

The Small Church Growth Strategies Handbook



Produced by the Office of Congregational Vitality

Evangelism and
Congregational life Center

The Episcopal Church Center

Welcome to the 2009 edition of the Small Church Growth Strategy Handbook. Thank you for taking the time to look through this compendium of resources to support the ministries present in small congregations across the country.

Did you know that, according to the **Episcopal Domestic Fast Facts: 2007** report, the median Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) in the Episcopal Church is 69? This indicates that over half of the 7055 congregations identified in that report are considered “small churches” (with an ASA of less than 70). This handbook, then, is directed specifically toward those churches.

I am often asked, “What does it mean to be a ‘small church’ in the world today?” The easiest response to is to say that there is no single model of what a “small church” looks like. From the 150 year old white-clapboard sided church sitting at the country crossroads in rural eastern Maryland; to the coffee-house ministry serving a young urban crowd in Seattle; to the small mission church on the windswept plains of Navajoland; to the gritty urban congregation ministering in inner-city Brooklyn; to the intimate house-church in Los Angeles; to the vibrant Latino congregation in North Carolina – all fit the same general category of “small church”, and yet each lives out that vocation in a very different, very contextually-driven atmosphere.

This handbook, then, assumes no basic “template” for what it means to be a small church today. Rather, we offer you a panoply of resources, many drawn from the work and insights of the staff at The Episcopal Church Center (whose names, offices, and email addresses are included so that you can contact them directly), along with some of the most recent data about healthy and vital small congregations. It is our hope that this material will sometimes support you, sometimes challenge you, sometimes open up new windows of possibility for you, sometimes inspire you to new work – but always with the assurance that, in the words of 2 Corinthians, “if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.” It is the belief that each day we are called to be that “new creation” as we seek to respond faithfully to the ever-changing world around us which provides the underlying foundation for this handbook.

We hope that you will enjoy the materials provided here. But even more, we hope that you will use them... to the glory of God, and to the furthering of God’s realm in your own specific locations. Thank you for sharing this part of the journey.

Faithfully,

Bob Honeychurch
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What is a “Vital Congregation”?

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Based on my experiences, conversations, and insights of working with communities of faith across the country, I have developed the following “definition” of a vital congregation... a definition which is very much a work-in-progress. It is constantly being informed and revised as I continue my conversations across the church. But for the moment, it goes like this:

A vital congregation is a community of faith which:

Invites people to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ

Creates opportunities for personal and corporate transformation

Equips and empowers people for gospel mission in the world

All that said, this definition says nothing about a congregation’s size or budget, whether it is rural or urban, whether it can afford the services of full-time clergy, or what part of the country this church may be located in. In other words, I believe that all congregations have the potential to be “vital” congregations. Let me briefly unpack that definition above just a little (though in reality I could go on and on about it).

“Invites people to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ” Much is proclaimed about “forming Christian leaders” in the Church today. One of the great challenges we face, however, is that before we can form leaders, we must first form Christians. And Christian formation is a life-long process. I believe that this invitation contains 3 necessary dimensions: Teaching people how to pray; teaching people how to engage the scriptures; and teaching people how to live in community. Lots of congregations tend to dabble in this, but not necessarily in a way that gives each individual member a point of entry into that life of passion. However, congregations which are intentional and strategic about forming Christians – at every step along that life path – create a culture where the deepening of every member’s faith experience lies at the heart of the life of the community.

“Creates opportunities for personal and corporate transformation” If our lives aren’t changed by being a part of a faith community, then what’s the point of being there? I believe that transformation is a two-edged sword as well. Communities of faith are places where **my** life can be changed, but they’re also places where **our** life can be changed as well as the holy People of God. Transformation is that process of being made new; it’s about believing that the person that I am, and the community of which I am a part, is constantly being invited into a new relationship with God. Certainly from an Episcopal perspective, one of the primary (although certainly not the only) opportunities we have for transformation is through our worship. I tell worship leaders (lay and ordained) that, when they design and lead a worship service – every worship service they lead – if they are not doing so with the intention that somebody’s life might be changed as a result of that worship service, then they’re wasting their time. This applies as much to the acolytes, ushers, and altar guild as it does to the choir, celebrant, and preacher. Worship lies at the heart of what it means to be an Episcopalian. And so, worship has to be a lot more than “going through the motions” if it’s going to have meaning in people’s lives.

“Equips and empowers people for gospel mission in the world” At the end of the day, it isn’t about “me”... it isn’t even about “us.” It’s about fulfilling the Great Commission to “go out into the world.” Vital congregations are those which give people the necessary tools – spiritual, technical, social, emotional, etc. – to ‘be the heart and hands of Jesus in the world’... for it is “in the world” where the church is ultimately called to be. We are not a cloistered community of prayer, defending ourselves from the assaults of the world around us. We are only the Church when we are fully integrated into the lives, the culture, the daily experience of our wider community. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world...” not “For God so loved the church.” And so, in the words of Kennon Callahan, “when the Church is in the world, God is in the church. And when the Church is not in the world, God is still in the world.” And so it is in the world where the Church is truly called to be – true to itself, true to God, and true to all creation.

As you can probably tell, this definition doesn’t provide for many specific metrics to determine how effective a congregation is. It does, however, provide some real-life, incarnated examples of congregational vitality. I invite you to explore this definition of a “vital congregation” in light of your own experience. Intentionally and thoughtfully explore each of those three aspects which I identified, and assess your own community of faith. Where are your own congregational strengths? Where might you continue to deepen and enrich your common life together? Looking at your own church through the eyes of someone not already deeply involved in that community, what do you see? Completing an exercise such as this not only gives you a sense of where you are, and where you’ve come from. It can also provide you with a roadmap of sorts as you identify the particular work that God has set before you. Enjoy the journey, for it will draw you ever closer into the heart of God.



St. Anna's, New Orleans LA



St. Mark's, Cole Mine NM

Evangelism in Small Churches

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There are both opportunities and challenges presented to the members of a small church when it comes to being effective evangelists.

One of the opportunities is the intimate nature of most small congregations. When someone new shows up, it will feel as if they are of participating in a family gathering. Those who are seeking a connection with an extended family will find this quite attractive.

This level of intimacy can also be a challenge, however. The newcomer will find it hard to blend into the background. The feeling of being observed by the other members can easily be mistaken as being tested regarding their worthiness for adoption into the family.

Another opportunity for evangelism somewhat unique to the small church setting is the importance placed on relationships. The development of personal relationships with those outside the Church is the key to effective evangelism. Usually, the decision regarding joining a faith community comes some time after the development of such relationships outside of the context of official church events. When the time arrives to choose a faith community, the small church has a very clear advantage, as often the relationships established through personal interactions are considered more important than the possible diversity of beliefs found within the family.

This can be a challenge as well, of course. Eccentric beliefs can easily find a home, and even flourish, within the small church setting, especially if the leadership affirms such beliefs. Such diverse belief systems under one tent can be confusing to the newcomer who may have a limited understanding of the Christian tradition.

The small church is usually aware of their limitations, and so often will be careful not to spread themselves too thin. Instead of taking on numerous outreach projects simultaneously, they are more inclined to commit to one or two, and focus on doing those projects well. In this regard, I think all our congregations, of every size, would benefit from adopting this approach. In most cases, it is better stewardship of our resources to take on a limited number of tasks, ideally drawn from a strategic plan or visioning process, and do those tasks well, rather than attempting to be all things to all people.

Here are several examples of small churches doing outstanding work in Evangelism:



St. Francis Episcopal Church, Turlock, CA

In the midst of the reorganizing work being done in the Diocese of San Joaquin, there is a group from St. Francis Episcopal Church in Turlock, California that has chosen to maintain an Episcopal presence in that community. They meet once weekly for Holy Eucharist on Sunday afternoons, and once weekly for book study, discussion, dinner, and Compline on Tuesday evenings.

One of the unique things about this community is that they practice what they refer to as “Church in a Box.” They started out meeting in a kitchen. Once they outgrew that space, they moved to the fellowship hall of the local Methodist Church. Part of their weekly ritual is to transform a very utilitarian space into a place of worship, which involves unpacking numerous boxes

The feeling of being welcomed is felt as soon as one steps into the small space they currently rent from the local Methodist Church. Their joyful worship and commitment to mission projects makes this community an excellent example of a small church that uses their gifts well.



Transmissions: an emerging liturgical community in NYC

Transmission is a faith community that explores numerous ways to redefine what we mean by “church.” They meet on the first and third Wednesday of each month in the homes of the members. The founders of this community are Isaac Everett, pianist and composer, and Bowie Snodgrass, program director for Faith House.

Imagining Worship in an Intimate Community

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Some years ago, for a period of two or three years, I attended a church in the center of a big city. The congregation met in a very large, late 19th Century building. The Sunday morning eucharist typically gathered fewer than 25 people. One Sunday morning the rector walked out of the sanctuary and stood at the head of the center aisle to make announcements. The first words we heard were “Welcome to Saint Swithen’s. If you are visiting with us this morning...” I caught my breath. There were fewer than 20 people in the cavernous nave, and the rector could easily call them all by name. Hmmmm..... Where were the visitors?

Another personal circumstance has a similar bent. Early in my career, I served as rector of a parish in a small farming community. The church was about a hundred years old when I arrived. It always managed to survive but never quite got off the ground in any significant way. Mostly, it served to baptize, marry and bury the children of local farmers and business owners. Those of us who cared about the parish worried a lot about numbers. In anticipation of any parish event, we wondered anxiously about how many folks would show up. I remember clearly any number of Wednesday mornings, heading into the sacristy to prepare for the midweek eucharist, wondering whether anyone would be there. When I had been in town for a few weeks, I recognized the extent to which we shared the angst about attendance. It was typical for someone to enter the church or a meeting room and say “Where is everybody?”

These stories demonstrate the negative impact of an inappropriate ideal image of church on a Christian community. If you close your eyes and imagine “Church at its best”, what visual images, sounds and movements pop up? My guess is that most of us imagine a large, rectangular building, fitted with heavy, oak pews on either side of a central aisle. A massive organ is playing a hymn. Hundreds of worshipers are singing lustily. A cross and torches lead choristers and clergy decked out in expensive vestments in solemn procession up the center aisle into the sanctuary. Well, for those who actually inhabit this kind of liturgical space with a large congregation, the image is just fine. But what does it do for the Christian who routinely gathers with twenty or thirty folks on Sunday morning?

In my first story, the rector was guilty of reciting a boiler plate speech which would have been perfectly appropriate had the room been full, but lacked authenticity in a small, potentially intimate gathering. The presence of those who showed up was dishonored by the rector’s image of ideal church. Our frustration with poor attendance in the church where I served as rector was equally damaging to those who showed up. The question “Where is everybody?” suggested that the people who managed to arrive weren’t important.

Statistics indicate that over half of the congregations in the Episcopal Church gather weekly with an average attendance of fewer than seventy souls. That suggests that the ideal image we have stored in our imaginations doesn’t work for most of us. And, it’s not just about the math. A congregation of twelve or twenty sings differently, with different leadership strategies and repertoire than a congregation of 400 with a large organ and a professional choir. One imagines

that a formal procession up a center aisle in a large building with a congregation of 30 might be just silly.

At the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, we have been struggling with questions about how to imagine our daily service of Morning Prayer. Attendance at this quiet liturgy varies from 1 to 15 or 20, depending entirely on random circumstance. Until recently, the service was held in the chapel with the small congregation seated in the semi-circle arrangement of 40 chairs that surrounds the eucharistic altar. One morning, I arrived to discover that the three people gathered to pray had circled their chairs in order to be more directly in touch with one another. I joined them and discovered that in that arrangement, the morning office became an intimate conversation, still using the prayer book daily office structure, but carried out in close contact among four people joined in prayer. That experience led us to create a small gathering of chairs in a corner of the building near a statue of the Virgin and Child, a votive candle stand and a pair of icons. Now, Morning Prayer is a liturgy, still faithful to the Anglican tradition, but suited to the small congregation that typically shows up to pray. A new model has emerged; a model for an intimate worshipping community. At the Church Center, our experience of the creation of a new ideal for corporate prayer happened almost by accident. How might this kind of transformation be more intentional? It's difficult to change the ideals people carry around in imagination. And, I'm pretty certain it doesn't happen by talking about it. My experience of Morning Prayer the morning I came into the room to see something I didn't expect started a reflective process that helped to create a new ideal.

I think one of the best ways to reorganize the imaginations of worshipers is to ask is to ask them to experience a familiar liturgical event in an unexpected physical space. Find an excuse to move the Sunday morning eucharist to the Parish Hall. Arrange the furniture to match the size of the congregation. Facilitate music-making in a way that works in the space. Leave the ecclesial trappings (vestments, baronial silver, etc.) in the sacristy and borrow hardware from the kitchen to serve bread and wine. Set the dialogical portions of the rite (intercessions, announcement, sermon) in a conversational frame. And after the dismissal, gather the congregation around more food and drink in a conversation on the theme "How did it feel? What did you experience? How might we introduce the positive aspects of this new pattern into our routine?"

One of the serious differences between tribal cultures and that of Anglo/America is that tribal cultures maintain the connection between religious ritual and everyday life. For example, before the mobile home and electric air conditioning came to Monument Valley, the Navaho Hogan was the place where corporate prayers were said and children were conceived. Small worshipping communities are in a very good position to help reconnect ritual behavior and ordinary life. The intimate liturgical event wants to be conversational. These are gatherings that can re-introduce the stuff of life into the formal ritual. Life in the small church will be vitalized by reconnecting commerce, family and religious life. For those of us who are eager to maintain the tradition of our Anglican heritage in religious life and worship in small communities, it is important to remember that the essential kernel of that tradition is the breaking of bread in the center of our liturgical life. It is good to know that tables, cups, plates and napkins come in lots of shapes and sizes.

Strengths to celebrate, ministry to share

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There are many reasons that congregations are small, and many positive things grow out of being an intimate community. Ways of engaging in ministry that are natural to small congregations can benefit ministries in larger congregations as well.

It can be good to be small. Small congregations can celebrate their strengths, and offer an example to larger congregations:

- You know practically all the folks who come on Sunday, and most who haven't yet paid you a visit.
- You can spot a visitor before they've crossed your threshold. (And you probably already know who they're related to.)
- You know what works in your community.
- You know how to build partnerships with other faith communities and organizations in order to get things done.

Some of the strengths of small churches may seem like weaknesses. Maybe you haven't thought about these as assets:

- You understand that your clergy may come and go, but your lay members define the character and the actions of your congregation.
- You're able to implement ideas and events quickly – probably by making no more than 10 phone calls.
- Everyone knows that whatever he or she does is vital to the life of the congregation.
- You understand that the pastor's focus is ministering to those already in the church; the laity connect their faith to their everyday life, attracting new folks to the church and being the church at work in the world.
- Being friendly to the people who come to visit is just the beginning. It lays the groundwork for helping them know where they are needed, and for introducing them to someone who needs their help.

Sometimes small churches forget how to share the special aspects of their life. Some vitally important practices may be challenging:

- Making space in your close-knit family for someone who's new, and allowing them to offer their gifts.
- Recognizing that the newest person in the room sees with fresh eyes and has something important to tell you.
- Setting term limits and working to rotate leadership, which makes room for people to find their ministries.
- Remembering to start looking for and raising up your successor as soon as you've figured out what your job is.
- Making sure that you find a partner to work with you, no matter what your ministry is. (Maybe even someone who isn't a member of your church!)

- Being willing to try something again that didn't work the first time – while incorporating a change that will increase its impact.
- Recognizing your strengths and celebrating often as a community.

Making the most of strengths is sometimes challenging, for small congregations as well as large ones. The church's office of lay leadership and ministry development offers resources that can help: dprentiss@episcopalchurch.org.

Church Planting

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For twenty some years I have been passionate about vital faith communities that connect to the Spirit's work in their communities. Everywhere I travel, I ask the same question of church leaders: "How are you partnering with God's mission in this community?" More and more I'm meeting leaders of thriving small parishes who describe a significant shift of focus in their leadership. Instead of asking, "How do we attract more people to join our congregation?" they are asking, "How are we being called to bless this community, at large?" For example, instead of service planning that focuses on "What will make us feel good and strengthen our faith?" they are also asking, "How might we improve on this service to better meet the soul needs of the stranger and the newcomer, as well?"

The leaders of the [Macrina Community](#) (Tiburon CA) patiently took parishioners with them to walk their community, listening and looking for unmet needs, listening for stories of "God at Work!" and asking community members, "If you were to attend regular gatherings of your ideal community of faith, what would they be like?" They then held those conversations up for the whole community to witness, modeling a process of discernment that waited for clarity about their responses.

For [St. John's](#) (Asheville NC), the answers they received called for such significant changes to their worship that they found it easier to start a new service that intentionally reaches out to those who presently would not attend a traditional service. Our research tells us that parishes like St. John's that create fresh worship opportunities based on this process tend to grow in their capacity to embrace the needs of their community, as well as grow in numbers. There is a fresh sense of relevance and a renewed vision for ministry in many of these small congregations – a wonderful reminder that great gifts often come in small packages!



Macrina Community at Worship

Stewardship in Small Churches

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Small churches can boldly claim that they are like the first century “house churches,” places where people gathered to eat, pray, and worship the presence of the living Christ in their midst. In a house church, people knew each other almost as extended family, they took care of another and were responsive to the needs of their community.

Small churches can live into the vibrancy and vitality of the original house church. Here’s a “top ten” list of ways to nurture a culture of generosity in small churches:

1. Engage in an appreciative inquiry process to name and celebrate all the ways your community experiences the abundance of God’s grace and generosity. To see a list of appreciative inquiry questions go to www.episcopalchurch.org/stewardship.htm
2. Communicate core values (i.e relational ministry), vision, and mission that emerge from an appreciative inquiry process in all platforms of communication – via the web, weekly bulletins, newsletters, and narrative budgets.
3. Create opportunities for people to tell how the generosity of the congregation has changed lives.
4. Understand stewardship holistically as a way to live a generous life in response to God’s grace: it is how we live out our baptismal identities. Read *Transforming Stewardship* by C.K. Robertson, Canon to the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.
5. Connect faith and finances. Leaders, including the rector/vicar and vestry, must demonstrate transparency about their own relationship with money, helping members connect their faith and finances. Read *Spirituality and Money: 7 Questions that Saved my Spiritual Life* by Bruce A. Rockwell at <http://www.tens.org/stewardship-booklets.htm>
6. Create and communicate expectations for new members, including the invitation to live into the *Holy Habits* of worshiping weekly, daily prayer, scripture study, tithing, and keeping Sabbath.
7. Discern if there is a need for a personal budget / money ministry in your parish. Too many people are burdened with debt which limits their freedom to be generous. See how the Diocese of Colorado has engaged in the conversation about money, debt and faith: http://www.coef.org/strategic_initiatives/free_to_be_faithful/
8. In February begin planning for the fall stewardship campaign. For a roadmap refer to the Diocese of Vermont’s *Developing an Annual Commitment Campaign* at

<http://www.dioceseofvermont.org/Stewardship/Stewardship%20Resources/AnnualCommitmentProgram.pdf>

9. Invite members to write and share a “contemporary epistle” of their own stewardship journey in lieu of the epistle reading during the four-to-six-week annual commitment campaign, especially those who tithe or are striving to tithe.
10. Invite children and youth to be generous year-round. Watch a local news video clip of thirteen-year-old Joseph Picket, a member of St. Marks in Hastings , Nebraska, who has raised \$6,400 to purchase wheelchairs for those in the developing world at <http://new.khastv.com/modules/news/article.php?storytopic=12&storyid=13739>



Grace Happens

St. James, Arlington is the birthplace of the Episcopal Church in Vermont. During 2008, the Vestry began to grapple with an understanding of stewardship that shifted from funding the budget to making a thankful response to God’s generosity. Accordingly, the vestry did not mail out a budget as a part of its annual appeal. Instead, the vestry celebrated the generous donations of time that make St. James’ the wonderful community that it is. A simple “narrative budget” , recounting the many volunteer efforts that make up the Church community, was mailed to every household. At the end of the annual campaign, after all of the pledge cards were collected, the parish held a celebratory dinner. The dinner was not only well attended but generated incredible enthusiasm and excitement about the future of St. James. St. James is a parish in the midst of a renewal of its spirit of service, stewardship, and worship. It is also discovering a new and vibrant role as a center of community life.

Episcopal Migration Ministries

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It only takes a few people to make a big difference in the lives of refugees being resettled in cities across the U.S. through Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). Within an affiliate network of 30 offices in 26 dioceses, EMM relies on congregations and others in local communities to welcome and engage the uprooted who our Church is privileged to assist in rebuilding their lives. To ensure that the newcomers' most basic needs are met in the initial phase of their resettlement, significant private resources are required, over and above the modest funds contributed by the federal government. And small parishes have provided outsized support to these strangers in our midst.

Many small churches have seized the opportunity that the refugee ministry provides to focus on mission and energize members around a common purpose. Extending hospitality to newly arriving refugees is a short-term, low-cost way for congregations who cannot send parishioners overseas to learn about and respond to a world of need. Smaller parishes occasionally give financial assistance to refugees, but great value is equally placed on the donated goods and volunteer time they offer. With EMM affiliates providing guidance and oversight, churches rent and furnish apartments, stock pantry shelves, and greet refugees at the airport. They orient refugees to their new environment and culture, assist with English tutoring, and, through friendship, give refugees a sense of personal connection to their new community.

The friendships this ministry helps to create among people across ethnic, cultural, and, often, religious lines, can last well beyond the 4-6 month period in which refugees are expected to reach self-sufficiency. What is inevitable for congregations sharing the journey of the refugee is transformation through an encounter that produces gifts of healing and hope that are exchanged and celebrated.

For information, contact Episcopal Migration Ministries visit www.episcopalchurch.org/emm.

Churches doing outstanding work in the area of refugee resettlement are:



St. Andrew's Church, Lexington, Ky.



St. Luke's Church, Minneapolis, MN

Latino Ministries

Patricia Millard

Portland, Oregon

Surrounded by tree farms and plant nurseries, off the beaten path, with no office hours during the week and served by a part-time clergy-person – at first look, Holy Cross / Iglesia Santa Cruz is just one more little country church struggling to survive. And yet, this little congregation, ast of the Portland, Oregon metro area and almost at the entrance of the Columbia Gorge, finds itself in the midst of a simple, effective and profoundly faithful experience of growth and grace.

The seeds were planted decades ago, as the membership made the startling commitment to embrace differences by welcoming the mostly Mexican migrant workers that worked in the surrounding plant nurseries. Over the years, church services became bilingual. People came and went, in the midst of baptisms, quinceañeras and first communions that celebrated family traditions but didn't take root into the identity of the church as such. Long-time members described Holy Cross as a “Church of Nomads,” while the same faithful Anglo core kept open the doors of welcome and hospitality, even as services became bilingual every single week for the sake of remaining open, bicultural and welcoming.

Early in 2008, confronted with the challenge of a faithful response to the ongoing requests for sacraments and “sacramentals,” two simple programs were put in place. First, families were invited to view the event, not only as a celebration within the family, but rather as an opportunity to deepen their own sense of commitment towards the formation of their children. This was done with a simple question, turning any sense of legalism inside out – “How can the church be a support to you as you continue to raise your child in the traditions and faith that you value?” Concurrently, a simple Sunday School program for young children and a Wednesday Youth Group for older children and teenagers was started. Finally, recognizing that transportation is a huge issue, especially for a remote little country church, many in the congregation volunteered to pick up the kids in carpools.

In less than six months, the Youth Group has quadrupled in size. By now, Holy Cross struggles to meet the needs of children and teens that come from the entire East Portland Metro area. The next step? Inviting parents into Kaleidoscope Bible Study, thus inviting the older generation into the same process of ongoing Christian Formation.

At Holy Cross, the key for growth seems simple: authentic hospitality, joyful acceptance of the needs of others, and a profound commitment to a lively encounter with the Gospel as the primary source that brings the congregation into a deeper, committed identity as Christians, as Episcopalians, and as the current and future leaders both at Holy Cross and the Diocese of Oregon.



Youth Group at Holy Cross

Opportunities and Challenges for the Small Church

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The results of a recent survey indicated that of 387 Black congregations, seventy four reported an Average Sunday Attendance of thirty or less congregants. By no means must it be supposed that small congregations are not vital and engaged in dynamic ministry. The gifts and talents that are present in larger congregations are the same that are present in small congregations though in few numbers. The challenges and opportunities are unique in that ministries and daily upkeep of the church must be maintained with limited resources. Many small congregations are planted in areas where there is no growth potential while others have the potential for growth. Here are the stories of two congregations doing outstanding work.

St Luke's Church, New Orleans

I met a dynamic, exciting group of individuals who comprised the small number of people who came back to St Luke's Church in New Orleans after the floods caused by Hurricane Katrina. They returned to a church building with water up to the pew seats, looked around and determined to reclaim their church. During my first visit we sat in the dried out church and prayed, sang hymns and I listened for hours as they shared their story of personal losses, material as well as parish family members, and we cried together. It was to be one of several visits over the years.

Today, much has changed. With the generous help of individuals and congregations throughout the Church, along with assistance from the Church Insurance Corporation, the facilities were eventually restored. Though grieving, the eight members made a decision to rebuild their congregation. Through telephone numbers that were salvaged from church records they began to reach out to members in Atlanta, Texas, Houston, Baton Rouge and other cities with the plea, "please come home."

They came, they saw, and went to work. In collaboration with the diocese they opened a "Homecoming Center" in the Parish Hall providing a safe place for students who had returned to the area while the nearby High School remained inhabitable. The Center also became a haven for the community to receive and fill out applications for FEMA and Medical Assistance, and it also received clothing and other necessities.

In October 2008, at the Black Ministries Conference in New Orleans, Bishop Jenkins awarded the congregation a plaque and at the recent diocesan convention, St Luke's was named as one of three congregations doing really well.

The amazing wonder of this story is that prior to the hurricane and for two years following, St. Luke's was without a rector. Extremely dedicated and full of hope, these faithful and inspired lay leaders kept this ministry alive with the Senior Warden Elvia James at the helm. Two years later the congregation has grown to approximately seventy six, and includes members who were looking for a church home. An interim priest currently serves the congregation and they are now developing a search process to call a rector.

St. Mary's Deerfield, Florida

St. Mary's of Deerfield Beach, Florida, with an Average Sunday Attendance of 42, proudly reports that they fulfill their diocesan assessment. Led for nine years by the Rev. Nancy McCarthy, they enjoy the blessing of knowing one another and their families and take care of one another even as they reach out to their community. For instance, lay members visit one another in hospital and assist with families as necessary. They volunteer for tasks that take care of their facility and administrative tasks, support a Day Care facility for the homeless, and maintain outreach ministries during the holidays.

Asian Small Church: Changing Image

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For Asian Americans, the term “small church” is not attractive. Asians generally love “big families” and there is uneasiness when you classify congregations into “small churches.” They believe in the Chinese proverb that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step,” and so when it comes to starting a business or building a congregation, Asians are advised not to despise “small beginnings” only because they are the “starting point of big things.” At its best therefore, the term “small church,” among Asians is a transitional term; it is a short-term, not a long-term, designation.

Many Asian American church leaders dream of large congregations with large income and multiple programs to serve the community. After all, the largest single church in the world (Full Gospel Central Church in Yoido Island), is in Seoul, Korea with around one million members and the largest Sunday Eucharistic Service (El Shaddai) is in Manila, Philippines with over one million communicants weekly. But while the ideal is large gatherings, the reality for many Asian churches in the United States, is that they are small and will remain in the “small” category. A “small church” is defined here as a congregation with a Sunday attendance of less than 70.

There are three reasons why many Asian ethnic churches in America are and would remain small. First, their target community is limited to the specific ethnic and immigrant populations that in most cities are considered minority. Asian cultures are so diverse and each racial-ethnic group is so unique that it would take a lot of creativity, vision and very hard work to establish a “pan Asian congregation.” The historical wars and language differences among Asians are so vast and so deeply ingrained. In other words, it is much easier to start and grow a Filipino, Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese congregation than to build a combination of all.

The second reason why most Asian churches in America would remain “small” is the fluid nature of the immigrant communities. Immigrants are constantly in transition and so congregations are in flux. Immigrants gravitate to cities where there are job opportunities and migrate to places where the weather conditions approximate that of their home countries. Ethnic churches in this regards are like “spiritual gas stations,” where travelers on the journey take on spiritual fuel and then move on.

The third reason why Asian Episcopal churches remain “small” is that this is the pattern that they see in most Episcopal parishes. According to the Episcopal Domestic Fast Facts 2007 Report, a survey of Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) indicates that “over half of the 7055 Episcopal congregations” are considered “small churches” with an average of less than 70. In other words, to be a “small church” in the spectrum of the Episcopal Church in the United States is to be part of the majority. Perhaps it is in this sense of being a “part of the majority” that small churches are re-defining their mission and reinventing their style of ministry. Theologian Karl Rahner noted that “the present situation of Christians can be characterized as that of a Diaspora.” Using that image, the small churches can be more “diasporic” than bigger ones can. Small churches are

more adaptable, more flexible, more adept to constant change and more versatile than large churches. It is amazing that in the recent economic meltdown, large business companies suffered tremendous losses, while “small businesses” survived and even showed tenacity. So there is hope for “small churches” to survive the changing times and even to thrive in God’s time.

I mentioned earlier the hope of small churches not only to survive but also to thrive in these changing times. Let me end with this: A story is told of an Asian immigrant entrepreneur who came upon a slum district of an American city and established a “Mom and Pop Store.” Because of his store, many similar small stores were also established and all of them serving the area which eventually was redeveloped into a better community. Upon seeing the progress of the area, big time companies decided to build mega malls and supermarkets on the area. How would the small stores compete with the Wal-Mart and Macy’s and Circuit City? Many of them sold out and left the area but the original entrepreneur made a startling innovation to compete. Upon seeing that behind his little store was Wal-Mart and Macy’s and Emporium, he renamed his store with a blazing sign that says “MAIN ENTRANCE!” Perhaps this is the new image of the small church.

Children in the Small Church

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How do we provide quality Christian Education programs with a small number of children and a limited budget?

What do we do when children show up on Sunday morning?

What resources are there for us to use?

These are the three most common questions I hear from small congregations looking at their formation* programs for children. It doesn't matter whether the church has always been small, or if they were once a larger congregation.

The number one piece of advice I give is to think creatively. Ask yourselves the following questions:

- o What material resources do we already have?
- o Who in your parish has an interest in working with children?
- o Who in your parish might be interested in helping out with programs for children if they don't have to be responsible for "teaching?"
- o What are alternatives to doing your formation programs on Sunday?
- o What resources are available from the diocese? Does your diocese have a resource center?

Material resources often cause the most concern. Look for people in your congregation who have skills and talents not usually associated with formation programs. One parish was able to find funds to send one person to Godly Play training, but they could not afford to purchase the story materials. During a conversation after her training, the teacher learned of a member of the congregation who had some woodworking skills. She asked him if he might be interested in helping to make wooden figures. He agreed, using patterns found in Sonia Stewart's *Young Children and Worship and Following Jesus*. Another member cut the felt pieces, and yet another cut and colored cardstock figures for lamination. By the beginning of the next program year they had enough story sets to get started.

Think about doing your formation program on another day of the week. Several parishes hold programs for all ages on a weeknight and include a shared meal. After supper the children have their own program while the adults have theirs. This format also lends itself well to intergenerational programs—something to consider for Sunday mornings, too. One parish started a Saturday program that meets five times during the year—in the Fall, Advent, Epiphany, Lent/Easter, and in the late Spring. The program includes story telling, large motor activities, worship and a shared meal.

Even parishes which do not have children on a regular basis do formation for children. They hold well-attended Vacation Bible Schools every summer as a service and outreach to the community.

Several parishes found that the most effective use of their limited program budget was to hire a professional nursery staff person for Sunday mornings. Not only does it demonstrate hospitality, it enables them to see themselves as doing ministry for and with children.

Finally, I encourage parishes to look at their worship. If there is no program for children, how are they fully included in the regular service. Are there coloring pages and other activity sheets ready for “drop ins,” as well as regular members? Is there a child friendly service leaflet?

Remember, no one program works in every parish. We need to share and adapt ideas to find what works for each individual parish. If you have an idea you would like to share, please drop me a note at jharre@episcopalchurch.org and let me know.

*We use the term “Formation” rather than “Education” because as Christians we never stop learning, and not all learning takes place in a classroom.

Young Adult Ministry in Small Churches

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“What’s the value added?” It’s a question that’s posed when seeking to know the tangible result of taking a particular action or engaging a certain strategy. Sometimes the question can sound as basic as “Why should we?” It can begin a helpful conversation for clarity or it can shut down or exclude. When we assess our mission strategies it sometimes requires us to make determinations based on resources (personnel, equipment, financial) as to if and when we can proceed with a particular focus.

So where do young adults fit in?

One thing that young adults can bring to a congregation is a willingness to engage with energy, and I would encourage a desire to embrace their presence and not be hesitant in welcoming them. Remember that they are as qualified as anyone to take on roles that give life to the church in every aspect of its ministry: in liturgy, service, governance, education, formation, outreach, stewardship. Some will need or want mentors. Some will be mentors.

The welcoming of young people, married, single and/or with children should never be done as an act of salvation for the life of the congregation. Rather provide hospitality, and be genuine and open to the way in which the life of all will be enriched. Ask questions. Listen. Listen for answers. Respond gently.

Two small churches doing YA ministry:

Trinity Church, Folsom, CA
<http://www.trinityfolsom.org/>
rector@trinityfolsom.org
916-985-2495

All Saints’ Memorial Church, Sacramento, CA
<http://www.allsaintssacramento.org/>
revmonnot@allsaintssacramento.org
betseymonnot@comcast.net
916-455-0643

A small church doing campus ministry

St John’s, Murray, KY
<http://stjohns.episcopalky.org/index.html>
office@stjohnsmurray.org
270-753-6908

Adult Faith Formation:
Small congregations offer those searching for more a unique and valuable gift!

Ruth-Ann Collins

Adult Faith Formation

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Faith formation happens! Be it intentional or unintentional, every life experience can be an energizing and provocative opportunity to live out our Baptismal Covenant. The question for the teacher/learner, learner/teacher is how we might celebrate this revelation in ways which empower adults to live counter culturally in a world which puts the secular life above a faith filled life. It is time to connect and rejoice in the transformative actions taking place in our communities and together explore new possibilities.

Faith formation is a life long process, and far too often we focus only on the children and youth. We frequently neglect the needs of adults who are searching to deepen their own faith, looking for opportunities which allow them the freedom to imagine and a safe place to explore who they are and whose they are.

The foundation of effective faith formation experiences is the ability to provide a safe, comfortable and energizing place for individuals. The precedence for small group work was established by the early church. Thirsting for a deeper understanding and a new way of discerning, people gathered together. These hopeful gatherings eventually evolved into an early church, which dared to risk and discover how they were called by God.

Small congregations are blessed with the ability to know each other by name. Small congregations are blessed to share the struggles and celebrations of Christian life in intimate and significant ways which are not and cannot be accomplished in larger congregations. The greatest resources for faith formation are not found in “slick” and expensive programs. The greatest resource for faith formation is found in the sharing of story; the individual story, the community story and of course the great story. It is in sharing these stories that as a complete body of Christ we live out our Baptismal covenant.

Listed below you will find some places to look for resources. Remember there is no perfect program or curriculum; no matter what you choose to use, make it your own. You know your congregation; their wants, needs, hopes and dreams. Faith formation need not be led by experts, it is a mutual ministry. Discern the gifts and talent of your laity and empower them to be faith formation leaders.

There is a great deal to be learned from small congregations so please share your gifts with the Episcopal Church at large. If you have any adult faith formation resources which you are using that might benefit others we would like to share them. If you would like assistance in getting an Adult faith formation program started or need assistance with your existing program please contact me at rcollins@episcopalchurch.org

Several resources for Adult Formation materials are as follows:

Adult Faith Formation: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/adultformation.htm>

Church Publishing: www.churchpublishing.org

Episcopal Council for Christian Education:
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/48931_52769_ENG_HTM.htm

National Association of Episcopal Resource Centers: <http://www.noerc.org/>



*The people of Misión San José – San Lucas de Pilahuin, Ecuador
building their church by hand, one cinder block at a time.*

Older Adult Formation

Sarah Johnson

Older Adult Formation and Resource Ministries

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In the fall of 2007, St Andrew's Episcopal Church in Grove, Oklahoma, started Daybreak, a weekly adult daycare program

(http://standrews.episcopaloklahoma.org/ministries/daybreak_senior_respite_care.html).

Daybreak is a non-denominational community adult day care program provided to Grove area seniors from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every Tuesday. Qualified volunteers at St. Andrew's church offer senior respite care with enriching program of social activities, music and singing, storytelling, arts and crafts, and light exercise.

St. Andrew's is located in a retirement community on Oklahoman's Grand Lake, and so senior ministries have always been an important part of their programming. The Rev. Phil Lawrence, rector of St. Andrew's, explained that the Daybreak program began as part of their call to have seniors ministering to other seniors within the community of faith.

Father Phil consulted his friends John and Alma Beltzer, both of whom are very active in senior ministry in Oklahoma. Together, they looked at opportunities to extend St. Andrew's existing program to the wider community, focusing on services for elderly dementia and Alzheimer's patients.

After gaining the support of the Diocese of Oklahoma, they explored the resources provided by the state of Oklahoma. The Grand Gateway Economic Development Association (P.O. Drawer B, Big Cabin, Oklahoma 74332-0502; 918-783-5793) is an Oklahoma state agency that connects rural communities with grants. The Grand Gateway Economic Development Association helped negotiate and administer St. Andrew's first grant through the Brookdale Foundation (950 Third Ave., 19th Floor, New York, NY 10022; 212-308-7355; <http://www.brookdalefoundation.org>). The Brookdale Foundation funds programs for early-onset Alzheimer's, and they provided \$7,500 seed money to help St. Andrew's start their community program.

Since its inception the Daybreak program has expanded beyond just serving the members of St. Andrew's; currently half its participants are community residents. When asked if he had any words of advice for other churches hoping to grow similar programs, Father Phil said, "Be patient and have faith."

