

The Standing Commission on Evangelism

MEMBERSHIP

Dr. Hobart Banks (California) 1997, *Executive Council Liaison*
The Rt. Rev. James Coleman (West Tennessee) 2000
The Rev. Julia Easley (Iowa) 2000, *Representative of Ministry in Higher Education*
The Rev. Ann Jones (North Carolina) 1997, *Secretary*
The Very Rev. Stephen McWhorter (Virginia) 2000 replaced
The Rev. Michael B. Curry (Maryland)
Dr. Francisco Navarro (Delaware) 2000, *Vice-Chair*
The Rev. David Norgard (California) 1997, *Chair*
Ms. Celia Vasco (Texas) 1997
Ms. Natalie Weir (Indianapolis) 2000
The Rt. Rev. Stewart Zabriskie (Nevada) 1997
The Rev. Hugh Magers, *Episcopal Church Center Staff Liaison*

Commission representatives at General Convention

Bishop Stewart Zabriskie and Deputy Hobart Banks are authorized to receive non-substantive amendments to this report.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

The Standing Commission on Evangelism (SCE) was created by action of General Convention in 1988 (A059s) "to hold up before the Church the needs and opportunities of the Church's ministry of evangelism." In 1994 its mandate was amended to include support and encouragement of "ministry in higher education throughout this Church." The Commission is charged with developing policy and recommending action to General Convention, Executive Council, and the several dioceses.

Objectives, 1994-1997

At its organizational meeting at the beginning of the last triennium, the Commission established for itself the following objectives:

- to encourage ways of renewing the public face of the church, centered in the Good News;
- to continue to affirm, enjoy, and hold up for celebration the rich texture of our church as good news;
- to continue to explore, learn from, and share specific local efforts, experiences, and successful programs in this apostolic fellowship;
- to work to expand the horizon beyond a "Decade of Evangelism" in order to acknowledge evangelism as normative in the church's life, and to assist congregations and dioceses in owning and contributing to that momentum; and
- to cultivate and honor a spirit of welcome and invitation as a proactive offering of the church to the lapsed and unchurched, as a primary characteristic of the Good News of God in Christ

Response to 1994 Resolutions

In addition to the objectives stated above, the Commission also responded to several resolutions referred to it by the 1994 General Convention. A summary of the disposition of these various resolutions follows.

A034a expanded the membership of the Commission to include a representative from Ministry in Higher Education. As a result, the President of the House of Deputies appointed the Rev. Julia Easley to serve on the Commission. The Rev. Easley presently serves as chaplain at the University of Iowa in Iowa City and is president of the Episcopal Society for Ministry in Higher Education (ESMHE). The Commission met at this site in the spring of 1997. (Due to the early deadline of this report, however, details have been deferred until the next report.)

D044s directed the House of Deputies State of the Church Committee to provide an analysis of long-term church growth trends, a task for which our Commission served in a consulting role. Recognizing the increasing importance of services held on days other than Sunday, we recommend that annual parochial reports begin to take account of all services and total attendance at them.

A048 encouraged all elected and appointed church bodies to establish as a priority overcoming the sin of racism. In response, Commission members worked with the Rev. Canon Ed Rodman of the Diocese of Massachusetts to gain a deeper awareness of the scope and nature of racism in the church's life. Recognizing that overcoming racism is in itself good news and, furthermore, is critical to evangelistic outreach, we recommend that all the congregations of our church engage in anti-racism training on the local level.

D052a directed this Commission to identify and recommend resources and courses available for making disciples who are equipped to lead others to faith in Jesus Christ. A set of such recommendations is available through the office of the Evangelism Coordinator.

D054a asked this Commission to report on the planting of new congregations since 1990. Of the 119 dioceses polled, 75 responded to our inquiry. As of the writing of this report, 133 congregations had been planted since 1990 with 48 more in process. The methods most frequently used were:

- a combination of financial and professional support from an established local parish and diocese;
- continuing financial support from a diocesan department of missions or equivalent;
- demographic surveys; and
- identification of people within a certain area who state an interest in Episcopal worship.

D110a established the Plant-a-Church Fund. To date no allocations have been received by the Fund. The Treasurer of the Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society is able to receive gifts from outside sources but the \$30,000 approved by General Convention in 1994 has not been available from the operating budget due to shortfalls in income. Nonetheless, recognizing the potential of such a fund, and assuming future gifts and allocations to it, we recommend that the following criteria be used by the designated administrator of the fund, in making future grants from it:

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- give priority to training ethnic leaders, particularly clergy and seminarians, who show evidence of a special vocation and gift for planting new churches;
- give second priority to training of lay and clergy leaders in (second) language skills and cross-cultural sensitivity;
- support only those projects which include local demographic studies in their planning;
- support projects only in their first and/or second year; and
- give preference to projects which are taking innovative approaches as to method or are reaching constituencies not previously reached by the Episcopal Church in the given area.

Moreover, understanding that an appropriation of \$30,000 is woefully inadequate to the task of funding a national church planting program, we further recommend the appointment of a staff officer who has as his/her primary responsibility the development of this fund. We note the value of substantial national initiatives undertaken by other denominations and support the development of the same for the Episcopal Church.

D112a appropriated \$50,000 to this Commission and the Ministries with Young People Cluster to gather and develop training materials for evangelism among high school and college students. This funding permitted the production of the following materials:

- a book of theological and practical essays on the evangelization of youth, students, and non-student young adults and the Episcopal Church (to be published by Cowley Publications);
- a resource of over eight models of effective evangelistic ministries with youth, students, and non-student young adults compiled and written by Dr. Anne Rowthorn;
- a "student" version of the NRSV that is suitable for use on campuses;
- a participatory needs assessment of youth and young adults using various media (including the internet and a web page); and
- the promotion of a new Episcopal edition of the magazine *Orientation* '97.

Special acknowledgment is made to the Rev. Sheryl Kujawa for her contribution to this project.

Site Visits

Site visits were made to four locations during the triennium. The schedule of one meeting did not permit local observation as it was part of the Conference of (all) Interim Bodies of General Convention held in Minneapolis, October 1995.

Houston, TX

Our visit to Houston in March 1995 provided Commission members with the opportunity to learn about ministry among Hispanic communities. Leading our discussions there were the now Rt. Rev. Leo Alard, Bishop Suffragan of Texas, the Rev. Alejandro Montes, Vicar of Iglesia Episcopal de San Mateo in Bellaire, and the Rev. Michael Baker, Chair of the Diocesan Commission on Evangelism. Insights highlighted by these discussions are:

- The need for bilingual and bicultural clergy is currently increasing faster than the supply.
- People are attracted to a church which is seen to be engaging in social advocacy relevant to the community to which they belong, i.e., a church which is seen to be helping people.
- For churches to grow, they must be founded/located in the midst of the areas they are intended to serve.

Boulder City, NV

Staying at the Wellspring Retreat Center of the Sisters of Charity in March 1996, we were afforded the privilege of learning about “total ministry” as it is lived out in the Diocese of Nevada. Leading us in our discussions there were the Rt. Rev. Stewart Zabriskie, Bishop of Nevada, the Rev. Michael Garrison, diocesan Vicar for Ministry Development, and several deacons serving in Las Vegas: Shirley Putz, Virginia Ferguson, Bonnie Polley, and Lionel Starkes. Among the insights gained that have direct implications for evangelism are:

- It is better to let structure come out of what the Spirit is doing than to expect the Spirit to come out of our structures.
- Parishes will be more effective in evangelism by seeing themselves as ministering communities than as communities gathered around ministers.
- The role of priests in such communities is to maintain their communities' core strength and health through the ministry of the sacraments while the role of deacons is to establish connections beyond the faith-community and make and share good news.
- It is always better to engage in ministry in a manner that is organic to the local situation as opposed to fitting ministry into imported models.
- Trust indigenization.

Atlanta, GA

The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation hosted this meeting which focused on the topic of effective communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ and good news from and about the Episcopal Church. Participating in the discussions there were the Rev. Canon Louis Schueddig, Executive Director of the Foundation, and James Solheim, Director of the Episcopal News Service. Among the helpful learnings gathered there:

- In this highly technical “age of information,” it is essential that church leaders gain a better understanding of how mass media work in our culture.
- It is equally important that church leaders develop working relationships with media industry contacts in their areas.
- While the church recognizes the need and spends money and time on internal communications, it tends to be reluctant about investing adequate amounts of the same in order to reach outside audiences.
- Advertising, particularly on television, does increase the level of recognition of the Episcopal Church on the part of the general public and, furthermore, increases the numbers of people inclined to visit.
- It is to the church's own detriment that it refrains from evangelism strategies which include both advertising and public relations efforts.

Iowa City, IA

The Commission meeting was hosted by the Episcopal Chaplaincy at the University of Iowa. Due to “Blue Book” deadlines, this report must be deferred.

Summary

Our site visits around the country continue to confirm our understanding that evangelistic outreach is happening all across the country. Making and proclaiming good news -- as defined by the life and witness of Jesus Christ -- is the business of the church in many locales. People who do not know about the love God has for them are being invited into communities of faith where the

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celebration and return of that love abounds. Those who accept the invitation are being cordially welcomed as honored visitors and those who stay are being incorporated as members of these households. Thus the threefold ministry of evangelism -- inviting, welcoming, incorporating -- is taking place in many locales and the Episcopal Church is discovering that evangelism is none other than the joy of extending hospitality and neighborliness as a household of faith.

Still, our potential for evangelistic outreach continues to be limited by two entirely avoidable counter-productive influences. First, there exists a tendency to focus on internal differences and discord when speaking about our church to others. Secondly, precious little has been done to raise the level of positive visibility of the Episcopal Church on a national basis. This is most painfully apparent on college and university campuses where, in many places of late, the only exposure to our church has come via media references to the misfortune of financial scandal and the anachronism of a heresy trial.

As a church which is rich in faith, faith that is evident in word and deed across this land, we can do better. It is within our power and ability to stop succumbing to the temptation of advertising division and discord. Empowered by the one Spirit who makes us one, we do have the means and the reason to focus instead on good news, news which attracts rather than repels the outsider and inspires participation in our faith-community. To be most effective, however, we cannot abandon the national level of communication. There is a role that the national structure of our church can and must play with regard to evangelism if we are going to be as effective as we can be in sharing the Good News. Specifically, that role is to raise the level of positive visibility of our communion whenever and wherever possible. In an era when, in the minds of many, the word "Christian" has become identified with politics of extremism and exclusion, our country now more than ever needs and deserves a Christian witness of reasoned faith coming from a church with a heritage of comprehensive inclusion.

To that end, then, we urge the national leadership of our church to support local evangelistic efforts with a national strategy aimed at raising the positive recognition of the Episcopal Church. In particular, being keenly aware of the key role college chaplaincies have played in the spiritual lives of so many of our church's leaders, we stress the critical importance of increasing our witness on the campuses of higher learning across this nation. We have been blessed by God with a very rich heritage of faith and a strong portion of the Holy Spirit. Being a community of people gathered around One who is synonymous with Good News, we have much to offer a society continuously racked by awful news rooted in racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty -- if only we will.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMING TRIENNIUM

In light of the learning from our several site visits during the current and previous trienniums, the Commission commits itself to pursuing the following objectives during the next triennium:

- to affirm changing and emerging church structures as appropriate vehicles for witnessing to the Good News of God in Christ;
- to raise the visibility of the Episcopal Church nationally and locally as bearers of that Good News, and in that regard, to recommend to local church communities means for developing

effective communications strategies for sharing the riches of their continuing experience of Good News;

- to reaffirm the central importance of healing and reconciliation in the face of the sinful biases which divide us: racism, sexism, elitism, ageism, homophobia, and other means of exclusion;
- to encourage engagement in anti-racism training as an integral part of effective evangelism and specifically to support the dialogues on racism taking place on Martin Luther King Day;
- to identify evangelism materials currently available for use from Episcopal and other denominational resources, and in that regard, to avoid unnecessary duplication and expense;
- to participate with Evangelism Connections (Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Reformed Church, Presbyterian Church -- U.S.A., United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and Net Results) in presenting a series of conferences through the year 2000 on evangelism, renewal, church growth and church planting; and
- to assure that the gifts and ministries of youth and young adults are included in the exploration and exercise of all the above priorities.

BUDGET APPROPRIATION

	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Income</i>	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$10,000	\$60,000

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution A026 Standing Commission on Evangelism Budget Appropriation

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the following amounts be appropriated from
- 2 the General Convention Budget for the Standing Commission on Evangelism: \$20,000 for 1998;
- 3 \$30,000 for 1999; \$10,000 for 2000; totaling \$60,000 for the triennium.

Resolution A027 Modify Parochial Report Form

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the Episcopal Church Center be directed to
- 2 request in annual parochial reports the total number of all services held each year and the total
- 3 attendance figure for all services; and be it further
- 4 *Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church Center be directed to provide annually to the Standing
- 5 Commission on Evangelism a list of churches which report a year-to-year increase in total
- 6 attendance of more than 10%.

Explanation

In various places today, it appears that church growth may be attributed in part to the provision and appeal of services held at times other than Sunday morning. Information gathered by the Standing Commission on Evangelism as a result of this action will help identify those places where such growth is occurring so that others may learn from their experience. Furthermore, this information will provide a more comprehensive picture to dioceses and the national church of the general vitality of congregations.

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Resolution A028 Plant-A-Church Fund Development

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the Presiding Bishop be asked to designate a
2 staff officer who will have as his/her responsibility the development of the Plant-A-Church Fund.

Explanation

Previous action by General Convention appropriated \$30,000 per triennium to the Fund. Funding at this level is inadequate. Authority and responsibility for the increase of the Fund needs to be placed in the hands of competent development personnel so that the Fund may grow to become the valuable resource for church growth it is intended to be.

Resolution A029 Create a Public Relations Commission

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the Executive Council be directed to create a
2 permanent Public Relations Commission which shall be charged with designing and
3 implementing an institutional strategy for sharing good news in a consistent and stable manner to
4 the public at large.

Explanation

Local and regional evangelistic efforts will be helped by increased positive name recognition of the Episcopal Church nationally. Such increased positive visibility on a national level will best occur as a result of a centrally coordinated, proactive approach undertaken by national leadership.