

Evangelism – Part two

The practice and pattern of evangelism for Anglicans today



DARCEY LAZERTE

The late Archdeacon Steve Hopkins spoke of Anglicans practicing “Vampire Evangelism”. It was tongue in cheek but insightful.

He described church members looking around for new members to keep the church going and wanting “new blood”. This understanding of evangelism is self serving and not the outward and missional understanding of evangelism to which God calls us.

When we read the scriptures —Dr. John Bowen in *Evangelism for Normal People* has a wonderful reflection on this—we see the purpose of Israel is outward looking and at its root evangelical.

Scripturally, Israel exists so that all the nations of the earth might come to know God. Likewise, in the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16–20) we see the purpose of evangelism is not the survival of the church but rather making disciples of all nations.

Evangelism, at its core, must be outward looking and not self serving.

That said, the truth is that mainline protestant churches in North America are not good at evangelism, and for the most part have ceded this ministry to the more evangelical churches.

There are many reasons for this.

As discussed in the last article (Niagara Anglican, September

“Going forward we must find a way to be as comfortable speaking the gospel as we are living it.”

2018), we are still wrestling with our colonial past which has not prepared us for this ministry.

Additionally, with few exceptions, there has been very little modern theological attention given to evangelism. There certainly have been volumes of church growth and evangelism conference material but little academic reflection.

Further, between the legacy of colonialism and the rise of some of the American televangelists, evangelism for many just seems in poor taste.

Add to this, that some have discomfort in and around the Great Commission as being somehow exploitive—the result is this ministry has been

neglected.

Further, whether we call it a multicultural society, a post-modern world or something else all together, there is a real fear we will somehow offend or contradict and that keeps us quiet when it comes to speaking about our faith.

So where does this leave us today?

While there are some Anglicans in North America who have embraced this ministry, it is fair to say most have not. Often, we hear those words which are attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times, when necessary use words.” While there is a sentimentality to this and it does

spurn us to social justice and the social gospel, when we do so at the expense of evangelism, we do lose a key ministry to which Christ has called us.

Going forward we must find a way to be as comfortable speaking the gospel as we are living it.

We need to re-examine our fear of the ministry of evangelism.

We need to recover the Great Commission and we need to be able to articulate why we ourselves are disciples of Jesus.

The Reverend Canon Darcey Lazerte is Rector of St. Simon's Oakville. darcey@stsimon.ca

(Last month Darcey started his three-part series on Evangelism by giving us “A glimpse into its history from an Anglican perspective”. Next time he concludes with “Some approaches going forward”.)

In conversation with ...

The Reverend Canon Dawn Davis

Faith Formation Coordinator

Niagara Anglican (NA): Tell us about yourself.

Dawn Davis (DD): Three key things to know about me:

1. I am a follower of Jesus and I am passionate about helping people grow spiritually.
2. I love the church because I believe it is the best community to help us form into the fullness of our calling.
3. I am intentional about partnering with the creative energy of the Holy Spirit. It can be a bit scary, but it can take us to unimaginable places.

Other bits to know:

I am ordained, have a human resources certification and recently earned a doctorate in ministry in spiritual formation.

My husband, daughter and I have just moved from Trinity Church Aurora to Hamilton and are discovering how similar it is to our coastal roots in Halifax.

NA: Tell us more about your

role in Niagara Diocese.

DD: I think for a long time we thought people would spiritually grow if they simply came to church. Our beautiful liturgies do help people connect with God, but because it is a private experience it can quickly fade. Consequently, lay leaders often say they are not confident as spiritual leaders in offering public prayer or using scripture in their daily lives.

In a nutshell, I am here to help the church spiritually grow in faith, so our people can confidently share their stories of transformation and live into the fullness of their calling.

NA: You are to spend 70% in the greater St. Catharines area (GSC). What will you be doing there and what do you hope to achieve?

DD: My goals are that:

1. All eight parishes be equipped with spiritual



practices and resources to help them discern their future and build suitable discipleship paths.

2. All parishioners—lay and clergy—are deepening in their faith as they feel called.

To make this happen I will connect people's needs with resources by creating an online bank of programs, books, conferences and spiritual mentors.

I will offer area workshops, parish consultations, preaching, presentations, clergy peer group facilitation and a faith-forma-

tion blog based on the Sunday lectionary.

NA: Your other 30% will be devoted to the rest of Niagara Diocese. What are your plans there?

DD: A lot of what I do with the GSC churches will be extended to the diocese.

NA: What brought you to this ministry or how has your thinking about ministry changed over your career?

DD: About 12 years ago, my parish wanted to go spiritually deeper, but I couldn't take people somewhere I hadn't been myself. That awareness significantly changed my role from pastoral leader to spiritual equipper and began a new stage in my own spiritual deepening.

NA: You created a new resource. Tell us about its purpose and benefits.

DD: There are few spiritual formation resources for church leaders, so I created one. *Revive: Equipping Church Leaders to be Spiritual Leaders* was recently published online by Forward Movement, a ministry of The Episcopal Church U.S.A.

Revive is a 10-month, small-group discipleship program for church leaders that focuses on prayer, scripture and a call to ministry. I hope it is a resource, along with many others, that the church will find helpful.

NA: Any final thoughts?

DD: My question for each person is: Are you growing spiritually? How can your church help with the most exciting and challenging journey you will ever take ... following Jesus!

The Reverend Canon Dawn Davis is Niagara's Faith Formation Coordinator. 416-567-1827 dawn.davis@niagaraanglican.ca