

FROM THE NAAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

NAAC held its first webinar, "Re-sourcing Congregations for the Catechumenal Journey and Baptismal Living" in January featuring Jessicah Duckworth (seminary professor) and Paul Palumbo (parish pastor) with Rick Rouse (NAAC president) as host. The purpose was to answer questions from both experienced practitioners as well as those just introducing the catechumenate practice to their congregations. People from

across North America logged in on their computers to see and hear our speakers "live" share their insights and dialog with them. This is but one example of how NAAC is expanding its ability to resource congregations for this important ministry of discipleship.

NAAC will be offering another catechumenate training event in Houston this April. (See below.)

Finally, we invite you to come to Chicago June 27-29 for a cel-

ebration of baptism at our annual gathering and joint conference this year being co-hosted by NAAC and APLM.

The blessings of Christ at the Festival of the Resurrection,

Your servant, Rick Rouse, NAAC President, and members of the Board of Directors: Devra Betts, Jessicah Duckworth, Elise Eslinger, Sherman Hesselgrave, Jay Koyle, Martha Maier, Jerry Pare, and Theresa Stricklen.

HOUSTON IN APRIL

This year NAAC will provide one catechumenate training event to be held in Houston, Texas on April 25-27, hosted by Christ the King Lutheran Church on their campus near Rice University.

An ecumenical team of clergy and lay persons from NAAC will lead this inspiring and informative experience that has been endorsed by Bishop Michael Rinehart, ELCA, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod; Bishop Andrew Doyle, Episcopal Diocese of Texas; and General Presbyter Mike Cole, Presbytery of New Covenant, Presbyterian Church USA.

This training is for pastors, musicians, educators, interns, and others who desire to participate in an immersion event that mirrors the spiritual journey of the catechumenate.

The cost is only \$275 which includes most meals. Housing is available at the Marriott/Houston Medical Center within walking distance.

For more information, to register online, and to download a brochure visit our website at www.catechumenate.org



“STIRRING THE WATERS” IN JUNE

The “Stirring the Waters: Discover the Subversive Character of Baptism” conference is a two-day event beginning at 3:30 pm on Thursday, June 27, and ending on Saturday, June 29 at around 3:00 pm.

We will be hosted by the Techny Towers Conference and Retreat Center, 2001 Waukegan Road, P.O. Box 176, Techny, Illinois 60082, telephone: 847-272-1100. You may wish to visit their website at www.technytowers.org For more information, for online



registration or printable brochure visit www.catechumenate.org

NAAC AND APLM JOINT CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

“Stirring the Waters: Discover the Subversive Character of Baptism” by Jay Koyle, NAAC Board of Directors and President of APLM

The North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC) and Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission (APLM) are co-sponsoring an exciting event to gather all with an interest, passion, or concern for vibrant baptismal formation and missional service. *Stirring the Waters: Reclaiming the Missional, Subversive Character of Baptism* takes place June 27-29 in Chicago at the Divine Word Seminary/Techny Towers.

For decades now, there has been a growing emphasis on baptism throughout North American churches. This fresh focus has shaped recent revisions of initiation rites and had notable impact on liturgical renewal overall. It has expanded our formational repertoire to include more than children and seminarians. It has widened our perspective to rediscover that “ministry”

is not the domain of the ordained alone. The visible shifts of understanding and practice in a great number of congregations have been considerable.

Yet, if we are honest, we must admit that, despite the heightened concern for baptismal practice and living across the denominations, we have only just begun to grapple with what a robust baptismal theology really means for the life of the church. Our engagement with baptism remains too domesticated, too wed to the presuppositions and priorities of Christendom. For the most part, the subversive implications of baptism that challenge both the church’s life and that of the society in which we live elude us in daily practice.

It is in response to this situation and with passionate hope for the promising possibilities before today’s church that NAAC and The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission (APLM) are partnering to offer this conference, which is designed to inspire, challenge, and equip congregations in

robust baptismal celebration and formation, living, and service. *Stirring the Waters* will provide participants with fresh perspectives, timely resources, and effective strategies for congregations and denominations to reclaim and be transformed through the missional and subversive character of baptism.

What about the church needs to be subverted? How can, should, or must the church be subversive in our society? How is God subversive? How does the church reflect and participate in the subversive activity of God? How does baptism celebrate, speak to, prompt, ritualize, proclaim, represent, effect such subversion? How is all of this missional? Together, conference participants will tackle questions such as these, not just as a matter of theological theory, but also as they touch upon the rhythms of faithful living. Three speakers, whose research and experience offer many fresh insights, will be on hand to assist us:

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APLM AND NAAC IN CHICAGO

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Dr. Benjamin Stewart is the Gordon A. Braatz Assistant Professor of Worship and Dean of Augustana Chapel at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. In considering matters of life and death through the lens of baptism, he will explore how baptism's paschal character drives the truly abundant life.

Dr. Ruth Meyers, Dean of Academic Affairs and Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and a council member of APLM, will demonstrate how baptism in its fullness is much more than a liturgical ceremony. Rather, it also splashes beyond the font as a profound and transformative way of life. According to Dr. Meyers, baptism is "the moment that lasts a lifetime!"

Bishop Jeff Lee (Episcopal Diocese of Chicago) has a deep and longstanding passion for the catechumenate. His talk will provide stirring snapshots of how his diocese is fostering a catechumenal way of being the church.

Bishop Lee will describe how the deliberate pursuit of this subversive approach to our shared life frees the church to do what makes for healthy and vibrant congregational life and ministry.

Of course, as important as plenary sessions that inform and inspire may be, it is also important for conference participants to be given practical support in translating conference insights into "back home" practice. Therefore, a significant component of the conference's agenda will be devoted to workshops and focus sessions. The implications of the gathering's focus will be considered for preaching, lectionary interpretation and reflection, creation care, ministry with youth and and young adults, engagement with the arts, vocational discernment by the baptized, "doing catechumenate" when there are no catechumens, celebration of the Initiation rites, baptismal preparation with parents and sponsors of infant candidates, and the challenge of consumerism.

As an example from the menu

of workshops, one elective will look at an exciting model for engaging young adults in spiritual formation, leadership development, and justice work. Scott Lybrand will share stories and strategies arising out of Chicago's Julian Year program. You can learn more about this initiative by visiting their website: <http://www.episcopalservicecorps.org/program2.php?id=11>

APLM, NAAC's partner in this event, is an organization that for nearly seventy years has networked members of The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Church of Canada who share a passion for promoting renewal in the dynamic relationship that exists between the liturgical life and missional vocation of the church. APLM develops resources and promotes practices to equip the church in reclaiming and living out a robust baptismal ecclesiology. Together, these two organizations serve the North American church.

WILLOMEN ON BAPTISMAL CALLING

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR AUGUST 5-8, 2014

for the next NAAC Annual Gathering
to be held in Canada
For all participants!

Location: Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver, BC
Keynote Speaker: Will Willimon of Duke University



Theme: "Reclaiming Our Baptismal Calling: Discipleship in a Post-Christian Culture"
Special Feature: We will offer a modified Catechumenate training event as part of the conference.

THE EASTER VIGIL: A RITE OF PASSAGE

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order which directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistry and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: "Take off your clothes." There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb – not that of the forum and the drawing room.

So they stripped and stood there, probably, faint from fasting, shivering from the cold of early Easter morning and with awe at what was about to be consummated; years of having their motives and lives scrutinized; years of hearing the word of God read and expounded at worship; years of being dismissed with prayer before the Faithful went on to celebrate the eucharist; years of having the doors to the assembly hall closed to them; years of seeing the tomb-like baptistry building only from without; years of hearing the old folks of the community tell hair-raising tales of what being a Christian had cost their own grandparents when the emperors were still pagan; years of running into a reticent and reverent vagueness concerning what was actually done by the Faithful at the breaking of bread and in that closed baptistry . . . tonight all this was about to end as they

stood here naked on a cold floor in the gloom of this eerie room.

Abruptly the bishop demands that they face westward, toward where the sun dies swallowed up in darkness, and denounce the King of shadows and death and things that go bump in the night. Each one of them comes forward to do this loudly under the hooded gaze of the bishop (who is tired from presiding all night at the Vigil continuing next door in the church), as deacons shield the nudity of the male catechumens from the women, and as deaconesses screen the women in the same manner. This is when each of them finally lets go of the world and of life as they have known it: the umbilical cord is cut, but they have not yet begun to breathe.

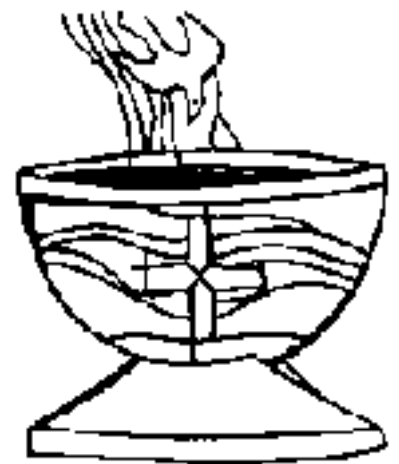
Then they must each turn eastwards toward where the sun surges up bathed in a light which just now can be seen stealing into the alabaster window of the room. They must voice their acceptance of the King of light and life who has trampled down death by his own death. As each one finishes this, he or she is fallen upon by a deacon or a deaconess who vigorously rubs olive oil into his or her body, as the bishop perhaps dozes off briefly, leaning on his cane. (He is like an old surgeon waiting for the operation to begin.)

When all the catechumens have been thoroughly oiled, they and the bishop are suddenly startled by the crash of the baptistry doors being thrown open. Brilliant golden light spills out into the shadowy vestibule, and

following the bishop (who has now regained his composure) the catechumens and the assistant presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, and sponsors move into the most glorious room most of them have ever seen. It is a high, arbor-like pavillion of green, gold, purple, and white mosaic from marble floor to domed ceiling sparkling like jewels in the light of innumerable oil lamps that fill the room with heady warmth. The windows are beginning to blaze with the light of Easter dawn. The walls curl with vines and tendrils that thrust up from the floor, and at their tops apostles gaze down robed in snow-white togas, holding crowns. They stand around a golden chair draped with purple upon which rests only an open book. And above all these, in the highest point of the ballooning dome, a naked Jesus (very much in the flesh) stands up to his waist in the Jordan as an unkempt John pours water on him and God's disembodied hand points the Holy Spirit at Jesus' head in the form of a white bird.

Suddenly the catechumens realize that they have unconsciously

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formed themselves into a mirror-image of this lofty icon on the floor directly beneath it. They are standing around a pool set into the middle of the floor, into which gushes water pouring noisily from the mouth of a stone lion crouching atop a pillar at pool-side. The bishop stands beside this, his presbyters on each side: a deacon has entered the pool, and the other assistants are trying to maintain a modicum of decorum among the catechumens who forget their nakedness as they crowd close to see. The room is warm, humid and it glows. It is a golden paradise in a bathhouse in a mausoleum: an oasis, Eden restored: the navel of the world, where death and life meet, copulate, and become undistinguishable from each other. Jonah peers out from a niche, Noah from another, Moses from a third, the paralytic carrying his stretcher from a fourth. The windows begin to sweat.

The bishop rumbles a massive prayer – something about the Spirit and the waters of life and death – and then pokes the water a few times with his cane. The catechumens recall Moses doing something like that to a rock from which water flowed, and they are mightily impressed. Then a young male catechumen of about ten, the son of pious parents, is led down into the pool by the deacon. The water is warm (it has been heated in a furnace), and the oil on his body spreads out on the surface in iridescent swirls. The deacon positions the child near the cascade from the lion's mouth. The bishop leans

over on his cane and, in a voice that sounds like something out of the Apocalypse, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in God the Father, who created all of heaven and earth?" After a nudge from the deacon beside him, the boy murmurs that he does. And just in time, for the deacons, who has been doing this for fifty years and is the boy's grandfather, wraps him in his arms, lifts him backwards into the rushing waters and forces him under the surface. The old deacon smiles through his beard at the wide brown eyes that look up at him in shock and fear from beneath the water (the boy has purposely not been told what to expect). Then he raises him up coughing and sputtering. The bishop waits until he can speak again, and leaning over a second time, tapping the boy on the shoulder with his cane, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died and was buried? Who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead?" This time the boy replies like a shot, "I do," and then he holds his nose . . . "Euphemius! Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the master and giving of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is to be honored and glorified equally with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the Prophets? And in one holy, catholic and apostolic church which is the communion of God's holy ones? And in the life that is coming?" "I do."

When he comes up the third time, his vast grandfather gathers him in his arms and carries him up the steps leading out of the pool. There another deacon roughly dries Euphemius with a warm towel, and a senior presbyter, who is almost ninety and is regarded by all as a "confessor" because he was imprisoned for the faith as a young man, tremulously pours perfumed oil from a glass pitcher over the boy's damp head until it soaks his hair and runs down over his upper body. The fragrance of this enormously expensive oil fills the room as the old man mutters: "God's servant, Euphemius is anointed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Euphemius is then wrapped in a new linen tunic; the fragrant chrism seeps into it, and he is given a burning terracotta oil lamp and told to go stand by the door and keep quit. Meanwhile, the other baptism have continued.

When all have been done in this same manner (an old deaconess, a widow, replaced Euphemius's grandfather when it came the women's time), the clergy strike up the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead, he has crushed death by his death and bestowed life on those who lay in the tomb." To this constantly repeated melody interspersed with the psalm verse, "Let God arise and smite his enemies," the whole baptismal party – tired, damp, thrilled, and oily – walk out into the blaze of Easter morning and go next door to the church led by the bishop. There he bangs on the closed doors with his cane;

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they are flung open, the endless vigil is halted and the baptismal party enters as all take up the hymn, "Christ is risen . . ." which is all but drowned out by the ovations that greet Christ truly risen in his newly-born ones. As they enter, the fragrance of the chrism fills the church: it is the Easter-smell, God's grace olfactorally incarnate. The pious struggle to get near the newly baptized to touch their chrismed hair and rub its fragrance on their own faces. All is chaos until the baptismal party manages to reach the towering ambo that stands in the middle of the pewless hall. The bishop ascends its lower front steps, turns to face the white-clad neophytes grouped at the bottom with their burning lamps and the boisterous Faithful now held back by a phalanx of well-built acolytes and doorkeepers. Euphemius's mother has fainted and been carried outside for air.

The bishop opens his arms to

the neophytes and once again all burst into "Christ is risen," *Christos anest* . . . He then affirms and seals their baptism after prayer, for all the Faithful to see, with an authoritative gesture of paternity – laying his hand on each head, signing each oily forehead once again in the form of a cross, while booming out: "The servant of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit." To which all reply in a thunderous "Amen," and for the first time the former catechumens receive and give the kiss of peace. Everyone is in tears.

While this continues, bread and wine are laid out on the holy table; the bishop then prays at great length over them after things quiet down, and the neophytes lead all to communion with Euphemius out in front. While his grandfather holds his lamp, Euphemius dines on the precious Body whose true and undoubted member he has become; drinks the precious Blood of him in whom he himself has now died;

and just this once drinks from another special cup – one containing milk and honey mixed as a gustatory icon of the promised land into which he and his colleagues have finally entered out of the desert through Jordan's waters. Then his mother (now recovered and somewhat pale, still insisting she had only stumbled) took him home and put him, fragrantly, to bed.

Euphemius had come a long way. He had passed from death into a life he lives still.

Aidan Kavanaugh, the author, was professor of liturgy at the Divinity School of Yale University. He told this story within a lecture delivered in August 1997 at the Theology Institute held at Holy Cross Abbey in Canon City, Colorado. It was printed in Liturgy 70 with Father Aidan's kind permission and is reprinted here to give both beauty and realism to our hopes for the Vigil. Clip art by Hermanolean. Used with permission.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EASTER VIGIL

1. How do you celebrate the Easter Vigil in your congregation?
2. Do you have any unique practices that you find especially meaningful?

Share your answers to these questions with others:

1. Go to the NAAC Facebook page and post your thoughts there.
2. Or go to the NAAC website and on our public NING site, start a new forum on the vigil.

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