

DISCIPLESHIP FOR A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

From the Board of Directors

You are receiving this newsletter about the time of our 2014 Annual Gathering and Training Institute being held the first week of August in Vancouver, British Columbia. We are delighted to return to Canada this year and I am most grateful to the planning team who made it all possible. Thanks to Dan Benedict, Devra Betts, Sherman Hesselgrave, John Hill, Tom Lang, Martha Maier, Charles Mantey, Lyle McKenzie, Paul Palumbo, and Scott Weidler for providing us with a first class event.

You can now mark your cal-

endars for next year's gathering which will take place Thursday, July 30-Saturday, Aug. 1 (2015) at the beautiful Bon Secours Conference Center just outside of Baltimore, MD. The theme of the conference is "Transforming Congregations Through Spiritual Practice: Creating a Discipleship Community" featuring keynote speakers Jessica Duckworth and Paul Hoffman.

The title of this article is taken from the theme of this year's gathering. It reminds us that the most important task that we need to be about as a church in this new century is making disciples.

NAAC encourages congregations of all denominations to reclaim the ancient discipleship process of the Early Church known as the Catechumenate. It is a faith journey that helps youth and adults explore what it means to live out their baptismal covenant and equips them to be missionaries in daily life. NAAC is offering another congregational training event for both experienced practitioners and those new to the Catechumenate Sept. 25-28, 2014 at St. John's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, VA. (See related article on this event which follows.)

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DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING EVENT FOR CONGREGATIONS

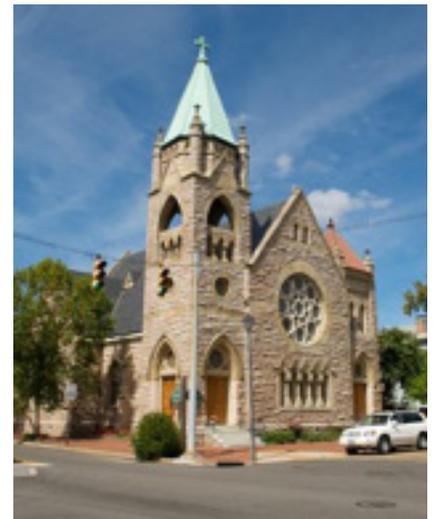
"Go, Baptize, Make Disciples" is the theme of the next regional Catechumenate training institute offered by the North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC). It will be hosted by St. Johns Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, VA, Thursday noon thru mid-day Saturday, Sept. 25-27. A team composed of Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians will lead participants through a practical training event designed to both introduce the Catechumenate "journey of discipleship" to congregations desiring to begin the practice as well as enhance

the practice of congregations currently engaged in the Catechumenate. All participants will receive a training notebook and a free copy of our new book *Go Make Disciples: An Invitation to Baptismal Living*, the first ecumenical guide for congregations.

The three-day event is not only a training institute that will lead participants through the four stages of the catechumenate journey, but can also provide a profound spiritual experience. Past participants have commented that they came away inspired, encouraged, and renewed in their

own faith and sense of discipleship. Congregations are encour-

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FAITH FORMING FAITH

Kathryn was in her forties when she first came to our congregation. She said she was looking for “something spiritual.” As it happened, we had something specific to offer her: a place in our catechumenate. For 15 years, the congregation had offered a yearlong intentional time of faith formation. As a result, a loving sponsor, a caring catechist, and a committed congregation walked alongside Kathryn as she explored what it means to follow Jesus.

The catechumenal process includes weekly meetings on Sunday evening. After a family-style meal, candidates and their sponsors gather into small groups for Bible study. These sessions focus on the preaching text for Sunday morning, on the life of faith that is modeled in the scriptures and on the questions that inquirers bring: Who is Jesus? What is prayer, and why pray? How do the stories of scripture apply to my life?

In Lent, the candidates and their sponsors stand before the congregation each Sunday to receive the community’s prayers and support. They receive gifts representing Christian worship and formation — a hymnal, a copy of the creed, and a catechism. These public rites offer candidates the final opportunity for discernment prior to being baptized or renewing their baptism at the Easter Vigil.

Soon after Kathryn was baptized, the congregation held a forum to consider inviting Tent City to spend three months encamped on the church’s front lawn, beginning just a few weeks before Christmas. Tent City is a well-orga-

nized long-standing coalition of self-governing homeless people who have banded together for safety, community, and advocacy. They refer to themselves as “houseless,” not “homeless.”

The city of Seattle permits the hundred or so residents of Tent City to encamp within the city limits, but only at places to which they have been invited and for no longer than 90 days in any one spot. It has fallen largely to the churches of Seattle to be the advocates and hosts of Tent City.

The possibility of our church hosting Tent City was raised the previous spring, after some kids in the church and their parents had taken a field trip to a neighboring church that was hosting Tent City. On the way home, a still, small voice spoke through the mouth of a third-grader: “Pastor, when can we have Tent City at our church?”

Six months later, the idea of hosting Tent City was gaining momentum, but it was by no means obvious that we would do this. Our well-manicured block-long property on the summit of Phinney Ridge is one of the few green spaces in the neighborhood. Even the most imaginative and liberal proponent of the gospel understood that people living in adjoining million-dollar-view homes would not instantly embrace our invitation to the houseless.

We hadn’t prepared ourselves, however, for the newly-baptized Kathryn. After listening to the conversation at the congregational forum, Kathryn stood and took a deep breath.

“I can’t believe the objections that I’m hearing to this opportuni-

ty,” she said. “I can’t believe them because, as I was preparing for my baptism last year, this is what you told me that being a baptized child of God would mean. You told me that to be a disciple of Christ meant to care for those less fortunate — to reach out to those in need and to share God’s love with all people. That’s what you taught me it means to be a baptized disciple of Jesus.”

Then Kathryn said the most amazing thing of all, the thing that none of us had anticipated hearing and for which none of us had rehearsed a response.

“So if we decide that we can’t invite Tent City to be on our front lawn, I will have to leave this congregation. If Tent City can’t be here, then I can’t either, because what you have taught me about who we are as the people of God and what it means to be one of you will not be true.”

The room fell silent. For all intents and purposes, the conversation was over. To be sure, there were still opponents to address and details to be worked out. But in that single moment of testimony, God spoke to us through Kathryn. As 1 Corinthians 5:17 promises, the old had passed away and the new had come. In Christ we were made a new creation. The voice of that third-grader three months prior was now amplified by the voice of a new adult child of God.

Had Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church not been a congregation practicing the adult catechumenate, we would not have been ready to reach out and welcome

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THE CATECHUMENATE AND MMORPGs

A Review of *Mediating Faith: Faith Formation in a Trans-Media Era* Clint Schnekloth. Fortress Press, 2014.

The first question is "What is a MMORPG?" Schnekloth answers this one quickly. It stands for "massively multiplayer online role playing game." There are numerous examples; Second Life and World of Warcraft are two of the better known MMORPG's.

The second question is "What do MMORPG's have to do with the catechumenate and the wider church? The answer to this is not so direct. Schnekloth devotes a significant amount of mediating faith to making a case that the catechumenate and MMORPGs share many traits. The most significant is "procedural rhetoric." Procedural rhetoric is the name for the phenomena that one often experiences in the gaming world, namely that "one learns the game by playing the game" (46).

Schnekloth's early encounter with the catechumenate was the process as embodied at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle. [See related "Faith Forming Faith" article in this newsletter.] Schnekloth's exposure to the catechume-

nate at Phinney Ridge Lutheran became fodder for his thinking about the use of online gaming media in the church today. "The catechumenate...is, in the strict sense, first of all, a medium. It is a kind of procedural medium" (53). This procedural medium, like that of entering a MMORPG, is one of initiation into a different world. "Liturgy is its own best catechesis" (55). One learns how to live in the world of Christian community by living in it, not reading about it.

Schnekloth puts a new "digitally-mediated environment" name to a phenomenon recognized by Christians down through the centuries. "Learning by living" is one of the reasons for the development of the catechumenate in the early church. It is one of the reasons for the development of the postulancy and novitiate in the process of becoming a member of a religious order (e.g. the Order of St Benedict). I suspect the author has a sense of this when he admits that he inhabits Second Life as a monastic.

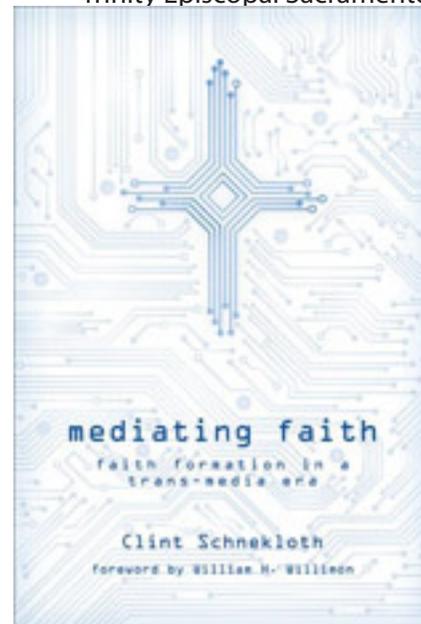
The final chapters of mediating faith contain insights on how the Church can more easily and productively move in the trans-media world in which we live. The

phenomena Schnekloth describes and comments on can be an opportunity for creating a more open, "fluid" church. "The liquid Church moves beyond the traditional boundaries of congregation and denomination through the use of communication and information technologies" (69).

mediating faith: faith formation in a trans-media era provides a great deal of material for thought in terms of ministry in our high tech world with so many new mediums for communication. And, yes, a Kindle edition is available.

Jerry Paré

Catechumenate Director
Trinity Episcopal Sacramento



"FAITH FORMING FAITH" IMMERSION WEEKEND

First Presbyterian Church, Snohomish WA (just north of Seattle) September 26-28, 2014

As NAAC sponsors a catechumenal training event on the east coast, Paul Hoffman will be sponsoring one on the west coast through Faith.Forming.Faith. Participants will leave the Snohomish event prepared to

initiate a formational process for those preparing for baptism or its affirmation. Accordingly, the ideal registration is a congregational team that includes a pastor and/or other rostered leaders and several key lay leaders. More information is available directly from Pastor Hoffman and registrations are now open through Event-

brite. Both addresses are supplied below. The \$350/per congregation registration fee includes all training, materials, and six meals. Lodging and transportation costs are on your own. For more information/registration, go to: www.eventbrite.com/e/faith-and-font-snohomish-tickets-11674662229

FAITH FORMING FAITH

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Tent City. Nor would we have been ready to welcome Harrison.

Harrison hadn't been to church in years. He came at the advice of his oncologist. Having been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, his doctor counseled that he "get his affairs in order." Among other things, this meant for Harrison a reexamination of a long-abandoned faith.

Harrison too found a place in our catechumenate. Recruiting an appropriate sponsor for Harrison was a challenge of pastoral care. His sponsor would need to be someone solid in his own faith, loving and caring in skills of listening and support and emotionally well balanced. We knew that the human bonds that were forged in this relationship would soon be torn apart by death. Walter was the perfect choice. He had himself come into our congregation recently and had made the year-long walk of faith formation.

It certainly is the case that all of us are dying. But Harrison's participation as a catechumen that year brought an intensified poignancy and urgency to contemplating death, especially among those who were preparing for baptism. For those sitting side by side with him in Sunday evening Bible studies, the words typically used to describe baptism had an added edge. Consider St. Paul's teaching in Romans 6: if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Christ. And again, so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.

By the time that Harrison af-

firmed his baptism, nine months after first coming to our church and asking for our help in preparing him for all that lay ahead of him, he was surrounded by a community of faith that knew him, loved him and supported him in ways that none of us could have imagined beforehand. Months later, a year after he first stepped into our assembly for worship, the community gathered for his funeral and commended not a stranger but a brother in Christ into the care of Almighty God.

All of us who knew him, who walked in the way of Christ with him and who suffered with him, found renewal, hope and strength in that connection. Our journey of faith together, along with our shared prayers, insights, fellowship and service, strengthened our Christian community. What happens in the catechumenal journey permeates our ministry. It is not only the candidates who are formed in faith but all of us, over and over again.

Bringing people to faith through baptismal preparation has been much more than a way to gain new members for the church. It has opened our eyes to a new way of being the people of God. Forming others in faith has formed us for ministry and outreach.

A friend tells the story of a woman who had never before had a relationship with Christ or his body, the church, yet for years she had visited the local jail, simply because she felt called to do it. Through a small group Bible study she came to see her visitation at the jail in a new way: she saw

herself ministering because Christ had called her to this ministry.

Meanwhile, the members of her Bible study were learning to take a risk that they had never before taken. At her encouragement, they came with her to the jail. Eventually, the six members of the group became a vibrant ministry in the jail.

This sort of formation — faith forming faith — can happen anywhere. Phinney Ridge is not an extraordinary place. We are a typical neighborhood church facing many of the challenges that affect other congregations a decade into the new millennium. Less than 10 percent of the population around us claims any formal affiliation with a faith community. Fifteen years ago, when we began the practice of forming new Christians for baptismal living, not many congregations believed that their communities of faith could benefit from such a ministry. But the creeping tide of secularism, the growing mistrust of institutionalized faith, and the general decline of churches all underscore the importance of having an intentional process of faith formation.

Our catechumenal story is the story of how, through the baptismal preparation of new Christians, we as a congregation are formed in faith and strengthened for mission. We were formed by Kathryn's courage to accept Tent City into our lives. We were formed by getting to know the residents of Tent City, which gave us the courage to look for additional ways to reach out to those in need. And we

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We are grateful to our NAAC Board and volunteers for keeping the dream alive of serving the congregations and church bodies in North America, providing training and resources for our members and friends. Returning to the

board for another three year term (class of 2017) will be Devra Betts and Teresa Stricklen Eisenlohr. We are in the process of recruiting a Canadian representative for the board as we also say thank you and farewell to Jay Koyle who has been a faithful servant on our

board for the past six years. We look forward to partnering with you in the coming program year and hope to see you in Baltimore next summer.

Yours in Christ's joyful service,
Rick Rouse, President
on behalf of

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING EVENT FOR CONGREGATIONS

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aged to send teams composed of pastors, musicians, lay leaders, and seminarians. It makes the learning so much richer to be able to share it with others.

Housing has been arranged at the nearby, beautiful Marriott property overlooking the Portsmouth-Norfolk Harbor at the low cost of \$99 per night. Reservations are to be made directly with the hotel no later than September 1st. You can call 757-673-3000 and mention conference code St. John's Episcopal Church to get the special rate. (From the hotel, it is

an easy walk, only a couple blocks through historic old town to the church.)

The hotel has graciously offered the special rate for both early arrivals and those wishing to stay over to enjoy many of the historic sites in the area which include Jamestown, Colonial Williamsburg, and many others. If flying in for the institute, you will likely want to come into the Norfolk Regional Airport which is only a short distance away, just across the river from Portsmouth.

NAAC is dedicated to serving congregations throughout the

United States and Canada (of all denominations), providing training, online and print resources, and support for those communities of faith who desire to embrace this ancient practice of the church for making disciples. It is our conviction that by doing so, youth and adults go deeper in their own faith walk and learn to live out their baptism in daily life. In many ways the Catechumenate is a process of conversion and has also been an effective evangelism tool that invites the seeker into a relationship with Christ and the Church.

To register for the event, go to the NAAC website at www.catechumenate.org. You can register and pay online or download the Training Institute brochure to mail your registration in with a check. For more information, please contact our registrar, Devra Betts at devrabetts@gmail.com or cell phone 702-232-8383. You may also contact Rick Rouse, NAAC President, at rwrouse@com-cast.net. Cost of the event is only \$270 per person that includes training, materials, and meals.

FAITH FORMING FAITH

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were formed by Harrison and his humble walk back into the arms of God.

Faith forming faith is a circular miracle. By leaning out in love and trust to those who are seeking Christ, we have discovered what

the scriptures have promised us all along. The gifts that one offers in leading a new Christian to baptism are gifts that immerse all of us more richly and fully in the love of God.

Paul Hoffman

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