

Nurturing the Church for Mission

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Our Synod theme of *Nurturing the Church and Family for Mission* comes at a time when the Church in North America is experiencing major cultural shifts. To begin with, North America is the third largest mission field in the world.¹ Moreover, Christianity among Protestants and Catholics in the United States is plummeting significantly at a rapid pace as more people continue to identify with no religious affiliation: "...Christians are declining not just as a share of the U.S. adult population, but also in absolute numbers."² There are of course several external factors why this decline is occurring when observing our current and ever-changing pluralistic society, however, too often Christians can be blinded to the state of affairs within the Church. Consider the recent findings of research pertaining to the Great Commission among American churchgoers: "When asked if they had "heard of the Great Commission," half of U.S. churchgoers (51%) say they do not know this term."³ Perhaps one reason why this shocking ignorance exists is because American Christianity over the past several decades has primarily been concerned with attendance over catechesis and discipleship. There was once a time within the American Church when the "Willow Creek Model" was what many a pastor desired to follow and implement in the communities they shepherded, but by their own confession, Willow Creek admitted they made a mistake. Former pastor, Bill Hybels, commented: "We should have gotten people (and) taught people how to read their Bible between services (and) how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."⁴ The Great Commission is not to plant churches or create seeker-sensitive experiences, but to make disciples; the Church does this, not merely by human initiative, but in partnership with the Holy Spirit, who is "the Lord, the giver of life."⁵ It is the purpose of this talk to invigorate us on our mission of disciple-making, arguing for more intentionality, planning, and follow-through at both the archdeaconry and congregational level.

Making Disciples: Go, Baptize, & Teach

As we refresh ourselves once more in the commission our Lord gave to the Church, we must fathom that mission involves movement. Making disciples does not occur just by sitting in the pews. The triad of—"go," "baptize," and "teach"—requires action and commitment for the long haul. This process of making disciples is not a quick endeavor to the dismay of Western Christianity which continually expects instantaneous results. Rather, the making of disciples can be likened to spiritual parenting where the mature believer spends a considerable amount of time providing catechetical information and presenting an example of life to imitate, which eventually

¹ Bevens, Winfield. *Plant: A Sower's Guide to Church Planting* (Seedbed, 2016) 14.

² "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape." [October 17, 2019] <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/> [Accessed September 30, 2020].

³ "51% of Churchgoers Don't Know of the Great Commission." [March 27, 2018] <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/?fbclid=IwAR1P8pPZTEGYqjTFImFS1Njbs73w-2w3XFDHccFt0v5Sm6UH76VP7U9jHK4> [Accessed September 30, 2020].

⁴ Stetzer, Ed. "Weeping for Willow's Disciples." [July 7, 2008], under Christianity Today article, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2008/july/weeping-for-willows-disciples.html> [Accessed September 30, 2020].

⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019) 127.

results in the novice being deployed to serve the Lord in their unique calling and gifts. Therefore, the process our Lord lays out for making disciples does not yield immediate outcomes but testifies to an intimate and intense pedagogy whereby spiritual sons and daughters are fostered to the conformity of Christ by spiritual parents.

GO: The first part of the triad perhaps is the hardest for most believers. As an apostolic Church, we are a sent people. Yet to whom are we going? Oftentimes the first people we must go to are the ones sitting next to us in the pews. How many of them have been spiritually parented? The reality in many a congregation is quite shocking indeed. Archbishop Ben Kwashi comments:

Christians who are not serious about their own walk with Jesus cannot successfully do mission or evangelism. When God wants them to go out, they will not. What God wants them to do, they cannot. What God wants them to achieve, they cannot. Instead, they are consumed by jealousy and hatred and are complacent in sin and lukewarm in faith. As a result, no mission takes place and the church becomes inward-focused. Budgets and programs predominate; mission recedes. The church thus begins to shrink. Not anticipating heaven anymore, both clergy and members want to get their own share right here on earth. Such "Christians" are unable to reach the unreached; in fact, they themselves need to be reached anew.⁶

Additionally, when it comes to believers going out to their families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, there remains a considerable amount of fear that petrifies people dead in their tracks. The primary reason the Gospel does not advance beyond the local congregation is fear of looking foolish.⁷ However, as Paul wrote to his spiritual son, Timothy, "...God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."⁸ The entire congregation is a sent people to the world. The Post-Communion prayer in the 2019 Book of Common Prayer reminds us all of this when we pray: "And now, Father, *send us out* to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you *as faithful witnesses* of Christ our Lord."⁹ What is important to remember is that we are not sent out alone, but as a people with the Holy Spirit, for Christians participate with the missionary Spirit of God as we go into the mission field of the world.

BAPTIZE: The second part of the triad deals with Christian initiation. Evangelist and biblical scholar, Michael Green, notes: "The New Testament does not spend a lot of time theorizing about baptism. It makes it plain that the early Christians obeyed their Master and went about actually doing it."¹⁰ When the Church goes out to advance the Gospel through catechetical evangelism, people repent and respond to the Good News in faith. Resultingly, they are baptized, incorporated into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Concerning baptism, theologian, Simon Chan, states:

⁶ Kwashi, Benjamin A. *Evangelism and Mission: Biblical and Strategic Insights for the Church Today*. (Africa Christian Textbooks, 2018) 138-139.

⁷ Evangelism Explosion Intensive (All Saints Anglican Church, San Antonio, Texas) January 4, 2020.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Study Bible*. "2 Timothy 1:7." (Crossway, 2008) 2338.

⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019) 137. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Green, Michael. *Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice and Power* (Paternoster, 2006) 30.

The cosmic dimension of baptism—this immersion into death and rising to new life in the new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)—does not mean that one’s unique personhood is lost. One does not become a nameless member of a herd. It is the old self that is buried, and out of the old emerges the new self. Our true personal identity is revealed in Christ.¹¹

Moreover, liturgical catechesis is a substantial factor in the second part of the triad. Herein lies the view, as expressed in the Anglican Catechism, *To Be a Christian*, of “those who are born, baptized, and raised to maturity in Christian homes and church settings,”¹² who, at confirmation, will “publicly affirm their faith and commitment to the baptismal vows”¹³ that were made on their behalf by parents and godparents. Hence, from the baptismal font, children are cultivated in the faith in the home and by the liturgical life of the congregation. Therefore, through both catechetical evangelism and liturgical catechesis, the Church baptizes disciples in obedience to the Lord.

TEACH: Yet it is the ongoing instruction and formation of disciples where we now must turn as we come to the third part of the triad. While we look at teaching in our own day, it is most helpful to look to the past with figures like St. Augustine. In *Catechising of the Uninstructed*, the church father strongly emphasizes both the biblical metanarrative and a nurturing relationship between the mentor (spiritual parent) and the novice (spiritual child). Novices must fathom the depth of the story of salvation history—from creation to consummation—in order that they become able, as St. Augustine observes, to “give a comprehensive statement of all things, summarily and generally, so that certain of the more wonderful facts may be selected which are listened to with superior gratification, and which have been ranked so remarkably among the exact turning-points (of the history).”¹⁴ Too often in our own time believers cannot articulate the epic account of the Bible; the inability for them to do so testifies to a serious lack of focus in catechetical instruction and continuous formation. We must teach the entirety of the Bible stressing the saving acts of God in human history—the *missio Dei* (the mission of God)—and build upon that foundation by explicating doctrine so that it is inwardly digested (resulting in both sciential and sapiential knowledge) and easily transmittable for novices to communicate to others. In other words, we do not just receive the Gospel, we also are to transmit it onward to the younger generations.

Furthermore, the prominence of the nurturing relationship between the mentor and novice for Augustine cannot be understated when he states, “Love is to be built up.”¹⁵ In spiritual parenting, “the mercy of God comes to be present through the ministry of the catechizer,”¹⁶ which then demonstrates to the novice the love of God, not just because the biblical narrative reveals God’s love through his saving acts in human history, but also because the mentor tangibly reveals God’s love as a living example for the novice to imitate. Children take on certain attributes of their parents; it is no different when it comes to the making of disciples.

¹¹ Chan, Simon. *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (IVP Academic, 2006) 119.

¹² Harrold, Phil, ed. “Toward an Anglican Catechumenate.” https://anglicanchurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Anglican_Catechumenate_Guiding_Principles.pdf [Accessed October 7, 2020] 6.

¹³ *Ibid*, 13

¹⁴ Augustine. Philip Schaff, ed. “The Catechising of the Uninstructed.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Volume 3—Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Hendrickson, 2004) 285.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 288.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 288.

Novices learn not just information from their mentors, but a way of life to imitate as they continue to walk in obedience to Christ.

Colonies of the Kingdom: Belonging, Believing, & Behaving

So far, we have briefly looked at the triad of making disciples: *go*, *baptize*, and *teach*. Now we must look at the culture of congregational life which serves as a womb by which catechetical evangelism and liturgical catechesis forms people to Christ, for “it is through the visible Church—foibles and all—that the world can best understand and find compelling the gospel and its derivative way of life.”¹⁷ Every congregation then can be likened to a colony of the kingdom of God whereby disciples are nurtured through belonging, believing, and behaving.¹⁸

Novices are continuously formed through fellowship (*koinoia*) with believers, for there is no such thing as a Lone-Ranger Christian in the New Testament. In other words, the Christian faith is not a private matter; it is to be lived out within the community of the Church. Whether through catechetical evangelism or liturgical catechesis, the shared life of the congregation exhibits an ethos contrary to that found in the world; hospitality, love, and joy are trademarks of this fellowship. Moreover, through initiation at Baptism and the common life of worship, catechesis, and mission¹⁹, novices discover their individual stories are rooted in a much larger story, that the epic narrative of Scripture narrates them: past, present, and eschatologically. Hence, novices are nurtured by coming to know their role within the larger story of salvation history through the rhythms and practices of congregational life. The fellowship of the community then testifies whom they belong to, namely the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As a result of understanding their identity as a people who belong to the Holy Trinity (*and the story they find themselves in*), the congregation then lives out that identity with the responsibility of being ambassadors for Christ in the world. Therefore, novices marinate in this fellowship, discover whom they belong to, and the responsibility that implies as representatives of God’s kingdom. Believing then is not a one-time event, but a journey where disciples continuously respond in belief, love, and obedience.²⁰

Additionally, the new reorientation of life which results from believing the Gospel takes on different dimensions when compared to the moral behavior of the world. Human beings made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) have yearnings and desires to be in community; ontologically, we long to love and be loved. The moral behavior of the Christian community then serves as an apologetic, for novices are nurtured by a community that emulates the love which Christ modeled and commanded in John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”²¹ The love of Christ lived out among the congregation is radical and otherworldly compared to a world overflowing with rage and aggression. However, when this love is lacking in congregational life, quarrelling and

¹⁷ Hollinger, Dennis. Phillips, Timothy R. & Dennis L. Okholm, ed. *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (IVP, 1995) 192.

¹⁸ Numerous scholars and practitioners have written extensively on this throughout the past several decades.

¹⁹ Many congregations depict their rhythm of congregational life as “worship, grow, and serve” or “Up, In, and Out.”

²⁰ Wright, N.T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (Harper, 2006) 209.

²¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Study Bible*. “John 13:34-35.” (Crossway, 2008) 2052.

factions arise as a result to pride and those seeking power. What then is revealed to the world is not a community which claims and practices love of God and neighbor, but a community whose moral behavior is no different from the world that steals, kills, lies, and covets. To requote St. Augustine: “Love is to be built up.”²² Let us then crucify our flesh and lay down our lives for one another, for as St. Paul reminds us, we are citizens of heaven.²³ Furthermore, the Christian community stands apart not just by how it loves the Lord and its members, but also, its enemies. As Christ commanded: “...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”²⁴ How wondrous is the moral behavior to which the Christian has been called—love of God, love of the Church, and even love of enemies.

Nurturing the Church at the Archdeaconry Level

As we now turn to the practical side of this talk, my aim is to first look at nurturing the regional church on the archdeaconry level. My friend, David Roseberry, once shared an insight he had on evangelism reflecting from his travels to Israel.²⁵ When you are on a boat in the Sea of Galilee you see fishermen throw out a net together to catch a plethora of fish. They cast out the net together; they haul in the load together. However, in North America, when it comes to fishing, our imaginations typically think of a person with a single rod casting out a line. What would it look like if an archdeaconry cast a net together? Simply put, the regional “net” at the archdeaconry level can be quite effective for mission when churches collaborate their spiritual, relational, intellectual, physical, and financial capital for the advancement of the Gospel. My doctoral research concentrated on how Anglican congregations can further expand the Church through archdeacons. The results from my studies concluded with the memorable alliteration of the 3 C’s of *church planting*, *clergy development*, and *community outreach*. These three concentrations thus cultivate regional archdeacons to be vehicles for mission.

CHURCH PLANTING: Since most Anglican congregations in North America range from communities of forty to eighty people²⁶, it is advantageous to shift the focus of church planting from the individual parish level to the regional net so that the pioneering work of launching new communities is resourced in a way that several churches share the responsibility together. Planters and their teams are to be deployed after prayer, discernment, assessment, coaching, and training. In other words, there is a clearly defined pipeline by which planters and their launch teams go through before the birth of new communities. This requires strong leadership, camaraderie, and ongoing discussion among the Regional Archdeacon and the other Rectors to identify what areas within their regional geography should be targeted for new missionary work. Additionally, the financial cost of pioneering new plants is distributed among the churches so that no one parish is taking the brunt of the load. Therefore, the archdeaconry allows for a broader planting methodology than individual congregations seeking to plant on their own. More can be done collaboratively by the regional net than a single parish hiving off twenty members to start a new work on their own. In this way, a culture of church planting emerges from within the regional net of the archdeaconry.

²²Augustine. Philip Schaff, ed. “The Catechising of the Uninstructed.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Volume 3—Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Hendrickson, 2004) 288.

²³ See Phil. 1:27; 3:20.

²⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Study Bible*. “Matt. 5:44-45a” (Crossway, 2008) 1830.

²⁵ Roseberry, David. “Conversation on Sea of Galilee.” Galilee, January 26, 2017.

²⁶ Ashe, Phil. “Conversation at R.S.V.P.” Destin, December 3, 2019.

CLERGY DEVELOPMENT: Firstly, the archdeaconry level provides an environment which allows a 360-degree assessment for clergy to discern aspirants for ordination. Instead of discernment just remaining at the congregational level, aspirants for Holy Orders can also be evaluated as they preach at congregations other than their own, thus allowing a process by which the regional net shares in the development of future clergy. Furthermore, the archdeaconry level can allow financial resources to seminarians who need monetary funds for their schooling. Class and book fees can be quite expensive, and here again the regional net can aid future clergy as they graduate and enter ordained ministry with less debt than what they otherwise would have incurred. Finally, ordained clergy need times of refreshment and opportunities for continuing education. Resources from the regional net can create occasions for retreat and continuing education thereby rejuvenating clergy who frequently are overworked and who need ongoing training for the demands of their ministries. The San Antonio Archdeaconry recently went on a retreat together in the Hill Country of Texas, which resulted in a fantastic time of mutual support and encouragement.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: With the combined resources of multiple parishes partnering together more creative mission opportunities can arise. Potential possibilities for collaborative mission in the archdeaconry may include Vacation Bible Schools for children, Youth Fellowship for adolescents, healing services, prayer services, evangelism training, short-term mission trips, to serving the poor. Coordinating such outreach among a multi-parish framework will also allow key lay leaders to build lasting relationships around the common vision of the archdeaconry serving as an incubator for prospects within the regional geography.

Therefore, several churches casting a net together at the archdeaconry level will result in substantial breakthrough for Gospel advancement because of the united vision of the 3 C's of *church planting, clergy development, and community outreach*. The basic premise of this model is more ministry can be done within a regional geography through collaborative mission of sister churches partnering together than through isolated efforts.

Nurturing the Church at the Congregational Level

Zooming in from the archdeaconry level, we presently find ourselves at the congregational level. A multitude of books have been written on this topic, but I offer here some thoughts I believe crucial when looking at the current cultural landscape of North America.

ENGAGING BOTH THE HEART AND THE MIND: What is frequently witnessed within the North American Church is an emotionalism that targets the heart and neglects the mind. The terminology of “worship experience” is repeatedly used in church advertising on the radio and social media, but oftentimes this language repulses a decent amount of people. At the congregational level we must take seriously the formation of both the heart and the mind, for God made both and both must be conformed to Christ. Too often churches are splashing around in shallow water with the consequences being having created a consumer-driven approach to church which cannot discern milk from meat. No parent wants their child to remain a toddler forever. Moreover, at some point adolescence must end for adulthood. Yet, when it comes to the maturity crisis we are facing throughout the North America Church, it is primarily because formation has not been balanced: people seldom move beyond the basics. A big reason for this

is they are taught to seek out the experience and put developing the mind on the back burner. But now is the time to move into deeper waters. Therefore, Rectors, Vestries, Staff, and lay leaders must prayerfully discern, plan, and execute a vision for their congregations that seriously fathom the formation of both the heart and mind. We cannot nurture the congregation by only appealing to one and malnourishing the other. A holistic methodology—from cradle to grave—must be weighed and considered then put into action. Throughout this talk we have addressed both catechetical evangelism and liturgical catechesis. Whether people are entering into the Church through the front porch or at the font, equal emphasis must be placed in formation on both the heart and the mind, for we are commanded to love the Lord with both. Our concentration then should be focused accordingly so that the disciples produced in our congregations may reach the maturity for which they were called.

FOCUSING ON MEDIA AND THE ARTS: The younger generations are visually oriented having been formed by the technological advancements of the past several decades. As the writer of one Forbes article put it regarding Generation Z’s media consumption: “It’s a Lifestyle, Not Just Entertainment.”²⁷ For many churches, the COVID-19 pandemic was a wakeup call on catching up with the times as congregations had to learn how to transmit their services, preaching and teaching in online formats. A certain professional quality production is expected by the younger generations whose lifestyle is the constant consumption of media through their smartphones or tablets; therefore, congregations need to make sure they are offering their best when they present their liturgical life online. Moreover, through the vehicle of media, the North American Church has a wonderful opportunity to communicate the beauty and truth of the Gospel through a vehicle that speaks the language of the people. There was once a time in church history where the Church was known for the arts. In my office hangs a copy of Rembrandt’s, *Return of the Prodigal Son*, a work which hundreds of years later continues to testify to God’s great mercy and amazing grace. Chances are in each of our congregations there are artists who paint, sculpt, compose music, write poetry, do graphic design, and who work with photography and film. How might these artists within our communities be encouraged to create art that transmits the Christian faith by being transmitted through media today? Art matters, and because of the visual mindset of younger generations, the Church has a wonderful opportunity at its fingertips.

DOING A COUPLE OF MINISTRIES WELL: One of the many challenges church leaderships face is the temptation to perform too many ministries consecutively with hardly anything being done efficiently. Perhaps there is both internal and outward stress placed upon the congregation to execute these functions but then things unravel and fall apart when the weight of the ministry apparatus begins to crack. It is better for a congregation to concentrate on doing a couple of ministries with excellence than a plethora poorly; therefore, discernment is crucial. A congregation needs to be able to identify key ministries it seeks to be known for in its local mission field. If a church’s leadership cannot judge what these ministries are, then they can submit an Appreciative Inquiry to the congregation for clarity. Concerning Appreciative Inquiry, Mark Lau Branson comments: “...the conversation changes as the congregation explores, through stories, memories, and imaginations, those life-giving forces that have shaped its past

²⁷ Granados, Nelson. “Gen Z Media Consumption: It’s a Lifestyle, Not Just Entertainment.” [June 20, 2017] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nelsongranados/2017/06/20/gen-z-media-consumption-its-a-lifestyle-not-just-entertainment/#6a94d9ba18c9> [Accessed October 20, 2020].

and offer possibilities for its future.”²⁸ What people are thankful and grateful for begins to shed light on a congregation’s identity, vision, mission, and hopes. Homing in on a couple of things being implemented thoroughly thus nurtures the congregation toward continuous breakthrough rather than seeking to accomplish an array of ministries that cannot properly be carried out due to overstressing the reach of the parish. In other words, less is oftentimes more and finding your church’s concentration is crucial.

We are living in a time where North American culture continues to “becom[e] more pluralistic, more individualistic, and more private.”²⁹ Therefore, church leaderships must seek to engage both the hearts and the minds of parishioners, focus on media and the arts, and concentrate on doing a couple of ministries well at the congregational level.

Intentionality, Planning, and Follow-Through

What I have sought to address in this talk is the Church’s mission to make disciples and how that mission can be nurtured at both the archdeaconry and congregational level. We have seen that spiritual parenting is more than mere catechetical instruction and information; it also involves imitation of a living example of faith followed by deployment into ministry. The Church is to *go, baptize, and teach* whether from catechetical evangelism of new converts or liturgical catechesis of children reared in the Church. We have also perceived each congregation as a colony of the kingdom of God whereby people are continually formed by *belonging, believing and behaving*—a place where, as St. Augustine claims: “Love is to be built up.”³⁰ We fathomed the regional church at the archdeaconry level being nurtured for collaborative mission as it shares resources for *church planting, clergy development, and community outreach*. And we finally addressed some of the challenges that face congregational life for the 21st century in a North American context. However, all of these are mere words if we are not intentional about stepping out in faith and obedience. Mission involves movement. We must be people with a plan, and planning involves discernment, prayer, ongoing conversations, and developing strategies. Lastly, we must follow-through. We must execute the plan with perseverance and power from the Holy Spirit, for we dare not seek to accomplish God’s mission merely by our own human strength. We follow-through in partnership with the missionary Spirit of God. In conclusion, by intentionally moving out in faith, prayerfully and strategically planning in hope, and following through by persevering in love, the Church on the archdeaconry and congregational level can be nurtured for mission.

²⁸ Branson, Mark Lau. *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (The Alban Institute, 2004) xi.

²⁹ Guder, Darrell L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998) 1.

³⁰ Augustine. Philip Schaff, ed. “The Catechising of the Uninstructed.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Volume 3—Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Hendrickson, 2004) 288.

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