

CATECHUMENATE IN POSTMODERN TIMES

Mark your calendars for July 24 to 26, 2008 for the NAAC Gathering to be held at the Dumas Bay Retreat Center in Washington State. We will gather to consider what it means to do catechumenate ministry in a postmodern context.

Our featured speaker, Dr. Samuel Torvend, will help us consider the challenges facing catechumenal ministers and Christian communities in an

increasingly secularized society where an awareness of scripture and the sacramental tradition has diminished. How can we listen afresh to the stories of those who are seeking faith? How might the catechumenate offer a fresh approach to assimilating Christians in a culture at odds with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Through presentations and guided group

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FAITH AND FONT EVENT OPEN TO ALL

Faith and Font, a NAAC-sponsored training event for bishops, seminary students, and pastors and their congregational teams will be held at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington on January 18-20, 2008.

Seasoned catechumenate practitioners and trainers, Pastors Paul Hoffman and Bev Piro, will lead *Faith and Font* along with lay catechists from the area. Dr. Mark Oldenburg, professor of

Worship at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, will also be on hand. Training will include Sunday morning worship with the Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church community including the Rite of Welcome of candidates into the Phinney Ridge catechumenate process known as *The Way*.

Faith and Font is open to members of NAAC's denominational partners: Anglican Church of Canada, Episcopal Church USA,

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Reformed

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WITH GREAT REGRET

To all NAAC members and friends,

It was with great regret and sorrow that the NAAC Board had to cancel the 2007 summer event in Niagara Falls. By the time we needed to get back to the site, our registrations were low and we could not financially meet our obligations.

The Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, the presenter for the Gathering, has expressed a great interest in the NAAC organization and hopefully will come

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NAAC NEWS ON THE WEB

Issues of *NAAC News* in color will be available on the website and ready for downloading by way of .pdf. The issues will be available on the Resources page of the site. Items, articles for future issues, and ideas for the newsletter should be forwarded to the editor. All back issues are also available.

North American Association
for the Catechumenate
www.catechumenate.org

OPEN TO ALL

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Church in America, and United Methodist Church.

The event concludes a one-week seminary level class on the catechumenate process offered

on location at Phinney Ridge by the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Participation in the class is not required for the training event; however the class is open to anyone who desires a

more “instructive” look at the catechumenate. Registration details, including costs and lodging, are available at www.catechumenate.org/events.

Bev Piro

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work, we will reflect on catechumenal ministry in our postmodern world and the grace this affords those who serve as practitioners of the catechumenate.

The speaker, Dr. Torvend, is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Pacific Lutheran University,

Tacoma, Washington. Dr. Torvend also serves as Associate Director of the Center for Religion, Culture, and Society in the Western United States. While an editor at Augsburg-Fortress, he supervised the editing of *Welcome to Christ*, the three volume ELCA catechumenal resource. He is author of *Daily Bread*, *Holy Meal: Opening the*

Gifts of Holy Communion and the forthcoming *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Theology, Sacraments, and Ethics*. He received an MA in liturgical studies from the Aquinas Institute, an Masters of Divinity from Wartburg Seminary, and a PhD from Saint Louis University. He is an active member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Seattle.

RECEIVING ONE BY ONE

“However, [some] candidates are already baptized. They have already participated in the primary sacramental symbols of resurrection. Consequently, the occasion for their full communion has less to do with Easter and more to do with readiness. They are eligible for reception when they are ready, whenever that may be. The celebration is not tied to any moment in the liturgical year. When a parish offers the Rite of Reception at different times of year, it benefits the candidates, who may come to the table of the Lord without undue delay.

“By receiving candidates apart from the Easter Vigil, we affirm their Baptism. We distinguish them from those who are unbaptized by separating their respective ceremonies, and we honor the original paschal connotations of their Baptism. So celebrating the Rite of Reception apart from the Easter Vigil benefits the candidates in terms of avoiding delays and clarifying the meaning of the ritual.”

Paul Turner, “Receiving Candidates One by One” in *Catechumenate*, September-October, 2007.

WITH GREAT REGRET

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and speak at one of the gatherings soon. We are all looking forward to being part of an exciting time of worship led by the Rev. Dr. Clay Morris, the Liturgical Officer for Episcopal Church USA, in the near future. On behalf of NAAC, we are sorry to have had to cancel the opportunity to travel to a place we have come to love at the Falls.

Please think about the 2008 gathering in Seattle now and, if possible, register early for this great time to gather and share experiences with each other on the West Coast.

Hope to see you all there.

Shirley Griffin
NAAC Site Co-ordinator



CATECHUMENAL RITES ENGENDER HOSPITALITY

How Rites for the Reception of Catechumens Engender a Sense of Hospitality

by Pierson Shaw

One of the major considerations for congregations employing catechumenate is the need to avoid the tendency to establish two types of worship services. The notion that there should be special seeker services as opposed to “members’ services” not only abandons good liturgical and theological considerations, it displays poor Christian hospitality. Hospitality is shown to the visitor by remembering that it is not into our worship service to which persons are invited, rather, it is into God’s worship and fellowship, into God’s Church which we invite persons. Christian worship also invites us into relationship with other members of the body of Christ. As fellow members of the body of Christ, all are gathered by God’s Holy Spirit.

Victor Turner has described persons and communities as “liminal” when they “slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom”¹ This is often more easily said than done in a 21st century culture. Some have often disguised dress down services or come as you want Sundays for attempts to lessen class distinctions. What often happens is that such attempts lead to middle class and upper middle class Church members coming to worship dressed as if it were casual Fridays at the office.

Historically, as Christine Pohl notes, those who sought to show hospitality to the liminal persons in

society became liminal themselves. This understanding of being liminal persons for the sake of other liminal persons is something which we can easily accomplish in our worship life as well as the catechumenal process. One way in our culture that we display our status is to throw out the names of contacts as a means not just of making connections but to suggest that the persons whom we know should follow us like a résumé. “Often this takes the form of name dropping” and such focus on our status can be a barrier to Christian hospitality. Considering ourselves as liminal persons would suggest that we might sit with and assist those who visit our worship services. Even with well laid out worship resources, those less familiar with the liturgy even from Lutheran Congregation to Lutheran Congregation, may have a difficult time negotiating their way through the service.

Congregations who intentionally engage persons who come to worship for the first time, who are willing to break out of their comfort zone for the sake of others, go a long way to recovering some sense of Christian hospitality. This does not mean that members of the congregation need to “over function” and offer assistance where it is not needed. Congregations can help those who visit not to feel out of place in negotiating what is for some is a strange new world.

Just as conversations in the parish hall or before worship need to avoid “name dropping” in the pre-catechumenate period, sponsors, catechists, and catechumenate team leaders would be well advised to observe the same courtesy as they move into the role of being mentors and guides for those whom they welcome and

receive into the process. The catechumenal process by its very nature assumes hospitality by being directed by the needs of inquirers and candidates.

Pohl points out that in nurturing people in Christian faith, nothing can supplant the richness of home-based hospitality. Conversation in the home setting allows for one to be nourished by both conversation and food.² Martin Luther saw this to be true when he said in his Lectures on Genesis:

Nothing is more irksome and senseless than a feast at which silence reigns; for discourses are the real condiments of foods if as Paul says (Col 4:6), they are seasoned with salt. For the wording is whetted by word; and not only is the belly fed with food, but the heart is also fed with doctrine, since godly conversations refresh the hearts, arouse faith, kindle love, and instruct in many ways.³

This serves to remind us that as the catechumenate team meets with inquirers, in the time leading up to the rite for the reception of catechumens, a good way of gathering is over a meal in the home of a member of the congregation or catechumenate team. Whether the fare is light refreshments, desert or a potluck supper the combination of a meal and a home environment offers a good place to become acquainted.

Endnotes

¹Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* quoted in Pohl, *Making Room*, 106.

²*Ibid.*, 155.

³*Luther’s Works* 3:200.

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RECOMMENDED

Christianity for the Rest of Us
How the Neighborhood Church Is
Transforming the Faith by Diana
Butler Bass, Harper San Francisco,
2006

Just when it seems that mainline denominations are on a downward spiral toward self-destruction, this hopeful book gives readers a look into the stained glass windows of ten mainline congregations that are thriving. Intentional, historic, and re-claimed faith practices have injected vital life into these diverse examples of city and suburban, liturgical and non-liturgical churches. From east coast to west and points in between, Diana Butler Bass tells the stories of these churches and their people in a gentle, easy and insightful style.

It is stories that best tell the story of vitality and growth and Bass is a master story teller. The stories are real, the churches are real, the practices are real.

Among the practices described

are classical spiritual disciplines such as centering prayer, spiritual direction or following a monastic rule, congregational leadership practices such as forming children in faith, or reclaiming historic liturgy and moral, theological, and ethical practices such as hospitality, discernment, peacemaking, and healing.

The catechumenate process known as *The Way* at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington is highlighted through the stories of people who have come to faith through the process. Diana tells of a woman who came to Phinney Ridge looking for a "drive through baptism" for her children. Instead of rushing to the font, she was invited into a time of scripture reflection, worship with the faith community, prayer, and Christian action with a sponsor and catechist that led to her own affirmation of baptism at the same Easter Vigil in which her children were baptized. There is the story of a man

who felt compelled to change his vocation after affirming his baptism, responding to the call of faithful living and Christian vocation.

Christianity for the Rest of Us was named a Best Book of 2006 by Publisher's Weekly. Since publication, Phinney Ridge has received numerous inquiries about *The Way*. The catechumenate isn't the only way to congregational vitality and transformative faith, but it is one way to renew faith in a person, a family, a church and a community.

Bev Piro, Pastor at Phinney Ridge



CATECHUMENAL RITES ...

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Sources Consulted

Lehman, Helmut T. (Volumes 31-55), and Jaroslav Pelikan, (Volumes 1-30), General Editors. *Luther's Works in 55 Volumes*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, St. Louis: Concordia: Fortress Press, 1960.

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room; Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

The Rev. Pierson Shaw is the Ecumenical Representative of the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, facilitator of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Covenant Committee, and facilitator of the Episcopal-Lutheran-Moravian Committee.

■ **"Catechesis is to be rooted in the experience of church in the company of those who live the Christian way of life. Catechesis includes learning by doing all that the Church does: praying, witnessing, loving neighbor, being centered on Christ, renouncing sin and selfishness, and working to bring about the reign of God."** Catechumenate, July 2007

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