

Annual Chaplains Report - 2010

January 17, 2010

*"To Each Is Given the Manifestation of the Spirit for the Common Good"
I Cor. 12, 7*

Over the last few weeks my sermon mantra has been the "anticipation of wisdom". It was the theme of the latter prophets this advent. It is what we hope for, this new wisdom, after what TIME magazine labeled the "Decade From Hell". (Tom Brokaw called it the "Oh, My God" decade.) All the referees are dead. We have killed all the umpires. Individual acquisition replaces social dividend. Can we rediscover values? Jim Wallis asks the question in his new book.

We talked last week about how non-profits must adjust. Ruth Lilly was buried from Christ Church Cathedral last week. The end. The end of the stereotypical Episcopal Church in Indiana. The Episcopal glossary is now largely unintelligible. We continue to struggle to "age down", to have the young mentor the old, to meet "techspretations", to cope with "me branding"; all terms lifted last week from Peter Brinkerhoff's book Generations. We looked at the US Congregational study we took in 2006 too. (Should we take another?) We were exactly that young church; not particularly pious, but interested in community outreach, whatever each of our generational locations.

Our particular situation as we begin this New Year is good. Better than I would have expected last year. Better than most. (St. Francis House in Madison is down to a 1/2 time chaplain.) Attendance is up 7%. All of that and more at this service, as student service attendance has slipped since I fired the praise band. We made a "profit" of \$8,000 last year. \$4000 of that from parking! (Who needs Sunday worship; we have our parking lot!) Pledges were up \$2000. Our investment income went up \$2000. Good news for us. Good news for the Diocese. Which is again good news for us, because the Diocese of Indianapolis pays my salary. I did not get a raise this year. Our "communicants" are up. Our "members" are down. We no longer receive preference information either from the Purdue Admission's or the Registrar's Office. We will identify fewer casual Episcopalians.

So our particular intergenerational work becomes even more of a challenge. Demographically we are younger than most churches, but still older than the population at large. We are asked to recruit and to incorporate strangers (new people like us) and foreigners (people from other generational "nations") into our community. It's hard. Half of us like to plan. Half of us prefer activities that emerge at the last minute. One generation emails. One generation doesn't read their email or answer their phones. They text.

Add this to the regular transition of having a portion of our population with us for two or three years out of their five to seven year academic experience. Remember too that 2/3 of you sitting here have only worshipped in this building, never in either of the basements that gave this church its style. Indicative of how much we've grown. How much we always change.

We do all the usual and customary things campus ministries are supposed to do to share their story. Plus a few more. We scheduled a call-out concert ("We the Living") with a volunteer fair. Paid for a folk band. Ran ads on WBAA. (Though that was mostly for morale.) Offered a \$1000 freshman scholarship throughout the whole of the United States; which got us eight names and one new body.

Which brings me to offering two issues for our study during the year ahead. With thanks to Brinkerhoff; our need for an "applied technologist" and for a plan to deal with "me branding".

We were cutting edge in technology once; in 1992. God bless Fuzzy Gerdes. The video of our Christmas pageant got on line – two days ago. We have a fund raising option on-line. It's there on our "Community" page. But I am the only person who has used "Network for Good". We used to raise some funds through on-line Amazon orders. We're not sure that link still works. My sermons used to appear on iTunes as podcasts . . . in 2006. Thank you Jon Rexeisen.

Our website was upgraded in 2006. It is better than most church's. We hired a Purdue student to do it. But as the person who changes the text and the photos, it means working in html. Not my strength. I do have a cell phone. The only student who has that number is Brendan Knapp; and that because of – parking! We have a Facebook page. Texts? Twitter? We need someone to evaluate, to improve, and then to help us apply our technology.

If you say “Episcopal” very few people know what that means. Once it meant the 1948 Christmas classic “The Bishop’s Wife”. (Loretta Young, David Niven; Gary Grant played the angel. This was covered as “The Preachers Wife” in 1996 starring Denzel Washington. He was not Episcopalian.) We were elegance, cathedrals, and good works. Move forward to 2006 and “The Book of Daniel” on NBC where Aidan Quinn played an Episcopal priest addicted to pain meds (an Anglican “House”) with a gay Republican son. Ellen Burstyn was his Bishop. She was having sex with his dad. It was filmed at All Saints in Pasadena. That lasted four episodes. Though it does sound a little like us!

People invent their own churches now. Invent their own political parties. Just like they buy exactly what they want on-line. Brand loyalty? Party affiliation? Church membership? We are all “spiritual” but not “religious”. Each has been given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good. How do we gather in those disparate visions? Assemble them so they are enhanced? Introduce the notion of “common good”? Repeat the story of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of his representation? By doing so we will live out our vocation to present a full and free witness to the Christian gospel in the places where we live and work.

I’ll use my daughters as an example. In the “Church of Molly” there is the Christmas choir and a chancel play about food stamp use. She was happy to learn that in Scotland the “Piskies” are the fun church. Maybe she’s an actor someday. In the “Church of Emily” there is a great student t-shirt (which adults hated) and perhaps our biggest student social service project (the Purdue Student United Way) ever. (Even larger than when Andrea Morse involved us in the Relay for Life - in 2006.) She was glad to be able to say to her gay friends that they would be welcomed here. Maybe she’s a teacher someday. Neither is likely to attend a worship service in the foreseeable future.

Yet these “churches” are in communion with the “Church of Cathy Barron”, the “Church of Mario Melendez”, and the “Church of Mark Thomas”. Each has been given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good. Now all we have to do is . . .

That’s why we elect a vestry. To make sense of the grace that each has been given to manifest the spirit for the common good. That’s their job. The list of nominees is in your bulletin.

We have made sense of the grace that each has been given to manifest the spirit for the common good for the last fifty-four years. It shows in the work of our annual award winners.

This year’s winner of our Angela Falzone Student Leadership Award is our Senior Warden Li Yao. We have never had a foreign student elected as Senior Warden before. Li is brave. He is a stranger in a strange place yet has taken on the strange job of leading the leaders of this eclectic congregation. And taken on the strange job of foraging for our free food as well. He is an icon of how all of us, strangers and foreigners, have come together to serve each other in memory of the Christ.

This year’s winner of our Nellie Johnston Senior Mentor Award is Don Lynam. Don reintroduced “Godly Play” to our Sunday School program. Who can forget the fun we had with the kids and the Heifer Project during Advent. A water buffalo! Don also gets the award because he invited Chris and Ximena to church. And they came. And they stayed. Each has been given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good.

Our annual parish meeting follows upstairs immediately after the service. Please join us.

Amen.