

## Report of the Ordinary to the 143<sup>rd</sup> Diocesan Council – The Exhortation

Some in the room today may remember the church growth movement of the 1970s through the 1990s. It was primarily a North American church movement that began with an emphasis on growing Sunday Schools and morphed into church growth. Well-known proponents were Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner, Win Arn and Lyle Schaller. Hundreds of books were written, seminars abounded and so-called Christian novelties were marketed through Christian book stores that sprung up like weeds across this country. At the heart of the movement was an emphasis on the utilization of technical analysis to determine programs that would produce increased church attendance. This marketing approach helped produce mega churches like Saddleback in California and Willow Creek in Illinois. If Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback wore a Hawaiian shirt to preach, then hundreds of Hawaiian shirts were purchased and worn by pastors across the country. If Bill Hybels, the head pastor at Willow Creek developed a new seeker model, thousands flocked to his seminars to learn the latest and greatest so they too could pastor a mega church. Hybels was purported to have a poster outside his office with these questions:

- What is our business?
- Who is our customer?
- What does the customer consider value?

So, church ministries were radically revised and traditionalism gave way to contemporary services, Christian rock bands and drive-in church services.

But then the church growth movement died out. What happened? Simply stated, when methods and techniques are used to replace essential principles in the church, failure is the inevitable result.

Some, using hindsight analysis have determined that the movement was perhaps over-hyped because the growth in the general population was greater than the growth in church attendance and transfer growth was a dominant factor as members left their smaller churches for the larger, program-driven ones.

A book entitled, “Reveal: Where Are You?” was published by a Willow Creek staff member. It provided an analysis of attendees and determined that a disappointing number of attendees experienced a disconnect between participation in church activities and spiritual growth.

Townhall.com’s Bob Burney reported, on the multi-year study of the programs and “seeker sensitive” philosophy of ministry of Willow Creek Community Church, that results aren’t good for churches that replaced “sin, salvation and sanctification” with “Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity.”

This past summer I reread a book entitled, Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New by the Rev. Walter J. Chantry. I enjoyed reading it again and was

struck by a portion of the book that appears on pages 65-68 having to do with revival in the church. Here is a selected compilation from those pages and I quote:

*Certainly, the modern church should long for and pray for revival. She should petition God for a wider spread of his truth. She should ask for a restoration of a generally higher level of righteousness in his people and in society at large. God's people should request that greater numbers be brought to know his gracious salvation. Nevertheless, they must realize that there is no necessity of having men of super-sanctification as a means to revival.*

*God uses rather ordinary Christians who are engaged in a desperate struggle against their own flesh and against the devil to magnify his greatness in revival. Instruments greatly used of God must be actively fighting temptation and praying for the removal of sin from their hearts...*

*In Luke 5 Peter saw the fish miraculously brought to his net by our Lord. At that moment he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He knew that he was unworthy to stand in the presence of the Savior; he was too unclean to be associated with him. Our Master immediately responded, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.' It is as if Christ had said, 'Now that you are fully aware of your moral impurity, you are prepared to serve me, Peter.'*

*When the prophets of the Old Testament were called to a mighty work, their calls usually began with a conscious awareness of their personal impurity and impotence.*

*Just so, God would rather keep Paul harassed with some Satanic temptation stirring up his flesh, than allow his servant to think himself exalted above others...*

*God did not spread the Gospel of Christ through the worldly means of extrovert personalities. Christ did not choose apostles for their native strength of character. The church was not begun by twelve emperors but by twelve political slaves of Rome. Our Lord had no special use for scholars. Most of the apostles were far from learned. His choice of evangelists included no warriors, nor 'Madison Avenue' publicity men. As a group, the apostles had no outstanding personal strength which can explain their impact on the world.*

*In various ways Christians reveal their suspicion that only extraordinary men can be used for great works of God. Some place a great emphasis on academic skills. They think, 'If we send men with respected academic honors through the world, the nations will recognize genius and come to Christ.' Others advertise football players, theater stars and politicians, expecting that the world will run to their meetings. Unfortunately, though the crowds come, they are not changed. Why should they not remain worldly after this appeal to human greatness?*

*Some of the most profound acts of witnessing and successful evangelism have been performed by the most unlikely and unprepossessing individuals. Great numbers believed on Christ through the immoral Samaritan woman on the day she first met the Savior. God did not wait until she established a super-holy reputation among them. The blind man of John 9 was called upon to witness before the greatest Bible scholars in the world during the week of his conversion.*

*God does not need your talents, wisdom, holiness and strength. But rather you, in weakness, definitely needing the power of his Spirit in your labors.*

*Revival depends upon the sovereign blessing of God...God revives his church through humble people who have real flaws, but who rely upon his grace alone as they diligently labor according to his Word.*

The people in the church at Corinth fell into the trap of believing that in order to be successful, they needed to have super-apostle leadership. They compared the Apostle Paul to these individuals. In doing so, he appeared almost laughable. It was true that he could write, for his letters were ‘weighty and strong’, but his bodily presence was ‘weak and his speech of no account.’ He had no appealing personality or impressive appearance. In fact, much like our own Diocese, many of his churches were small, experienced difficulty, and struggled to keep afloat. So, what was his inspired counsel to this Corinthian church?

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)*

*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)*

*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)*

People have asked me, ‘Bishop, what is your vision for our Diocese and what’s the plan to accomplish it?’ I assure you it’s not gimmicks, programs or analytics. Spiritual strength and

progress have always been the result of humility and confession of sin acknowledging one's complete dependence upon Almighty God. So, what is the answer to the question about vision? Are you sure you want to hear my answer? Put your head on a swivel and look around. The answer is quite simple. It's you, and those around you, and here's the reason.

Our Prayer Book sets the tone for humility and repentance in the words of the General Confession in the Daily Office:

*Almighty and most merciful Father, We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.*

As you confess your sins in the Daily Office, please remember that revival begins with you and ask the Lord to use you in his process. It begins with humble prayer. Daily ask him to bring an unsaved person into your orbit of influence whose heart he has prepared to respond to the Gospel, and then share it. Daily, ask him to bring to mind a member of your congregation, family member, friend or neighbor who needs help, and tangibly assist with that need. Daily ask him how you can better serve the Lord through your local church to help make it more impactful in your community. Why must this be done? Because jars of clay, like you and me, with all of our faults, are the hope of the world in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please listen carefully to this oft quoted portion of Holy Scripture from 2 Chronicles 7:11-16:

*Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's house. All that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house he successfully accomplished. Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.*

We may not have famine due to lack of rain, but we have a famine of holiness resulting in godlessness in our land. We see it daily over the communication airways, in wanton violence in our streets and in the worship of mammon. We may not be overrun with ravenous locusts, but our Judeo-Christian heritage is being devoured bite by bite. We may not have pestilence, but the fruitful crops of righteousness are shriveling on the stalk and vine before our eyes.

Where is this house of the Lord today? It no longer stands in Jerusalem. Then, where is it? Hear the testimony of God's Word:

*For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:16)*

*Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Hebrews 3:5-6)*

*...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5).*

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

Dear people, do you realize that you are the key to revival? We are the house in which the Spirit of the living God dwells. And, *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. May God forgive us for our complacency and neglect, for 'those things we have left undone those things which we ought not to have done'. May he have mercy upon us and bless us as we continue to serve him in the spirit of Zechariah 7:6 - 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.'*

You will hear, in my presentation later today, about the good heritage we enjoy in the Anglican tradition. Share this exhortation with your congregations and may God's 'eyes and heart' be with us forever.

In Christ Jesus our Lord,  
Bishop Chuck Gillin  
Ordinary