

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VERMONT
Together in Christ...growing locally, serving globally

Search... GO

ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS MISSIONAL CHURCH RESOURCES LOCATIONS CONTACT



Spread the Word... “Cleveland Rocks!” Reflections on the 2018 Evangelism Matters Conference with Guidance for Congregations

By Fr. Liam Muller

For those who remember The Drew Carey Show, “Cleveland rocks” was the phrase, sung (yelled?) over and over during the opening credits. It’s also an apt description of the enthusiasm of the 400 Episcopalians gathered for the Evangelism Matters conference, which was hosted by St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio from March 14-17.

The Episcopal Church in Vermont was well represented!

The Episcopal Church in Vermont was well represented at this conference by the Rev. Titus Presler of Enosburg Falls; Joe Fortner, Jr. of Willmington; Kathleen Moore of Arlington; Katie Runde of South Royalton, Jamison Dunne of Burlington and me (of Rutland).

Enthusiasm and eagerness to share the Good News were everywhere during this conference which included a wonderful Eucharist which was officiated by the President of the House of Deputies the Rev. Gay Jennings, with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preaching what was the very best sermon I have ever experienced (a sentiment I believe was shared by most who were there). There were also several helpful panel groups and a wide variety of workshops which the Vermont contingent attended. Below please find a brief write up of the workshops we attended.

Summaries from Joe Fortner, Jr.:

Scrappy Church – Evangelism on a Shoestring Budget. The presentation offered suggestions for how a church, faced with a minimal budget and serious questions of survival, could continue to reach out to the world and, hopefully, thrive. As the speakers emphasized, “Don’t confuse ‘scrappy church’ with ‘crappy church.’” Instead, it’s a mindset of thriving in a difficult environment. Attitude is the key: No foe is too great; if you get knocked down, always get up swinging. The blessing of serving in a place that’s falling apart is you have nothing to lose; you expect that they’re going to close the church anyway, so go out with a bang. Go wild; trying anything/everything. Look for ministries that are needed in your area and aren’t serviced already; if you want to do a youth ministry, but there are 30 already, that need is filled, so look at something else. Do a prayer walk regularly around the neighborhood; you can find out what the community’s real needs are and try to fill them.

The blessing of serving in a place that's falling apart is you have nothing to lose.

In the Beginning Was the Word. This presentation focused on communicating the message, both outside and inside the church itself. The focus of the discussion was “Awareness” rather than other elements of the marketing progression model known as “AIDA” (Awareness of the product; Interest in what the parishes offer; Desire (need); Action). Use of social media was discussed, but it was emphasized that if no one shares a social media post, it’s actually worthless. “Liking” does not build awareness; instead, to have a post get traction, there’s a need for comments and for sharing them on other feeds. In all things, you need to understand your audience, and show truth/authenticity/respect for your audience. You can use social media to change a narrative, but you need to update regularly, add content, and keep it active.

Dealing with Millennials. This wide-ranging presentation offered numerous suggestions about how to deal with and attract millennials. Many millennials are looking for something that is structured, serious, and sincere; thus, take the liturgy seriously. If anything, the Episcopal Church’s meaningful use of its BCP may afford it a distinct means of reaching and engaging millennials, as the liturgy is an antidote to the unstructured world in which they swim. Evangelism can be a means to interest millennials, if they see that evangelism and working towards social justice are two sides of the same coin. Welcome millennials into leadership roles, but also be mindful that many are looking for older mentors to help them. Don’t be afraid to examine changes; offering “we’ve always done it that way” is the only reason for doing something will not attract millennials.

Many millennials are looking for something that is structured, serious, and sincere.

Music Evangelism. Music can energize our parishioners, and reach out beyond the four walls of the church. Our tradition can expand our music ministry beyond the traditional choral music if we do liturgy and song like we mean it. There are two types of church: the “Gutenberg Church” where things are planned out, timed out, scripted, and nothing changes (how can the Spirit live in that?) or the “Google Church;” where anything can happen (and probably will), and the creative juices flow. You want people to get energized by the music, and encourage everyone to sing even those who don’t think they can because someone told them they couldn’t. Resources to help are available.

Digital Matters. This was an examination of social media platforms to evangelize. Before considering and deciding platforms, however, the first and crucial step is to understand: What’s the big idea? What do you want to do? Once you’ve decided, photos are important, and showing photos of your service helps let people know who you are, and that the service is important. Of the platforms, Facebook is typically most useful, as it’s good for posting detailed updates with links; sharing photos and video albums and galleries; giving details about your parish; engaging your audience through comment sections and private messages; and posting events details. Instagram is good for candid “in the moment” looks into what’s happening in the parish, short video messages, and visually representing the vibrant life and a day in the life of your Parish. Twitter is good for short messages/announcements, reminders, and driving traffic to your website or other social platforms, but it is probably the least useful for organizations.

Summaries from Fr. Liam Muller:

Mission as Mutual Transformation. This excellent workshop, given by Elizabeth Boe and Will Bryant, delved into the transformational aspect of mission work. The presenters looked into ways mission and evangelism comes together. Some takeaways:

- The secret of life is a double fellowship with God and God’s people.
- Mission is about relationship; about being present, honest and humble; and about being you because that’s who God wants you to be.
- Our Baptismal covenant contains the “what” of our faith and the “how” of our faith which we will accomplish with God’s help.
- And this quote by Kahlil Gibran: “Your neighbor is your other self, dwelling behind a wall. In understanding, all walls fall down.”

The secret of life is a double fellowship with God and God’s people.

“I am Yours.” Presented by the Rev. Dr. Steven Rottgers, Canon to the Ordinary of the Diocese of West Missouri, and based upon his book by the same name, this workshop explored the importance of authentically and enthusiastically sharing our stories. He discussed the importance of moving from ego (I) to ego amin (I am). Further, he spoke of the importance of recognizing God incarnate being present in our day to day lives, in the here and now. Some takeaways:

- Enthusiasm occurs when we are captured (in a good way) by the Spirit of God.
- It’s not a question as to whether you have the Holy Spirit; it’s a question of whether the Holy Spirit has you.
- Be dependent on God alone and recognize this dependence working with other people.

***It's not a question as to whether you have the Holy Spirit;
it's a question of whether the Holy Spirit has you.***

Parish Evangelism. This excellent workshop focused on the necessity of beginning evangelism efforts in our parishes. While there was a tremendous amount of information given over the hour-long workshop, here are some takeaways:

- Get the parish motivated and excited to begin spreading the Good News!
- Praying and neighborhood prayer walks. What does the Good News look like in our neighborhoods?
- Knowing that we are all called to proclaim the Good News through our Baptism.
- We are a community of Good News; a community of others.
- We need to know who is around us and who we are not reaching.
- There needs to be a systemic structure to parish evangelism: BLESS—Be authentic (be who you are); Listen; Eat (break bread together); Serve (stemming from Listening); and Share your story.
- Make evangelism a parish habit: It's not just what we do; it's what we commit to.

Summaries from Katie Runde:

Going Gently, Listening Deeply, Changing Regularly, Opening Our Hearts: Developing a Sensitive Model of Parish Outreach - Dale Grandfield. The title says it all - Grandfield led us through a theological exploration of changing our focus from strictly service-oriented thinking in our outreach to the deeper level of relational thinking. In other words, we can offer much more powerful outreach in our communities if we focus not simply of doing 'the work that God has given us to do' but being it, breaking down the typical church: community barriers of 'out there' versus 'in here. This is outreach as participating in the Body of Christ in the world. This demands care, openness to change (even as far as creating a solid accountability structure that involves a team dedicated to making changes for the sake of staying awake and flexible as a church), and, of course, lots of deep listening. This kind of approach not only helps serve the wider community, but brings us into deeper relationship with the wider world and so strengthens all involved.



Evangelism for Shy People - Frank Logue. This was by far and unsurprisingly the quietest lecture room I entered! I wish I could just share the whole talk here as it was deeply apropos to all of us, not just the shy ones. Logue spoke of how we are called upon to meet people where they are, to listen above all else - people are afraid of showing their whole selves, their wounds and their darkness, but it is in creating a space of care and love for them that we can be Christ in a moment when we are needed to be. There is no need to worry about doing this perfectly, but more about trying to be God's 'person in the area' - someone ready to be present and ready with an open mind and heart to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Harry Potter and the One Who Lives: Evangelizing the Imagination - Patricia Lyons and Jason Prati. This workshop spoke to what I for one feel is the heart of the matter - how do we re-enchant the disenchanted and find a way to speak the wonder of God in the language of those we are speaking rather than the language we ourselves are familiar with. (Isn't that what the Pentecost was all about, after all?) Lyons and Prati gave tremendous examples of how this can be done through the shared 'language' of Harry Potter, from the Hogwarts Houses as different identities within the Body of Christ to the Christological symbolism of Fawkes the phoenix, from fighting our own dementors with our own Patronus charms. Who among us does not need to practice memories of the fundamental joys of the world to combat fear and despair when they strike? So often,

'churchy' language sends unchurched people running for the hills, leaving the joy of the Christian message not only unheard, but rejected for good. Using the medium of story and fairy tales, we can speak of the heart of our faith in a language people can recognize and embrace? Check out The Hogwarts Chaplain and the Word & Wizard Network to see Patricia Lyons in action being a brilliant translator!

So often, 'churchy' language sends unchurched people running for the hills, leaving the joy of the Christian message not only unheard, but rejected for good.

Summaries from Kathleen Moore:

Governance as Evangelism - Frank Logue and Gay Jennings. This workshop demonstrated how the decisions made at General Convention really do make a difference. The workshop leaders then added that the budget itself passed at General Convention can have a direct effect on evangelism. They also pointed to the work of the House of Deputies Special Committee on Sexual Harassment and Exploitation, which will draft legislation for this summer's legislation, as having come out of a call from people in the church to respond to the #MeToo movement within our church. General Convention legislation can serve as a corrective "when we see our words don't match our actions." Later, I spoke to Michael Michie, Episcopal Church staff officer for church planning infrastructure. He indeed seemed interested in talking about the kinds of ministry projects we might dream up in Vermont that would benefit from a Genesis grant.

Digital Matters: Evangelism in the 21st Century Public Square - Jeremy Tacket and Chris Sikkema. This workshop demonstrated how work in the digital world really can be the work of evangelism. It can't be the only tool we use, and it must of course ultimately lead to some kind of real relationship, but it can often serve as a way to show people what our lives of following Jesus and being a part of church are all about. There were some basic mechanics of how, as a parish or ministry, to make use of tools like websites, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Jeremy and Chris talked about how using Instagram can be an easy way to visually show the life of your parish. For Twitter, as we have probably all long noticed, it is most effective when it is a person's account. They also mentioned the resources Canva.com, which is a free online platform that allows parishes users to easily create any graphics you might need on social media. They talked about the power of individuals (all of us!) being willing to share things going on at church the way we share about other exciting things in our lives that we care about.

Work in the digital world really can be the work of evangelism...and it must ultimately lead to some kind of real relationship.

Summaries from Jamison Dunne:

Evangelism and Discipleship. Many Episcopal churches struggle to form young Christians into evangelists. The church today is engaged in this massive evangelistic push because somewhere in the last few decades the

church lost this energy to evangelize. Evangelism and Discipleship are ways in which we can create future evangelists, and set the groundwork for a future evangelistic Episcopal Church. The main way of doing formation is to mentor those in your congregation. Everyone can impart their wisdom and experience to those younger than themselves in order to shape them into good evangelists. If every young Christian was formed well through good mentors, just imagine what the world would look like in a generation.

Evangelism through Healing and Deliverance. The ministry of Christ in the Gospels is about a third preaching and two thirds healing or delivering people from illness. This workshop focused on how our churches need to do the work of healing and deliverance with as much or more fervor as preaching to truly minister to our world as Christ did. Healing works evangelistically because it meets people at their needs, for everyone at some point needs spiritual or physical healings. After a discussion on the causes of sickness focused on the evil in the world, it was discussed then how to heal someone. First and foremost it is medical doctors. God has given us the gift of medicine and it would be wrong to disregard it. Second is through things of the church; prayer, anointing, laying on of hands, prayer shawls, etc. This leads to a spiritual healing, bringing the Holy Spirit to touch the spirits of those who are sick. I think that if healing ministries, done well, are implemented in Vermont it could work wonders.

The ministry of Christ in the Gospels is about a third preaching and two thirds healing or delivering people from illness.

Reaching Millennials. This workshop had a lot to offer with many things discussed, but a few things really stood out as being relevant to Vermont. One was to take your liturgy seriously. Far too many churches struggle by being caught up with being so welcoming that they boil down liturgy. Many millennials in Episcopal Churches are there specifically for our unique liturgy. Second is that contemporary is not always the answer, so do not rely solely on contemporary worship to attract millennials. The best thing to do is listen to your young people and work with them to develop what works for your congregation. Thirdly is to make membership matter. There are many things in the world today that do little to demand of millennials, yet they respond to things that put demands on them. Every church in the diocese would do well to think about what membership should look like in their church and hold people accountable to it. The last thing that matters is to be genuine. So many communities work so hard to attract young people who many just not be there. What turns millennials off the most is insincerity.

True connection in a too busy world. This workshop was very much a best practices workshop. It focused on how to welcome new folks to your congregation correctly. Its model though was for churches that had around a 300 Sunday attendance, which is for now a rare thing in Vermont. One piece of her system that was amazing was this: In the city in Texas where the facilitator's church is, there is a lot of visible homelessness. Instead of giving a pamphlet to visitors, they give each of them a bag of food and socks to give to a homeless person. This allows every visitor to be able to minister to someone upon leaving a service. While this may not look the same way in Vermont, being able to equip visitors and members with the ability to minister after each service one of the best ways to be Christ-like in the world.

Summaries from the Rev. Titus Presler:

Episcopal Evangelism: I Love to Tell the Story - Susan Brown Snook, Canon for Church Growth and Development, Diocese of Oklahoma. "Why evangelize? Because God has done amazing things for us, and we just have to share that good news. Following Jesus is the most important thing we have to do in our lives, and we are called to invite others to do that most important things in their lives. Evangelism is an expression of care, for

we have life-transforming good news to share.” So declared Susan Brown Snook, canon for church growth and development in the Diocese of Oklahoma and author of God Gave the Growth: Church Planting in the Episcopal Church, in the workshop, “Episcopal Evangelism: I Love to Tell the Story.” Snook highlighted some conversation starters suggested by David Gortner of Virginia Seminary:

- What do you love most about your life?
- What does it mean to you to be made in God’s image?
- Where or when do you feel close to God?
- Have you ever had an experience that you thought was an answer to a prayer?
- Have you ever witnessed a miracle?
- When you hear the phrase, “Love your neighbor,” what does it mean to you?

Evangelism is an expression of care, for we have life-transforming good news to share.

Revival for Your Parish - Elizabeth Popplewell and the Diocese of Iowa Team. Revival 2017 was a remarkable initiative in the Diocese of Iowa in which 42 revivals were held in congregations throughout the diocese from January through October, with a number of the events including several congregations. In fact, according to the diocesan team led by Elizabeth Popplewell in their workshop, “Revival for Your Parish,” only two congregations out of 60 refused to participate. What does the Diocese of Iowa mean by a revival, a term they chose deliberately in order to reclaim it as part of Episcopal tradition? From the workshop it appeared that they mean a freestanding event of singing, praying, preaching, testimonies and other activities designed to quicken the spiritual enthusiasm and participation of everyone attending.

The workshop was organized around a sample revival, which included an opening hymn, a greeting, a “charge” to the congregation, a litany, more singing, scriptures, testimonies, a sermon, more singing, meditative activities, thanksgivings, a commissioning, and a blessing. A typical revival lasted two hours. Relevant to Vermont, the Iowa team stressed that a revival does not require a large congregation, for many of the participating congregations were small, including one with an average Sunday attendance of nine.

Evangelism for Churches in Transition - Victor Conrada and Louisa McKellaston, Transition Team, Diocese of Chicago. “Transition is a time to reaffirm our primary task,” said Victor Conrada, transition officer for the Diocese of Chicago in the workshop, “Evangelism for Churches in Transition. “The unique purpose of a congregation is to gather, transform and send.” Evangelism is inherent in the what the church sends its members out to do, Conrada said. “Transition is a time to regain and reinvent who we are as individuals and communities who want to proclaim God’s love in the world.” The message of evangelism’s relevance during transition is important to the Diocese of Vermont as we are now in period of transition in episcopal leadership, when one might naturally ask, “Shouldn’t we wait on this until a new bishop comes and we see what his/her priorities might be?” Responding to that rhetorical question, one workshop attendee said, “That’s like women in the 1950s saying, ‘I don’t know who I’m going to be until I know who I’m going to marry.’” Others stressed that good candidates during a rector or bishop search are attracted to congregations and dioceses that are strong in their core identity and direction, rather than being put off by such strength.

In the photos: Representatives of the Episcopal Church of Vermont are in the house for Evangelism Matters 2018 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland, OH.

[Like 3](#)[Share](#) [Tweet](#)

Thursday, March 29, 2018 - 13:22:43

[Rock Point](#)
[Safe Church](#)
[Asset Map](#)
[Employment Opportunities](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Submit News/Subscribe](#)
[Help](#)

CLICK TO DONATE



Rock Point
Partnership Campaign

The Episcopal Church in Vermont
5 Rock Point Road
Burlington, VT 05408-2737
Telephone (802) 863-3431
In Vermont (800) 286-3437

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH

Copyright © 2018 The Episcopal Church in Vermont. All rights Reserved. Neither this site, nor any of the material contained herein may be reproduced or redistributed without prior written permission from the Diocese.