

Evangelism and Renewal Office

The General Convention meeting in Louisville in 1973 provided funds for the appointment of a staff officer in evangelism and a working budget. The Convention further stipulated a close working relationship between evangelism, education and lay ministry. It also defined evangelism stating "Evangelism is the presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in Him as Saviour and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of His Church." In April of 1975, the Rev. A. Wayne Schwab accepted appointment as Evangelism and Renewal Officer. This appointment reflected the growing commitment of the Episcopal Church that had hitherto been carried on by the National Advisory Committee on Evangelism.

The Executive Council Committee on Evangelism took over the supervision of the work, and the executive became a part of the Program Division of the Church Center staff. Since April, 1975, the following steps have been taken.

1. A task force of Coalition-14 dioceses prepared a parish guide in evangelism and renewal that is currently in use throughout the coalition and beyond.
2. A bi-monthly newsletter and a collection of resources in evangelism and renewal were started.
3. The Presiding Bishop called a conference on evangelism in January, 1976 in Dallas, Texas, attended by 125 people. Half of the participants were leaders in other parts of Episcopal Church life. Evangelism thereby received the wide hearing it needed and reaffirmation of a multi-faceted approach to it.
4. A Task Force was gathered to carry on the work begun in the Dallas conference. Currently it is working on provincial conferences and the creation and testing of resources.
5. A survey of literature has reviewed the field of basic writings in evangelism and renewal and the related secular fields of recruitment and membership in voluntary organizations.
6. At the present time approximately 65 dioceses have units in evangelism and renewal and three have full-time staff persons, one of whom is a lay person.
7. Since April, 1975, the executive has worked with over 3,800 laity and clergy in 5 provincial conferences, 25 diocesan conferences and meetings, 4 seminaries and 18 related conferences.

Out of these experiences some basic learnings have been identified.

1. Every baptized Christian has some role to play in evangelism. All can be "general practitioners" making Jesus Christ known in deed and in work and helping others to commit themselves to Him when asked to do so. About 10% of the average congregation have special gifts as "specialists" in evangelism. They go beyond the spontaneous witness of the "general practitioners" to plan and carry out ways to seek out the unchurched and to cross the barriers between sub-cultures and cultures.

2. Evangelism must be undergirded by renewal of the church. The newly committed must have the nurture of vital congregational life. Therefore, we must always consider evangelism and renewal together.

3. Evangelism and renewal are more of a life-style than a program. They grow out of our Christian being. This lifestyle recognizes Jesus Christ's presence in the world as well as His presence in the Church. Listening to the other person's story is essential. Evangelism and renewal are the inevitable result of a life lived in Jesus Christ.

4. Evangelism and renewal are tasks of both the individual Christian and the

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Body as a whole. Evangelism is not completed until the newly committed shares fully in the life of the Body, finds his/her ministries in the world and in the Church, and begins to seek out the unchurched.

5. There is Anglican style for evangelism that we seek to discover. On the one hand we must avoid domesticating it. On the other, we want to be sure it reflects the fulness of our Anglican heritage. It will be genuinely trinitarian, incarnational and sacramental. Commitment can grow "inch by inch" as well as occur in one ecstatic moment.

6. People respond to evangelism and renewal at different times and places so no one program is sufficient.

7. A systemic approach to evangelism and renewal is needed. It has to become part of the normal life of the Church at every level.

8. The home may still be the best of all fields for evangelism.

9. One of the criteria of effective evangelism is how many disciples are being added to the Church. Numbers are not everything but they are something. The shepherd would not have known one of the sheep was lost if he had not been counting them. Growth is normal for a healthy congregation.

10. We do not have all the answers.

Along with these learnings have come some key questions we are working on.

1. How do we train for expertise in evangelism?

2. How can we help the enthusiastic not alienate others?

3. How can we sustain evangelism and renewal over a period of time?

4. How is evangelism done in sub-cultures different from our own?

5. Should we be thinking of starting new congregations as well as adding to the present ones?

6. How much do our own lives have to change?

7. How can clergy be enabled and supported in evangelism and renewal?

8. How can we take more of a systems and less of a program approach to evangelism and renewal?

9. How can we cope with the areas of resistance in Episcopal culture?

10. How can we learn from and adapt methods in evangelism and renewal from other denominations?

11. Where are the unchurched?

In the next Triennium, we seek the deployment of five regional co-ordinators in evangelism and renewal who will work on a part-time basis. They will help evangelism and renewal have that local flavor which is essential to its effectiveness. Regional conferences, enabled by these coordinators, will convene diocesan networks for sharing of resources, identifying needs and further training in new directions.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. A. Wayne Schwabb
EVANGELISM AND RENEWAL OFFICER