

VESTRY PAPERS

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

First There Must be Health

by Claude E. Payne

Health has always been the ingredient of a vibrant church. If a church at any level — local, regional, national or global — is healthy, with robust self-esteem, trusting relationships, respected leadership, and life-affirming goals, it will radiate confidence and hope.

Yet so often in the church, good health is assumed. Lofty goals are set without any consideration of an internal audit. This can lead to disappointment and frustration.

So the first huge, often daunting, fundamental task for any church embarking on an evangelism initiative is internal scrutiny. What is the existing church culture? Are there trusting relationships, healthy self-esteem, respected leadership and life affirming goals?

Usually, the evaluation of leadership is the most difficult. Few want to critique a rector

or a vicar. Certainly not a bishop. But a fact of communal existence is that a group, whatever the size, will never develop beyond the vision and competence of its leader.

This doesn't mean that those clergy who do not possess the personal gifts for congregational leadership are not competent. They often have tremendous skills for pastoral work. So they need to be in positions where they can utilize those skills. When that happens both they and the places they serve can thrive. And health will reign.

The laity also need evaluation. If there are not healthy relationships, high levels of trust and a ready willingness among lay leaders, those issues have to be addressed before going any farther. Health demands it.

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GROW OR GO

A Radical One Point Program

by William McD. Tully

My first talk to St. Bart's, after my inaugural sermon, came at the first of a series of meetings to share my thinking and hear from my new parishioners. I remember it as if it were yesterday.

There was some urgency in the air. People knew that the parish profile and the terms of my call had made clear that the parish was living on borrowed time and inherited money. It was agreed that at the present rate, we had about three years before closing — or at least until ceasing to be a church rather than a landmark museum.

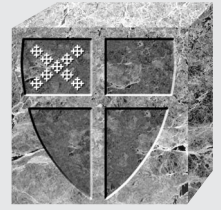
I asked that someone get a pen and paper and take dictation. Just one sentence, and

I'll never dictate again. A few nervous laughs. A couple of looks that masked the thought, *Yeah, right. What do rectors ever do but dictate?*

I said simply, "We will grow, and you won't like it." Then I asked that someone save the paper. I was fairly sure I'd want to refer to it again.

Before I could get far into the talk, several hands were impatiently raised. "No, no, that's why we called you. We want to grow. We have to grow."

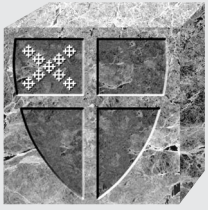
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**CORNERSTONE
IS A MINISTRY OF
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
FOUNDATION**

Church growth is essential, not only for the future of the church but for the present. What does it mean to be a welcoming church? What are the best ways to reach out? What happens if you don't like the results? Here our writers explore these issues and others in the first of a two part series.

**This Issue:
Being a
Welcoming Church**



A One Point Program

continued from page 1

Agreed, I said. We want to, we have to, and we will. But you won't like what you'll have to get used to. There will be much change, and new people with new ideas and new needs. You'll wonder who they are, You'll wonder even more why such a fuss is being made over those who haven't given what you've given and lived through what you've lived through. You'd be less than human if you didn't feel that way, I said. I meant it, and I had experience to back it up.

Grow or go

Quite simply, I went into a situation familiar to most of us who love and lead the church. Institutional decline had left St. Bart's at a size not big enough and strong enough to be the people of God in our situation. I came to my work with a radical one point program: church growth.

I don't believe you can read the New Testament and miss this basic truth. Jesus challenged those he called and taught to grow in spiritual maturity and depth. And he called followers to become leaders, and he left them with the tools they needed to spread the word and build the community. Paul and others brought a holy entrepreneurship to the building and growing process. The spiritual and practical message of the Gospel and the spread of the church was and is: Grow or go.

Several "best practices" stand out, and one stands high above the others. The leader, and then the wider group of leaders, must believe unequivocally in growth. They must be tough and consistent in devising a strategy that subjects every decision and investment to that end. That's indispensable when the growth actually begins. The "you won't like it" part is simple reactivity to change. Many faithful leaders can stir up growth; only the non-anxious, non-reactive types can manage the backlash and keep growth going.

Some of the things I know will work:

- ✚ **Invest ahead of the growth.** A scary and counter-intuitive proposition for most vestry members, but there it is. Usually this will mean adding clergy, professional staff, and investing in quality music that is proportional to your need and consistent with your style.
- ✚ **Do an audit of the blocks to people finding you and coming in** — from signage to publicity to quality of ushering. It's appalling how we often appear to be a

small group having a good time with our arcane customs in a closed circle.

- ✚ **Be candid and lovingly aggressive about stewardship of financial resources.** Teach and practice proportional giving for the personal, spiritual benefit it is. But don't avoid setting an annual, institutional goal — a real growth budget — and then work all year to get to it.
- ✚ **Be transparent about what you believe** and teach the faith and local customs as attractively and continuously as you can. Nothing is less inviting to a seeker than to hear, "Sorry, you just missed the Inquirers' class, but there will be another next year."
- ✚ **Take a look at your governance structure and customs.** We've had to rethink vestry roles and processes twice in ten years. Clarify the difference between management and oversight. Staff and lead volunteers are the managers in all but the smallest congregations. The vestry must stick to oversight, and, periodically, long-range planning for mission.

Above all, come together as leaders and work until you can adopt and believe in growth as an underlying goal and strategy. Make sure your leader preaches an "Our Dream" sermon at least once a year. And then, back him or her when the growth starts — and when the whining begins.

Not with a bang but a whimper

Peter Drucker, in one of his basic management texts, speaks of "plastic moments" [as] "those periods that overlap when the old has gone but the new has not yet arrived and when the course of history is more open to being shaped and steered than any other time." The New Testament uses the word "kairos." This is such a time for us. We know we must grow, or we will go — not with a bang but with a whimper no one will hear.

I believe the Episcopal Church is still useful to God. We have about 7500 local places who can prove that is true.

Rector of St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City, William McD. Tully celebrates ten years with the parish this year. When he arrived, attendance for Sunday morning services averaged around 200; now, it is 1100. In 2001, St. Bart's was selected as one of three hundred excellent congregations in a nationwide Lilly-funded survey, the only such Episcopal congregation in New York State.

Vestry Papers won three Polly Bond Awards in June at the Episcopal Communicators' annual meeting in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Given in recognition of particularly high standards in religious journalism, the citations are awarded, in the words of the Communicators, to "the best of the best."

Are they Visitors or Guests?

by George Martin

Have you ever walked into a Wal-Mart about 9 o'clock at night? Even at that hour, chances are that there will be a greeter at the door who smiles at you and offers you a shopping cart. Sure, you could get one yourself. You know all about wrenching the last cart when it is stuck to a long line, but at Wal-Mart you take the offered cart and start shopping.

Wouldn't it be nice if we greeted people at church in the same way? We don't need to give people a shopping cart, but the analogy shouldn't be lost on us. Chances are that folks have come to church looking for something that is meaningful and lasting — maybe even something that is eternal. But even if folks don't have such long-range goals in mind, if we simply greet those first time guests with a smile and offer to help them find seats, we may actually start a process that will lead them to come back again and again.

Please notice, by the way, that I've talked about welcoming *guests*. What a difference between treating someone as a visitor rather

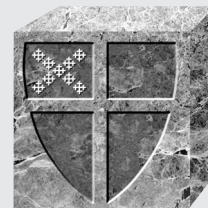
than a guest! The former is a tourist, while the latter is more like a member of the family. Very few of us, for example, have *visitor rooms* in our homes, but many of us have a guest room. A guest is a special person in our home who is often given kitchen privileges, who often gets to stay for more than a single night, and who may even be given a key to the house.

What about your church? Do you have little cards in the pews for your visitors? Do you thank your visitors for being with you? If that's what you're calling them, are you thinking that they won't come again, and that you'll have a different group of visitors to welcome next week? *That's the trouble with the term visitors.*

Examining our ministry to guests

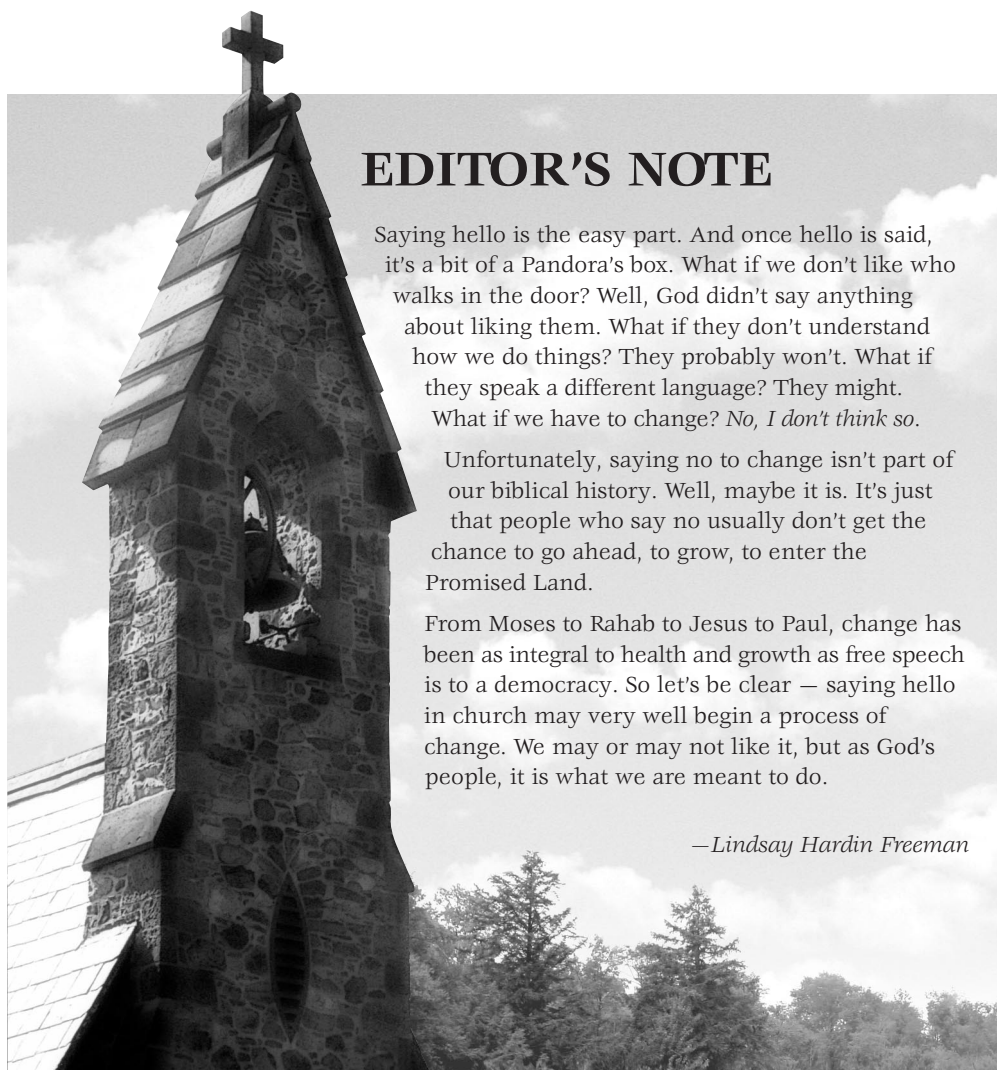
These questions force us to examine what our business is when it comes to welcoming people who are new to the church. If your

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Most people come to a church because they were invited by a neighbor, friend or family member. Sponsor regular "Bring a Friend to Church" Sundays. Make it fun. Remember that young people move in crowds. Have food, decent coffee, even prizes — besides eternal life, that is.

Next Issue: Newcomers



EDITOR'S NOTE

Saying hello is the easy part. And once hello is said, it's a bit of a Pandora's box. What if we don't like who walks in the door? Well, God didn't say anything about liking them. What if they don't understand how we do things? They probably won't. What if they speak a different language? They might. What if we have to change? *No, I don't think so.*

Unfortunately, saying no to change isn't part of our biblical history. Well, maybe it is. It's just that people who say no usually don't get the chance to go ahead, to grow, to enter the Promised Land.

From Moses to Rahab to Jesus to Paul, change has been as integral to health and growth as free speech is to a democracy. So let's be clear — saying hello in church may very well begin a process of change. We may or may not like it, but as God's people, it is what we are meant to do.

—Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Visitors or Guests?

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church is serious about having guests, especially the kind who really end up getting their own keys, then this emphasis will be visible and clear to all. Guest ministry is essential, needs to begin with the vestry, and should show up in the church's budget.

Ever seen an ad suggesting how much fun it might be to come to a Disney park? Ever seen that smiley face on TV cutting prices at Wal-Mart? Chances are we've all seen these ads, and that's because each company invests money in advertising. What does your church budget say about welcoming guests? Have you budgeted money so that you'll increase the likelihood of people coming to your church? Think of money that is budgeted for advertising as an investment in a guest ministry meant to pay dividends in the lives of those you welcome.

Then there is the matter of what we actually do when Sunday morning arrives. I suggest we begin with signs that say "Guests Expected!" What if the vestry followed the Wal-Mart principle, with the clergy and/or vestry members at the front door each and every week? (Hint: if you have more than one service, let vestry people serve at the service they prefer to attend.)

If we want to extend the logic of this ministry even further, we should also be concerned with a whole range of things which could make that first church experience as pleasant and as memorable as possible. You might want to start asking if your worship really is as easy to follow as you think it is. (Put the whole thing in a bulletin, including prayers, and hymns, and it will be totally user-friendly.)

Improve the coffee and conversation

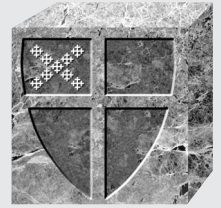
If you want to really get serious about this ministry, you might also want to think about the quality of the coffee that is served after church — and look at your budget item for coffee. Few people seem to be asking for coffee that has a slight metallic flavor left in it, but that's what you can find at many a church! Upgrading your coffee makers and the kind of coffee you brew might pay dividends. What's really needed, of course, are people who will talk to our guests during

those social times. Once again, members of the vestry can decide to take the leadership on this matter.

On page six, Bishop Payne says that "an engaging, open and loving aggressive church culture is a prerequisite for health." Good words. Let's be engaging, open and loving. Let's also be aggressive, at least in the sense that we will go out of our way to welcome those who come.


We won't simply expect them to find their own place and we certainly won't treat them as if they are visitors whom we will never see again. On the contrary, let's invest in those guests in such a way that they will always know that they received a genuine and sincere welcome when they came to the Episcopal Church. If we take this ministry seriously, we may finally understand what God means about welcoming strangers and discovering that God really is sending us angels. (See right.)

*The founder of the Episcopal Ad Project, the Rev. Dr. George Martin is a trained interim priest serving Christ Church in Red Wing, Minnesota. He is the author of four books on practical aspects of ministry including **Advertising the Local Church**. His ministry includes seminars and consultations in the areas of evangelism and leadership.*



"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Hebrews 13:1-2



Free coffee. Everlasting life.
Yes, membership has its privileges.

If you really want to belong to something special, become a regular at our church. You'll receive the kind of perks that last a lifetime. Or even longer.

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Church Ad Project

As a result of General Convention's vote to support parishes and missions as they seek to grow, all congregations will receive their choice of two free ads from the Church Ad Project, paid for by the Office of Communication at the Episcopal Church Center, for use in local papers and other media. Contact the Church Ad Project at (800) 331-9391; www.churchad.com



OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGNS A Sunday Checklist

Welcoming guests to your congregation is somewhat like a sacrament — an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. So open the front doors and take a walk through your church. Try to feel what a newcomer would experience. Or better yet, take a guest with you and listen to what he or she has to say.

Approaching the Church

- Are the service times posted outside?
- Are they accurate and readable, not blocked by bushes?
- Is there an easy way to get directions via phone or website?
- Do the grounds reflect that people care?
- Are there spaces for guest parking?

Walking In

- Does the door open easily? Is it free of peeling paint and cobwebs?
- Is the entry way clean and free of clutter? (Old jackets, snowshovels, coffee cups, etc.)
- Is there an usher, a vestry member and/or clergy saying hello?
- Are there signs to bathrooms? Are they clean?
- Are there signs to the church school and nursery?
- Is there a guest book or a sign in system?
- Is there written information on the church?

The Service

- Is the Sunday bulletin understandable?
- Are instructions clear for receiving Communion, etc.?
- Are guests welcomed during the service? Helped if looking lost?
- Is there a level of vitality that would be attractive?

The Nursery

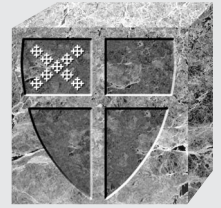
- Is the nursery well-marked? Would you feel safe leaving your baby there?
- Is it cleaned regularly? Is it cheerful?
- Is the nursery caregiver friendly?
- Is there a way for parents to be reached if their babies are crying uncontrollably, etc.?
- Are there snacks? Diapers?
- Are there clean toys and books? Often nurseries can be dumping grounds for grimy toys and dog-eared books.

The Church School

- Are there signs pointing to the church school?
- May children join throughout the year?
- Are parents welcome to observe?
- Is there a greeter to say hello and answer questions?
- Is there information available as to curriculum, etc.?
- Is there energy in the rooms? Does it look like there is new life?

After Church

- Is the coffee good enough to serve guests in the Lord's house?
- Are guests greeted in a friendly but not overbearing manner?
- How about visual aids? Bulletin boards of current events and photos of vestry members and staff are helpful.
- Decent munchies?
- Are copies of the parish newsletter out for people to pick up?
- Can guests get nametags, too, if members wear them?
- Is there a system for following up with those who have come?



Hand each vestry member a treasure trove of stories and practical tips on how to be a leader in the congregation. From us, the folks who bring you Vestry Papers, comes Volume III of The Vestry Resource Guide: Now That You're on the Vestry. 42 pages of articles and discussion questions. Forward Movement Publications, (800) 543-1813 Item #1781, \$8.00

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First There Must be Health

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Transformation by divine power

For evangelism to flourish, the clergy leader must place high value on “proclaiming by word and example the good news of God in Christ,” as the baptismal covenant states. So a leader must be driven by the exciting possibility that the lives of those possessing no faith community will be transformed by divine power through efforts of the faithful.

Let me embellish with a story. Early in my episcopate I visited a congregation — we called them missionary outposts to reinforce the diocesan vision — which was in a small town where there was little growth. The lack of young people was a major concern.

They had an energetic vicar with leadership skills who believed firmly in the evangelism imperative. The congregation was composed mostly of retired people. When I asked whether there were other retired people around they said yes. So I suggested that they missionize the retired folk and not be paralyzed by their lack of younger people.

They were already in a splendid posture for evangelism. They had a resale shop as an outreach ministry. This established their integrity as a church that cares for those beyond it.

Evangelism necessitates a completely reordered and dynamic church culture whose goal goes far beyond survival to full-blown mission.

Several years later I found they had not only attracted retirees but also had several younger folk in the congregation, including children. Their culture had changed from a focus on survival and a preoccupation with the young people they didn't have to one of miraculous possibility. This brought new life first to them, and that life became an attraction to others. Another thrilling thing for me was that it proved again that small churches can grow.

Not maintaining, but building

Creating an engaging, open and loving aggressive church culture is a prerequisite for health. It is tough. People have to be convinced that Christians are called not simply to maintain the church, but to build it through discipleship. Clergy leadership must be prepared to preach, teach and live this vision, realizing that change comes

slowly, one person at a time. Lay leadership has to be developed and nurtured in the Anglican way of evangelism.

Evangelism can also serve to transcend some of the dysfunction in the Episcopal Church around controversial issues. These issues won't be settled soon. Thus the timely opportunity is to concentrate on what can be done and done well. Furthermore, if those of differing opinions on vital issues can find an exciting mission centered on evangelism rather than fighting each other, they can provide a model of health for society and find that seekers of a greater diversity will be attracted to it.

It is immeasurably helpful if the diocese is healthy to the extent that it can support the local church with both a godly vision for mission and programmatic resources.

Dioceses electing bishops would also be well served by choosing nominees with creative leadership skills and a passion for evangelism.

Money follows mission

Finally, remember that money always follows mission. People are by far the greatest asset of the church. They always have been. The earliest disciples were poor. Yet in the richness of their faith and their dedication to Jesus' vision of a Kingdom of God now, their reliance upon the promised Holy Spirit led them into a miraculous expectation that led from victory to victory.

So to the faithful the harvest is always plenteous. But evangelism is not a new program. It necessitates a completely reordered and dynamic church culture whose goal goes far beyond survival to full-blown mission. This is true health.

In 1995, the Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne was elected Bishop of Texas at age sixty-three and immediately cast a missionary vision for the Diocese of Texas. In the nine years prior to his mandatory retirement, the diocesan culture began a transformation to reach out to all sorts and conditions of unchurched people. Outreach soared. The diocesan NBDI (net budgeted disposable income) doubled. Sunday attendance rose 22% and on any Sunday, 8% of diocesan worship was in Spanish. An audio/video training film series called "Discovery" was developed as an evangelism tool.