

WED CLASS 4/29/15 Adult Formation & Lifelong Learning from TEC website

Christian formation is the lifelong process of growing in our relationship with God, self, others, and all creation. Every experience in our lives can provide us with the opportunity to express our faith; the challenge we face is recognizing these opportunities and learning ways to live a sometimes countercultural life in a secular world.

Faith formation happens! Be it intentional or unintentional, every life experience can be an energizing and provocative opportunity to live out our Baptismal Covenant. The question for the teacher/learner, learner /teacher is how we might celebrate this revelation in ways which empower adults to live counter culturally in a world which puts the secular life above a faith filled life. It is time to connect and rejoice in the transformative actions taking place in our communities and together explore new possibilities.

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The Charter for Lifelong Christian Faith Formation in The Episcopal Church is Lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

I have called you friends. JOHN 15:14-16

Through The Episcopal Church, God Invites All People:

- To enter into a prayerful life of worship, continuous learning, intentional outreach, advocacy and service.
- To hear the Word of God through scripture, to honor church teachings, and continually to embrace the joy of Baptism and Eucharist, spreading the Good News of the risen Christ and ministering to all.
- To respond to the needs of our constantly changing communities, as Jesus calls us, in ways that reflect our diversity and cultures as we seek, wonder and discover together.
- To hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people, placing ourselves in the stories of our faith, thereby empowering us to proclaim the Gospel message.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit. JOHN 15:14-16

Through The Episcopal Church, God Inspires All People:

- To experience Anglican liturgy, which draws us closer to God, helps us discern God's will and encourages us to share our faith journeys.

- To study Scripture, mindful of the context of our societies and cultures, calling us to seek truth anew while remaining fully present in the community of faith.
- To develop new learning experiences, equipping disciples for life in a world of secular challenges and carefully listening for the words of modern sages who embody the teachings of Christ.
- To prepare for a sustainable future by calling the community to become guardians of God's creation.

I am giving you these commands that you may love one another. JOHN 15:17

Through The Episcopal Church, God Transforms All People:

- By doing the work Jesus Christ calls us to do, living into the reality that we are all created in the image of God and carrying out God's work of reconciliation, love, forgiveness, healing, justice and peace.
- By striving to be a loving and witnessing community, which faithfully confronts the tensions in the church and the world as we struggle to live God's will.
- By seeking out diverse and expansive ways to empower prophetic action, evangelism, advocacy and collaboration in our contemporary global context.
- By holding all accountable to lift every voice in order to reconcile oppressed and oppressor to the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christian Faith Formation in The Episcopal Church is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ.

For more information visit: www.episcopalchurch.org or contact Ruth-Ann Collins at 1-800-334-7626 ext. 6051
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Fixing Adult Formation
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by Derek Olsen

The state of Adult Christian Formation in the Episcopal Church seems to be in a state of serious decline. The recent piece on the Lead about [a rector who decided to end her adult education programs](#) drew a number of comments both here and on Facebook acknowledging similar challenges in parishes across the country. On the national level, the proposed budget slashes funding for spiritual formation and Christian Education across the board. What are we to do? Is there any way to reverse this decline? What can we do to get things going the other way? Of course, if this were Hollywood, we know what could happen: a plucky group of misfits would pull together to form a catechetical school, meeting—perhaps—in an abandoned police station in serious need of renovation. They could have a priest who's a former astrophysicist weighing in on questions about God and the cosmos, a respected New Testament scholar whose traditional seminary folded and who now wanders the world in search of alt music and fountain

pens. A former atheist with an operatic background could uncover and introduce the gems of church music. An English vicar battling his own demons and a narrow-minded bureaucracy could handle the pastoral care load. The ordained head of a philosophy department with a taste for fine liturgy could hit the theological heavyweights while tossing out snarky comments about hymn-tune choices and liturgy-fails. Throw in the odd ecumenical figure—maybe a Lutheran civil servant with a taste for heavy metal who ponders theology, pluralism, and the ethics of veganism and the environment. Round it off with an over-educated IT guy who rambles on the trivialities of medieval liturgy and patristics at the drop of a hat. The whole motley crew could be informally presided over by a wily journalist who's grown tired of the baseball beat who grudgingly takes the position of dean with a shoestring budget, and—ensconced in his crumbling station—proceeds to educate the church. A fulsome cast of extras bringing in a network of eccentric English and Australian voices could be a real plus too. This pitch has got all kinds of promise—and plentiful opportunities for a rockin' soundtrack.

Reality, as they say, is stranger than fiction. Scrap the picturesque location and move this vision online instead. Oh, yeah—scrap the shoestring budget too; there's actually nothing that can be called a budget here. What I'm describing is not the future of adult faith formation. I'm describing its past as it's been for me for the past five years or so—as well as its present.

The majority of my Christian education and faith formation that's been feeding me for the past while has come from reading (and writing) blogs. There's a regular circle I visit, informally anchored by the Episcopal Café, and liberally supplemented by the English-based Ship of Fools forums. All of the wacky people above—and several other colorful characters to boot—actually exist and are regular reads for me. Reading the works of others exposes me to thoughts I wouldn't otherwise think, and writing my own blog forces me to clarify my ideas and communicate them in such a way that other people would want to read them.

Sometimes in the wider electronic discussion I hear people asking what the place of blogs is in an increasingly Facebook-dominated world. This is the place of blogs as far as I'm concerned: they offer a solid essay-driven form of communication that can be both challenged and supplemented by comments. I can offer an essay on a particular topic and know that it will be seen and read by any number of people who are then free to ask further questions or to call me on what I've written. I'm held accountable knowing that anyone from the guy-born-yesterday to the world's foremost authority on the topic could randomly drop by and call me on the carpet. In one sense these writings may be ephemeral and fleeting as blog hosts go up and down but—as anyone who's penned an electronic drunken rant or seen a horrific third-grade choir photo posted to Facebook knows—“What happens on the internet, stays on the internet.” Forever. In short, I want to suggest that instead of wringing our hands about the state of adult faith formation, we realize that, for those of us reading these words now, a significant effort is happening online and that both learning and formation are happening based on what people find here.

It ain't your momma's Sunday School.

What of the budget cuts? An electronic acquaintance has a quote from Margaret Mead in his email signature: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” I've thought about this quote frequently as I've surveyed the Episcopal side of the internet. What has dawned on me is that every major online resource that I use has been created by an individual with a passion—not by a funded church committee. Take Chad Wohlers's site on the [Books of Common Prayer](#) or the currently anonymous [bcponline.org](#). Ditto for [Project Canterbury](#) or [The Lectionary Page](#) or

[MissionStClare](#) or [DailyOffice.org](#) or my own [office site](#). Even the Episcopal Café itself—as far as I know—comes out of Jim’s own passion (and that of his dedicated news team)—with only web space coming from the Diocese of Washington, D.C.

The national church? Dunno.

What I’m seeing is a set of resources that work under the open-source/crowd-source model. Good material for adult faith formation is being produced and offered every day for free. It’s available; it’s out there. Am I denigrating traditional brick-and-mortar Adult Sunday School classes and forums? No. And that’s not my intent. Indeed, one of the bright spots of Christian Ed for me in the past decade is a Sunday School class on Romans at the Cathedral of St Philip in Atlanta. It was a fun yet thorough walk through a complex book led entirely by a small group of dedicated teachers—laymen—who educated themselves laid out the various issues and readings and meanings for the rest of us to interact with. It wasn’t from a packaged curriculum and it wasn’t produced by a national or diocesan anything.

I am in favor of the traditional pattern when and where it works but the indications I’m seeing is that those places are becoming fewer and farther between.

So what now—are we good? No, not yet. A few more things need to happen.

First, we need to keep writing blogs. Me and you. We’ve got to keep producing good edifying content.

Second, we need someone who’s willing to bring some organization to all of this.

As a database guy, I’ve long argued that the challenge of our age is not having information or generating content. Rather, we’ve got the reverse problem—there’s way too much information available. The challenge if our age is analyzing and organizing the data that’s out there into meaningful and—more important—useful chunks. While blogs are great, they tend to be occasional in both main senses of the word. That is, they get written occasionally (mine not often based on the craziness of my schedule) but are also occasional in the formal sense. Like Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, they’re prompted by specific events and tend not to be systematic presentations of a single field or idea. What we need is an initiative to group together internet resources and blog posts into clear and helpful groupings. Thus, if someone in a local church wanted to learn about—or to teach a traditional brick-and-mortar Sunday School class about—a given topic, they could go to this resource and see what’s available, perhaps even finding a disparate group of resources balanced with one another in a helpful way.

Could a church funded committee do this work? Well, maybe... but I doubt it. And, looking at what has been done and who has been doing it, it doesn’t seem statistically likely either.

So, if you’re serious about wanting to fix the apparently broken state of adult faith formation, we need a volunteer—what are you doing in your spare time?

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