

Mission Minded....

From Bishop Bob Biermann



One of the most difficult tasks of the past several years has been that of establishing and growing churches. In today's day and age, it is seemingly harder, as the culture is increasingly less tolerant to the true message of the Gospel. In addition, we find a strange mix and diversity of today's "churches," many of which would have been unheard of a generation ago. For example, a massive number of formerly "solid" church bodies have literally abandoned the "faith once delivered to the saints," in exchange for a man-centered and earth-centric social message. In other words, "another gospel." The irony is that as they become more like the world, they are the fastest declining church bodies in North America.

Other church bodies, in an effort to seem relevant, have adopted a methodology and presentation that is often hard to distinguish from a rock concert, night club, or pep-rally. While I appreciate what they are trying to do - and their rapid growth is often explosive -- I have found that many of their members are often not very deep in their faith, and (from direct personal experience with many) tend to place their feelings, desires, and emotions above their commitment to Christ. Sadly, they value the (entertainment) "experience" over the Saviour. Worship is often a one-way street where it what they get, not what we should give of ourselves to Christ, that matters.



The new "shiny thing" on the block in North American Anglican circles is the ACNA. In what I'm about to say, I am not attempting to be disparaging or mocking, I am simply aware that the ACNA is essentially the Episcopal Church (in many ways) prior to V. Gene Robinson. They have not honestly dealt with Women's Ordination (as seen in picture on left), and much of the "meism" and watered down theology found in the 1979 BCP. I am certain because they have momentum, size, and resources they will continue to grow for a season. However, at some point, the unresolved issues will begin to boil under the surface, and will most likely cause a split.

Many of the continuing churches are both growing and declining at the same time. As a general rule, their membership is older, and the new pool of "older" members is not going to be as large as the first group of the aging "baby-boom" generation. In addition, many of the later "baby-

boomers" have become so secularized that they have no interest in the church. The Gen-X group is also noticeably smaller than the baby boomers and even less engaged in the church as a group.

In the "Continuum" you have smaller churches quietly closing, some slowly shrinking, and a few, that because of what they are trying to do beyond just a Sunday morning 1928 BCP service, are actually holding their own, and often growing.

PARADIGM
SHIFT



For the past 15 years, I have been trying to get an understanding of this new dichotomy, and have been trying to piece together a scriptural and effective paradigm for church planting in this secular age. One thing I've learned, the church under persecution may not have been universally large, but it was/is committed, faithful and growing. Our current culture is gradually increasing a "purging and belittling" of people of faith in the marketplace of ideas. The church needs to stop emulating the world and be the "Ecclesia," which is the living Body of Christ on this earth, and to truly be Consecrated and set apart unto God.



In my ministry, I have had the pleasure of seeing churches grow and prosper. I've also seen some of the same churches (*after I left*) decline, or even close. In every case where that occurred, they were no longer properly fed, instructed, or cared for, and they lost their primary vision. I have planted churches that flourished for a season, but when handed off to another clergy, suffered similar fates for the very same reasons. When a church plant is treated as only a "once a week gathering" around simply a worship style and tradition, it ends up not being something of value and is easily forfeited.

Here are the sobering realities. This week between 250 and 350 churches **will close their doors forever** in the United States. In some cases, it will be because they embarked on a social gospel path 20 or more years ago that sounded good at the time, but offered nothing of real spiritual substance to the community. In other cases, the congregation eventually aged out and did nothing to evangelize the lost generation. There was no one to fill their shoes as they aged out and died.



I recently read of a traditional Anglican church that closed in North Carolina. This church was started about 6 or 7 years ago. Because of its small size it was always classified as just a "mission."



They were fortunate to get a clergyman that was able to serve them during all those years. They had services each and every week. Their clergyman finally came to the point that he needed to retire from both his secular work and church work. He moved hundreds of miles away. Without a clergyman, and no hopes of



ever getting one -- as their community is not very large and they had no resources to pay anything to help a clergyman, they decided to simply close their doors forever.

In their 6+ years, with a very nice place to meet which they owned, along with a fine altar, pews, pulpit, Prayerbooks, Hymnals vestments parchments and organ, they had only "*grown*" to about 10 people each Sunday and were virtually unknown in their community. I have a name for that type of church. I call them the "1928 Prayerbook Burial Society." Their only community outreach was a tiny advertisement in the local newspaper with *ONLY* the church name, meeting location, phone number and the words "1928 BCP-1940 Hymnal." To a community in North Carolina what would that advertisement mean? Not much. Both their FaceBook™ page and website were extremely out of date, and very limited.

So why this long and depressing dissertation? It is to first remind us of the reality of the world in which God has called us to proclaim His Holy Name. Second, for us, all to (re)commit our efforts following a realistic, impactful, and biblical methodology. In our efforts, we must be wise but also seeking what God would have us to do. I am working on a basic mission plan that can be the foundation of planting churches. Third, to get your input from your own personal experiences in ministry. In putting this together there is no "*magic bullet*" that will make churches just pop out of the ground, but we need to take that first step to identify how to share our Ancient Faith in this 21st Century World.

The truth is we DO have something of value to offer to the world that is "trapped" online, within themselves and untrusting of others. As even Millennials begin to age, they are starting to feel the insecurity and the false sense of purpose this increasingly artificial world has to offer.



As they begin to have their own children, they will begin to worry about what kind of life and world those children will ultimately have. We have something that is real, proven, and timeless.

So, my third point is to open a dialogue with those that want to help in putting together a plan of action to help fulfill our calling to be the Salt and Light of this world. Unlike that small mission in North Carolina, let us NOT put our light under a bushel basket.

If you would like to help me on this project, let me know. Contact me at:

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In Christ's Service,
+Bob