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All Saints Episcopal Church

Church Renewal: A Deliberate Choice

In this Issue of the Good News, you will find much ink spilled about the things that George and I have learned from the Convergence Conference in Burnsville, MN. Most of what we learned were more reminders than new territory.

Our memories were jogged by those simple truths, which form the basics vital to the life, growth and renewal of a Christian church. The truth about a healthy church is that life, growth and renewal is a conscious choice. The choice to live out mission and vision. Now, while the exact vision may vary from congregation to congregation, the foundational mission is the same.


The mission of the church is not about survival. It's not about paying the light bills, or the rector, or high-pressure stewardship campaigns. It is about spreading Christ's transforming love to one another and to the world. All else must serve this ancient mission. The mission should ring some bells because it is simply a variation of the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

This truth was an affirmation of our stance over the past three years: If we are to stand a chance for renew and grow, we must first make sure that we are living the mission. That is, that we are Christians, literally meaning little Christ's, to those inside and outside our doors. To love as Christ loves is the call of the gospel. It is our first call; It is our first choice.

Supporting that mission, we have found several more decisions. We found the decision for lively, meaningful worship that speaks to each generation: a congregation that opens its arms to strangers, sending caring messages from the point of their first experience; we found congregations that actively fight unhealthy behaviors...they battle gossip, passive-aggressive behavior, and backbiting; they promote reconciliation.

We find willing, team-minded leadership that has a deep level of commitment. They choose a commitment to daily prayer, continuing study of the word, and support of the church.

We also reviewed the many enemies of the life, growth and renewal of a church. And, I can say, that many churches commit slow suicide, and that is a choice, also. It is as deliberate as swallowing a daily dose of poison until the inevitable happens... and it will happen. Choose to swallow unhealthy hateful behaviors, flaccid worship, and a selfish human environment that says to a newcomer "You are not one of us. You are not welcome here," and the church has made a choice for death.



Now, we know it seems that, sometimes, unhealthy churches continue on and on; and, sometimes loving Churches close. But, the former exists in certain shame and the latter concludes its' time with the dignity of Christ and the very life of Christ glowing from the souls of its congregation.

This article, indeed this issue of the Good News, should be taken as a loving challenge to All Saint's congregation to make a choice and dedicate yourselves to that choice.

If you choose dissension, fear, and a host of selfish, unloving behaviors to be passed off as Christianity...your path to the grave seems clear.

But, if you consciously choose to be Christian, you have chosen renewal and All Saints' must be about the saving love of Jesus Christ and all the good behaviors that undergird that love. It is the choice for life and it is the church that George and I fight for and pastor. ja+