

IN THIS ISSUE:

The End to 'Business as Usual', page 1

Let Your Light Shine Through, page 6

Understanding and Celebrating Differences, page 8

Closing the Planning Gap, page 10

Healthy Transitions: Part 1, page 12

Resurrection Leadership, page 14

Healthy Transitions Part 2, page 16

Covenants in Congregational Life, page 18

Editor's Note:

The January/February 2011 edition of *Vestry Papers* is the Episcopal Church Foundation's first completely online version. Recognizing that some readers may choose to print and share this issue, we've retired our signature layout in favor of a simpler design that works equally well in black and white or full color.

The End to 'Business as Usual'

BY TOM ERICH

Many vestry members start out with three assumptions:

- Their job is to run the congregation
- Their goal is to keep longtime members happy.
- From work and home, they already have the skills they need to do vestry work.

Not one of assumptions is accurate. And our own history proves it.

Imagine the year 1965 – ancient history for some, and yet a critical year, because this is when church leaders failed to see the future breaking in and thereby started the Episcopal Church on a 45-year slide that has shrunk our national membership from 3.5 million to 2 million.

Until vestry members stop trying to run churches and turn their attention to discerning the future and anticipating its requirements and opportunities, that slide will continue. Already, one-half to two-thirds of Episcopal congregations teeter on the brink of non-viability.

If vestries had been paying attention to the marketplace in 1965, they would have seen that Baby Boomers were starting to graduate from high school and leave home, and the easy

growth of the post-War era was ending.

If vestries had paid attention to metrics and organization development, they would have asked, how will we recruit new members to replace those leaving home? How will we hold on to their parents? What does the future look like as families change?

If vestries had studied suburbanization, shopping malls, consolidated schools, early signs of the “big box” store, and Interstate highways, they would have seen that the business model they knew – neighborhood parishes opening for worship on Sunday – was passing away. They would have asked if churches could expect to be exempt from market forces that were transforming every other institution.

American life was changing. Mainline churches were fighting bitterly over a few changes – such as changing roles for women, a desire for contemporary idiom in worship, an insurgent laity wanting power, and changing attitudes toward homosexuality – but ignoring other changes that would end up having far greater impact on church health.

The result – experienced by all

seven mainline denominations – was collapse: a relentless slide in membership, participation and giving that began in 1965 and continues to this day. A denomination that had grown from just over 1 million baptized members in 1925 to 3.5 million in 1965 now began to decline, until membership sank to 2 million at present.

Key metric: market share. From 1925 to 1965, the Episcopal Church claimed a consistent 1.6% to 1.7% of the US population. Today our share is just 0.68%, not even half of what it was. If we had held our own, we would be a denomination of 5 million, not 2 million.

As it happened, vestries didn't see the missing, didn't ask enough questions about cultural shifts, didn't think strategically, and didn't anticipate a future beyond the next 12-month budget. Vestries became embroiled in the day-to-day operations of parishes. The future was left to fend for itself. Leaders clung to magical thinking: just keep making Sunday morning better and better, and some day people will return. Not happening.

The result: one-half to two-thirds of our congregations are close to dying, our average age is 65, young adults and young families take their religious interests elsewhere, and many leadership circles are setting their sights no higher than survival.

I believe the time is right for us to move forward. The stars are aligning. There is growing interest in

progressive Christianity. We have diversity to offer and, for the most part, have moved beyond fascination with the wealthy. We are far more nimble than we were.

But for a better future to happen, vestries need to recognize that business-as-usual is over. Over the next two to three years, vestries need to undertake six radical shifts in how they operate.

1. Vestries need to stop running churches. Leave that to staff and lay volunteers. A healthy organization needs a leadership cadre that sees its charge as the future and its task as strategic thinking. In a corporation, that would be the board of directors. In an Episcopal congregation, it's the vestry. In partnership with the clergy, vestries need to study how successful congregations are thinking about their futures.

2. Vestries need to take risks and make a radical commitment to [change](#), including moving away from Sunday morning as the primary locus of ministry. They need to invest aggressively in technology. The “over-my-dead-body” attitude toward change that prevailed in the tumultuous 1970s and 1980s needs to stop. If longtime leaders can't imagine a future beyond what they know, they need to step aside.

3. Vestries need to understand how churches work – not in the “golden era” that a few always remember, but today. We need [methodologies](#) that are better

suited to this era. We need to ask how others have been growing churches of all sizes while we were declining.

4. Vestries need to become savvy about [church systems](#). Too many vestry members believe their life skills and job skills are readily transferable to the church setting. In fact, vestry duty is unlike other work.

5. Vestries need to insist on sophisticated, consistent and accurate [metrics](#). Everything that went astray in the 1960s and beyond could have been seen and dealt with if we had just had better metrics. The Episcopal Church Parochial Report is barely a starting point.

6. Vestries need to [listen](#) to the marketplace, the broader context in which the congregation operates. I read three dozen market-based reports every day and am impressed with how much good data and trend spotting are available. Listen to people's needs.

If vestries stepped back from day-to-day operations, took on entrepreneurial attitudes, learned from others, got smart about church dynamics, made a radical and informed commitment to engaging a changing world, and stopped blaming the recession, they could turn this decline around quickly and set a new growth era in motion.

Business as usual will sink us.

Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and pastor. In 1993 Tom founded Journey Publishing Company, which evolved and expanded into [Morning Walk Media Inc.](#) in 2007.

Through Morning Walk Media, Tom writes a nationally syndicated newspaper column on faith and ethics for Religion News Service and a column on Multichannel Church for "Presbyterian Outlook." He publishes daily and weekly writings, and writes books such as "With Scripture as my Compass" (Abingdon Press, 2004), "Just Wondering, Jesus: 100 Questions People Want to Ask," (Morehouse Publishing, 2005) and "Church Wellness" (Morehouse division of Church Publishing Inc., 2008).

Through the Church Wellness Project, Tom provides educational materials and consulting on how to nurture healthy congregations by applying "best practices" in critical areas that determine health. Clients include congregations and judicatories around the US and Canada.

Editor's Letter

Happy 2011!

In the United States, the start of a new calendar year signals time for reflection and renewal and setting goals. Out with the old! In with the new!

The January/February 2011 edition of *Vestry Papers* is the Episcopal Church Foundation's first completely online version. Recognizing that some readers may choose to print and share this issue, we've retired our signature layout in favor of a simpler design that works equally well in black and white or full color. Each article begins on a new page, making it easier to print and share a single article.

Honoring the New Year's tradition of evaluation and goal setting, *ECF Vital Practices* invited church leaders to share 'healthy practices' in the areas of mission, formation, leadership, stewardship, and wellness. What best practices might congregations adopt to facilitate the work God is calling them to do in the coming year and beyond? How might these new, healthier practices prepare congregational leaders to meet the challenges presented by the world we live in today?

Here's what we you'll find in this issue:

- Tom Ehrich of Morning Walk Media challenges us to take a hard look at how our approach to 'being church'

has contributed to the continuing, overall decline in membership, participation, and giving. "The End to 'Business as Usual'" may be tough to read yet Tom's six radical operating shifts offer a road map for vestries and other congregational leaders to reverse this decline and reclaim their role as vital members of their communities.

- Dorothy Gibson and Barbara Larson of Seattle's St. Andrew's Episcopal Church share their "Let Your Life Shine: Naming and Sharing Your Gifts" program which supports and encourages congregational members to live out their baptismal call seven days a week. Their 'Gifts Inventory Resource' offers a way to help individuals indentify their gifts and then link them to areas of service.
- Episcopal Divinity School professor Bill Kondrath shares a model for understanding and celebrating differences. He offers a three step process to help congregations to move from good intentions to action using exercises from his book *God's Tapestry: Understanding*

and Celebrating Differences.

- "Closing the Planning Gap" moves from congregational practices to personal practice. Planned giving specialist David Farrand of Calvary Episcopal Church in Summit, New Jersey encourages each of us to make 2011 the year we tackle end of life issues such as a writing a will, planning our own funeral services, and specifying medical directives.
- Sandy Kolb of Fresh Start, in "Healthy Transitions: Part 1" uses the Exodus story as a model to guide congregations experiencing a change in ordained leadership. She names the difference between 'change' and 'transition' and offers specific steps congregations can take to help members weather the 'inward and spiritual' process of transition beginning with the announcement of the change and continuing until the new rector is firmly established in the life of the congregation. Part 2 of this article will be posted in early February.
- "Resurrection Leadership" tells the story of how St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Waco, Texas was reborn

both as a vital member of the Waco community and as a thriving congregation after closing their 60-year old school.

Over the next two months, *ECF Vital Practices* will be adding to this content with additional Vestry Papers articles as well as related Vital Posts, VP Talks, and Tools. We invite you to add to this content by sharing your healthy practices in the Your Turn section and by participating in VP Talks and/or posting comments related to our articles, blog posts, or other content.

Faithfully,

Nancy Davidge

Editor, *ECF Vital Practices*

Let Your Light Shine Through

BY DOROTHY GIBSON WITH ASSISTANCE FROM BARBARA LAWSON

When our rector asked me to help develop a class on leadership for the community, I was intrigued by the possibilities. His idea is to find ways to support and encourage members of the congregation to live out their baptismal call seven days a week, not just on Sundays. A part of that challenge is figuring out what we are called to do and be.

The parish life at [St. Andrew's](#) is a whirl of activity. We have a bunch of ministries—everything from the usual altar guild and Sunday school teaching to baking bread for communion to a technology committee to bring the work of the church into the current century. Lots of people are involved, and the community is strong and vibrant.

Given all that energy and the challenges of the time we live in, it feels like a good time to expand the opportunities for lay leadership beyond the church walls. Many people take a chance on trying something new when they are in a safe, supporting environment like the church. We seek to encourage people to stretch themselves a little further and to examine how they live out their Christian call in the wider world. Maybe they are feeling a little pull in the back of their minds, or maybe it's a great big tug, telling them that they want to dig a little deeper and learn more about themselves or try a new way of being in the world.

This class aims to help with that process.

For several months I have had the privilege of working with Barbara Larson—a member of the parish and a diocesan consultant—and members of the St. Andrew's staff to design a class called "Let Your Light Shine: Naming and Sharing your Gifts."

This five-week, 1-1/2 hour evening program is built on the theme of developing leadership within the congregation by helping participants name and claim their gifts to use in the community and at their work and home settings. The class begins with a [gifts inventory](#), following which small workgroups are established for support and fellowship to aid with both personal discovery of gifts and validation of each other's gifts. Each week participants are assigned reflective spiritual exercises designed to help them incorporate what they're learning in class and about themselves and to find what brings them joy, what their passion is, and how they can use that passion in the world. [Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life](#) by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn, SJ (Paulist Press) and [Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts](#) by Lloyd Edwards (Cowley) are our current favorite resources for this type of exercise.

We want this to be a joyful and rich experience for those attending and for those teaching. (Someone once said that you teach what you need to learn yourself. I say Amen to that!) Those who sign up are expected to commit to attending all the classes, participating in their groups, and doing their homework.

It will be exciting to see how the work we do in class will translate into the wider world. Some of the small groups that form as part of the class might continue after the class. And if there's interest, we can work on the next steps to leadership development.

To close, I want to share one of my favorite quotes, from Marianne Williamson, which inspires me to find ways to let my light shine and support others, too:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about

shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn, SJ (Paulist Press)
<http://www.paulistpress.com/bookView.cgi?isbn=0-8091-3579-5>

Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts by Lloyd Edwards (Cowley)
<http://www.amazon.com/Discerning-Spiritual-Gifts-Lloyd-Edwards/dp/0936384654>

Dorothy Gibson is senior warden at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Seattle, Washington where she has been a parishioner since 1997. She has served on the Standing Committee for the Diocese of Olympia and co-chaired the Call Committee at St. Andrew's. A native of the Diocese of Virginia and a preacher's kid, Dorothy has been a member of the Episcopal Church for longer than she can remember.

Barbara Larson joined St. Andrews' in 2009 and has been active in the Diocese of Olympia for over 40 years. An experienced consultant, she served as part of the Diocese training group and recently completed the College for Congregational Development. Barbara has facilitated several Vestry retreats and parish call committee processes within the diocese. She recently retired from healthcare administration in the Providence Health Care System.

Resources with reflective spiritual exercises:

Understanding and Celebrating Differences

BY WILLIAM M. KONDRATH

Scientists tell us that biodiversity is a key measure of the health of any ecosystem. Many of us suspect that diversity within our congregations would also be a sign of health, creativity, radical welcome, and the possibility of growth. If we think this is true, why are Sunday mornings one of the most segregated times of the week? It seems to me that the answer lies most often not in our intentions, which I think are generally well conceived, nor even in the demographics of our neighborhoods, which are often more varied than our churches. The reason most of our congregations fail to represent the rich and diverse tapestry of God's people lies more in our lack of imagination, in the negative affective messages we caught early in life, and in the inability to live by guidelines that would assure, in the words of the great anthropologist Ruth Fulton Benedict, a "world made safe for differences."

Imagination and welcoming differences

I often hear lay leaders and clergy (especially those on newcomer or stewardship committees) talking about how *we should* have more members and more diverse membership in our congregations. While this intention is admirable, it sounds like many of my Lenten or New Year's resolutions: I *should*

pray more often; I *should* reach out to family members and friends that I know are forlorn or having a tough time; I *should* eat a more healthy diet and lose ten pounds. In the language of Transactional Analysis, these resolutions come from the Critical Parent. And while there is a place for such messages to keep children from playing on the highway, those messages have rarely helped me to initiate creative behaviors, or to stay with new behaviors more than a few days or weeks.

What has proved more helpful to me is opening myself to the Playful or Natural Child—the part of my being that delights in new and creative opportunities. From this stance, I think of what I *want* to do or be. I *imagine* our congregation as vibrant, culturally diverse and growing.

On a personal level, I learned this shift of perspective some years ago when I felt in a rut around our family meals. Rather than saying I *should* learn to make some new meals, I *imagined* our family eating the kind of meals we ate at restaurants when we were being daring. I fantasized being a fanciful and creative chef in our own kitchen and the excitement of my daughters

and wife sitting down to a meal we had never had before at home. After the imagining I followed through with cooking one new meal every week for four months—a resolution record for me!

The role of feelings in embracing and celebrating differences

Very often people say they want their congregations to be more diverse culturally. They may even give theological reasons for welcoming all sorts and conditions of people: young and old, women and men, gay, lesbian, transgendered, and straight, folks of all colors and cultures. Their values and thinking seem open and inclusive. Why then do we not see more multicultural congregations? I think the reason is that we are often halted from making progress on an *emotional* level. We frequently fail to accomplish what we wish because we are caught in our sadness, our fear, or our anger.

"Processing Feelings During a Leadership Transition" names some of the common feelings experienced by congregational members during times of change. While unprocessed feelings can be a roadblock to leadership transition or any other significant change, expressing and processing feelings can help individuals and communities make appropriate transitions at a rate that is

acceptable.

In order to get the outcomes we desire on a cognitive level, I believe we have to deal with our emotional roadblocks. If we are afraid about the changes that will come with new and diverse people, we need to find *protection and support* for the changes we are making. We need knowledgeable allies who can help us emotionally, as well as cognitively, to embrace people who are different than us. If we are sad about the intimacy we have lost or anticipate losing, we may need a time to *grieve* and *to let go of* what has been familiar and comforting to us. If we carry any anger about failed attempts to change or about expectations that are not being met, we will need to *negotiate new boundaries and/or expectations*. When we deal with these emotional challenges appropriately, we find new energy to engage the process of welcoming differences.

Guidelines for understanding and celebrating differences

Perhaps the most important requirement for embracing interpersonal differences is a set of guidelines that opens us to seeing, understanding at a deeper level, and celebrating differences. These guidelines assure that people with historically less access to power and resources will be treated as full participants in our communities. These guidelines include *trying on* new beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, feelings, and processes. It is also important to *be able to disagree with others without shaming*

and blaming them or ourselves. In a world of either/or thinking and “my way or the highway,” we need to *practice a both/and attitude*. Simply replacing “but” with “and” when we introduce a position that differs from the last thing spoken works wonders. *Attending to our impact on others*, and not simply our *intention*, will assist greatly when conflicts arise. While groups will surely add other guidelines, the important point is we assure that dominance is not exercised by individuals or groups that have historic or positional power and privilege, and new folks have real access to decision-making.

The ability to creatively imagine a different future, the attention to our feelings and those of others, and mutually agreed upon guidelines for entering discussions and trying new behaviors will go far to helping us live into the fullness of the diversity that God created and invites us to embrace.

The Rev. Dr. William M. Kondrath is the William Lawrence Professor of Pastoral Theology and Director of Theological Field Education at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the author of [*God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences*](#). Bill has worked with congregations, judicatories, and theological schools in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Mauritius on leadership development, creativity, affective competency, change and conflict, and understanding and valuing differences. He is also a

program consultant for [*VISIONS, Inc.*](#), providing multicultural training and consultation to corporate, educational, nonprofit, and ecclesial organizations.

Closing the Planning Gap

BY DAVID FARRAND

As we begin a new year, perhaps you are trying to decide, once again, what resolutions might bring you health and peace. One goal might be to close the planning gap. Or, put another way, this may be the year to finally address end of life issues for you and your family.

I would like to call your attention to page 445 of the [Book of Common Prayer](#) and to what some have called the Planned Giving Rubric that concludes the section "Thanksgiving for a Child:"

"The Minister of the Congregation is directed to instruct the people, from time to time, about the duty of Christian parents to make prudent provision for the well-being of their families, and of all persons to make wills, while they are in health, arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, not neglecting, if they are able, to leave bequests for religious and charitable uses."

I believe that this is a call to intentionality; it is not necessarily a fund-raising plea. Surely, wonderful gifts to the church or other not-for-profit organizations can flow from this emphasis. But first, there must be a plan. My work in planned giving is rooted in

my personal experience with planning and the lack of planning about the end of life. I want to share part of my story with you.

About sixteen years ago, just as we arrived at our vacation destination, our summer was shattered by the phone call bringing the news that my brother, Jack, had died suddenly of an apparent heart attack at age 56. He was single and lived in Connecticut where he was a member of an Episcopal Church. It became my "job" to notify family members and pull together a funeral service.

The clergy of Jack's church were enormously helpful as we planned the scripture readings, psalms, and hymns to be included in the service. But, I found it particularly distressing to be in the position of planning my brother's funeral without a clue as to what he would actually want. Like too many people in their mid-fifties, none of us had made funeral plans. At one point in the chaos, I turned to my wife and said, "If you want to know what sort of funeral I would like, here it is!" The realization that it was more my funeral than Jack's still bothers me. Everyone seemed to think

it was a lovely service. I certainly did.

It turned out that my brother did not have a will. Nobody in our family was surprised that he, the creative, freelance writer, had not spent a moment on estate planning, let alone funeral planning. I ended up as the administrator of his intestate estate, dealing with on-going royalty checks, tax payments, etc., etc. It took several months to settle all of his affairs.... and life went on.

One year later, my 90-year-old Aunt Louisa died of a massive stroke. She lived in a retirement community in North Carolina and was a member of an Episcopal Church there. She had a will naming me as the executor and I was given clear instructions. For example, somewhere on every item of value in her apartment was a "post-it" directing that item to one of her many nephews, nieces, or godchildren. Some even had names crossed out in favor of new designees.

But first came the funeral. The rector of her church told me that, over the years, he had enjoyed many conversations with my aunt, including a discussion of her funeral wishes. Even the version of the scripture was specified. For example, he had been asked to read the King James Version of the

Gospel of John (14:2), "In my father's house are many mansions." This was neither a "dwelling places" nor "rooms" kind of lady; mansions were much more appropriate. This distinction became part of the homily.

Certainly there is a different kind of grief that attends the death of a vigorous 56 year old as opposed to the death of a frail 90 year old who has lived a rich, full life. But for me, who had a special place in both "impact zones," the latter was much, much easier - because I knew what to do.

For the past decade I have consulted with congregations and groups in the area of planned giving. When talking about end of life issues, I often refer people to the Episcopal Church Foundation's booklet *Planning for the End of Life*. This resource contains information about medical directives, funeral service planning and a guide to preparing to write your will.

There does not need to be a planning gap at the time of your death to add to your family's grief and stress. It is a profound gift to your family to leave them with a clear understanding of your wishes.

David Farrand is a member of Calvary Episcopal Church in Summit, NJ. Following his career as a fixed income specialist on Wall Street, David continues to share his expertise in planned giving through his work with Calvary Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Newark, St. Philip's Academy in Newark, and the Episcopal Church Foundation.

Healthy Transitions: Part I

BY SANDRA CLARK KOLB

Change in ordained leadership in a congregation creates a time of both challenge and opportunity. As a vestry member you play a critical role in making the transition a healthy one.

Understanding the difference between change and transition is important. Change is the event itself – it occurs at a specific point in time – an “outward and visible sign.” Transition is a psychological process; the internal response people have to the change. It is “inward and spiritual,” and occurs in three stages – ending (letting go of the old), in-between time (wilderness), and new beginning. It starts when the congregation learns their rector is leaving and continues until it seems as though the new rector has been there all along.

Both the change and the transition need to be managed well. Your diocesan policy tells you how to manage the former – select a search committee, call an interim, develop a profile, etc. The Exodus story provides us with a map for managing the transition. Using Moses as our guide, here are some steps to take.

Pray for God’s guidance

Just as the Israelites followed the pillars of cloud and fire you need to be looking and listening for God’s call. Include a prayer for the search in all your Sunday services. There are examples in the [Book of Common Prayer](#) (page 818) and [Women’s](#)

[Uncommon Prayers](#) (pages 55 and 362). Better yet, write one yourself. Ask the vestry and search committee to pray for each other collectively or by forming prayer partners across the two groups.

Help assure a good exit by the departing rector:

The Red Sea provided a dramatic and visible end to Israel’s past, and you need to create some Red Sea events. You also need to assure an orderly transfer of knowledge and tasks from the departing rector to interim leadership.

- Conduct an exit interview to glean needed information on issues the rector has been handling and seek his/her thoughts on your mutual ministry.
- Establish mutual expectations for the future relationship of the departing rector with members of the congregation and make them known. This is particularly important if the rector will continue to live in the immediate area.
- Have the rector create a list of contacts in diocesan, community, and ecumenical groups to which he/she belongs so those connections can be retained.
- Plan for the rector to pay

one final call on those who are housebound or ill.

- Plan a congregation-wide leave-taking celebration – for example, a festive reception following his/her last Sunday services. Host other events appropriate to your congregation’s culture and traditions such as dinners in people’s homes, a picnic, or special meetings with the rector and key groups or committees (e.g., choir, altar guild, outreach).
- Don’t forget the rector’s spouse/partner and children. Their life in the congregation needs to be celebrated.

These tasks are more difficult if the ending is sudden or tragic (e.g., death or dissolution of pastoral relationship). In those cases seek help and support from your bishop and diocesan staff.

Celebrate your congregation’s history

When the Israelites left Egypt they took the bones of Joseph, fulfilling a promise that he would be buried wherever they went. While mission and ministry must change in response to changing needs, there are essential pieces of congregational identity that will serve as building blocks for future mission. Holding a history-sharing event allows the congregation to

celebrate its past and identify those building blocks.

Invite the congregation to look at its history over the past 50 years. Post three timelines (one each for world, community, and congregation) and ask the congregation to add specific events they remember on each timeline.

Divide people into five groups, assign each a decade, and ask them to answer the following:

- What was occurring in the world and the community during that decade?
- How did these events impact the congregation?
- How did the congregation respond?
- What does this say about the core values and mission of the congregation?
- What should be carried into the future?

Ask each group to report out. Hold this event when you can get the greatest participation – after Sunday services, at an evening potluck, on a Saturday morning. You can also leave the timelines up so people can add to them.

Communicate

Moses spent time by the campfires listening. You need to do the same to keep your finger on the pulse of the congregation.

- Share your understanding

of the difference between change and transition through newsletter articles, your Web site, blurbs in your Order of Service – as many ways as you can.

- Check in with committees to find out what is needed to maintain their ministry.
- Be transparent about the progress of the search while maintaining appropriate confidentiality. If you don't know when something will happen, tell people when you will know.
- Talk to people and solicit their thoughts at social gatherings such as church potlucks or foyer dinners.
- Monitor your own level of anxiety and do not overreact to feedback or negative comments.

Next month we will explore further the idea of healthy transitions. In the meantime, check out the resources below.

Sandra Clark Kolb is the Curriculum Coordinator for [Fresh Start](#) and serves as that program's liaison to Dioceses in Provinces 1,2, 3 and 5. An active lay woman, she has been a senior warden and chaired a search committee and is currently an Alternate Deputy to General Convention from the Diocese of Washington (DC).

Resources:

Fresh Start is a diocesan-led program for clergy and

congregations in transition. Over 60 dioceses have a *Fresh Start* program. If yours is one of them, ask the *Fresh Start* coordinator for resources about transition. For more information visit www.episcopalfreshstart.org or contact *Fresh Start* by phone (901-275-3125) or e-mail (info@episcopalfreshstart.org).

Organizational consultant William Bridges has a small pamphlet about Moses as a transition leader. Though written with secular organizational changes in mind, the parallels are clear. Read his free article called [Getting Them Through the Wilderness](#) or check out his Web site www.wmbridges.com.

Resurrection Leadership: Making All Things New

BY JEFF W. FISHER

Do we *really* believe in resurrection? That is the question that the people of [St. Alban's Episcopal Church](#) in Waco, Texas, asked themselves after closing St. Alban's Memorial School, an Episcopal school that had served the children of Waco for 60 years.

St. Alban's Memorial School was founded in 1946 to minister to and educate children from pre-school up through the sixth grade. At the time of its founding, St. Alban's was the only Protestant parochial school in the Waco area. However, by 2006, after several years of declining enrollment and with increased options in the private school arena, the parish was faced with mounting deficits related to the operation of the school.

In December of 2006, the Vestry closed St. Alban's Memorial School. All school faculty and staff were now unemployed. The local television stations covered the final school chapel service. The children were dismissed and the halls of the school building were empty, cold, and silent.

As the rector, I challenged the parish to listen to the needs of the community and to do something new and significant with the now empty school building. Prayer was the first step; I would walk down the cavernous halls of the building and literally ask: "O God, what are we going to do with this school

building?"

Parish activities, such as vestry meetings, were moved into the old school building. At the annual parish meeting, every parishioner was asked to brainstorm how the empty building could be used to serve the community. During Lent, the parish held weekly "holy conversations," inviting leaders of Waco's 'helping' organizations to talk about the real (rather than perceived) needs among the people of our city. We listened to every idea; no idea was too small or large. A Community Outreach Council was formed for discernment. In the process, we figured out what we were good at as a church: worship, music, and the arts.

And then, the Holy Spirit began to speak. The director of the [Central Texas String Academy](#), an Episcopalian from another parish in Waco, needed space to run her program. The string academy teaches children using the Suzuki method. St. Alban's now had its first outreach partner. Violin and cello music filled the halls and full orchestras were provided on occasion during Sunday worship in the church.

[Waco Children's Theatre](#) then

asked if they could move their operations into the old building, using classrooms to teach children drama and dance. The children's theatre kids even acted out the scripture at St. Alban's Easter Vigil! Then [Camp Fire USA](#) moved in. Camp Fire's offices and classrooms host after-school and summer programs for children.

The Vestry of St. Alban's quickly realized that the old school building was now bustling with people from the community. Therefore, the building was renamed: the [St. Alban's Outreach Center](#).

A year later, [Avance Waco](#) partnered with our Outreach Center to serve as one of their educational facilities. With programs tailored primarily to Hispanic/Latino families Avance teaches preschool children and their parents educational and life skills to enable children to be successful in school. GED and ESL classes are also offered.

Now, both Spanish and English voices fill the halls of St. Alban's. The people of St. Alban's are receiving "on-the-job-training" on how to become a multicultural community.

St. Alban's Outreach Center now serves four times as many people in the community than we did when we operated a school. We

have four outreach partners each paying rent to the parish. The parish has also grown by leaps bounds; average Sunday attendance is up over 60% from 2005. We now have parishioners who do not remember us ever operating a school. A new day of resurrection has truly dawned.

Yet the road has not been easy. The leadership and I realized one day that we were calling the organizations in our buildings “tenants,” which was really not very welcoming. So we changed our vocabulary and call the people sharing our buildings “outreach partners.” I brought a jar into vestry meetings with the word “tenant” on it and big red X over that word. If any vestry member used the word “tenant” instead of “outreach partner,” a dollar was put in the jar! To foster further partnership, each outreach partner is assigned a parishioner to be a liaison, to strengthen ties between the parish and each outreach organization. Also, a joint bilingual Bible study and lunch last fall with the Avance staff and church staff did wonders in increasing understanding and cooperation.

We are slowly changing our values, continually thinking of others outside the church walls, continually remembering our story of resurrection, the story of St. Alban’s Outreach Center emerging from the tomb of St. Alban’s School.

What nuggets can we share from the story of St. Alban’s Outreach Center?

- Believe that, in our Baptism, we have already been killed – and resurrected. So what else can be done to us?
- Think like a church planter. What would you do if you had an empty tomb of a building?
- Be enablers of ministry, not gatekeepers, by saying “go for it” to 99% of the ideas in your ministry setting. So what’s the big deal if it fails?
- Don’t be afraid to bury that dead ministry in the tomb. Don’t we *really* believe in resurrection?

At St. Alban’s Episcopal Church in Waco, Texas, our people have truly experienced resurrection, making us less fearful to try more new things for God. At St. Alban’s, we believe in Jesus, who sits on the throne and says: “Behold, I make all things new.”

The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher has been the rector of St. Alban’s Episcopal Church in Waco, Texas, since 2006. In the last five years, the parish has experienced unprecedented growth in membership, pledged income, and attendance.

Healthy Transitions Part 2: The Role of Leaders

By Sandra Clark Kolb

As a vestry member during a change in ordained leadership you play a critical role in making the transition a healthy one. Both the change (the event itself) and the transition (people's internal responses) need to be managed. Returning to the example of Moses we used last month, here are some additional steps to take as the process unfolds.

Help People Let Go

One cannot be loyal to two masters, and people need to let go of the past in order to live into the future. Having helped the previous rector make a good exit, reinforce the concept that leadership is changing. Support your interim, if you have one, and strictly enforce whatever agreements have been made about the relationship between the previous rector and members of the congregation.

Encourage Experimentation

The in-between time (the wilderness of the Exodus story) is when people are most open to new ideas. God's new covenant with Israel was forged in the wilderness – not when the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt or after they reached the Promised Land – because in the wilderness they were most able to hear the still, small voice of God. Similarly a congregation's interim time is a good time to try something new. Has adult Christian education become stale?

Try a new approach. Is the 11:00 am service on life support, while the 9:00 one is flourishing? Try going to a single service that incorporates the best of both. Have you always wanted to try a late afternoon, informal worship service to attract young adults? Do so. Experiment with inclusive language translations of Scripture or the use of alternative liturgies. Engage lay leaders in setting up a pastoral care team (or strengthen an existing one). Try something for a given season and then evaluate it before making any final decisions.

Avoid Unnecessary Changes

At the same time, avoid creating further anxiety by making too many changes – particularly ones that trample on the best of the past. The Israelites carried the bones of Joseph and the ark of the tabernacle with them, which provided continuity and were visible symbols of their history. So be clear about what is not changing. Make sure that the essential elements of outreach, pastoral care, and worship continue to flourish in ways that let people know this congregation is still their "home."

Lay the Foundation for a New Start

Now is a good time to clean up your organizational structure so everything is in good shape for your new rector.

- Review your by-laws. Are they in compliance with national and diocesan canons? Should the size of your vestry be changed to better reflect the current size of your congregation? How about vestry responsibilities – should they be changed? If the answer is yes to any of these, begin the process of amending the by-laws.
- Evaluate your committee structure. Does it still serve your mission and ministry? Are there overlapping committees? Ones that no longer function? Responsibilities that are falling between the cracks? Propose a revised structure that will strengthen your mission.
- Make sure you have a financial audit of the previous year and compile an accurate accounting of all funds to give to your incoming rector.
- Deal with any personnel issues that are festering. It is unfair to confront a new rector with the need to fire a non-performing member of the staff!

Get off to a Good Start

When the new rector arrives, help him/her not only get acquainted but establish the groundwork for a truly mutual ministry.

- Appoint a transition team to help the new rector and family get settled. This group can put together a list of near-by health care providers, veterinarians, banks, dry cleaners, etc., along with maps of the area and transit options; offer meals or move-in help for the first few days; organize welcoming events; and serve as an informal support group during the first year or two.
- Hold a congregation-wide welcoming event, and arrange a series of smaller get-togethers so people can get to know the new rector, including arranging for him/her to attend committee meetings to meet the members and be briefed on their responsibilities.
- Organize a history-sharing session, perhaps based upon the time line used for the Profile. This can be held as an evening potluck, a brunch following the Sunday service, or whatever will draw the biggest crowd.
- Arrange for former senior and junior wardens to meet with the new rector and have them share their wisdom and experience.
- Schedule a vestry retreat, preferably with an outside facilitator, to establish mutual expectations between the new rector and the vestry, clarify roles, and set goals for the up-coming year.
- Set up mechanisms for

periodic, informal check-ins to keep mission and ministry on track.

- Plan a [Mutual Ministry Review](#) at the end of the first year so the rector and vestry can assess how well they are meeting agreed-upon goals and expectations. A good resource for planning a Mutual Ministry Review is *Living Into Our Ministries*. [This resource may be downloaded from the [Tools](#) section of *ECF Vital Practices*.]

Above all, remember that clear and frequent communication is especially critical during times of transition. Moses put on his sandals and walked among the campfires, stopping to listen to what people had to say and keeping them focused on the journey. You need to do likewise. Go with God on this transition into a new ministry.

Sandra Clark Kolb is the Curriculum Coordinator for [Fresh Start](#) and serves as that program's liaison to Dioceses in Provinces 1, 2, 3 and 5. An active lay woman, she has been a senior warden and chaired a search committee and is currently an Alternate Deputy to General Convention from the Diocese of Washington (DC).

Resources:

Fresh Start is a diocesan-led program for clergy and congregations in transition. Over 60 dioceses have a *Fresh Start* program. If yours is one of them, ask the *Fresh*

Start coordinator for resources about transition. For more information visit www.episcopalfreshstart.org or contact *Fresh Start* by phone (901.275.3125) or e-mail (info@episcopalfreshstart.org). Organizational consultant William Bridges has a small pamphlet about Moses as a transition leader. Though written with secular organizational changes in mind, the parallels are clear. Read his free article called [Getting Them Through the Wilderness](#) or check out his Website www.wmbridges.com.

Covenants in Congregational Life

By Thomas Brackett

For 21 years, St Johns Episcopal Church had averaged 42 in Sunday attendance. Though the parish was only 40 years old, it was clearly “stuck.” So, on the Sunday that the Vestry reported that they had called Reverend Patti from the next diocese over and that her primary task was to bring new life to the parish by working with young families in the surrounding community, you could almost feel the relief spreading out over those present! Two months after their beloved Mother Patti moved in, the Senior Warden made the announcement that the Vestry was forming what they referred to as a “Visioning group.” The group would work with a coach who would guide them through the process of designing and experimenting with a whole new service for those in the surrounding community who were unlikely to attend their present 10:30 am service.

Not five months later, every member in the parish (active, as well as those considered “lapsed”) was invited to a Saturday morning brunch, served by the Vestry. The Senior Warden introduced the new Visioning Group and their Coach, Elaina. Elaina explained exactly how plans for the new service were coming along (step by step) and reiterated that this service was specifically designed around the needs of those who would not attend a traditional Episcopalian church service. She went on to ask how many of those

present were happy with the 10:30 service they attended. It was unanimous. One person stood up and said that he wasn’t sure why the parish needed another service when everyone present was so satisfied. He expressed concern that they were going to overwork their new rector. Elaina listened carefully and then explained that the Episcopal Church has many faces and that only one of those is the traditional service known to most Episcopalians. She went on to offer many examples of innovation throughout our Church’s history and opened up time for discussion. By 2:00 that afternoon, she had convinced all present that it was time to make some commitments.

She then invited the Visioning Group to unroll their poster-sized “covenant” for new behaviors for all to see. Even with extensive explanation, the covenant and its eleven commitments were a bitter pill for some to swallow, specifically because of one of the stipulations. It asked that those presently attending the 10:30 service not attend the new 6:00 pm service unless it was to “offer unconditional support by offering hospitality to newcomers, only after completing three training sessions offered by Mother Patti and Coach Elaina.” After minor grumbling and some struggle, everyone present was invited to sign the covenant. Only six abstained and by late afternoon, eighty-two signatures were lined

up under the most remarkable commitments this parish had ever seen!

The new service started after eight more months of hard work and elaborate preparations. New teams were trained in hospitality and new member incorporation and within six months; the new Sunday evening service was averaging 85 in attendance. That was six years ago; today, that same parish has four services on Sunday! I recently caught up with Mother Patti to ask her what she thought it was that opened the door to the new vitality that St. John’s is enjoying. Her answer was to the point. In fact, it was just two words: “That covenant!” Patti then went on to explain, “We were able to start a whole new culture at St John’s without the interference of those who were happy with what they already had.”

That remarkable story is in keeping with my own experiences over the last forty years of church life. Via witnessing four congregational “splits,” several new ministries and the redevelopment of two dying ministries, I have come to respect “covenants” as the essential glue for vital faith communities as well as for those leading ministry revitalization. In my understanding of this ancient concept, “covenant” is both a behavior and a way of being. One of the definitions for “covenant” in the New Oxford American

Dictionary is “an agreement that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and his (sic) people.” Our Judeo-Christian scriptures make it clear that we attain this “way of being” by vulnerably committing ourselves to a God that longs for relationship. This covenant between us says, “You matter to me. When you show up, keep your word, share your life – these matter to me! In fact, when you don’t, I am personally affected.” Again, our Scriptures make it clear that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus actually prefers this mutual vulnerability! As such, we engage a covenanting way of being because we join with God’s dreams for all of Creation and we realize that mutual covenanting is the means by which God is made known to us. [1]

One of my favorite Episcopalians begins his manual on new member incorporation with the question, “How can we help people join the church?” Knowing what I know about George (as well as knowing him through the rest of the book that follows that statement), he really means to ask, “How do we make it easier for newcomers to experience the benefits of being in community so that they discover the commitment necessary to learn what it is to live a life covenanted with God, Her children, and all of Her creation?” [2]

If we believe that “covenant” is the gateway to being in community, then we might more courageously engage the questions that newcomers (as well as many of our “cradle” Episcopalians) bring through our

front doors. Those questions often include: “What does it mean to be in covenant?” and, “Can I try this out before making a long-term commitment?” and “What are the benefits of living in covenant and do those benefits somehow outweigh the costs?” The questions for our church leaders might include: “How does our community of faith offer a ‘safe zone’ for those new to the intricacies of covenant living?” and “Are we intentional and public about offering that safety and, better yet, a nurturing environment to those who have never experimented with what it means to live in covenant, or even in community?”

If we believe (as Edward Deming claimed) that “your system is perfectly designed to get you the results you’re getting,” then we might ask, “What needs to change in order for more of our churches to embrace a post-Christian culture with the hope of real community?” (“System,” as I use it here, refers to the ways in which we manage our relationships, the stories we tell about ourselves, that which we focus on, and finally, the resultant behaviors.) In other words, there are good systemic explanations for the lack of vitality or the lack of vision or the lack of “rootedness” in many of our faith communities. The question with which so many of our Episcopalian leaders are wrestling is, “How do we model or relearn covenant living in settings where there is no memory of that way of being with each other?” (*For a more in-depth look at the power of covenants to*

transform communities of faith, see Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences by Gilbert R. Rendle.)

It seems to me that “change agents” (those who develop new ministries, as well as those who redevelop ministries in decline) are released to offer their best gifts when they are invited to work within clearly defined behavioral covenants. They do this on at least three levels: covenants between the Leader(s) and Diocesan representatives, between the Leader(s) and the surrounding faith communities, as well as between the Leader(s) and their particular faith community. For example, the Bishop might covenant to buffer the fledgling ministry from area leaders intimidated by the new life emerging. The new leadership team might covenant with area ministry leaders not to engage in that onerous practice known as “sheep stealing.” They might also covenant with newcomers to support them with all of the coaching and mentoring necessary to empower them in their God-given strengths and ministries.

Though it may sound complicated, this three level approach to behavioral covenants clarifies expectations and opens up the possibility of fresh approaches to covenanting communities. In this way, the Diocese, the surrounding faith communities, and the local community enter into behavioral covenants that model new

understandings of what it means to be “the people of God.” With this renewed commitment, leaders of faith communities can intentionally pray those incredible words in Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP, p. 372), “Open our eyes to see Your hand at work in the world about us ...” and then give thanks as new windows of possibility are opened!

The Reverend Thomas Brackett is the Episcopal Church Missioner for Church Planting, Ministry Redevelopment, and Fresh Expressions. He can be reached at 646.203.6266 and he blogs at <http://plantingcentral.typepad.com/bench/>.

[1] Because this essay cannot offer an in-depth look at the intricacies of our Judeo-Christian covenant theology, I highly recommend Dr. Walter Brueggemann’s **Covenant as a Subversive Paradigm**.

[2] From Disciple to Apostle (A User-Friendly Manual for Church Membership), by Rev. Dr. George Martin can be found here: <http://www.churchad.com/books.cfm>