lay representatives obtained copies to see what was involved.

For most of our churches, this one short-term goal of devising a Rule of Life is significant enough that it may be all that our churches can accomplish in the first year. The other short-term goals may have to wait until year two. A Rule of Life for each parish or mission may also require a Vestry retreat so that the leadership of the church can hammer out a Rule of Life that will be acceptable for their people. And it definitely will take some research. But it is a very strong way of putting our faith into practice.

The other goals discussed tended to deal with outreach: outreach by the priests; outreach by the deacons; and outreach by the laity. Some goals ask for communion to be given to people outside the church. Others ask for research into different community groups and charities where the church is located. Still others, down the road, ask for small house groups to be formed for those who live close to each other and for new people in those areas. As written above, some of these goals will not make sense until a parish Rule of Life is written. However, others can be done before, such as researching the different charities and groups in your community. But again, because it is a working document, no one expects all churches to achieve all these goals.

Personally, I found the adaptability of each of these goals crucial for them to be workable and “doable” for our churches. For instance, one of the goals deals with deacons. If your church has no deacon, then this goal is not achievable and will have to be adapted. However, it may take an energetic layperson to achieve some of the goals. Others may have to be

put on hold until a person is found for the diaconate.

Likewise, some churches are set in rural areas. Their community groups and charities are going to look different than a church in an urban area. Some of our churches are large; many are small. So, what can be done will be based more on what physically is possible than a lack of desire to do it. Priorities will have to be set. And parameters established. But this is acceptable.

So here are the short-term goals for the first year:

1. Adopt a rule of life for the congregation;
2. For priests:
 - a. Offering Communion to 10 more people than today;
 - b. Weekly mentoring 3 people/leaders in the faith.
3. For deacons:
 - a. Monthly mentoring one person in the faith;
 - b. 3+ hours a week of Diaconal work outside of Sunday worship:
 - i. Administrative,
 - ii. Maintenance,
 - iii. Alms deeds,
 - iv. Pastoral.
4. 10% of Laity monthly mentoring one person in the faith;
5. Know well 10 mercy ministries in your community;
6. Have a significant relationship with one mercy ministry (partnered or the church’s own);
7. 10% of non-clergy households monthly in mercy ministry;
8. 10% of non-clergy households involved in other community service.

And these are the long-term goals for the first five years:

1. Have a clear Rule of Life describing what following Christ looks like in your parish/mission/ministry;
 - a. Example: “The Way of Christ” by Fr. Michael Jarrett (*Available on Amazon and for free at thetrinitymission.org ->Resources*).
2. For priests:
 - a. Live out “The Rule” as it applies to the individual;
 - b. Developing 3 leaders;
 - c. Forming 12 souls outside of primary service;
 - d. Offering Eucharist to 70 people, which may include:
 - i. The primary Eucharist,
 - ii. The Deacon/Lay distribution of Eucharist,
 - iii. Other sites, i.e. nursing homes, shelters, prisons, etc.
3. For deacons:
 - a. Live out “The Rule” as it applies to the individual
 - b. Mentoring 1+ person in the faith
 - c. 3+ hours a week of Diaconal work outside of Sunday worship
 - i. Administrative,
 - ii. Maintenance,
 - iii. Alms deeds,
 - iv. Pastoral.
4. For laity:
 - a. Live out “The Rule” as it applies to the individual;

- b. Mentoring 1+ person in the faith (by thought, word, and deed)
- 5. For New Members:
 - a. Have a mentor;
 - b. Learn the faith.
- 6. For each household:
 - a. Live out "The Rule" as it applies to the household;
 - b. "Meet together" with other members weekly.
- 7. For each parish/mission:
 - a. To have a significant mercy ministry of their own;
 - b. To have 50% of non-clergy households serving monthly in mercy ministry;
 - c. To have 50% of non-clergy households serving monthly in other community service.

Again, I must stress this is a working document designed to be adopted and adapted as needed. It is NOT written in stone. For, as we all know, no two churches in our Convocation are the same, nor do they serve the same kinds of people, nor have the same talent. But to further these goals, I will start discussing

them at each Zoom Clericus, seeing what is working and what is not, and finding out what we can do to help each other.

Our goal is always to put forth our faith in love and in kindness. We all believe that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. And, knowing this should give us pause. It should convince us that we need to share this saving knowledge with others. The question is, of course, how? We must let our faith and this knowledge change us so that we "speak" of our faith through our thoughts, through our words, and most importantly, through our deeds. It is the hope and prayer of all those who participated in this Synod that these Goals will further our mission, our vision, our values and our commitments so that we may further our duty to spread the Word that we have the Bread of Eternal Life for a starving world. And with God's help, and only with God's help, we may fulfill His will.

Amen and God bless.



Walking Together

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

We humans are social animals. When that instinct is thwarted, we generally experience the affliction of loneliness. Today, the patterns of community many of our forefathers-and mothers-had, which sustained them and assigned them a sense of place, belonging and destiny, have been distorted or destroyed.

There are multiple causes. In my lifetime alone, the world has gone from 2 billion to 8 billion inhabitants, an alarming explosion with an equally alarming choice of ends in sight. Consequent urbanization has swollen cities, erasing the former ethnic or religious neighborhood communities where people bonded, and creating random places where people exist but do not relate. People are grouped in large impersonal categories, without heritage or meaning ("whites" have replaced "Irish, Italian, German, Poles, etc.," "Asians" have replaced

"Chinese, Indians, Pakistani, Japanese, etc.," for example). Rural communities, where life was personal and anchored, have gone from the predominant demographic to a small remnant of the population. Extended families, full of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins living nearby have morphed into small nuclear families living on their own. These developments and more have caused a significant and wrenching shift in how we live our life, see ourselves and relate to those around us.

Among the impacts of this demographic revolution is loneliness. Perhaps the loneliest places in the world are the middle of large cities, where individuals live surrounded by crowds of people, but who they do not know, and in fact often fear, or see simply as obstacles. Church, in a former day, was at the center of the village, within easy distance and where you

knew everyone in multiple contexts. Church today is a consumer choice. It is likely to be at a distance and it may or may not have genuine community, or even be a size where that is possible. Even if it is a community, you are likely to see the people only on Sundays, outside of any other circle of friends or of a lonely weekday existence.

As with all dysfunction, the first step is to acknowledge we have a problem. The Church as she was meant to be, and was in large part for many centuries, exists in only a few places today in America. The predominant model is of an institution intent on self-survival as such in the face of significant decline. It is dominated by a professional career clergy, who need a living income, and real estate which needs upkeep, insurance, utilities and the like. Evangelism is driven by the awareness that more members are required in order to meet the budget to maintain all this, although it may be described in “religious” terms. Various programs are employed to boost attendance and entice new members, who have many consumer choices of what church to attend. While churches strive to be “friendly,” and have assigned greeters and welcome signs out front, achieving authentic oneness in the sacramental Body of Christ is considerably less common.

Yet that was exactly what the Church is, and always has been. The day of Pentecost, when the Church was founded, and when we celebrate her “birthday,” was the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit among us. The action of the Holy Spirit on that day simultaneously defined the universality of the Church, the fire of enthusiastic joy that the community breathed, and the bonding of the disciples, new and old, into a seamless community of love in Christ. There is little mention in the account of Pentecost in Acts about the budget, tithing, providing for the clergy, or building upkeep. They had no programs designed to motivate them to become more involved and giving. Instead, the disciples were immersed in a loving, close fellowship transcending all human barriers and overflowing with the dynamic joy and gratitude of people whose lives have been saved. They didn’t have to be motivated by programs because they could not contain their joy and enthusiasm.

Loneliness was absent. When you have been drawn into a loving community where all human barriers have been removed, the causes of loneliness are removed. The point of the miraculous ability of the disciples to speak in a large number of languages recognized by those present was to bring home the universal nature of the community, a radical inclusion before it was

politically correct. For the Jews, this was a difficult concept. No longer was the Chosen People to be defined by an ethnic and religious exclusiveness. Now it was to be for all people, just as the Savior came to raise all people with himself, in his Body. “For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy,” says Peter (1 Peter 2:10).

Is this your experience in being part of the Body of Christ, the People of God? It can be a painful question, because much that is “church” is far from this picture. And if your church does not resemble the Church on the day of Pentecost, what can be done?

1. Start with the sacraments. We all enter the Body of Christ through baptism. We all are bonded in the loving Body of Christ through Eucharist. These are not extraneous, optional extras.

These are the irreplaceable heart of the Church.

2. Stop worrying about the needs of the institution. You can be fully the Body of Christ without a building or a budget. Such things follow and serve the existence of a community. The community can thrive without them, without being handicapped.

3. All the human barriers of ethnicity, race, economic status, nationalism, language, politics, style, gender, and anything else are irrelevant, meaningless and counterproductive in the Body of Christ. Do not allow them to intrude into the community.

4. Share the vision and invite participation. Many do not want community in their church life,

but a lot of folks do. Start with the latter group. Be sure to base it in Eucharistic celebration.

There is no such thing as a lone Christian. Jesus promises his presence “where two or three are gathered in my name.” There is no such thing as a Christian outside the Body of Christ. Pentecost gathers us all in that Body. If you are baptized, you are never going to be alone again. It is our Pentecostal mandate to make sure our Christian community is fully absorbed into the Church, the Body of Christ. “Synod” comes from two Greek words, “syn,” meaning “together” and “odos,” meaning “road.” In a synod, we are meant to walk together, the very essence of pilgrimage. To walk the road alone is to miss what it is to be in the Body of Christ, together. When we say we are a synodical church, it is that we are doing life’s pilgrimage in community, together.

May you be privileged this Pentecost, and the Pentecost season following, to walk together in the Eucharistic communion with all those walking the Way.

