

Talks About Mission for the 2020 Provincial Synod of the Anglican Catholic Church
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Talk #1.

I. The Main Challenge We Face

I want to thank Archbishop Haverland for the opportunity to talk for a few minutes about the mission of our church. The topic of mission needs to occupy a larger and preeminent space on our agendas. We have been encouraged over the last few years by our movement towards unity. Unity is important and essential to our mission. We've been handicapped by both external and internal disunity and acrimony. In his high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus linked unity and effective mission (17:21). However, while our unity is a necessary foundation, it will not, in and of itself, create an effective mission. Thus, organic unity within the G-4 is not our most pressing challenge. Our most pressing challenge is to discover and develop our mission.

We are facing significant challenges. Many of our churches are aging and are not reproducing themselves with new spiritual offspring. However, when we gather as a church to do our organizational business we do a rather efficient job of ignoring this challenge. I want to urge and exhort us to change our priorities and place prayer for mission and dialogue about mission at the top of our agenda from now on.

II. The Origin of Our Challenge

It is easy to misinterpret our mission challenge as a criticism of the ministries of our churches. We have good and godly people in ministry who are doing good and godly work. Our problem is that the mission we started with as a movement is no longer our mission. We have not adjusted to the changed cultural environment. Our original mission was to define and defend Anglican Catholic orthodoxy and differentiate ourselves from the heresy that arose in the mid-twentieth century within the Anglican tradition. The heroes of our movement took a stand and paid a price for the Truth. Because of that heroism, there was a church for me to return to when I went through a conversion in college in 1981. Because of that heroism we have a church and movement to sustain us as we wait for the fulfilment of our blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

But this cannot be our primary mission any longer. We now know who we are, and we are who we are. The question now is: How are we going to bear witness in more effective ways in the new world in which we find ourselves? This new world is dramatically different than the world we started in. How are we going to develop an effective ministry in it? How are we going to reach the lost and wounded of our culture? How are you going to reach at least some of the lost and wounded in the neighborhood or region of your church? They don't know what an Anglican Catholic is and they don't really care—unless an Anglican Catholic will love them and introduce them to Christ and to the community of Christ's church.

When I began my ministry in the 1980's, you could still develop a church by advertising our unique strengths to people who were looking for a church. You cannot do that in most places anymore. Fewer and fewer people are looking for a church. For many, church is either irrelevant to their lives or, worse,

is a source of a deep wound because they have been hurt by a church. How do we reach out to people in this new setting?

III. A Modest Proposal for a Starting Place

If we are honest, we will admit that we don't know what to do. This can be a good thing if we embrace our vulnerability and our need to trust God in new ways. Moses did not know what to do when his back was to the Red Sea and his eyes were on the thundering herds of approaching Egyptian soldiers. But he found a new pathway forward for his people because he listened to God, prayed to God, and trusted God (Exodus 14:10-15).

I want to make a modest proposal for a starting place. Because we do not know what to do, we need to establish a corporate practice of fasting and praying for the mission of our church. In Acts, the early church waited and prayed in the upper room before the Holy Spirit came and led them into ministry (Acts 1:12-14). We need to enter into an extended season of church-wide prayer and fasting for the development of our mission.

About seven or eight years ago, Bishop Wilson visited our diocese. He told us, "If you want your churches to grow, you must fast and pray." We listened and established Wednesday as a day of fasting and prayer for the mission of our church. We ask our people to fast in some way on Wednesday and to pray a "Litany for Mission" that we developed. I propose that we make this a practice of our entire church; a day a week on which we fast and pray for our mission. The activity of fasting and prayer for mission will put the topic of mission on the map of our church. It is a way to begin; something we can really do. If we cannot commit to regular prayer and fasting for our mission, it means we are not serious about it.

As we fast and pray, we need to listen for God's voice and guidance and discuss the new things we might do; the new doors we might open into our churches; the new ways we might reach out to those who are not now our members; the new good works we might do. Prayer for mission and discussion about church renewal and mission need to be regular, weekly activities of our church. And these need to be the central focus of our energy when we gather for synods.

Talk #2

I. A History of Our Discussions and the Error of Our Approach

It is not as though we have never discussed the topic of mission. We used to have what were called "Evangelism Congresses." These met in the off years between our synods. They were reasonably well-attended for the three or four times we met. They were based largely on the church growth literature, which had some applicable points, but they failed to ignite any significant renewal of our mission. One problem with these discussions was that the church growth literature is too deeply and subtly enmeshed with the consumer and marketing culture.

Part of the problem is the motive. Why do we want our churches to grow? My unscientific research has observed a sort of overarching attitude, which might be summarized in this way: We want our churches to grow because we like our churches and want them to continue. I was at one church where a vestry member said, "We need some new members to help us pay the bills." The problem is that no one wants to join our churches to help us pay our bills.

Of course, we want people to know Christ. But there is a subtle way in which our mission has been informed the unspoken truth that we want people to come and help support this thing that is really valuable to us. We want them to help us. However, true mission works in the other direction. In authentic mission, we want to share Christ with others. Christ has changed our lives, forgiven our sins, made us members of his Body, and given us a meaning, purpose and a goal or telos for life. We want others to know him as we know him. We want others to have these things also. True mission is a desire to share Christ with others, not merely the recruitment of members to help sustain us.

II. Some Foundational Questions.

Before we can share our faith with others, before we can give what we have, we must first ask: “What do we have?” We tend to answer this question theologically. We have the faith defined by the councils and creeds. We need to begin to answer this question experientially. How do we experience the redeeming and sanctifying presence of Christ as a community? What is the experience of Christ that we want to share? As Alexander Schmemmann says, “Of what are we witnesses?” (*For the Life of the World*, Ch. 1, p. 21).

An honest assessment of our churches reveals that before we can develop a mission, we must develop our own spiritual life as a community. If we are to be witnesses to the power of Christ in our lives, then we must have a communal experience of that power. If we want people to come, there must be something powerful and compelling to invite them to come to. It won't work to develop a great marketing campaign to get people to come to church if, when they come, they find a small group of discontented people who seem mostly to complain about the world and each other, and whose mission is mainly is to keep the doors open.

III. A Reorientation of Ministry Around the Theology of the Remnant

Many of our churches need a reorientation of ministry. We need to start by focusing on our own spiritual formation. The truth is that while our church has its holy people, even its saints, we have been handicapped by spiritual and emotional immaturity among our clergy and lay leadership. Our greatest need is for clergy and lay leaders who are willing to reorient the ministry of our churches around spiritual formation. We need to develop ourselves in order to develop our witness and mission.

This is a reorientation we began four years ago at St. Matthew's Church and in the Diocese of the Holy Trinity after some profound experiences of missionary failure. I realized that our mission efforts had been undermined by the emotional and spiritual immaturity of our missionaries. Rather than being witnesses to Christ in the world, they tended to succumb to the pressure and anxieties that came upon them in the church. This is a church-wide issue.

We began to reorient our ministry around developing our life of prayer and focusing on emotional health. Our new approach is heavily indebted to the Anglican writer Martin Thornton, especially in his book, *Pastoral Theology, A Reorientation* (with needed adaptation because our setting is different from his) and to something called Family Systems Theory, which is having a growing impact on many churches. It turns out that other churches are facing the same issues. We have channeled our energies away from marketing campaigns and promotion and towards the spiritual formation of what Thornton calls, “the Remnant.” The Remnant is not the grumpy core of traditionalists who are mad at the world. The Remnant is the core group in the church that is willing to be serious about its own life of prayer

and spiritual growth. According to Thornton, this Remnant has a vicarious and leavening impact on the larger church and the world. It is the foundation for authentic mission.

We developed a year-long class that is focused on two things. Developing one's life of prayer in the community in the church and cultivating emotionally healthy ways of interacting with other people—developing healthy ministry. The year-long class leads into a second year and a third year and culminates in membership in our diocesan "Order of the Holy Trinity." We currently have sixty people participating at one stage or another and nine members of our diocesan order. I've never made any public announcement in church about these classes. All participants have been personally invited to participate. I've been influenced by a seminary professor who said, "Jesus did not ask for volunteers. He called people to, 'follow me.'"

This approach has substantially reoriented our church around interior spiritual formation leading to outward oriented mission. Though the details of this approach may vary depending on the local setting, I believe that this framework fits our tradition as a way to reorient our ministry towards mission. It creates a parochial Benedictine spirituality in which mission is focused on hospitality and building relationships.

IV. A Mission Retreat Next Year

We want to share with others what we have learned because we believe that these themes are essential to developing the mission of our church. We are looking for conversation partners. We are not interested in starting a campaign to get the whole church excited about it. If it sounds unattractive to you or inapplicable to your situation, that is fine. In keeping with theology of the Remnant, we are only looking for those who are serious about mission and are willing to dedicate the time and effort that will be necessary to change their church culture. If you think you might fall into the category, talk with me.

We want to have a mission retreat next year, at around this same time, that focuses on this approach. We would like this retreat to be held at a location that is accessible to people across the country. We would like this retreat to become a regular gathering every other year when we do not have a synod. Let us know if you are interested in participating with us or if you have any questions. Thank you.