

IMMERSED IN BAPTISMAL LIVING

This past fall members of NAAC have been swimming in the deep waters of baptism. Many exciting things are happening as we seek to be faithful to our mission of providing resources to congregations across North America in the area of faith formation and discipleship. Here are some of the highlights:

New Ecumenical Handbook for Congregations: Members of NAAC have been collaborating with Augsburg Fortress in the production of a new congregational resource scheduled for publication in February 2012. *Go Make Disciples: An Invitation to Baptismal Living* is the product of seventeen authors representing most of the mainline denominations in the US and Canada. See the review in this

issue.

Wellspring E-News Launched: Rev. Martha Maier (Vancouver, WA) has reformatted our monthly news broadcast using Constant Contact to keep members of the NAAC network better informed of events and resources, as well as provide inspirational material for each season of the catechumenate.

NAAC Receives Grant from Roanridge Foundation: Thanks to the efforts of Rev. Paul Palumbo (Chelan, WA), we were successful in receiving yet another grant that enables us to add a fourth regional training institute to our 2012 schedule. Immaculate Heart Conference Center in Spokane, WA will be the site of a congregational training event scheduled

now for August 3-5. Other events will be held in Phoenix (Feb. 24-26), Baltimore (April 13-15) and Minneapolis (May 18-20). See the related article.

Living Wet Forum Moves to Facebook: The Board of Directors has decided to move our online forum to the NAAC Facebook page for a more robust interactive conversation. Over the next month, we will be transitioning from NING to Facebook and you are invited to join us there. Just search for NAAC.

I join with the Board of Directors in wishing our readers many blessings on our baptismal journey to the Cross and the Empty Tomb.

Rick Rouse, President
Board of Directors

THREE NEW BOARD MEMBERS WELCOMED

Rick Rouse welcomes three new NAAC Board members at the Gathering in San Francisco. Pictured left to right are Rick Rouse, the president of NAAC; Devra Betts of Las Vegas who serves NAAC as treasurer; Teresa Stricklin of Louisville KY, who is Board liaison for the joint APLM/NAAC gathering in 2013; and Elise Eslinger of Dayton who is the membership director for NAAC. NAAC celebrates their commitment to the catechumenate.

All issues of *NAAC News* are available on the website and ready for downloading. The issues are available on the Resources page of the site. Items, articles for future issues, and ideas for the newsletter should be forwarded to the editor. We welcome contributors and writers.



GO MAKE DISCIPLES: AN INVITATION TO BAPTISMAL LIVING

Go Make Disciples is a new handbook for the catechumenate. Eighteen members of NAAC collaborated with Augsburg Fortress Publishers to produce this helpful work. Many other works on the catechumenate are focused upon a particular denomination's embodiment of the catechumenal process. Each set of initiation rites is slightly different. But baptism is the primal Christian sacrament. The common elements in the celebrations are key.

The ecumenical orientation of *Go Make Disciples* is what makes it unique in the library of catechumenate ministry works. It is also

helpful, practical, and a comprehensive resource for welcoming seekers and forming disciples. The authors distill and offer the best of the entire church's experience and resources for Christian initiation. You can find accessible directions and guidance for initiation and implementing the process in any size congregation. For congregations anchored in the sacraments, *Go Make Disciples* offers practical suggestions on how to bring members to a raised consciousness of sharing the sacramental life, of living our baptismal covenant. It even comes with a CD-ROM of downloadable

resources, including worship rites for most mainline denominations. This handbook is truly a practical guide, a handbook. It can move catechumenal leaders, current and potential, from the daunting to the doable. It equips both lay and clergy for engaging in the work of conversion and baptismal living. In short, *Go Make Disciples* harvests the richness of theorists and practitioners of the contemporary catechumenate. This wonderful resource will be available from Augsburg Fortress as of April 1st. Participants at the NAAC Regional Training Events will receive copies.

REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTES - DON'T MISS

As we go to press with this newsletter, the NAAC has just completed its first of four regional training institutes, "Go, Baptize, Make Disciples" in Phoenix Arizona. Three opportunities for this experiential training event remain:

- Bon Secours Spiritual Center, Baltimore (April 13-15)
- Oak Ridge Conference Hotel, Minneapolis (May 18-20)
- Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, Spokane (August 3-5)

These institutes are "hands on," on how to minister to catechumens and candidates as they journey through the faith formation, and how to celebrate their progress in the worship rites of the catechume

nate. More information and on-line registration is available at www.catechumenate.org

"The Arizona institute was an incredible weekend!" exclaimed NAAC President Rick Rouse. "The leadership team worked very hard to make the experience worthwhile for the participants. The stellar evaluations show success in that effort."

Participant comments include:

- "This conference was strong in laying groundwork for the catechumenate."
- "The visual learning, spiritually meaningful worship was a high point for me. Excellent sermons too!"
- "Fantastic! What a refreshing spiritual treat! Well worth the time. A great educational experience."

Space is still available at the three remaining institutes. We look forward to meeting you there



“HOLY HANGING AROUND” AND THE CATECHUMENATE

Dr. Mark Stamm, the keynoter for last year’s NAAC Gathering in Burlingame, California and Associate Professor of Christian Worship at Perkins School of Theology, Dallas TX, wrote a blog for Liturgical Press’ “Pray Tell” winsomely titled “Holy Hanging Around, on Formation for Baptismal Living among United Methodists” (praytelltellblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Holy-Hanging-Around.pdf). The article is like a string of pearls — many observations and musings strung on the string of an experience he had with students in his seminary course on Word and Worship. The class commended the lecture on Weddings in order to hold a healing service for — not Dr. Stamm — but “Mark”, who was scheduled for heart surgery to replace a heart valve. Reflecting on that class-session-turned-healing-service led by students, he asks, “Where did they learn to do what they did?” Answer (his): they learned some of what they did from him, but much by “hanging around” the gospel and the community of faith from other people who pray and by praying themselves.

“Holy hanging around” is Stamm’s image for another way of doing baptismal formation. It may not be as neat, ordered, organized as the RICA, and similarly based approaches found in Episcopal, Lutheran, and other denominations that are seeking to promote formation of adults moving toward the font. He writes, “I don’t think the particular form matters all that much, as long as faithful Christian living is embodied. Indeed, when folks hang around

such community long enough, the faith usually takes root in them and they become a blessing to others, just as my students did for me.” Is Stamm undermining the good work that NAAC aims to do? Is he offering churches an easy way out of the catechumenal process — the path of least resistance? Not really.

Mark is a longtime friend, brother, and former abbot in the Order of Saint Luke, and colleague in advocacy for baptismal formation. I interpret his article as his way of facing squarely the realities in many of our denominations that do not have the “luxury” of strong support for the catechumenate from bishops and judicatory leaders. In an “afterward” to the blog that appears in the Summer 2011 issue of *Sacramental Life*, he notes “The problem is that they [the stages and rites of initiation] are optional . . . [and so are] ‘rarely practiced.’” (emphasis mine).

This “rarely practiced” reality is something we face in NAAC. We have to admit that a very small percentage of our churches are undertaking this ancient-future way. Unlike our Roman Catholic siblings, our several denominations do not require such ordered baptismal formation, though each commends it and offers rites and resources.

NAAC’s work is to encourage, support, and resource “early adopters” – pastors and churches who are willing to undertake the catechumenal process, letting the results speak for themselves. This is a long haul. As a liturgical historian said to me when I enthused

that it would take forty years to implement the catechumenate, “Try four hundred!”

In the “Afterward” in *Sacramental Life*, Stamm: “some form of formational discipline, by whatever reasonable shape, would help. . . . I would be pleased to see more local churches take the Baptismal Covenant questions [renunciation and profession] into their discernment processes and discuss them. What would it look like for us to ‘resist evil, injustice, and oppression’ in our context? What would it look like for us to ‘trust in (Christ’s) grace’ and serve him in a radically inclusive assembly of the faithful?”

Inhabiting those questions is part of what “holy hanging around” means. The Spirit is at work by any and every means necessary to form us for baptismal living. “We can do better, of course,” says Stamm. He concludes, “Nevertheless, remember that the Spirit is at work in our midst reaping a harvest of disciples who pray and serve effectively. I’ve seen them, and so have you. Open your eyes, look at them again, and be encouraged” (p. 16).

Mark’s musing is not so much an evasion as a call to not weary of the task of making disciples and to persevere by all means available to form disciples for baptismal living whether catechumenal or otherwise. The internal dynamic is “holy hanging around” — inviting others to join us in doing what is at the heart of the baptismal covenant: worshiping, praying, reflecting on God’s story, and ministering in daily life.

Dan Benedict

HOW THE CATECHUMENATE CAME TO HOLY TRINITY

The Way In
Sometimes the way
to milk and honey
is through the body.
Sometimes the way in is a song.
But there are three ways
in the world:
dangerous, wounding,
and beauty.
To enter stone, be water.
To rise through hard earth,
be plant desiring sunlight,
believing in water.
To enter fire, be dry.
To enter life, be food.

Linda Hogan
Rounding the Human Corners

September 25th was Back to Church Sunday in the Anglican Church of Canada, and we had some new faces in attendance that day. The preacher was a prominent Canadian housing policy guru who came for the first time on Back to Church Sunday the previous year, then stayed and thrived — sort of our Back to Church Sunday poster boy.

After the service I was approached by a couple who were there for the first time. They are planning to be married next May at

a nearby Roman Catholic church (the bride is Catholic), and the groom, who was born in England, had been dedicated as a child, but never baptized, and wanted to be baptized in the Anglican church before the wedding.

The wheels began turning. The Easter Vigil will be April 7th — BEFORE a May wedding.

“Let’s have lunch and explore this further,” I proposed. And so we did. I mentioned in simple terms that I would like to use the time between now and Easter to prepare him for baptism. (But I was also hoping that another adult would emerge so we could have a catechumenal community.)

Who else might be in the wings?

By coincidence I was having a late supper with the chair of one of our church committees, following a meeting last week. I had officiated at his wedding in April but had forgotten that his wife, though raised in a church tradition, had not been baptized. He informed me that “she didn’t just want to get baptized, she wanted to un-

derstand what it was all about.”

In that moment I knew that I had found my second catechumen as well as the sponsor for the other fellow: the person sitting across the table from me.

Since coming to Holy Trinity nearly four years ago, I have been looking for a way to introduce the catechumenate, but it is a community with a lot of things happening already and people are always worried about “spreading ourselves too thin.” I am a long-time believer in kairotic moments. You never know when they will come, but you know them when they appear.

So, now all I have to do is raise up a formation team (at least two lay persons – a man and a woman) and a woman to sponsor the second catechumen who committed to the process over lunch today, and we’ll be all set.

God is good . . .
ALL the time!

Sherman Hesselgrave
Holy Trinity, Toronto



“Mystagogy piles up meanings rather than seeking clear definitions. It invites particular people into a deeper experience, understanding and appreciation of the specific rites in which they have participated. Mystagogy demands that we understand faith not as intellectual assent but as choosing a way of life.” Craig Satterlee

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