

ANOTHER SEASON OF BLESSINGS

Most congregations are beginning another program year, the season of Advent is nearly upon us to mark the beginning of another church year, and the catechumenate journey has begun anew or is about to start in many of our parishes. This is truly another season of blessings as we look to the Christ who has embraced us with God's wide arms of grace. This summer my wife and I traveled to religious sites in Spain and Italy and were reminded of the legacy of faith that has been passed down the centuries to us. Baptismal images welcomed us at every turn, from St. James Cathedral in Santiago to St. Marks in Venice, and from Sagrada Familia in Barcelona to the Basilica of the Nativity of St. Mary in Milan where St. Ambrose was baptized by immersion at age 18. NAAC is committed to continuing to pass on the blessings of a rich discipleship tradition that is ours as Christians in every season of life.

Update on Board Members

We are pleased to report that board member Jerry Paré (Sacramento) has recovered nicely from his heart surgery earlier this year. We continue to pray for Sherman Hesselgrave (Toronto) who is just

now finishing up chemotherapy treatments for prostate cancer. We rejoice with Teresa Stricklen (Louisville) who is engaged to be married, following the loss of her husband about two years ago. And congratulations to Jessicah Duckworth on her new position as a religious program director for the Lilly Endowment and on the publication of her new book for Augsburg Fortress, *Wide Welcome – How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church* (reviewed in this issue).

Annual Fall Membership Drive Underway

Elise Eslinger, Director of Membership, reminds you that now is the time to renew your membership in NAAC for another program year. There are four categories of membership: \$45 individual, \$10 retirees and under 35, \$100 congregational/institutional for multiple members of your team, and \$500 lifetime membership. You can renew online or download a membership form on our website at www.catechumenate.org should you wish to mail Elise a check.

Upcoming NAAC Events

Mark your calendars now for the **NAAC Annual Gathering** sched-

uled for **Aug. 5-8, 2014** in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia. (See related article in this issue.) This gathering will feature keynote speaker Will Willimon from the Duke Theological School and provide a catechumenate training event as well.



St. John's Episcopal, Portsmouth, VA

Also coming in **Fall of 2014** will be another parish-based catechumenate training event offered by NAAC at St. John's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, VA. Check out their website at www.stjohnsportsmouth.org for a wonderful video on the Easter Vigil that was shared at our Chicago gathering in June.

Yours in Christ's faithful service,
Rick Rouse, President

NAAC 2014 ANNUAL GATHERING AND TRAINING IN CANADA



Bishop Will Willimon

“Reclaiming our Baptismal Calling: Discipleship in a Post-Christian Culture” is the theme of the next NAAC Annual Gathering and catechumenate training event which will be held August 5 to 8, 2014 at the Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia. Housing and meals will be available next door at the Carey Centre on the beautiful campus of the University of British Columbia.

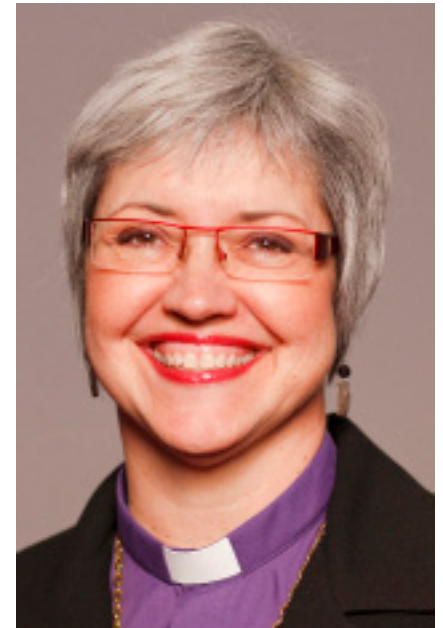
This event, sponsored by the North American Association for the Catechumenate, features Bishop Will Willimon from Duke University and School of Theology as keynote speaker and Susan Johnson, National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, as preacher. Other presenters include John Hill, Paul Palumbo, and Rick Rouse along with a stellar worship team of Lyle McKenzie (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) and Scott Widler (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) who serve in the Office of Worship for their re-

spective churchwide expressions.

The Annual Gathering is for both experienced practitioners and for those who are exploring the faith formation and discipleship process called the catechumenate. Practical workshops will be offered with tracks for both beginners and for veterans. Pastors are encouraged to bring a ministry team that might include musicians, educators, interns, and lay catechists. This will be a unique Annual Gathering in that NAAC is also offering a training event that will include the full worship rites and an immersion into the four stages of the catechumenate journey. It will be an opportunity to connect with a great network from across denominations, to learn and share together, and to bring back new ideas and resources to enhance your congregation's ministry of making disciples. We hope to see you in Vancouver BC next summer!

For more information about the annual gathering including a downloadable brochure and

an online registration form, visit www.catechumenate.org. You may also contact Rick Rouse, the NAAC President (612-710-7959) and at rwrouse@comcast.net or Devra Betts, Registrar (702-232-8383) and at devrabetts@gmail.com.



Susan Johnson, the National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, will preach at the closing Eucharist service.



BOOK REVIEW OF WIDE WELCOME

Wide Welcome – How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church by Jessicah Duckworth, a NAAC board member.

Catechumenate ministers do not proceed far along the path before being confronted with questions about inquirers or seekers. Who are seekers? Where do we find them? Do we meet them at our door? Do we fling open our doors and invite “them” in? How do we explain this mysterious worship? What do we do after we invite them to join us for coffee? “Emergent church” ecclesiology explores these questions and responds that the seekers are out there. Our mission is to help them identify who it is they seek. “Missional church” ecclesiology explores these questions and responds that the seekers are coming in. Our commission is to share ministry with them and name it as the Way of Christ.

In *Wide Welcome – How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church*, Jessica Duckworth acknowledges the praxis of both these ecclesiologies. And she adds an extremely important insight. We (“the Church”) are not the only ones who point the way. We (“the Church”) are not alone in describing our mission. Newcomers also point to “alternate routes” and suggest modifications and clarifications to the mission. We (“the Church”) need to listen and learn even as we hear and teach.

Duckworth’s term for this dialogic is the *ecclesia crucis*. “The *ecclesia crucis* is a gathered people under the cross compelled to tend holy spaces where ques-

tion and promise encounter one another, where faith encounters doubt, hope encounters despair, and love encounters the suffering world” (p. 101). You can read almost all of *Wide Welcome* – I strongly encourage you to do so – before finding this definition. Duckworth takes us through stories of newcomers and “established members” of the Church finding each other and shared meaning through the dynamic. She identifies the ancient but new catechumenate as the best process for facilitating the dynamic. She describes faith communities who are courageous, deliberate, open, and graced enough to be “disestablished,” i.e., open and welcome to new perspectives, new ideas, new practices. A mantra of many congregations is “we’ve always done it this way.” Duckworth reminds us (as Paul did with the Jerusalem Church) that welcome demands discarding such mantras and attitudes.

In discarding these mantras and attitudes the local congregation needs to deliberately and consciously move towards what Duckworth terms “disestablishment.” “Established” congregations may strive to be welcoming. Members seek to reduce the tension between established members and newcomers by “rushing to make newcomers members” (p. 18). The established congregation says “We welcome you! Here are our customs, our committees, our worship. Be like us and you can be one of us.” “Disestablished” congregations make active listening to newcomers a top priority. Here is the challenge: they recognize



that such listening will mean that our customs, our committees, our worship may change because of the presence and insights of these “newbies.”

This is potentially radical stuff. It is not only challenging but also frightening to some. Will we lose our identity? What is our identity, our core values? A congregation that moves toward disestablishment will find itself in these fundamental discussions. When this happens, the open intersection of oldcomers (Duckworth’s “creative term for established members” [p. 35]) and newcomers can happen. This is a major part of the *ecclesia crucis*. Genuine welcome involves death and resurrection for all of us – oldcomer and newcomer alike.

Let us throw open our doors, be prepared to change and find new life! This is the Good News that Duckworth proclaims in *Wide Welcome*.

The above sounds a huge note

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MAKING DISCIPLES THE WAY JESUS DID

This is the conclusion of a paper presented by John W. B. Hill at a meeting of NAAC. Part One may be found in the Fall, 2013 NAAC Newsletter.

There is a certain irony, of course, in the notion of ‘casting out demons’; those who have been demonized, or written off as demon-possessed, have already been cast out! So when you are exorcized, you are ‘un-cast-out’. Demon possession may be a myth; but it is a myth of the Master of Myths, the Father of Lies. Demonizing is an essential feature of any society founded upon violence, to this very day.

It is striking, therefore, that the fourth Gospel never once mentions a ministry of exorcism. What apparently replaces this element of the tradition is the more developed teaching about the exorcism of the world: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” Jesus says to the crowd of disciples. “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”¹

Thus, in very different ways, the Gospels represent Jesus as calling his disciples into a new awareness of the false nature of the world’s peace and order. When he sent them out on their mission, he told them to expect both welcome and rejection; this was important not merely because they had to learn to recognize the difference between the world’s peace and the peace of God’s kingdom; Jesus was also showing them “things

hidden from the foundation of the world”² – the phenomenon of Satan’s reign which is sustained by suppressing those who see the world from the perspective of its victims.

Why the Disciples Didn’t Get It

Yet the Gospels all tell us that the disciples were unable to recognize what Jesus was doing. The only ones who could see it were those who were already the victims of a social order founded on violence and exclusion, especially those who had been demonized: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”³

So it is to this day: wherever the church passively coexists with oppressive regimes, the Gospel is split in two. There is a gospel for the rich, which typically recasts the suffering of Jesus as a myth of sacred violence – a founding sacrifice that sustains a privileged social order. And there is a gospel for the poor, who alone are able to recognize what Jesus was up to but who are taught to imitate him only in his patient suffering. The question now as then is this: how are those who are the victimizers to recognize what Jesus was up to?

It is true that in the resurrection God swept aside our verdict upon Jesus, exposing the innocence of the victim and the evil phenomenon of scapegoating; but, in itself, this did not constitute the revelation of the “things hidden from the foundation of the world,” for it was only his disciples who saw the risen Christ. We are therefore com-

pelled to look more closely at the role of the disciples, to discover what was the significance of their witness to the resurrection. All the Gospels point to the paradigmatic role of Peter in the telling of the Gospel story.

Peter is often misrepresented by preachers as a boisterous and fickle disciple who proved himself a coward when Jesus was facing his crisis. This is not the picture the Gospels paint. Peter is portrayed there as someone who was prepared to stand up to Jesus. He was also brave enough that when all the other disciples had forsaken their master and fled, he at least followed at a distance to see what would happen. But he soon found himself drawn into the vortex of the crowd’s angry fascination with the hapless prisoner.

He warmed himself at the fire in the courtyard – the fire where all are drawn together (Peter almost found himself excluded when someone picked up on his accent – just the thing that might get you unwanted attention from an angry mob looking for a scapegoat.) The fire evokes old memories of the immolated victim around whom the crowd gathers as if drawn by a magnet. Peter of course could not see what was happening to him – his experience was only the most dramatic instance of the blindness of all the disciples. If Jesus had not actually predicted Peter’s denial, Peter might never have realized what had happened that night; he might have disappeared for ever into the safety of the unanimous crowd.

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But then the cock crowed, and Peter remembered; and he began to awaken from the anesthesia of social unanimity, from the sacred culture which is grounded in sacred violence. His shock, regret, and contrition were the moment of conception, if you like, leading to a new birth into a new way of being in the world for those who, like Peter, had always before been the beneficiaries of such a sacred social order.⁴

In this we begin to see what is most important about Jesus' way of making disciples. It is of the greatest significance that the risen Jesus did not appear to the crowd. In a world that knows itself through its mythology, the risen god always appears to the crowd, for it is the god of the crowd. The god of myth is the mind of the crowd in a projected form. But the risen Jesus only appeared to those who were no longer part of the crowd. For example, Mary Magdalene and Jesus' other women friends from Galilee – those invisible people who had nothing to lose by their association with someone the world had abandoned – they were at the cross, and followed the body to the tomb, and they were the first to see the risen Jesus, according to the Gospels. Peter was the next to see the risen Jesus. The rest of the disciples had tried melting into the crowd, but clearly it wasn't working, for they were still afraid for their own lives and hiding in an upper room; there, they too saw the risen Christ.⁵ The story of Jesus differs from all the world's other myths of a dying and rising god in these two important ways, Girard observes:

the dying victim is clearly represented as innocent; and the rising victim appears only to those who have broken with the crowd.

Jesus' Purpose in Making Disciples

And so, one way of describing Jesus' agenda with his disciples is to say that he needed to prepare them to surmount the scandal of his own violent death. The reason his death was so scandalous to them was that their consciousness, like ours, had already been formed by the very system that Jesus' death and resurrection would begin to deconstruct. They had to learn something about themselves that they could never have discovered in any other way: namely, that they were just as enmeshed in the rule of scandal, just as powerless before the force of collective delusion, as the people they were sent to liberate.

Jesus also needed them as witnesses to his passion, so that by their witness they would undermine the attempt of Jesus' persecutors to make of his death the instrument of a new social unanimity.⁶ By their solidarity with the Crucified they would constitute the ever-present revelation of a different kind of peace. Their painful formation through the experience of Jesus' passion would enable them to recognize what a transformation of the world Jesus' death and rising would cause, what a tectonic shift in human consciousness it would set in motion. They would come to play something like the role of midwives to this new creation that was being born from the womb of the dying Christ.

It is from this perspective

that we can make sense of the teaching of the fourth Gospel about the Paraclete. This was not something cooked up as an afterthought, but a theological account of this very process through which the consciousness of the disciples had been reshaped by their experience of the passion of Jesus. It is the work of the Spirit of Jesus: as Advocate, contradicting the insinuations of the Accuser (Satan), bringing to mind all that Jesus had taught which the disciples had been unable at first to hear, teaching the world through their testimony to the dead and risen Jesus what is the real meaning of sin, righteousness, and judgement.⁷

And so the upshot of all this work of Jesus, in calling disciples and forming them through sharing with them his life and his death, is the emergence at last of a reconstituted Israel: an Israel which knew itself called out of a life of imitating others – which always leads to rivalry, conflict and a plague of violence, and ultimately to the sacrifice of a victim – and called into a life imitating God by imitating Jesus, even by taking up a cross to follow him as victims. And now the disciples were free to do this, for in Jesus' resurrection God had revealed that it is not violence that provides the foundation of our world, but God's own indestructible faithfulness and unfathomable mercy. In this people, the world would see the sign of a God who is related to the world not in a reciprocity of revenge but in a reciprocity of forgiveness. In this people, the world

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would see the sign of a God who is related to the world not in a reciprocity of revenge but in a reciprocity of forgiveness. In this people, the world would see the risen Christ whose Passion continues both to scandalize and liberate the world.

Implications for Catechesis

What this implies about catechesis in our time is clear: catechesis must not be an attempt to cultivate conformity to an ecclesial sub-culture, to draw people into an in-group where they can have a new sense of pride in learning an insider language and a secret knowledge, where they can content themselves with the assurance of personal salvation. That is not what the gospel is about. It is an introduction to the double thrust of Jesus' work in liberating the world from the Culture of Death.

The first thrust was showing disciples how their desires can be purified and protected from the allurements of the tempter. He taught them to pray, so they could set their hearts on God and imitate their Father in heaven; and he taught them to renounce the habits that would draw them back into the maelstrom of contagious rivalry: the love of money, the allure of retaliation, the passing of judgement. This is not moralism but wisdom, the wisdom of true spiritual freedom that Jesus nurtured through prayer. We need to share with new disciples the ways in which this wisdom of Jesus comes to be embodied in Christians through prayer, both

liturgical and personal, in a liberated lifestyle supported by the Christian community.

The second thrust in Jesus' work with his disciples was teaching them to see the world from the perspective of the victim – not so that they could take sides against the oppressor, but so that they could recognize why the world's violence could only be ended by Jesus' compassion and ultimately by his own loving submission to that violence. Those first disciples began to learn this perspective by being with Jesus and then by venturing off on their own, in pairs. What better way for sponsor and catechumen to work together than by involving the catechumen in the sponsor's own ministry to the poor, whatever that may be. The purpose of this is not to be converted to some kind of liberal optimism about how we're going to change the lot of the poor, but to learn to see from the perspective of the poor, from the perspective of the cast-offs of our society, from the perspective of the demonized of our world.

Undergirding this work must be some genuine engagement with the human dynamics of the gospel story. It is not enough that would-be disciples learn the Christological dogmas, or theories of the atonement. It is not enough to be told that "Christ died for our sins."⁸ The gospel narrative is the soil in which discipleship is rooted and where it must grow; and those who would follow Jesus must come to terms with the 'necessity' of his Passion.⁹

I think it is when a catechumen begins to look at the world from

this new perspective that the inner conflict is likely to erupt; and he or she will have to come to terms with the scandal of following the way of Jesus. This may be the time when the support of the community is most crucial. For we know that this struggle never ends for any of us; and faithful Christians can offer understanding and encouragement in this life crisis. This is the point in a person's life when the question about 'putting one's hand to the plough' becomes uppermost; and the ultimate resolution of this crisis would properly be the decision for or against Baptism into the death of Christ. Once that decision is made, and the wounds of that struggle are laid bare, the subsequent time of preparation for baptism can truly become a time of illumination and purification – indeed, of healing.

Thus, when the moment of Baptism itself arrives, the candidate will be ready to live with the scandalous implications of Christ's Passion, ready to share his suffering for the transformation of the world, ready to participate in the embodiment of the risen victim, ready to die with Christ into a new way of being in – and for – the world.

Does Baptism establish an exclusive society (in spite of Jesus' own struggle against religious exclusivists)? Clearly, the answer all too often has been, Yes. But the heart of the matter is this: by calling disciples and forming them as witnesses to his life and death and rising, Jesus established a trajectory of transformation of

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the world which depends on the capacity of these disciples to manifest in their life the freedom of God's new creation through him. They are awakened to this new life through their initiation into his death, culminating in Baptism; and they are formed in this new life by the ritual of remembrance which he gave them. Transformation of the world continues so long as disciples refuse to veil these rituals under the old lie out of deference to the feelings of those who still live under the lie. Baptism and Eucharist are intended to enable the world's awakening through the revelation of its satanic deceptions and God's undying love. Such revelation is indeed threatening to a culture based on violence, and those who are under its power will insist that the rituals of the church exclude them. But exclusion is not what

they are for.

Our challenge, then, is to faithfully sustain these rituals and a process of formation that enables us to be aware and intentional as we celebrate them, proclaiming our hope for the gathering of all peoples into God's kingdom, while exposing the lie that governs Satan's kingdom.

NOTES

- 1 John 12: 31 - 32; cf. Luke 10: 18 ("I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.")
- 2 Matt. 13: 35
- 3 Mark 1: 24
- 4 Mark 14: 54 - 72
- 5 Matt. 28; Luke 24; John 20, 21; 1 Cor. 15: 5 - 8; etc.
- 6 The narrative of Acts 2 - 5 illustrates this function.
- 7 John 14: 16 - 17, 26; 15: 26 - 27; 16: 7 - 15
- 8 Girard's reading of the Passion story has provoked considerable debate about the most popular doctrines of the atone-

ment, especially those which imply that it was God who inflicted the suffering of the cross upon Jesus, scapegoating him for our sins. When such doctrines are firmly held, there is little possibility that the actual dynamics of the Passion stories of the Gospels will be recognized or appreciated. Hearers who think they already know the reason why Jesus was crucified (i.e., that God required it) will not be able to hear the reasons implied by the story. 9 Matt. 16: 21; 26: 54; Mark 8: 31; Luke 9: 22; 17: 25; 24: 7, 44.

John Hill is a presbyter of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. A member of the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission council and a founding member of Liturgy Canada, he is the author of *Making Disciples: Serving those who are entering the Christian Life and Into The Household of God: a presider's manual for the rite of Baptism in the Book of Alternative Services*.

WIDE WELCOME

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of caution for the cautious – metanoia ain't easy. There are two other items that the reader of *Wide Welcome* needs to be aware of. First, *Wide Welcome* is a result of Duckworth's doctoral dissertation work. As such, she relies heavily on the work of several scholars in her description of what facilitating newcomer participation and designing dis-

establishment entail. This middle section of the book is somewhat academic but full of insights. Second, Duckworth writes from within the Lutheran denomination. Her references and the congregations she worked with are Lutheran. Yet her message, insights and direction are ecumenical. It is not a far stretch to see how this work also applies to opening wide the doors to Episcopal, Methodist,

Presbyterian and many other congregations who strive to open wide their doors to newcomers.

Duckworth takes us a step further along the road in the discussions of emergent and missional ecclesiology. There is much written that defines . . . together.*

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***NAAC will also host a conversation** with the author, Jessicah Duckworth, on the NAAC Ning site during the month of January. She will be available to dialog with you online about her new book. Feel free to post your comments or questions for her. Go to OPEN FORUM: Living Wet on our website at www.catechumenate.org.

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