

Vestry Spirituality – 2008 workshop

NOW – our agenda calls this workshop “Spiritual Leadership” and says, “Being on a Vestry means leading a community of faith. Our own spiritual life must be alive and growing, not stagnant. How does the Vestry model and lead the spiritual life of a congregation? How can it do this better, and in a way that helps the congregation become better as disciples? This workshop will examine these issues as the necessary component for leaders in a congregation.”

In order to clearly understand this, let me ask you – who makes up a Vestry?

The PRIEST and LAY LEADERSHIP are the Vestry – and they need to work together. The Canons of the Church do say that the Priest has the oversight of the Spiritual life of a congregation [get specific wording] -- but let’s discuss that a bit.

People have opinions about liturgy, etc.
 But priest has studied liturgy & spirituality
NEED TO WORK TOGETHER
 Requires TRUST – which I will get to later

Several years ago at the Vestry School when I talked about the Spirituality of the Vestry I used the analogy of rowing a boat. I used this in the context of saying that a Vestry has to deal with temporal needs but also spiritual needs – rowing with both oars. If a Vestry only deals with the temporal needs of a congregation, it’s like rowing with only one oar.

The same is true with the membership of the Vestry. If a priest wants to be the only one leading – or if the lay leadership must have it their way – it’s like rowing a boat with only one oar. Priest and Vestry need to work together – and as I said, this requires trust [which I will get to later].

I would say -- “The primary role of the lay leadership on a Vestry is to work with the Clergy to provide spiritual leadership in a congregation – and I believe it is crucial for clergy and lay leadership together to develop a corporate spiritual life that nourishes them as individuals and inspires them as a leadership team.”

How is this best done? How can your Vestry develop its spiritual life? I think by helping the individual members strengthen their own inner spirituality.

Important ways for you as an individual to strengthen your spiritual lives:

- Bible Study
are you involved in some type of Bible study?
- Regular attendance in worship
do you worship regularly? Regular: breath
- Participate in adult education or formation
are you involved in adult education?

Then it is important to work on the corporate spiritual life of the Vestry.

When the Rector and Wardens plan a Vestry meeting, there are several questions that I believe they should keep in mind:

- What can we offer the members of the Vestry that will nurture and form their inner lives?
- How can we transform the agenda of a business meeting into an opportunity for an encounter with the living God?
- How do we nurture one another into spiritual role models for the rest of the congregation?

Let me suggest a number of ways to do this:

- When you mail out the agenda, invite the members to add the items to their daily prayers prior to the meeting -- and then see the meeting as another form of those prayers. DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?
- Do Bible study at the beginning of the meeting – set the tone in study and prayer – and, no matter how packed the agenda, don't skip this. DOES THAT MAKE SENSE? How might you do this? [[Hand out African Bible Study](#)]
- Spend time at the beginning of the meeting to reflect on how you have seen and experienced God working in your life and those around you since the last meeting. DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?
- Have the Vestry share a meal – not necessarily at each meeting -- maybe every quarter or so. DOES THAT MAKE SENSE? How might you do this?
- Get and use "Vestry Papers". I've talked about these at past Vestry Schools – very often they have helpful articles – mail them out before and plan to discuss what you learned from them. [[Hand out copy of Vestry Papers](#)] DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?
- Allow discussions to be held in an environment of love and respect for one another's opinions – and listen to one another – develop TRUST. DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?
- Try to work on a consensus basis – votes of yea/nay tend to divide and have winners and losers. DOES THIS MAKE SENSE? How might you do this?
- When major decisions need to be made, spend time in silent prayer before the vote. DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?
- You might even ask one of the members to be the designated "pray-er" for the meeting – someone that will offer silent prayer throughout the meeting. WOULD THIS WORK?
- Sing – There is a quote from St. Augustine:
"For he that singeth praise, not only praiseth, but only praiseth with gladness: he that singeth praise, not only singeth, but also loveth him of whom he singeth. In praise, there is the speaking forth of one confessing; in singing, the affection of one loving." (St. Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 73, 1)

Apparently over the centuries this has been abridged to "He who sings, prays twice". DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?

- Before closing, each person reflects on how they have seen God working in the meeting and through the individual members. DOES THIS MAKE SENSE? Would your Vestry be able to do this?
- Have Vestry prayer partners – who will pray for each other between meetings. DOES THIS MAKE SENSE? How might you do this?

In all of the above I asked if it made sense. A lot of what we ought to do is just common-sense stuff.

Do you have any other ideas – which you use or could use?

OK. Now I'd like to ask another question. What is the mission statement of the Diocese?

"To be a community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Christ."

In order for us to lead others to Christ for transformation, our own lives need to be transformed in Christ to begin with.

What would you think a transformed life might look like? [[Get answers – put on news print](#)]

GOOD!!

Our lives, our work as leaders in a congregation, our witness to the whole congregation in how we work together, needs to be based in this transformed life.

The work of a Vestry should reflect the characteristics you mentioned – of which some Paul calls "fruits of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

I'm convinced that Paul believed that these are not individual "fruits" from which we can pick and choose. After all he said "the fruit of the Spirit is...". Not "fruits". The Fruit of the Spirit is one nine-fold "fruit" that is a physical manifestation of a Christian's transformed life.

If we are spiritually transformed in Christ – then our Vestry meetings should also be a manifestation of the "fruit" of the Spirit. In your meetings do you see:

Love	Joy	Peace	
	Patience	Kindness	goodness
Faithfulness	Gentleness	Self-control	

How could those things become part of Vestry meetings? [If time, small groups; if not, get answers]

And then, in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians (4:1-2) Paul says: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”

We also need to be trustworthy and to TRUST.

As I make my Visitations and work with Vestries and congregations in other ways, I find that *trust* is often in short supply – especially in congregations that are experiencing trouble or are heading in that general direction.

Lay leaders don't trust the clergy and vice-versa. Members of the congregation don't trust the clergy or the lay leadership – or even, and I know you won't believe this, don't trust me or the Diocese or anyone outside their local congregation. Leaders are suspicious of one another. And what is most devastating is that many have lost the ability to trust that God is good, gracious and strong enough to see them through even the darkest days.

There are several things that I have noticed:

- When trust is low, morale is low.
- When trust is low, fear takes over.
- When trust is low, it is difficult if not impossible to focus on mission.
- When trust is low, worship attendance stagnates or dwindles.
- When trust is low, leaders, but paid and volunteer, suffer greatly.
- When trust is low, it is hard to be the church together.

THERE'S A BETTER WAY –

1st) Work on your relationship with God:

- Pray
- Explore again and again the wondrous stories of God's unchanging love for you and all people
- Share Bible stories of trust, faith and hope at every Vestry meeting
- If your trust in God can be strengthened, it may lead you to trust others as well.

2nd) Believe that others have good intentions

- I can't tell you how hard it is on leaders when they are challenged and questioned about their intentions.
- Most people, even those with bad ideas, rarely set out to destroy, harm or imperil the church.
- Most people are doing the best they can when called on to help out.

3rd) Work hard to listen and understand the thoughts of others.

- We cannot build trust between us if we will not listen to one another.
- We cannot build trust between us if we hear only what we want to hear in our conversations.
- We cannot build trust between us if we are waiting for the first moment to argue against what the other is saying.
- Trust begins with the willingness to hear each other, and trying hard to understand the other's point of view.

4th) Remember, you are on the same team.

- Mission and ministry is not about *I* or *ME*....it's about *WE* and *US*.
- When one of us loses, we all lose.
- When one of us is dismissed, we are all dismissed.
- When one of us hurts, we are all hurt by that action.
- Focus on how we can and will do things together, for the best of all concerned.

Lively congregations, effective Vestries, strong Dioceses are founded on trust. Energetic mission and ministry are driven by trust. Core relationships are glued together with trust.

Trust is a gift from God's Holy Spirit that is worth tending, mending and sending every day.

I want to conclude by sharing with you a brief article entitled "Reflections on Spiritual Journeys" by Charles Morello. I found this on the Internet – from the East Range Churches – a cluster of three small congregations in the Iron range of MN.

"In the 70's and 80's when Carol and I attended an Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia, there was one person who stood out: Bill. He was the unofficial "greeter and hugger" of the congregation. Every Sunday and at every

church event he was there to say hello and give everyone a hug. Bill had achieved a level of personal spirituality that made him comfortable in sharing that spirituality with everyone. We used to joke that Bill was much more advanced in walking with The Holy Spirit, that he had reached a place in his spiritual journey that we "mere mortals" could only hope to reach.

This past weekend I was at a meeting of search consultants for the Diocese of Minnesota. At one point in the meeting we began discussing spirituality in and of congregations. One participant spoke about how leaders of meetings and events can be mindful of God's presence at the meetings. Often in the rush to go through the mechanics of a search – or any other activity of the church – we do not hear what God is saying to us in the dynamics of the activity.

This discussion got me to thinking again about Bill. His greetings and hugs were a small way of displaying the love of Christ at meetings otherwise filled with budget information or contentious issues. In taking that time to be hugged by (and to hug back at) Bill, we all were able for a moment to feel loved and give love – unconditionally. Bill did not care about our outward appearances. He was more interested in God's presence in what each of us brought to the event we were attending.

Our discussions at the meeting raised some questions about the presence of The Holy Spirit in all our lives (as individuals, as members of a congregation, and as members of a diocese). One of the participants asked the question of all of us: "What kind of a spiritual call experience have you had that you are willing to share with others?"

Again I thought of Bill. His spiritual call experience was to be the presence of Christ wherever he was, at church, at work, or at play. As I thought about Bill in this context, I began to consider where, in my life, I have felt a spiritual call and how I have shared that call and where our congregations have felt a spiritual call and how they have shared that call with others.

I ask you to prayerfully consider where your spiritual call is – individually and as congregations – and to share these calls with others. As we continue our journey let us be mindful of God's presence."

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What a wonderful story – and something to contemplate. Where is your spiritual call, as an individual and as a Vestry? And how do you plan to share that call with others?

QUESTIONS?