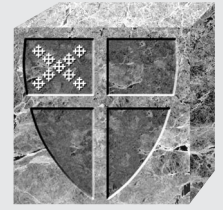


VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



CORNERSTONE

IS A MINISTRY OF

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

FOUNDATION

Tending the Home Fires

by Anne Kitch

One of the most vibrant arenas for Christian formation does not exist anywhere on church grounds. Yet it is an arena that the parish can influence. It is the households of the members.

People who mature in the faith are most influenced by a parent who is faithful. What happens in the home has greater impact than weekly participation in worship or study. *Yet parish leadership often overlooks how to support faith development in the home.*

How might this change? If we are to take the Great Commission seriously — to follow his commandment to teach others “to observe all that I have commanded you” — then we need to be active in our support of families and households and to consider how the gathered community can interface with the household arena.

Ask families to be faithful

Many families with children feel more pressure now than ever about how to devote their time. Sports, arts activities, cultural activities, school bands and clubs all vie for the devotion of families. More and more workplaces demand weekend hours. One parent told me that her son's coach read him the riot act for choosing to attend the parish youth camp during the summer and missing a week of practice. It's hard enough to ask families and youth to choose church over all the other activities that compete for their participation, but when we have to contend with that kind of negative feedback, it seems an impossible task.

But then it's not about competition. And that is the key. We are not asking families to

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What does it mean to reach out intentionally to families? Why is it so important, not only for the future of the church but also for the present? Our authors, known for their expertise in Christian formation, come up with some surprising finds.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Saving Our Souls

by Jerome Berryman

Do you have time for a story? A better question is, “Do you have time without a story?” Let me tell you what I mean. It is a story I have told often, because it has been so significant for my life. Perhaps, it will be significant for yours as well.

Once I worked at Houston Child Guidance on a team treating families with suicidal children. What did those families have in common? They did not tell stories. There was nothing to weave their family together. They were a collection of individual units. They did not tell about grandparents, when Mom and Dad met, births, deaths, vacations,

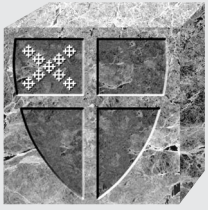
pets, or anything. There was no family narrative. The family had died or at least was sleeping.

The power of stories

What was the treatment? We got them to tell stories. As soon as the family story began to be told, the child stopped acting out, trying to kill himself or herself for unconscious reasons. I came from a story telling family, so I was amazed. I had no idea that stories had such power. I had taken them for granted.

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*This Issue:
Christian Formation
for Families*



Saving Our Souls

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What does this have to do with the families in your parish? Let me tell you about a program for families with young children that grew up while I was Canon Educator at Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Houston (1984-1994). We wanted to get this age group involved, so we put together a program which recognized births, baptisms, children in church, organized seminars about child rearing, set up “no-agenda” parties for fun, provided a research “bank” for schools, doctors, mental health, toys, pets, and in addition, things I have probably forgotten. It was a great program.

Significant “waste of time”

But the most significant thing we did, it turned out, was something that many would consider as a waste of time, certainly not “programmatically” — we gathered the moms to tell stories about their young children.

We met at the Cathedral and took our lunches into a private dining room and told stories about children. Why children? We took Jesus’ parables of action and sayings about children seriously. We let them show us the way into God’s domain.

My job was to redirect any psychologizing, medicalizing, competition, or other activity that was not purely narrative back to telling stories with pleasure about one’s children. That was all. I did not intrude my stories onto the group, but remained an active listener and affirming presence.

The children who came with their moms were held, crawled around the room, tried to reach things on the table and kept busy, but none of this was distracting. The major distraction, at least at first, was to not respect the stories for themselves, because in our culture people are not used to telling stories just for their own sake.

Still together

Why do I think this was significant? Because this group of women still get together. I have been away from the Cathedral for ten years; they are still important to each other. Even those who have moved to other cities stay in touch. In a culture that breaks down families, the church can be a place that builds them up in a way that doesn’t cost anything except the time to tell stories.

The Great Story

Meeting in a church setting was important as well. The Great Story makes no sense if one has no family story. Once family stories are alive, then fitting them into the Great Story meets the desire to find meaning even greater than one’s own family.

In a church, the Great Story is there: in the windows, the carvings, the readings, the singing, the brass, and in the shape of the church itself! The priest is a symbol and bearer of symbols for telling this Great Story from Creation, to the End, and beyond.

This is important for two opposite reasons. First, the moms may have lost their story, so they need to know they are part of the Great Story. Second, in the story telling about children the value of the Great Story is quietly, deeply, and indirectly validated, just as Jesus said it would be.

I regret only one thing, as I look back on this experience. I did not take the extra time to see whether I could gather a group of men for the same kind of storytelling. It would have been interesting to compare the two groups and the men probably needed “wasting time” like this even more than the women with young children did.

Consumer death

Consumer society frees one from the limitations of family stories. To many that is exhilarating, but that is its limitation and danger as well. In the end it is not good for our souls to wear clothes and eat food from nowhere, grown by invisible people, and made by no one we can even imagine, because there is no human connection, no greater Story to which we connect. Not taking time for stories can, in fact, be suicidal.

Do you have time for story telling in your church?

*An award winning writer, the Rev. Dr. Jerome W. Berryman is known for his groundbreaking work with children and Christian formation. Director of the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston, he is the author of numerous articles and books. His most recent series of books is *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, published by Living the Good News.*

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The Welcome Guest

by Caroline Fairless

My Bishop once traveled to Papua, New Guinea, and returned with reports of — among other things — what he called edible delicacies, not one of which sounded remotely delicate, or even edible for that matter. He spoke of eating things he had never considered even in his nightmares, because his desire to be a welcome guest in an unfamiliar culture took precedence over his need for comfort.

I begin with this story because it becomes increasingly clear to me that those of us who lead congregations — vestries, educators, clergy, musicians, liturgists, ministers of all kinds — have forgotten, under the guise of hospitality, perhaps, what it means to be a welcome guest in the life of another.

Hospitality suggests that we're the ones at home, and we want to welcome those "out there." But all too often, hospitality turns on the expectation that those to whom we have opened our embrace will soon become as we are. This is particularly true of our liturgy. We say to our prospective new members, "We will teach you how to worship in the right way, namely, the way that we do, and then

you can become a participating member of this congregation."

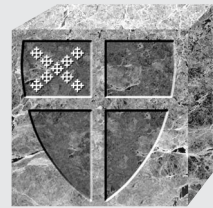
Stepping outside the bounds

To become a welcome guest in the life of another requires that we agree to step outside the bounds of comfort and familiarity, of power and control, to experience what life feels like from the perspective of The Other.

Imagine being a welcome guest in the lives of your teenagers. Imagine being a welcome guest in the life of a family whose children are growing beyond, or who have never participated in, the framework of your cherished patterns of worship. Imagine being a welcome guest in the life of a family new to your church. Imagine being a welcome guest in the lives of all those for whom your rich, familiar, traditional, liturgical and symbolic life has little or no meaning.

It means going beyond polite conversation, to learn something about the ways and traditions, the signs and symbols, the mysteries

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"The test of fishing is what comes up in the net. If the net seems empty, we should consider Jesus' advice to the disciples: Cast the net to the other side."

Tom Ehrich
On a Journey

www.onajourney.org

A Surprising Transformation

by Stacy Williams Duncan

Talk to Episcopalians in parish leadership across the country, and one of the common concerns expressed is the need to attract and retain more young families. Some are hoping for younger people to help get things done, others miss the energy children bring into a community, and still others realize that to survive, the church must attract a new generation who will raise its children within the Christian tradition. On a deep level, however, this conversation is not about how to get families in the door, but about transforming parishes and new families so they respect and value each other.

This issue was in my mind when I came to St. James', a faith community of some 250 households in Silicon Valley two years ago. Paramount in this area is the consumer culture that exists throughout our country. This, along with the large number of people in transition due to the economic recession, made this an even more challenging place to

transform families into committed, connected members. Yet, by the grace of God, and some intentionality, it has begun to happen.

We set out to transform families, but the most significant transformation has been in the lives of long time parishioners and the culture of our church as a whole. Without knowing it would happen, we ourselves have been changed by opening our buildings, theology, and leadership to the families that were already part of our community and the new ones that have joined us.

Two summers ago, we began this process openly by discussing the disrepair that existed in our education building. Our education team began talking about what we believed about children, how God saw them, and what we hoped children would learn at St. James'. We talked to people about what they remembered learning in Sunday School and how

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A Surprising Transformation

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they felt when they went to church. Taking our notes, we walked through the education building. The team realized something had to be done.

Sweat equity

Like most churches, we did not have any money budgeted for this project, so we started with those things that could be done with sweat equity. We began by cleaning out every room, even every supply closet, which some said had not been done for over fifteen years. By sorting materials, getting rid of broken crayons and tattered furniture, small rooms suddenly seemed spacious. Two parishioners volunteered to coordinate painting teams. Soon, all six rooms were repainted with the help of over forty parishioners.

Every time we reported about our work — at vestry meetings, in the newsletter or in church — we would refer to the original list of what we believed about children and how they are in relationship with God. That theology of children's ministry became infectious. Vestry members replaced thirty year-old carpet, grandparents donated new wooden furniture for the Sunday School rooms, and our building supervisor worked to replace all the windows in the building. The education building went from being an eyesore to the physical incarnation of our theology toward children.

A clear theology

Articulating a clear theology that our parish could adopt and grow into was the key, and we have continued this process by being

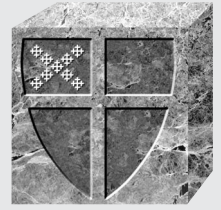
intentional with this year's vestry. As we continue to establish a wide range of programs for children and families, we are constantly seeking to be clear about why we are choosing to put our resources into a particular area.

Living into this process is a challenge, and one that we are presently facing. Deciding that we wanted to upgrade the playground during 2004, we realized that it was a great opportunity to hand over the project leadership to the parents of our young children, several of them new to St. James'.

Originally, we set a \$4,000 budget for this project, but are being pushed by these parents to plan and consider a multi-phased project that might take several years, and over \$20,000 to complete. They have even decided to engage a professional playground designer. For the first time, we are being challenged to live into another piece of our theology about young families, that they should be encouraged to take on leadership roles in the parish.

Once again, it appears the heart of the story will be about how they transformed St. James' instead of us transforming them.

Stacy Williams Duncan is the associate rector of St. James' Episcopal Church in Fremont, California, and a national Godly Play trainer. She is proud to be described by the children in her family as the silliest adult they know.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Christian formation for families involves several things, not the least of which is opening the door — literally. Think for a minute. What does the entry way in your church look like? Is it welcoming and free from clutter? That same mind set is needed when it comes to being intentional about Christian formation for families.

They will need hospitality, worship that embraces them, resources to take home, and opportunities to share in the leadership of the parish sooner rather than later. Most will not fit in the old mold, but that is to the benefit of all, for if given the chance, they will bring both new energies and new ideas.

—Lindsay Hardin Freeman

*Next Issue:
Being a
Welcoming Church*

The Welcome Guest

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inherent in lives that are not our own. Being the welcome guest requires that we honor the “stuff” of those lives in ways that allow mutual exchange rather than mere assimilation.

The spiritual lives of children and teens are deep and rich. The spiritual lives of people who have never been in church are deep and rich. The question is not, “How quickly can you become like us?” but rather, “How can you and I together serve as God’s creative partners in ways bigger than either of us?”

The discerning of gifts

The adventure lies in the discerning of gifts. What gifts do families, whether or not they are new to the church, bring to the community? And how will your community encourage and support the exercise of these gifts?

The adventure lies in the old and the new agreeing to partner in a new dance, even when the learning of new steps entails many stumbling and bruised feet.

Learning a new dance isn’t too difficult, but does require that vestries and congregational leaders stand together on at least one thing: the belief that a community which is diverse in terms of ecclesiology, experience, age, culture, race, education, economic status, and sexual orientation is a good and desirable thing.

Are you a vestry that gives lip service to diversity? Or are you a vestry committed to developing such a community? It doesn’t happen by accident.

It requires that your leadership establish clarity as to how decisions, particularly around worship, will be made. Who really makes your decisions? Is it the one who squawks the loudest? Is it the biggest pledger or the old timer? Are your decisions based on personal agenda and personal preference? Are they made by default?

Do the decisions you make honor the full spectrum of your membership? Families, both traditional and nontraditional? The many people who live at the margins of your congregations? People who are new to your community? Young people?

If the answer to that question acknowledges room for improvement, then as a vestry body, undertake the exercises and practices of community building with the help of numerous available resources. (See sidebar.)

Common congregational practice suggests that we plug people into our committee structures in an effort to assimilate them into the community. Recognizing that participation is a good thing, we do our best to match tasks with human resources.

The conversation often sounds like this:

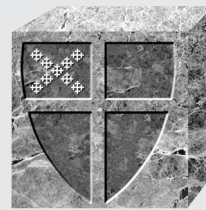
- Q** How do we bring the Watson family more solidly into the community?
- A** Well, Bill’s had a great deal of investment experience, I understand. Why don’t we invite him onto the Finance Committee?
- A** Yeah, and Anita has already told us she bakes for her children’s classrooms. What if we ask her to head up the baked goods part of the fund raising dinner?
- A** And isn’t the older girl ready for the Youth Group?

But to be a welcome guest means, first, to listen. Maybe Bill will tell you he wants to serve on the Finance Committee. But, maybe he will tell you that he has a secret love of ceramic sculpture, and that he would like to work with a few people to design and create several pieces of art for the sanctuary. You might hear that, if you allow yourself to be a welcome guest in his life.

Maybe Anita will share with you that the younger of her two daughters is autistic, but has a gift and an appreciation for drama.

A welcome guest in the life of another will likely hear that information. And once you hear it, you become responsible for it. You hold it tenderly; it becomes your treasure. And you bring the history and tradition and ways of your community into the dance with this new thing. You honor the old; you honor the new, and both come together. Both are changed. Together you take a step in the direction of a New Jerusalem.

The Rev. Caroline Fairless is founding director of Children at Worship ~ Congregations in Bloom. Her publications include Children at Worship ~ Congregations in Bloom; New Voices/Ancient Words: Dramatic Adaptations of Scripture; Hambone; Confessions of a Fake Priest; and The Bloom Box.



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Tending the Home Fires

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choose church among the many activities that our culture offers. We are asking them to be *faithful*. And faithfulness to God is like faithfulness in any relationship. Whether a friend, parent, spouse, colleague or daughter, to be faithful in our relationship with another requires our presence. We have to show up. We have to communicate our love and demonstrate our care. This is the faithfulness that God requires of us. God is always faithful. God is always present. God continually reaches out to us.

Getting more church into the home

Worship is our loving response to God. Coming to church is coming to God. It is showing up. It is placing ourselves in the divine presence within the community of the faithful. It is good for our souls. As a parish, what we really ask people to do is to extend the loving relationships they share with members of their household to the larger community of the parish. And in return, the parish can honor and nurture household faith.

But how do we do this? I believe it's a matter of shifting our viewpoint. Rather than focusing our energy on how we get more families into church (or families into church more often), the driving question becomes how do we get more church into the home.

By teaching about household faith and providing the skills and resources for people to enact it, we strengthen the relationship between the parish and the home. In God's economy, this inevitably strengthens the entire Body of Christ. It is about the Great Commission, about mission. Taking the message out from the parish into the home. And where do you suppose families that are actively engaged in faith formation in the home will be called to be on Sundays?

Practical steps in the parish budget

- ✚ Is there financial support in the parish budget for resources that people can use in the home?
- ✚ Does the parish offer devotional materials for spiritual growth such as Advent or Lenten materials that can be used at home? Are daily devotionals available and easily picked up?
- ✚ What would it look like if every couple that is married or every family of the newly baptized was given a book of family prayers?

- ✚ Is there a staff person or a vestry member who is responsible for supporting faith formation in the home?

Practical steps in ministry

Think of your areas of ministry and then intentionally add a component for the household to each.

✚ Stewardship campaign

How about making available a children's savings bank? This bank teaches children about stewardship and tithing with three slots for coins: one labeled "store," one labeled "bank," and one labeled "church."

✚ Evening programs

Provide parallel programs (e.g. Lenten study) for children, not just babysitting. Thus, when family members return home, they can tell the stories they learned that night.

✚ Church school curriculum

Offer activities that families can do at home. What about offering opportunities for families with children of similar ages to get together? Invite speakers in to talk about basic parenting, teenagers and sexuality, or empty nesting.

✚ Communications

How about including a regular column in your newsletter with suggestions for family rituals? Or a monthly bulletin notice recommending books, websites and other resources that encourage faith at home.

Accessible and intentional

In the end, we should make sure that our parish programs and meetings are accessible to families with children and provide child care when we want families with young children to attend. In literature, preaching, and teaching, *keep the household in mind*.

Overall, being attentive as a parish to household faith means being intentional about communicating a concern and love for the home. And, in turn, being open and ready for what new call to ministry those faithful households will bring to the congregation.

The Canon for Christian Formation at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Rev. Anne E. Kitch is the author of The Anglican Family Prayer Book; Bless This Way; One Little Church Mouse; and Bless This Day: Toddler Prayers, all by Morehouse Group.