

20/20: A Clear Vision *A Domestic Mission Imperative of The Episcopal Church*

by James B. Lemler

“Without a vision, the people perish . . .” as it is written in the Book of Proverbs. The corollary is also true: “With a vision, the people thrive.” The General Convention of The Episcopal Church meeting in Denver embraced a vision that can contribute to the thriving of our Church at every level: local congregations, dioceses, seminaries, provinces, and the National Church. It is a vision about mission, about our purpose and call as God’s people, about our beliefs and actions in the Name of Christ.

The charter of the Standing Commission on Domestic Mission and Evangelism was to look at issues of congregational life, mission in our own country, and evangelism. Composed of lay people and clergy across a wide spectrum of the Church, the Commission, over the last triennium, reviewed trends and met with congregations and dioceses that have effective mission strategies. And it prayed and prepared a vision to present to the General Convention.

That vision is direct and hopeful. Its foundation is the mission of the Church itself – our call “to restore people to God and each other in Christ.” It envisions a Church which is “dynamic, inviting, and deeply rooted in faith and in the Gospel.” It envisions a Church that is growing – in spiritual depth, in commitment, and in the numbers of people who are part of our communities of faith. **It calls for doubling the size of the Episcopal Church by the year 2020.**

Let’s be direct about it. The Episcopal Church can and will grow in number. To double the size of the Episcopal Church by the year 2020 is achievable. It doesn’t mean that every congregation will double in size, nor does it mean

that we have become a church concerned about numbers of members to the exclusion of the quality of our life together. Rather, **it means that we believe God calls us and empowers us to invite and incorporate many new people in our society who are hungry for God’s love**, for the message of forgiveness and reconciliation, and for a community of praise and support. The Episcopal Church is growing and will grow as we live out our mission of invitation and inclusion in the Name of Christ.

Still, the bold and audacious call for the growth of the Episcopal Church is but one part of the Domestic Mission Imperative. Equally important are the five areas of mission and life to which the Church must give attention if it is to pursue its mission faithfully and effectively. Each must be done if the Church is to thrive:

- creative strategies of evangelism
- prayer and spiritual development
- recruit and equip innovative leaders
- strengthening congregational life
- focus on children, youth, and campus ministries.

The Episcopal Church has resources and ideas in all of these areas. The 20/20 vision calls upon us to be bold and faithful stewards of them and to pursue new creativity and work within them. It calls the National Church to structure its work and to build collaborations around the five areas. It calls upon dioceses throughout the Church to perceive these mission areas as primary and necessary work by developing a mission vision and strategy for their own diocesan life. It calls upon seminaries to prepare and equip leaders (lay and ordained) who can be effective in these areas and to provide resources for local congregations that assist them in their mission. It invites

At the request of many subscribers, this issue of Vestry Papers offers a variety of perspectives on church growth and evangelism. “Growing a church” is not the same thing as evangelism, and the two should be distinguished. “Growing a church” is just that – expanding your congregation by increasing your numbers of communicants. Evangelism has more to do with preaching the Gospel and making new disciples. Both are needed, and both have a place within The Episcopal Church.

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Growth in Small Churches

by Ben E. Helmer

Church growth in small congregations is a direct consequence of two behaviors: cultivating an attitude of expecting growth and taking responsibility for developing discipleship.

Small churches experience increased membership when they develop behaviors that result in growth. Members invite, greet, and incorporate visitors, create a welcoming environment where secrets are minimized, directions and signs are prominent, and greetings are sincere. In family terms, there are always extra places at the table.

Small churches experience growth when members pay attention to their own spiritual formation and discipleship. They find ways to study Scripture together without depending on clergy to lead them. Members discern what ministries they are uniquely called to outside of their Sunday worship experience, and focus on developing them. They expect when others see them modeling discipleship they too will want to become part of the enterprise. Deacons and non-ordained persons usually lead these ministries.

Clergy of small churches that grow understand their role as vision bearers and leadership developers. They do not need to be present at everything, nor do they assume the role of minister vicariously on behalf of the people. They know the meaning of shared leadership, and they know how it can benefit their congregation.

Vestries understand that their role is to uphold the common core values of the congregation. They are not interested in micro-managing mission, but in cultivating the core values articulated by the faith community. Every-one is encouraged to pursue a mission in new and innovative ways. These vestries are seldom heard to say, “We’ve never done it that way

before!” Rather, they seek to learn how other faith communities grow, adapting what they learn to their own situation.

Perhaps the most important attitude shift in congregations that grow is the move from scarcity to abundance. Small churches tend to operate on the scarcity model expressed in terms of not enough money, people, space, etc. The deliberate move to an abundance model that depicts resources as assets for mission makes all the difference. When congregational leaders begin talking about assets and mission instead of scarcity and survival, things begin to cook.

Leaders are the most valuable resources congregations possess. They can make growth an attitude that permeates the life of the faith community. They need to be encouraged as a team with a clear focus – to do everything possible with the resources they possess to foster growth. When leaders discover the joy of asset-based energy focused on growth, there is no stopping them.

Changing attitudes in small congregations is the greatest challenge we face today. Attitudes change when leaders are not simply burdened with jobs nobody wants, but when they are nurtured frequently in Scripture and spiritual resources. **The norm for a vestry meeting should be that nothing happens until the vestry has spent time with Scripture and prayer, always seeking what it is that the Gospel is calling them to do.** This time is as valuable as any time spent on other issues. It is what makes us disciples of Jesus. And it is the foundation for churches that grow.

Ben Helmer is a member of the Congregational Ministries team at the Episcopal Church Center. His special responsibilities include Rural and Small Communities and New Church starts.

*Without counsel, plans go wrong,
but with many advisers they succeed.*

Proverbs 15:22

Resources . . .

- *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, Bishop Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley
- *12 Steps to an Effective Church*, Kennon Callahan
- *Effective Church Leadership*, Kennon Callahan
- *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*, Reggie McNeal

- *Leading Congregational Change*, Jim Herrington
- *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard
- www.episcopal-youth.com, a web page of the Diocese of Central Florida
- *Jesus for a New Generation*, Kevin Graham Ford, Intervarsity Press
- *Generations: The History of the Nation's Future*, Strauss and Howe

Reaching Out to Others

Louisiana Embraces a Vision of Evangelism

The Diocese of Louisiana has a strong, emphatic vision. In the words of its mission statement, it is one church, faithful to Jesus Christ, united in mission, reaching out to the unchurched. Simple words, but words that call for a distinct paradigm shift away from maintenance to mission – a way of breaking out of old patterns and reaching out to others in a way that the Church hasn't always successfully embraced.

Three years ago when Charles Jenkins became Bishop of Louisiana, the state was the only one in the South that was losing population. The Episcopal Church in Louisiana was losing members as a result. Today, the state is still experiencing decline, but not so with the Church. Bishop Jenkins looked around at what was working well and where the Church was growing in other parts of the country, and he developed a plan and a vision for the Diocese of Louisiana – a plan in large part patterned after Bishop Claude Payne's plan for evangelism in the Diocese of Texas. Bishop Jenkins' vision is three-fold:

- Double the diocese to 38,000 baptized disciples by the year 2010.
- Establish resources at the diocesan

level that are directly supportive of congregations.

- Create at least three new congregations by the year 2010.

The diocese is now beginning to implement this vision in an intentional way. It began with "The Rally" last January. Over 1,100 Episcopalians from all across the diocese gathered to hear Bishop Jenkins' vision, to share in fun and fellowship, and to partake of the Eucharist together. People began to get excited, and they began to share ownership with the Bishop of his vision.

The next step – the heart of the plan – is a series of Congregational Leadership Conferences where congregations of like size are coming together to hear the vision and the plan in more detail and to work on developing their own plans for implementation of that vision. They are networking, and they are sharing ideas. During these conferences, they are learning about the characteristics of a missionary church, the differences between maintenance and mission, and developing an understanding that evangelism can, and should be,

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Where there is no vision, the people perish.

Proverbs 29:18

Points to Ponder . . .

The following questions are offered for your vestry's consideration in evaluating your own efforts at mission and ministry:

In the area of creative evangelism:

- How is the invitation and incorporation of people part of the ministry of your local congregation?
- How are congregational members being equipped to witness to the Gospel in their own everyday settings?

In the area of recruiting and equipping innovative leaders:

- How is your congregation recruiting and equipping leaders?
- Is there a plan to develop clergy and vestry leadership?
- Are there opportunities for congregational members to discover their own gifts for leadership and to develop those gifts?

In the area of prayer and spirituality:

- Is there attention to the vitality of prayer

and worship in the congregation, including the use of traditional forms and new forms that speak in new ways about the Spirit of God?

- Does the congregation encourage members to develop their own practices of prayer and spiritual life?

In the area of congregational development:

- Is your congregation connected with the congregational development resources offered within the Episcopal Church and its institutions?
- Is there an ongoing planning and evaluation process for congregational mission?

In the area of children, youth and campus ministries:

- Is there an intentional focus and plan for ministry with children, youth, and young adults in your congregation?
- Are children and youth fully incorporated and recognized in the life of the congregation?

Contributed by the Very Rev. James B. Lemler

Effective Newcomer Strategies

No one ever makes a casual decision to come visit a church. Something is going on in their lives that brings them there. How you welcome them and the things you do to make them feel a part of your congregational community can determine whether they come back or choose another place to worship.

Hugh Magers, former Director of Stewardship and Evangelism for the National Church, cautions that there are three primary areas congregations should consider in attracting and keeping newcomers. They are hospitality, communications, and incorporation.

Hospitality

The first ten minutes of a newcomer's visit to your congregation are the ones to worry about. And it starts in the parking lot. Even the location of parking spaces for newcomers should be readily apparent when they drive up, and they should be in sight of the door. Visitors need to see a smiling face at that door when they enter, whether from an usher or a greeter. Make sure that the ushers really usher. It's much easier on visitors to be escorted to a place to sit than to have to find one on their own.

Nametags are good to use if you can get everyone to wear them. If you can't, don't do it. You run the risk of singling out your guests if they are the only ones wearing them, and that can make them feel very uncomfortable.

Make sure you have adequate signage. Most churches don't have it, and when they don't, they make it difficult for visitors to find their way around. Good signage is mark of hospitality.

Nurseries and restrooms are two big issues with newcomers. Both need to be well lit and immaculate, and they need to have top quality supplies. (Cheap toilet paper may mean the vestry is cheap about other things as well!)

Once someone has visited your congregation, it's advisable to **make a "screen door visit" within the first 24 hours.** But don't go in and invade their space – stay on the front porch. This should be a very brief visit, and it's better if done by the laity. (The presumption is that clergy have to do it, so it makes a stronger impression if done by members of the congregation.) Take a gift, such as a loaf of homemade bread or a plant, and give them an infor-

mation packet as well. This packet should include financial information – it instills a sense of trust that everything is out on the table.

Communications (both Internal and External)

Internal communications should be in the form of newsletters, bulletins, and service sheets – all full of information about the life of the congregation. Don't appear to keep secrets – they are deadly.

External communications can take many forms. The most effective is an ad in the Yellow Pages that includes the name of the church, the phone number and address, and a simple map of how to get there. It should also include worship times and a one-sentence description of the church.

In the "good category" are radio and internet communications. Radio stations are geared to niche markets, however, if you use this form of communicating your message, you need to know what market you are after. The key to effective internet communications is to have someone who can keep your web site updated. The internet is most effective with the gen-ex and millennial age groups.

Newspaper advertising tends not to be very effective with generations other than an older generation.

Incorporation

Once a visitor becomes a member of the congregation, you have to find something for he/she to do. However, it will not work well to put the new member in an already formed group. You have to constantly be creating new affinity groups in order to assimilate newcomer effectively into the life of a congregation. Task-related groups are often the easiest because they are time-limited.

The bottom line in working with visitors and newcomers in a congregation is to understand that, whatever group or person is in charge of this ministry, **every effort should be made to ensure that needs are met if effective integration into the life of the congregation is to take place.** And always remember that to grow the church, you must literally give it away to those who don't have it, yet want it.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Hebrews 13:2

Youth Ministry:

A Vital Part of Church Growth

There are three interesting facts that should be enough to convince anyone that youth ministry is important to the future life of the Church and ultimately, to church growth:

- The number one reason people have joined churches over the last five-year period has been because there was an active youth ministry for their children.
- Churches that are growing are “youth-friendly.”
- Youth ministry is cost-effective.

All good reasons to hire a youth minister and make youth ministry an important part of your congregation's program. But the qualifier is that you want to build and/or maintain a “successful” youth ministry program.

According to Jon Davis, director of youth ministries for the Diocese of Central Florida and a sixteen-year veteran of youth ministry work, there are several key ingredients to hiring a good youth minister and building a successful program.

1. The first and most important element is to bring the congregation on board. There needs to be a significant sense of ownership and investment in youth ministry on the part of the congregation. That sense should be woven into the fabric of the Church's identity, and it should be nurtured. In other words, your congregation should be “youth-friendly.”

2. The next step is to hire a qualified youth minister. You are looking for a leader to build and grow the program. But you are not looking for just anyone with leadership capabilities: You are looking for someone, preferably trained in youth ministry, who understands the youths' world view and that it is a post-modern world view that is often in conflict with the world view of older generations, even the GenXers. Most of all, this leader should have a passion for working with young people.

3. There needs to be a core group of people within the congregation who are committed to working with the youth minister and the youth. And it needs to be a core group who can carry on this vital ministry, even in the

absence of the leader. Davis likens it to farming. Churches in some respects are like the land, some of which is fertile and ready for planting. It takes many farmers to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, and reap the harvest. Successful farming doesn't happen in one season – it takes many growing seasons. The youth minister is the lead farmer, the core group is his/her assistants, the youth ministry program is the harvest, and the youth are the fruits of the harvest. The success of the harvest will depend, in part, on the skills of the farmers and their ability to nurture and care for the crop.

The needs of young people are unique. Identity in youth under age 11 or 12 is rooted in family and home. After that, things begin to change. They do more with their friends, they experience the culture around them, they start building their own identity. It is a prime time for them to make a decision about Christ, both cognitively and emotionally. The Church can and should be a part of that process by saying to them, “this (the Church) is where you can grow into that identity.” If the Church is not a part of the process, and youth find their identity in other places, it will be very difficult to get them back.

.....
“Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?”

“I will, with God's help.”

The Book of Common Prayer
page 302

.....
Part of the Baptismal Covenant asks, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” The answer is, “We will.” In the words of Jon Davis, “We need to clear a field and make it fertile for youth ministry to grow. We need to dedicate space and funds to bring in this future crop of believers in Jesus.” And in doing so, we will make a place that welcomes youth and gives them access to the keys of the kingdom. We will grow the Church.

Jon Davis, Director of Youth Ministries for the Diocese of Central Florida, contributed to this article.

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. . . And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Joel 2:15-16, 28

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local congregations to examine their own mission in all five of the areas and to prepare new efforts and ways for mission effectiveness.

The 20/20 Vision makes maximum use of national, regional, institutional, and local assets for mission. It has a direct focus and impact on local congregations. It raises a vision for the life and mission of each congregation within the Episcopal Church and for congregational leadership (vestries, clergy, and other leaders.) It calls congregations to commit themselves to creative, faithful and effective mission, to growth in the Gospel and in mission, and to strategy and planning for mission and evangelism. Most importantly, it calls on congregations to hope, to hope for mission and ministry.

What about your congregation? How can you reinforce good work which has already begun in the areas of mission and vision? How can you develop new efforts and create new collaborations to further your mission? How can you utilize resources from your diocese that support your vision for growth and mission? How can your congregation be a partner with

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fundamental to their ministry. They are learning what steps to take in order to reach out to others and grow their churches. They are also providing the Bishop and his staff with valuable suggestions as to how the diocese can better serve its congregations.

According to Ron Clingenpeel, Canon to the Ordinary, the leadership conferences will become a yearly occurrence. The conferences in the future will offer new information, but the goal of sharing and implementing the vision will be the same. He emphasized that this is not a program – it's an entire church aimed in the same direction with a practical goal and a plan for getting there.

Will it work? The diocese has run up against some opposition and some skepticism regarding whether the vision is universally embraced.

seminaries in the formation of leaders?

The 20/20 Vision recognizes the energy and efforts of local congregations. It seeks to be a support to congregational life and ministry. The resolutions adopted by the General Convention call for the commitment of significant financial and programmatic resources to the Domestic Mission Imperative and its five areas. A committee will be charged with developing an actual vision strategy over the next three years. In addition, \$200,000 was committed for new projects that emerge during this initial stage – all signals of the commitment of The Episcopal Church to mission and to this vision.

The 20/20 Vision is a hopeful one for the Church. It acknowledges our resources and the gifts God has given us for mission, and it supports our life together within The Episcopal Church.

James B. Lemler is the Dean of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, the Chair of the Standing Commission on Domestic Mission and Evangelism, and a General Convention Deputy from the Diocese of Chicago.

But Clingenpeel is confident it will work. He also says that the numbers are there to plant 6 or 7 new churches by 2010 if they had the financial resources to do so and enough church planters to get it going. "People are excited about sharing their faith journey, and they haven't felt like there's been a medium to do that in the past," Clingenpeel stated. "People come to church because they find community there and they find Christ. If you're intentional and you're out to bring people to Christ, you will grow. If you just keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've got. The Church needs to have big goals."

In the case of the Diocese of Louisiana, the goal is to double the size of the diocese by 2010. Will they do it? It will be interesting to watch. But one thing is certain: without big goals and a commitment to reach out to others, it won't happen.

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