

Making Disciples Newsletter

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A Forum for United Methodists and Friends Engaged in Catechumenal Ministries

What Is God Doing in Ancient-Future Formation?

In a day when the church is largely focusing on the church rather than on the reign of God, the temptation for catechumenal leaders is to do three things:

1. to feel lonely and discouraged about being in such a minority in this way of forming Christian disciples,
2. acting on this feeling of isolation, to quit the hard work and cave in to "church growth" thinking and approaches that treat seekers as consumers and the gospel as a commodity,
3. to let the intent of the catechumenal process slide into a means of making church members rather than forming disciples in the basics of Kingdom living.

I confess that as a denominational staff leader I have been tempted to think, "What's the use?" However, conviction and community have not let me. As I write this, I am a participant in the North American Association for the Catechumenate Gathering in Rochester Minnesota where all the men are good looking, the women are strong and the children are above average.

I resolved here that I would finally get a newsletter going to all of you who are practitioners and supporters of the ancient-future process of initiating people into Christ and his mission for the life of the world. I will get this out quarterly to you and invite you to join me in a fellowship of prayer and action related to evangelization (more about that word later) and the catechumenate.

I would very much appreciate your sharing what you and your congregation are doing as you work the process with those God is sending you. Your stories can be about perceived successes and failures. (I say "perceived" because God may be at work in ways you and I do not see clearly.) Your questions would also stimulate response and communication between this unique group of leaders.

If you have others in your church or elsewhere that you would like to get this electronic newsletter, send me their email address or ask them to contact me at worship@gbod.org.

NAAC Gathering 2004 in Niagara Falls, Ontario July 22-25

Set your 2004 calendar for a great destination spot at the border between the US and Canada will be the site of the North American Association. The Rev. John Hill, priest, author and missiologist, will be the keynoter exploring how the



catechumenal process is part of God's way of converting the church. The Rev. Jay Koyle will lead the liturgy team. Mount Carmel Spiritual Center is located right in Niagara Falls, which means that there will be opportunity both for retreat and for active exploration of this tourist mecca. There are shuttle buses to the site from both the Toronto and Niagara Falls airports. You can check out Mount Carmel Center at www.carmelniagara.com .

Make plans now to be part of this

ecumenical feast and learning opportunity. I heartily encourage you to bring a team of catechumenal leaders from your church, though attendance is not contingent on your doing so. Brochures will be sent to you in January. Keep up with the event and the work of NAAC by going to its website at www.catechumenate.org .



Catechumens as Missionaries

From the beginning of our relationship with seekers, sponsors and catechists help them to make connections between their exploration of faith and their daily lives. I discussed this in *COME TO THE WATERS*--pages 64-66. A. Wayne Schwab's new book, *WHEN THE MEMBERS ARE THE MISSIONARIES* covers this ground in depth and power. Consider this book as a guide to recasting your worldview of ministry. Schwab spells out clearly with stories and with clear guidance how to move from "churches that have a mission" to "a mission that has the churches." This approach turns the way we are church on its head--the mission of the church is to empower and support the members who are the missionaries in their homes, work place, leisure, community, wider world, and church.

I led a workshop on this at the NAAC Gathering this July. You can find the outline for the workshop at <http://www.membermissionpress.org/Catechumens%20as%20Missionaries.htm>. Perhaps it will give you a flavor of Schwab's book and how to link it to the catechumenate.

You can order WMM at www.membermissionpress.org.

Evangelization and Mission

What is the church for? That question needs to be at the heart of our conversation these days, said Jim Schellman, executive director of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate. Jim was the plenary speaker for this year's NAAC gathering. He noted that if we talk about the catechumenate, it becomes a program, but if we ask how to be church and what is the church for, the catechumenate becomes a vehicle for how to be church. He put it memorably:

This mission is evangelization and the job description is initiation.

"Evangelization embraces a lot of things--it is not just about doing," he said. Evangelism as we often think of it is *transactional*. It is not telling the good news with the expectation that the hearer will "buy" the package and join the church, which is a transactional approach. Evangelization is *transformational*; it is God's mission to form humanity and all creation into Christ. Evangelization is much bigger than church. It is the deep longing of God and our deep longing for the garden where we walked with God and the other. It is the memory of the way things were meant to be. We are a people who also remember how the garden was lost. God has remained faithful to the memory, Schellman reminded us. The love of God impels us to live for the life of the world. The church is for being in love with the world God loves and proclaiming the good news of Christ in anticipation of God's recreation of the garden. Evangelization evokes and lets us experience a holy dissatisfaction. Evangelization is a sacrament of our longing. God calls the church to be a body--Christ's body--in which God is reconciling the world. The catechumenate is a divine means of joining people to the body. In this understanding, evangelization moves from bringing outsiders in to proclaiming Jesus Christ; from membership to conversion. It is

Asbury Seminary Offering a Course on the Catechumenate

(Lester Ruth sends this greeting and update.)



I thought I would let you know that I'm teaching a catechumenate course to close to 40 Asbury students the last weekend this month. I'm calling the class "Baptism with Integrity." The title seems to have piqued the interest of the students. It'll be a dual campus class, meaning I'll be telecast to our campus in Orlando as I'm teaching in

Wilmore. I'm excited to get such a response from the students.

Lester

Lester Ruth is Associate Professor of Worship and Liturgy, Asbury Theological Seminary--SPO937204 N. Lexington Ave., Wilmore, KY 40390-1199 (859) 858-2175

Stories, Stories, Stories—

This newsletter will be most fun and most engaging when we have your stories of people in the process—inquirers, candidates, sponsors, other leaders and

congregations—and what they experienced in the process. Send your stories to me at worship@gbod.org. I will put them in the January issue of “Making Disciples.” Or, if you would rather me interview you and write it up, let me know and I will call you. God is at work in the details. Bear witness!

Another Canadian learning opportunity: **July 21-25, 2004**



What happens to Christian worship when the Christian communion is actively engaged at the boundaries of its culture?

- How do we speak with a contemporary voice while honouring our history?
- How do we serve as a home for the faithful while welcoming the newcomer?
- How do we engage our neighbours while remaining true to ourselves?
- How do Anglicans and Lutherans serve as an inspiration to one-another and to the larger world?

For more on this opportunity go to <http://www.worship.ca/conference.html>

Yes, I do realize this overlaps the NAAC gathering. However, I don't want to manipulate the facts. Both events are out there and you'll decide which to attend depending on your needs.