

6th Connectional Lay Council Quadrennial Evangelistic Retreat

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Dorothy Walls Conference and Retreat Center

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Topic: "Lay & Clergy Serving Together"

"Laurens van der Post in one of his papers reminds us of the legend of the white and black knights at King Arthur's court, which illustrates what our meeting with another often is.

'There were two brothers, the Black Knight and the White Knight, and they set off on a quest, each on his own, one going north and the other one south. After many years they met in a dark wood, and did not know each other. They immediately assumed that they were enemies until, when both were lying bleeding to death on the grass, they undid their helmets and recognized that they were brothers.'¹

- ◆ "Are we better off as a church and community than we were 10 years ago?" (a question on the newly designed AME Zion website)
- ◆ From time to time, we hear people say (lament) that we need/should have a "New Testament" church. So...which of the New Testament churches would you like to be/have?

Acts	A church which is growing numerically but actually ignored Jesus' mandate to witness (Acts 1:8) until persecution forced them to do what Jesus instructed (Acts 8:1).
Romans	A church whose faith is highly regarded and celebrated (Romans 1:8) but is at the same time a judgmental, hypercritical, insular group of believers who are guilty of the same sins they condemn in others (Romans 2:1).
Corinthians	A church full of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7; 12) but also arrogant and rife with sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-2).
Galatians	A church with a great origin and foundation but unable to take a firm stand in faith and order and almost torn apart from within by erroneous teaching and shifting doctrinal positions (Galatians 1:6-7; 3:1-3; 5:7).

¹ Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968. p. 2

Ephesians	A church that is doctrinally strong (Ephesians 1:12-13) but learning and struggling to integrate and practically apply truth and principles (Ephesians 5:15 – 6:18).
Philippians	A generous church (Philippians 1:3-5), but also a church full of competition (Philippians 1:15, 17) and division because key leaders don't get along (Philippians 4:2-3).
Colossians	A faithful, loving church (Colossians 1:4) but heavily influenced by false teaching and doctrine and in danger of returning to unbelief and pagan ideas (Colossians 2:4, 8, 16-19).
Thessalonians	A hard working church, "an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1 Thessalonians 1:7), eager and ready to receive God's word (1 Thessalonians 2:13), but a church which struggled with a mixture and sometimes clash of cultures striving to get along (1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:13) as well as a misunderstanding of the Apostle Paul's instructions (2 Thessalonians 2:2).
Hebrews	A church struggling to merge the "traditional" and the "contemporary" (Hebrews 1; 2:1-3).

- ◆ "Sometimes we hear our friends talk in moony, romantic terms of the early church. 'We need to get back to being just like the early church.' Heaven help us. These churches were a mess, and Paul wrote his letters to them to try to clean up the mess." ²

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

James Baldwin

- ◆ "While no local church is perfect, it can at least strive to be 'true.'" ³
- ◆ The challenge/question is: can clergy and laity work together? The answer is yes; but first we must eliminate any excuses for why we can't, don't, or haven't. "Excuses came to reinforce the empty feeling of your heart." ⁴
- ◆ "Therefore, true ministry must be mutual. When the members of a community of faith cannot truly know and love their shepherd, shepherding quickly becomes a subtle way of exercising power over others and begins to show authoritarian and

² Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000, p. 16

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship: It Will Transform Your Life*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson Books, 1986, p. 85

⁴ Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey*, Friends United Press, Richmond, Indiana, 1961, p. 101

dictatorial traits...What makes the temptation to power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love.”⁵

Lay & Clergy Serving Together: 9 Habits that Matter

- ◆ Effective: “adequate to accomplish a purpose; producing the intended or expected result.”
- ◆ How can lay and clergy and lay serve together for “effective” ministry?
- ◆ “Each of these habits requires an approach to ministry that is different from the norm...If God has called your church into existence, then He intends to bless it. The major factor left to your discretion will be the commitment to deploy godly, gifted leaders to facilitate such ministry and an unflagging commitment to strive to become all God intends for your church to become. Are you willing to make such a commitment?”⁶

1. ENSURING THAT LEADERS DIRECT THE CHURCH.

- a. We must destroy “the myth of the ‘omni-competent’ pastor.”⁷ The pastor is not, and should not be expected to be a “master of all trades.”
- b. “A trait of highly effective churches is that they are always on the lookout for more leaders...a church can never have too many leaders. What do highly effective churches do with such a large cadre of leaders? They turn them loose and let them innovate.”⁸
- c. Because leadership is evolutionary, effective leaders will not become stagnant because effective churches insist that leaders are involved in a permanent learning process. Those chosen or called to lead are always subject to constructive evaluation.⁹

2. STRUCTURING THE CHURCH FOR IMPACT.

- a. “Highly effective churches agree that ministry is not the domain of spectators; it must be populated by activists.”¹⁰
- b. How well are we doing with helping persons grow into maturity? The 21st century church may be producing many things, but mature Christians is not one of them. “Attracting large numbers of people to a church is not hard to do. Getting them to come back week after week, and ensuring that they are growing spiritually is something else”¹¹

3. BUILDING LASTING, SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS.

⁵ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989, p. 62, 77

⁶ George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches: Being Strategic in Your God-given Ministry*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1999, p. 25

⁷ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1979, p. 133

⁸ Barna, p. 47

⁹ Barna, p. p. 50-51

¹⁰ Barna, p. 58

¹¹ Barna, p. 66

- a. "Highly effective churches are more than just friendly congregations...what makes a church secure and stable is not mere friendliness but true concern, compassion and caring for others" ¹²
 - b. We must become more concerned with who we are than with what we know.
4. **FACILITATING GENUINE WORSHIP.**
- a. "America," says Barna, "has a worship problem." This problem is defined by 1) a lack of definition of worship; 2) no priority of worship; 3) wrong perceptions about worship; 4) religious activity that substitutes for spiritual relationships; 5) poor sensitivity to God's presence; and 6) no desire to confront sin. ¹³
 - b. "Worship means creating an atmosphere in which people can personally and intimately connect with God to glorify, honor and bless Him." ¹⁴
5. **ENGAGING IN STRATEGIC EVANGELISM.**
- a. "Success in evangelism is intelligently taking advantage of every reasonable opportunity to evangelize that God provides to them" ¹⁵
 - b. We evangelize as an act of love, not to prove our worth through productive witnessing.
 - c. We must insist that evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand. "You cannot separate evangelism from discipleship; the former without the latter is simply religious marketing, and the latter without the former builds on a foundation of sand." ¹⁶
6. **FACILITATING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGICAL GROWTH.**
- a. "The Christian Church seeks to be many things, but among the most important of its functions is to develop people." ¹⁷
 - b. In highly effective churches, "they do not perceive Christian education to be an ancillary option; at these churches theology is serious business" ¹⁸
 - c. Such churches serve as a "theological seminary for the laity," because "Christian maturity is regarded as a lifelong pursuit - a journey rather than a specific destination that one may reach and then dismiss." ¹⁹
7. **HOLISTIC STEWARDSHIP.**
- a. The *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* defines a steward as "a manager or superintendent of another's household." This is why stewardship is not just about money (Psalm 24:1).
 - b. We must carefully and intentionally integrate the concept of stewardship into the total life of the church.

¹² Barna, p. 74

¹³ Barna, p. 84-86

¹⁴ Barna, p. 87

¹⁵ Barna, p. 115

¹⁶ Barna, p. 123

¹⁷ Barna, p. 129

¹⁸ Barna. p. 130

¹⁹ Barna, p. 131, 133

- c. "Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission. Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging. When we seek to raise funds we are not saying, 'Please, could you help us out because lately it's been hard.' Rather, we are declaring, 'We have a vision that is amazing and exciting. We are inviting you to invest yourself through the resources that God has given you - your energy, your prayers, and your money - in this work to which God has called us.'" ²⁰
8. **SERVING THE COMMUNITY.**
- a. "Unfortunately, we have also discovered that churches talk a better game than they live when it comes to social service ministry" ²¹
 - b. How much of our activity is directed to those outside of the congregation? Churches are often insular and self-serving.
 - c. Four things can help get the ministry of serving others off the ground: 1) willingness to teach and mentor aspects of service ministry; 2) willingness to learn from others who have experienced success in such ministries; 3) willingness to serve alongside other churches or parachurch ministries, and, 4) willingness to accept difference, working with any partner who possesses the same goals. ²² (Barna, p. 164-165).
9. **EQUIPPING THE FAMILY.**
- a. "Building up Christian families is one of the most desperately needed - and most daunting - challenges facing the Church today." ²³
 - b. What do families need? 1) Trustworthy counselors; 2) True partnership in marriage; 3) Better child development skills; 4) Better parenting skills; 5) Greater courage to change; 6) Greater emotional support; and, 7) A family crisis safety net. ²⁴ (Barna, p. 168-171). "The issue confronting churches is not whether they are perceived to be family friendly but whether they are seen as providing practical and valuable help to families" (Barna, p. 173).
10. **DON'T FORGET PRAYER!**
- a. The 'deeper life' is deeper only because the average Christian is tragically shallow." ²⁵
 - b. "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 - c. Ruth Haley Barton said, "When people know you are a praying person, it changes the way they disagree with you."

◆ Final thought

²⁰ Henri Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Fundraising*, Nashville, The Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust, 2010, p. 16

²¹ Barna, p. 156

²² Barna, p. 164-165

²³ Barna, p. 167

²⁴ Barna, p. 168-171

²⁵ A.W. Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life*, Chariot eBooks, 2014, loc. 170

“The church exists because God wills it to be. The church has always had too much going against it, too many negative forces, too many reasons why it should not be here at all, for its continued presence in the world to be explained in any other way than as an act of a gracious God who wills that we should not be left alone, that is should not all be left up to us...we may ask what on earth unites this disjointed story. The answer is: the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of the community.”²⁶

²⁶ William H. Willimon, *What's Right With the Church: A Spirited Statement for Those Who Have Not Given Up on the Church and for Those Who Have*, San Francisco, Harper & Row Publishers, 1985, p. 44. 45