

Cast the Net_Clergy Days Summary_UPDATED

Introduction

We were asked to sift through the verbatim comments gleaned from four clergy days held across the Diocese in Fall 2022.

We understood our task as to get out of the way and to try to let the voices of the clergy speak and, to the best of our ability, to sort and sift those voices into themes or categories that emerged organically.

As we began this process, it became clear that sifting clergy comments into so-called “positive” and “negative” categories would be an inadequate approach. The nuances were too great and varied. Words like “weariness” and “energy” - found throughout the comments - somehow seemed to us not polar opposites but related and intertwined. And that insight is what led us to re-read biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann’s book, *The Prophetic Imagination*. This work both blew open and brought together our whole task; for in it he linked *theologically* the weariness and energy, exhaustion and hope, that we heard in our fellow clergy’s voices.

Brueggemann writes:

“The riddle and insight of biblical faith is the awareness that only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embraced endings permit new beginnings” (56).

If this is true - and we think it is - then the so-called “positive” and “negative” voices are all essential chapters in the new story that God is writing in our midst, through Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brueggemann’s insights enabled us to plot the themes below into a kind of narrative or theological arc. Not an arc of “progress” (finding oneself at one point in the arc is neither better nor worse than finding oneself at another point). Rather, the arc is a

way of understanding this journey we are all on, as God shows up in new ways precisely at the places we were sure God was absent.

Thank you for the privilege of dwelling with these myriad voices. Engaging with this project has been a gift.

Yours truly in Christ,

Andrew Federle & Pamela Rayment
Advent 2022

Themes

Question: *What might it mean for each of us, in our various ministries in this diocese, to cast our nets on the ["right" or "other"] side of the boat?*

key to structure below

ANSWER: *It might mean / look like...*

→ Quote from Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition*

- Representative verbatim quotes from Clergy

NAMING (with courage that everything is not ok)

"...the real criticism begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral announcement that things are not right. Only in the empire are we pressed and urged and invited to pretend that things are all right.... And as long as the empire can keep the pretense alive that things are all right, there will be no real grieving and no serious criticism." (11)

- "We are a small parish, weighed down by the burden of caring for an ageing building and property. We'd like to start dreaming, but everyone is so tired. We need to name the truth. Why isn't everyone coming back?"
- "don't throw seniors under the bus, hard to recruit the young"
- "There's unresolved grief as part of the pandemic. Why are people not back? We still have Jesus."
- "Toronto too expensive for housing"

GRIEVING (over the anxiety, invisibility, and exhaustion of our ministries)

"I believe that the proper idiom for the prophet in cutting through the royal numbness and denial is the language of grief, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral." (46)

- "I'm exhausted, been trying to do too much"
- "Sense of anxiety"
- "I have no clue about how to make the next step: am working hard on being a non-anxious presence"
- "Am already feeling tired, even with less parishioners back"
- "Burnt out"
- "Deacons want to be understood and valued"
- "There is a new reality in the sense of grief around losing a lot of things"
- "There is less energy in the parish now"
- "The builders of the legacy church are gone or going. We have a new generation with a totally different idea about church. They are doing things in

a different way. The traditional roles and governance model are rapidly disappearing.”

WEEPING (over our denomination’s sin, guilt, and inadequacy)

“Jesus knew what we numb ones must always learn again: (a) that weeping must be real because endings are real; and (b) that weeping permits newness. His weeping permits the kingdom to come. Such weeping is a radical criticism, a fearful dismantling because it means the end of all machismo; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism.” (57)

- “#ACCToo”
- “a ‘trauma-informed’ approach to ministry”
- “Missional language may be seen as colonial.”
- “Letting go of egos - them and us – showing vulnerability – fixing legacy things.”
- “How do we reach people who aren’t there and have an unpleasant view of who we are?”
- “The model of how clergy are appointed to parishes is for the owner of the boats and not for the people in the boat”
- “There is a colonial fear of allowing in the new. New, not just in what we do, but how we do things”
- “Where I am, we are engaging in a process of ‘reculturing’ - asking questions about our assumptions”

RELINQUISHING (the former things that are passing away)

“It is the business of kings to attach the word ‘forever’ to everything we treasure. The great dilemma is that religious functionaries are expected to use the same ‘forever,’ to attach it to things and make it sound theologically legitimated. But ‘forever’ is

always the word of Pharaoh, and as such it is the very word against which Yahweh and Moses did their liberating thing.” (42)

- “we’ve over-emphasized institutional structures to the neglect of discipleship and spiritual growth”
- “Form follows function. We work on a ‘franchise’ model. We are motivated to keep our own franchises (parishes) running, not to make sacrifices for the greater good. We need more cross-giving, redistribution of resources.”
- “We spend too much time worrying about the boat – instead of the fish and the water.”
- “The diocese’s expectation that 70% of our budget will come from giving may not be realistic for us.”
- “I am enthusiastic about this discussion, but pessimistic about the call to cast the net in new ways and still being measured in old ways - meaning attendance, the money that attendance brings”
- “What we measure we value. We are invested in buildings, and it would be a travesty to lose the community of the buildings”
- “Our models of church and what happens in church need to change. When people met in backyards and in people’s houses, those were examples of church”
- “We have had good experience with satellite prayer groups—small groups meeting in homes”
- “Do we have to have ‘bums in pews’ to be the church? People who were unable to get to church prior to the pandemic got connected virtually....we are ‘still fishing’ but in a new area.”

MOVING (beyond the church walls)

“The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing.” (40)

- “Go where the fish are’? They are all kinds of fish to catch if willing to move out of our church walls.”
- “We need to discern the new gifts those people bring”
- “This is an encouragement to not give up, to keep going, to listen and trust the voices that may be outside the boat. Jesus called to the disciples and they listened to him before they knew it was Jesus”
- “Being in the neighbourhood”
- “I am always shocked at how we only want the fish that are acceptable to us. What about the other fish in our net?”
- “situation of extraordinary addictions, street homelessness, mental health challenges—great chasms of need. What we do as the church is specifically NOT offer social service—we offer ministry coherent with our liturgical life.”
- “Many newcomers are looking for friendship and a relationship with Jesus.”
- “We’re becoming a more networking church: building a sense of ‘community’ - not ‘church community’ but a community of restoration”
- “It began prior to the pandemic...parish shaped and formed by the immigrant experience; now multicultural experience - seeking to integrate various cultural groups. We’re being led to branch into the immediate community”

LEARNING & LISTENING (for God’s new thing)

“I believe that, rightly embraced, no more subversive or prophetic idiom can be uttered than the practice of doxology, which sets us before the reality of God, of God right at the center of a scene from which we presumed he had fled. Indeed, the language of amazement is the ultimate energizer in Israel, and the prophets of God are called to practice that most energizing language.” (68)

- “Is God present in our ministries? Do we recognize how Jesus is coming to us?”
- “bring who you are and what you have and I (Jesus) will multiply it. I know you, and am with you, and I love you and bring what you have and you will be astonished.”

- “need to anchor ourselves in prayer and being ready to listen”
- “From my work at Mac’s Milk my eyes were opened to people who are NOT part of the church. Who is telling people—’You are forgiven! You are precious to God?’”
- “Something happens because Jesus is present, not because of ‘new casting methodology.’”
- “The future does not always look like abundance. Cast the net is not in our control – there’s no technique – it is a divine work.”
- “Listening can be difficult. Are we listening to hear? Jesus did not ask the disciples to do anything different than what they were already doing – He asked them to position themselves in a different part of the boat. Do we need to re-position?”
- “We are in a long, open-ended process; not term-definite. A time of Reformation”

ENERGIZING (living out of God’s newness and amazement)

“The newness from God is the only serious source of energy.... The prophet must not underestimate his or her urgent calling, for the community of faith has no other source of newness....exiles must always learn that our hope is never generated among us but always given to us. And whenever it is given we are amazed.” (78-9)

- “I hear in this story the need to trust in the unknown and unseen, to push out in the darkness.”
- “we don’t need to do things we have done before.”
- “I am energized in this new form of ‘improvising in ministry’.”
- Let God out of the box – seek fresh ideas for ministry, listen to Jesus in new ways.
- “It is time to be brave, so people can be brave with us (clergy) – it’s ok if it doesn’t work. It is an opportunity to learn.”
- “our need to be flexible; do things differently; embrace change”

- “God surprised us by opening our eyes / bringing to us unexpectedly new resources”
- “reconnection with a sense of myself as a church-planter”
- “There is plenty. A shift of mindset from meagre resources to abundance”

GOING TOGETHER (in collaborative leadership)

“Jesus is able to articulate a future that is distinctly different from an unbearable present. But that future is energizing only for those for whom the present has become unbearable. For those people and that community the abrasion takes the form of promise; the judgment takes the form of energy; the condemnation takes the form of hope.” (111-12)

- “rethink or explore different leadership models”
- “Jesus sent the disciples in pairs – many clergy are working alone.”
- “The disciples already had the equipment and the skills; what they needed was to be reoriented. We’re not completely reinventing the wheel. There is integrity in coming alongside the people we have, where they are.”
- “Maybe a ‘hub’ model of partnering in ministry with neighbouring churches?”
- “We know how to fish / have the skill set to fish but not how to cast the net together.”
- “We need to find ways to work together in team ministries—parishes where the priest is not the leadership figurehead—free up the laity to take more leadership”
- Recognizing what skills we lack and know where to go for competent support (e.g., “administration, volunteer management, fund-raising, motivating, building relationships”)