

SHARED MINISTRY – RE-SETTING THE BROKEN BONES

-Martha Tatarnic

A. The Blessing of Necessity

Luke 21:1-4

¹As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ²He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

St. David's Story:

3 small congregations, 2 Anglican (2 point parish, sharing one Priest) + 1 Lutheran Mission renting space from one of the Anglican churches.

-Struggles: lack of money, lack of people, burn-out – same people doing all of the work, no children, no youth, 'too much grey hair', repetition of programs, poor stewardship of resources

Had been doing some joint worship, outreach, and education among the three churches. Established relationship.

-Necessity -- all three churches feeling stretched -- drove a conversation of a merger.

Reflection:

-Where have I seen God's gifts through the experience of having nothing?

-Are there opportunities in my current situation because 'there is nothing to lose'?

B. Pitfalls

The Broken Bones – Thomas Merton

In the whole world, throughout the whole of history, even among religious men and among saints, Christ suffers dismemberment.

His physical Body was crucified by Pilate and the Pharisees; His mystical Body is drawn and quartered from age to age by the devils in the agony of that disunion which is bred and vegetates in our souls, prone to selfishness and to sin.

Even the innocent, even those in whom Christ lives by charity, even those who want with their whole heart to love one another, remain divided and separate. Although they are already one in Him, their union is hidden from them, because it still only possesses the secret substance of their souls.

As long as we are on earth, the love that unites us will bring us suffering by our very contact with one another, because this love is the resetting of a Body of broken bones. Even saints cannot live on this earth without some anguish, without some pain at the differences that come between them.

St. David's Story – Conversations begin

Proposal: 1 merged congregation, eventually selling existing buildings and building a new church in the growing part of town.

Anxieties – sense of ‘my church’, what ‘I’ve worked for’

-sacred space, attachment to buildings

-hierarchy, Bishops making decisions

-unknown – joining of two congregations. What in the world will this look like? Few models

Hurt – anxiety breeds anxiety.

- hurt feelings on all sides

Outcome – 2 congregations voting for (1 Anglican + 1 Lutheran), one against.

Mistakes? It is hard to talk about mistakes, because we have to also believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work of discernment. And it is easy to second-guess, to play the ‘what if’ game. In the end, maybe what had to happen, happened. However, there are always some reflections about things that might have been done differently:

– was it good that it was lay led? Was lack of the ‘Pastor’ participating in the vision part of the problem?

-Or was that good? A vision owned by the Lay People. New Pastor came in to a ‘fresh’ situation, no history with either previously-separate congregation.

-was it too fast? From the creation of a task force to a vote was about five months. However, more time could have created more anxiety and second thoughts. There were already strong existing relationships on which to build.

-Other suggestions: Dispute Settlement Mechanism in place

Concerns Nights

Reflection: What is your congregation most attached to? Is there a spiritual side to these attachments? Is there a spiritual way of detaching?

What are the greatest obstacles in our church today to doing shared ministry?

Theological? Physical?

C. Tips

¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter,^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[b] will not overcome it.^[c] ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. –Matthew 16:18-19

St. David's Story – The plan changed. With only two congregations going ahead with the merger, selling one building and creating a new 'plant' in the west end of the city was no longer realistic. The formerly separate Anglican and Lutheran congregation began worshipping together in June 2008. Because the Lutheran congregation hadn't owned a building, they moved into the Anglican building. That decision was easy. As a mission, their name had come from the congregation who had founded them, so there was no attachment to keeping that name. The decision was made to go with the Anglican church's name – St. David's – since it was an already established name in the neighbourhood.

Worship styles alternated on a week to week basis, and they began to seriously look for a Pastor/Priest now that they knew the new configuration. Formal amalgamation, new pastor and new 'blended' Anglican-Lutheran worship, happened in January 2009

Two Pieces of Advice:

- 1. Pray.** There will never be a one-size-fits-all merger/shared-ministry/amalgamation plan. What works for one congregation is not necessarily the right thing for another. Set up an intentional structure of prayer and discernment to guide the conversations, to make decisions about pace and process.
- 2. Theology:** Keep the conversation grounded theologically. Effective shared ministry cannot merely be about survival (although realistically, it might emerge out of that desire for survival). It must be about **Identity**. Who are we as the Body of Christ? What is our call? As we exist right now, are we able to be the Body of Christ effectively? What can we do to increase our capacity to serve God's world?

***Note: Definition of Church:**

- 1. Community**
- 2. Followers of Jesus**
- 3. Gathered by Word and Sacrament**
- 4. Committed to service**
- 5. Linked to the wider church / wider Body**

Each of these five pieces is integral to Church Identity. If you are not living out each piece of this definition, you are not a Church.

Reflection: Given that the church is going to change, that shared ministry will need to be a reality more and more for congregations who want to continue, how can we be setting the stage for these new realities?

What should we be considering in the way of formation? Education? Theology?

D. Scenarios

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

-I Corinthians 12:4-6

St. David's Story – St. David's is now One congregation. We have One worship, a blend of both traditions. Only two years into the formal amalgamation, issues of who is Lutheran, who is Anglican, have become almost entirely non-issues.

Blended worship works for us because of the degree of similarity between Anglican and Lutheran liturgy, and because of the formal partnership between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Worshipping together as one congregation has, more than anything, made us into One Congregation.

This scenario will not work for everyone.

But, because of St. David's good experience of shared ministry, we have looked for other opportunities for shared ministry:

-Partnering in worship and education with several small Anglican communities outside of Orillia.

-Shared ministry and worship opportunities with other Anglican and Lutheran churches throughout this area, ie. this past summer, 12 churches took turns hosting a mid-week outdoor service which was attended by people from all of our churches.

**Reflection: What experiences of shared ministry have you already had?
What potential scenarios do you envision in your current context?**

E. Unfolding Possibilities

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. –Ephesians 3:20-21

St. David's Story – We are no longer talking about a new building in the new part of town. We have found ourselves called, resourced, for compelling, life-giving ministry right where we are. Because of our merger, we have seen an incredible increase in our ability to serve our current neighbourhood, and there is a great deal of need in this part of town, so that work feels very meaningful.

-Fall 2010 – we began a free weekly community breakfast program

-Spring 2011 – we intend to start a Community Garden

-From there.... The possibilities are endless.

Because of the leap of faith required to go into this merger, we have seen our congregation opened to a sense of adventure and flexibility about emerging changes, the new directions into which God is calling us. It has allowed us to make a name for ourselves as a vibrant, lively congregation.

Reflection: For what do you ask for your church? What do you imagine for your church? Dream about?