

THAT THEY MAY COME



In recent years the most common evangelism strategy for mainline congregations has been congregational hospitality. Churches have paid attention to the creation of welcoming space, welcoming behavior, welcoming liturgy, welcoming coffee hour. Churches have prepared them-

selves to welcome the newcomer and waited for them to come in their doors.

Most newcomers come looking for a new church home having left another church due to a move to a new city or a new neighborhood. Sometimes it is because of a disagreement or disenchantment with another congregation or a disengagement for some period, long or short. Certainly these newcomers appreciate their reception into an authentically welcome congregation.

But what about the unchurched, the de-churched, the "spiritual but not religious" and the "nones?" What about those who feel an emptiness in social media relationships and are looking for something to fill the gap-

ing hole in their innermost being? What about the ones who are wrestling with God questions that the prosperity gospel and judgmental fundamentalism dismiss as inappropriate or a sign of weak faith? What about the generation of young people whose parents raised them without any religious or spiritual formation, deciding instead to let them engage their own search for "The Other" when the time is right for them? What about . . . ?

What welcome are we prepared to offer them? These are the ones we are called to welcome not just to our congregations but into a relationship with the God of grace and mercy and unfailing love. These are the ones we are called

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ENJOY THE BEAUTY OF NEW MEXICO

The 2016 Annual Gathering will be held June 28-30 at the beautiful Bosque Center run by the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande. It is a first-class conference center in a secluded, southwest setting just minutes from the Albuquerque airport. Pastors and lay leaders from various denominations will gather for an inspiring three days of workshops, worship, and presentations on the theme "Sing a New Song: Unpacking the Mystery of Faith" featuring Dan

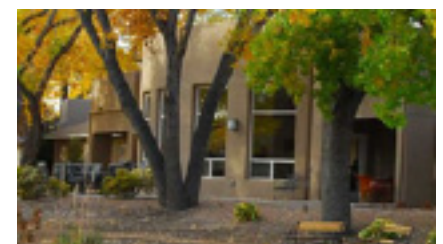
Benedict, Lizette Larson-Miller, and Marty Haugen.

Albuquerque has much to offer including its Old Town with a variety of southwest shops and eating establishments. The home of an international hot air balloon festival, other attractions include: the Sandia Peak Tramway (celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016), the BioPark Botanic Garden, Zoo, and Aquarium, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, many museums, as well as various wineries

and breweries.

Santa Fe, the State Capital, is

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The Bosque Center

Come early or stay after the conference to enjoy the cultural diversity of New Mexico.

A WAY HOME

I sit in my pew, ready to receive what the pastors promise me is the “good news” of the Gospel. I am a shaky new Christian. The hymns get to me. Anyone who has sung Lutheran hymns knows they can last about a half an hour. Tears slip down my face as the music progresses, and I keep saying silently to myself “I am home.” How can this be home when I’ve never been a church person? I’m divorced, I’ve had an abortion, I’ve lived with a cocaine dealer, and I go to AA. I am drawn to this place, and yet feel out-of-place at the same time. The bulletin says, “We have sinned by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.” I can smell a no-win a thousand miles away. I am up and out of my seat, and back home within the first ten minutes of the service. I write my pastors yet another letter, stating why I cannot be a Lutheran. I fear I will quit the church again.

For much of my childhood I was told how bad I was. My parents’ erratic, ever-changing alcoholic rules and behavior, meant we “sinned” daily by what was done, and by what was left undone – no matter how good we tried to be. There was too much chaos and terror – harsh criticisms and punishments were common. This left us covered in shame and feeling like hopeless sinners. Grace and forgiveness were words I never heard in my childhood home.

No matter how many times my pastors tried to point out to me that the forgiveness of sins comes right after the confession of sins, I told them, it did not matter. I had already stopped listening by then.

Crushing shame had closed off my ears, and shut down my brain. All I heard was: “You are bad, and no matter how hard you try, you will never be anything but bad.”

I tell my pastors I am struggling to fit into a church community, and that grace is just too good to be true, and I have made too many mistakes in life. They say, “You are a child of God and God forgives everything. Come back for The Way at five.” I show up to my Way small group; I tell them I feel terrible about myself. I cry; they hand me Kleenex. I tell them I think they are all too nice for me, and that I am not good enough to be there. They laugh. But not a mean laugh – a laugh of recognition, and say they have felt that way, too. I say, “I ask too many questions.” Karen says, “Donna, those are the questions I have always wanted to ask, but I am too embarrassed to ask. I feel I should already know the answer. Please stay, I learn so much when you ask a question – I get so much from everyone’s answers.” David says with a wink, “If you try to leave again, I will throw a net over you and bring you back.” Jo Ann hugs me. Grace is not too good to be true – I am experiencing it now. I find out I do belong. I stay. I’m glad.

After trying radical politics, feminism, psychology, and studying major philosophies and world religions, I found I had only partial answers to my quest for truth and meaning. I found a Higher Power through Twelve Step Programs, but who knew that God was at church? Not me. I knew that the Divine could be found in friends, books, and flowers, but church?



Yes, after searching the whole world over, I found my answers to serenity, meaning, and community in my neighborhood church.

I expected to be condemned in a church. What I found instead was kindness, warmth, and acceptance. I found the love and power of God’s saving grace. Grace is Christianity’s greatest gift to the world. It is the cure for shame and the way out of the exhausting life of self-reliance. I now have a secure identity and peace of mind knowing I am a beloved and forgiven child of God. I found my way home.

Donna Linn

I am an enthusiastic late comer to Christianity. I was hostile to organized religion and skeptical of Christianity. I was shown how to become a disciple of Christ through the catechumenate process. I was a candidate three times, a sponsor twice, and I have been a catechist for eleven years running. I never would have been able to ask my questions, express my doubts, and find my way to this wonderful state of a beloved and forgiven child of God if it were not for Phinney Ridge Lutheran’s Catechumenate Process called The Way.

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to invite into a journey of faithful discipleship. The hospitality piece is certainly an important first step, but should we not be praying week after week, month after month, year after year that they will come? "That they may come" should be included in every congregation's evangelism strategy, voiced in the prayers of the people on Sunday, included in every committee, task force or team meeting and taught to Sunday School

children.

If you pray for them, they will come. They will find a genuine place of welcome among people who have prayed for them and expected them and waited for them. Then the next question is this: Then what? What welcome does a congregation have to offer them beyond fair-trade coffee at Fellowship Time?

When you meet this summer with pastors and lay people in your denomination's annual meetings or as-

semblies or at the next theological or continuing education conference, ask these questions: "Do you intentionally pray for the unchurched to come and is your congregation prepared to receive them?" This is a great way to begin a conversation about the gifts of the Adult Catechumenate to equip a congregation to welcome seekers and in the process to deepen the spiritual life of those who prepare to meet them.

Bev Piro, NAAC President

ENJOY THE BEAUTY OF NEW MEXICO

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only about a forty-five minute drive north of the conference center. It is an artist colony filled with wonderful museums, restaurants, and shops. Head north to view Georgia O'Keeffe's

beloved landscapes with visits to places like Loretto, Chimayo, and Taos. Experience the richness of Hispanic and Native American culture. Check out the various missions, pueblos, and cliff dwellings. For more information contact the

Native Pueblo Cultural Center at www.indianpueblo.org or call 866-855-7902.

You can also order a free adventure guide from www.newmexico.org

TREASURY OF WORKSHOPS

The 2016 ecumenical gathering to be held June 28-30 at the Bosque Center in Albuquerque will feature not only amazing presenters and inspiring worship, but also a wonderful selection of practical workshops that can enrich congregational life and ministry. Once again the North American Association is offering two levels: level one for all participants and level two recommended for those with some knowledge and experience with the Catechumenate. Below is a sampling of offerings. For a full description of workshops check out the NAAC Gathering page at www.catechumenate.org

Level One:
"Beginning the Catechumenate"

with Martha Maier.

"Congregational Hospitality: How to Really Welcome the Stranger" with Beth Lewis.

"Enfleshing, Expressing, and Embracing the Mystery: The Role of the Arts, Symbols, and Environment in the Christian Journey" with Marty Haugen.

"My Catechumenate Journey" with Donna Linn.

"Discovering Spiritual Gifts: A Keystone Habit that Changes Everything" with Timothy Dombeck.

"In the Spirit of the Circle: Native American Spirituality" with Doug Bleyle.

Level Two:
"Preaching the Mysteries" with Bryan Hanson.

"Daring to Hear the New Song: Trusting the Spirit" with Dan Benedict.

"Online Formation and the Catechumenate" with Chris Yaw.

"Living the Faith: Equipping a Congregation that Equips the Newly Baptized" with Dwight DuBois.

"The Year-Round Catechumenate: Why and How" with Jerry Pare.

"The Catechumenate: Growing in Faith Step-by-Step" with Mike Marchal.



NEW RESOURCE

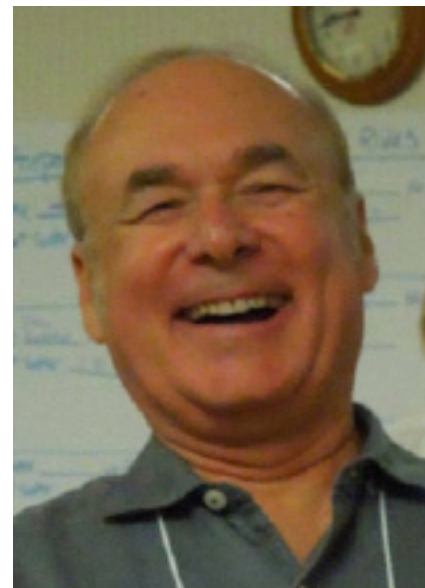
Beyond the Church Walls: Cultivating a Culture of Care by Rick Rouse, Fortress Press, 2016

The history of Christianity is full of turning points that Grace has nurtured to be defining moments. Ponder with me these few that come to mind: the early days when a small Jewish sect that followed Christ gradually morphed into a church in the wider Gentile world; the transition from being a persecuted minority faith community to being the state religion; the tension between Christians of the East and the West that led to the Great Schism. The list goes on, and continues daily. Each of these "crisis moments" called for unique developments in our shared journey of faith.

Rick Rouse, a wise and experienced ELCA pastor, ponders our current circumstance as the Christian church in North America in his newly published book *Beyond the Church Walls: Cultivating a Culture of Care*. He reflects on

what our core mission needs to be in our time and culture. Many have termed the present state of mainline Christian churches today as a crisis. Over eight well-crafted chapters, Rouse articulates and explores with practical strategies what a "discipleship community" is called to do and needs to be in response to this crisis. He gently confronts our individualism and widens the vision of church to be a caring community not only of other members but of the community it lives and breathes in. Echoes of the breaking in of the Reign of God reverberate in the pages of the text.

A wonderful feature of this resource is that does not simply lay out a well-founded vision, stages of development, and techniques. Each chapter has process questions to use as a group or individual to allow the topic to deepen and apply to one's context. Topics include reframing pastoral care, the challenges of change, creating care communities, congregational community organizing, creating



vision/strategies for a discipleship congregation, and the power of ritual in communal events.

The vision laid out in *Beyond the Church Walls* begs to be integrated not only into practical congregational life, but also into the process of the Adult Catechuminate that exists within the congregation. What is at stake is the very meaning of being the Christian church in the twenty-first century.

Larry Ehren, Vice President, NAAC

IS YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY "CATECHUMENAL"? TELL US.

The NAAC Board is striving to gather a list of congregational faith communities that self-identify as "catechumenal." Such a list could serve as a resource bank for individuals and communities looking for models as they move along the Journey to Baptismal Living.

By "catechumenal" we mean: is the community engaging any or all of the elements that are part of the catechumenal process? Do you gather seeker, newcomers, returning baptized, and baptized

seeking renewal in ways which foster discipleship rather than membership; accompanying and mentoring into the life of following Jesus more than instructing? Do you mark key moments on the faith journey with liturgical rites when the whole faith community is gathered? Does your community understand, celebrate, and live Baptism in meaningful and life-giving ways? If any of these qualities

describes your faith community, we would love to know about it and create the list of "catechumenal" communities of faith.

Please send your contact information with a brief description to: gsmith@uwo.ca.

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