



THE WILDERNESS:

A New Sunday Night Service Brings the Ancient Future to the Cathedral

BY SHARON ALMIRALL

Created by the spiritual enthusiasm and commitment of Saint John's Cathedral clergy and a group of parishioners, the Wilderness, a Sunday night service that debuted last September, is in its eighth month at the Cathedral.

"The original concept was to offer a service at a different time on Sunday for those who were not able to come to Sunday morning services -- people who worked, people who were spending the weekend in the mountains," says Canon Poulson Reed, Sub-Dean at Saint John's.

"But the more we talked, the more we thought about creating a very different kind of service, particularly for those people who may not be especially comfortable with our usual service. We put together a group that included lay leadership and clergy, people who were informed by the Emerging Church Movement," Canon Reed continues.

One of the founding members of the planning group is James Wall, a Saint John's parishioner who says he wanted something "deeper and more engaged," than he was finding in traditional services. "Poulson Reed and I hooked up on this. We found this notion of the Emerging Church which had actually come out of the evangelical church but has now been embraced by many churches," Wall said.

The Emerging Church movement has "theological underpinnings but is experimenting with liturgy," according to Wall. "At Saint John's, we were not getting the demographic we were looking for. It seemed the congregation jumped from high school kids to older people. When we put out the word, people came out of the woodwork. The whole group has evolved," Wall says.

"Now, there's a mix of ages. There is a greater percentage of younger people but it has appeal to a broad range," Wall adds.

The group determined the service would incorporate parts of ancient Christian and Anglican traditions and adapt them to contemporary worship practices. Resources that were used include materials from the IONA Community, the Anglican Communion and Lutheran resources. "Traditions would be both respected and honored while creativity would be employed to add contemporary elements. It was designed to serve a community focused on mission, hospitality and spiritual formation," Canon Reed explains.

Emma Timboe, a member of the Wilderness community, says, "I have a Lutheran background, thus naturally drawn to liturgy and formality, but icons and incense are very unfortunately not in the realm of Lutheran-hood. I immediately found the service inviting while very reverent, creative while still traditional. In my head was, 'what would my dad say about all this incense?' Yet inconsequential were those questions as I began to feel refreshed by the words, reflections, new forms of prayer and times for silence. I remember looking at the face of Jesus painted on the wood, staring at the candles, and interpreting the images on the screen in my own way -- images that were connected to the reflection however abstractly or directly.

The Wilderness creates a space to look or stare, to come, to breathe, wonder, think or try not to think. It is a place of worship, yet open to all of us who share the experience of seeking to fill our souls."

Icons and candles -- both ancient elements -- make for an environment that fosters contemplation while contemporary elements, such as a projection screen with images displayed on it -- from religious images, to images of nature, to people -- encourage participants to reflect on how the service is relevant to their contemporary lives. The music is also a combination of ancient and future and is influenced by world music. Sermons might involve conversational elements, poems or other literary references or might be based on an image.

After launching the service in the fall of 2007, the founding group expanded to include a regular worshipping community of some 75 people that represents a mix of people from the Cathedral and newcomers. People from neighborhoods surrounding the Cathedral are appearing for the Wilderness. They are learning about the service through word of mouth or seeing posters in neighborhood locations as well as seeing the banner that has been hanging outside the Cathedral since the inception of the service.

Almost every week, organizers are hearing stories from people who have not been to church for years or are feeling the draw of the hospitality offered in this community. "Although there are many creative and contemporary elements offered in the service, people feel nourished by the spirituality -- the scripture and prayer and focus on Jesus," Canon Reed says.

"I am thankful for this community and for the service which I pray God uses for his purposes," says Emma Timboe. "The Wilderness allows space. It doesn't move at the steady and 'we've got another service in 10 minutes people' pace of some morning services I've experienced. I leave wanting to pray for more, stirred up by the concerns of my immediate surroundings, people, family, the world, and all there is we can be praying for," Timboe adds. "The Wilderness is repentant. The liturgies provide a format for speaking in accord, confessing sins and our need for grace together and individually, and having communion weekly together. The music also echoes the reverence and mystery of God."

The community spends time together following the service. Sometimes, they have a potluck dinner following service, sometimes they go to the nearby Cheeky Monk pub for fellowship. The group has also met mid-week for Christian meditation and to explore opportunities for outreach in the community.

"These efforts to create a new service and new community have been strongly supported by Dean Peter Eaton, the Cathedral clergy and staff, as well as Bishop O'Neill's office," Canon Reed explains. "We are all hoping the Wilderness can be a resource for the wider church."

How is your church reaching out to the neighborhood?

Have you experimented with alternative worship times, formats or services to draw in people who don't or won't come on Sunday morning?

What populations are missing from your church (e.g., young families, older adults, teenagers, twenty-somethings, neighborhood residents, etc.)? What obstacles would these people face in your congregation? Can you remove some or all of these obstacles?

Have you used Percept and Link2Lead to understand the demographic makeup of the neighborhood around your church? Have you made changes based on that information?

How Has Your Life Changed?

BY THE REV. MARTHA ROGERS

Lately, I've been waiting on the world to change. To change back is perhaps more of the truth. I want things to be simpler. I want it to be the way it used to be. And then someone comes along and reminds me that we can never return to the past. We must adjust and keep up with change. "I won't", I say, as I dig my heels more firmly into the ground I'm standing on. I don't want to change."

"But," says my wise daughter, "you are changing all the time." No, that can't be true, I think, but then I look at myself more closely and have to agree with her. Change happens. All around me. And I participate with it more than I really realize.

How do you personally participate in the varied changes of our world and our life as we know it? Not sure? Take a look at the following questions and see where you might notice more change in your life than you previously thought.

- How have you learned to shop differently? Do you shop more often? With more ease? Do you have more choices?
- Are you and your family more mobile? How many vehicles do you own? Do you travel more or farther for work? For vacation? For shopping or visiting?
- Do you use technology to communicate other than a phone in your own home?
- What entertains you? A DVD? A CD? HDTV? Satellite radio or tv? A CD player? An iPod or mp3? (Have you begun to speak on only in 3 – 4 letter acronyms?)
- Does anyone in your family match the Ozzie & Harriet model? (two kids, dad works, mom stays home, no stress, dressing up for supper, clean kids who own dress shoes and wear ties each Sunday to church, etc, etc). If not, how has the model changed in your own familial relationships? Do you know anyone divorced? Or of a different race?
- Is your medical care fragmented into specialties? How many professionals do you see to help take care of your body? (Cardiologist? Chiropractor? Orthodontist? Counselor? Podiatrist? Physical Therapist? Etc)
- Do you socialize with people from work?
- Do you know the names and family members of your neighbors?
- How close does your next living relative live?
- Do you repair most things (Darn socks? Replace zippers? Duct tape your eyeglasses together?) or do you simply replace them?

Even if your life reflects a couple or a few of the changes above, you can see that whether we like it or not, we are in the midst of many changes, or cultural shifts as they are called by some. We're there.

But, is our church changing too? This is the time for the church to get on-board, to open its eyes and to ask those hard questions. If God's Word will be spoken, how can it be presented so that we can hear in the midst of all these changes?

Your Website as Your New Front Door

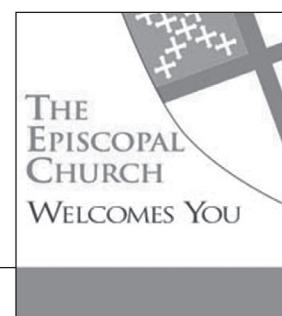
In a recent address to the Episcopal Communicators' Conference in Seattle, The Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, Bishop of Olympia reflected on some of the difficulties facing The Episcopal Church (and many mainline churches) today:

"We still spend countless time on bulletin boards, when they no longer work. We show too little attention to our websites, when that has become the front door to the church and the very first contact most have with us. We continue to use our code, ECW, EYC, Narthex, Nave, 815, ... even Eucharist. I want to teach them what Eucharist means, but we can't do it at 60 miles an hour on our outdoor signs ... Our "Episcopal Church Welcomes you Sign" was developed in the 1940s. This was when cars moved at half the speed they do now ..."



As you design a new web site, or redesign your existing one, there are some things to keep in mind, to make sure it is the most inviting front door you can provide:

Make sure you use images and other visual material, while keeping text short and readable. Think carefully about what images and text you choose. People come to web sites expecting a visual experience – they will look for pictures first, and then read text next to the pictures they are drawn to. Make sure that the photos or other images you choose reflect what you want them to – are they associated with the church building, or with people? Are they specific to your community, or more generalized? Would they reflect the essence of your congregation to someone unfamiliar with it?



Make sure information about service times and location is easy to find, up-to-date and accurate. It is also helpful to let potential newcomers know what to expect in the way of child care, at which service.

Make sure the information on the web site meets the needs both of your current parishioners as well as newcomers – don't neglect one audience for the sake of the other. Including information of interest to current parishioners – including event and class information, updates on particular ministries – will also help newcomers understand what your congregation is about.

Indeed, the places where people look for and find church have changed and multiplied, and to truly proclaim the Gospel to more people, churches must explore and exploit the variety of ways that people look for, and find, church. New technologies



also provide exciting possibilities for staying in touch with and providing information to parishioners and the surrounding community in a busy world.

One of the tools for communicating both with your congregation and the outside community that might have been considered optional even five years ago, but that is now required, is a church web site. A recent article on the Alban Institute's web site points out that many young people would never visit a church unless they'd visited the web site first, and found something of what they were looking for. More and more parishioners also expect to be able to go to a web site to find times and places for events, uploaded audio or text of sermons or discussions, and links to community organizations and activities.

Like any ongoing communications project, constructing and managing a web site is easier said than done – it requires resources, expertise, and constant attention to keep it up-to-date and fresh. Particularly to those who feel they have little technical expertise or aptitude, it can be a daunting prospect. Moreover, many churches have had bad experiences with web sites – the parish administrator's son or daughter built a beautiful and serviceable site two years ago, but he or she has long since moved on to other things, and no one can figure out how to update the site.

So, if you are in a position where you need to develop a web site from scratch, or update or overhaul your current site, where do you start? What do you do if you have no one on your church staff, vestry or other volunteer body who has the time or the expertise to build a site? Is it possible to build and maintain a web site without spending thousands of dollars? And then, isn't a web site the tip of the iceberg? What's a blog? Do we have to post our rector's sermons? How on earth do you do that?

The good news is that it is getting cheaper and easier to build and maintain web sites, and there are several new resources that allow someone with basic computer skills to build a web site from scratch, and maintain it on an ongoing basis – and many of them are designed especially for churches. If you are willing to tolerate a little advertising from Christian organizations on your site, you can even use some of these services for free (see list of resources in the box at right).

Have someone outside of the church review your web site, and make sure it is not speaking in code. Is it clear what to expect? Does "10:30 am Solemn Eucharist" sound inviting to someone who's never attended an Episcopal church? Is there insider "code" on any of the pages a newcomer would visit to understand the church and what you do (e.g., LEV training in the Narthex, ECW in the Undercroft, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in the Great Hall.) It's fine to use traditional terms, but make sure you define them for newcomers.

Most importantly, consider your web site your new, updated version of your old "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!" sign. It should offer the same welcome, the same clear direction about how to find the parking lot (or nearest light rail or bus stop), and the same sense of invitation into a relationship with God.

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Low-Cost or Free Online Resources for Building Websites

ForMinistry.com –
<http://www.forministry.com/>

Church Web Works –
<http://www.churchwebworks.com/site/home.php>

E-Zekiel –
<http://www.e-zekiel.com/templates/cuszeke/default.asp?id=1381>

Advanced Ministry –
<http://www.advancedministry.com/index.cfm>

Secular Resources –
Web.com – <http://www.web.com>