

Annual Chaplains Report - 2014

January 19, 2014

“Here is the Lamb”

- John 1,36

I have no deep theological reason for choosing “Here is the Lamb” for my text this morning. It just seemed right to use it on the morning I deliver the annual Good Shepherd Chaplain’s Report. Lambs. Sheep. Shepherds.

Since we have even more new people here than usual this year (11 of our 33 pledging units are new) I thought I’d begin with who and what the Chapel of the Good Shepherd is.

Officially, we are an “organized chapel mission” of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis. We are a mission of the diocese. Our history can be found on the inside left page of this morning’s service bulletin. We have moved around a lot.

The diocese is made up of 48 “altars”; parishes and the like. Thirteen are smaller than we are. The diocese encompasses the lower two-thirds of the state of Indiana, from here to the Ohio River.

Our Bishop is Catherine W. Waynick (she became Bishop in 1997), and she, **not** me, is in charge of this mission. Why? Because we are dependent on diocesan aid. They, the diocese, pays my salary. So some of the rules are different. Canonically, according to the church’s rules, we don’t have a vestry, we have a “Bishop’s Committee” which I chair. But throughout my 28 years here I have used “parish” language, because it is the church’s most common organizational language, and most people will leave here for a parish. So we have a vestry (our by-laws say half of its members must be students), an annual meeting to elect its members and approve the budget, wardens (our word for “chair and vice-chair of the vestry), and this annual chaplain’s report.

“Here are the Lambs”.

How many lambs are there? Ideally, 30,000 lambs! Or whatever the student/staff population of Purdue University happens to be. In terms of our communicant strength, there are 93 of us. Exactly the same number as last year. We are not the same 93 people. There is always transition. There are now more adults and fewer children who make up the 93. Attendance for the year is up 2%. (When we moved to this building in 2005 attendance went up 15% and we have stayed at that level. Our average attendance for the last nine years is 3075.)

But I had hoped there would be more than 93 of us this year.

Nobody *really* remembers these reports I know, but last year I made three proposals that I thought might increase our membership.

The first was to improve our social media presence. Our good friend Phil Larsen died far too young, and Elizabeth Larsen gave us \$6,000 from his estate to improve our social media presentation. With mixed results. You receive an early week email from us through Constant Contact. (If you don’t get this email, PLEASE let us know immediately so we can update the database. We would ask that you use your “real” email address and not the one you use to catch letters from your Nigerian prince.) Constant Contact works really well. We pay a fee for the service.

We do have a new computer and upgraded software that has allowed us to move up to the latest version of Word Press. Word Press is the platform for our website. Essentially it is a very fancy blog. We have hired a Purdue staffer, the Student Affairs Communications Coordinator, who also does free lance consulting, to help us with the upgrade. But we have stalled there. We have yet to catalogue all of the bugs that live in the site. Also, we still need someone - preferably a student - who can maintain the content on our two Facebook pages, our Twitter feed, and on Foursquare (again this year Brendan is "Mayor" of Good Shepherd; if you don't know what that means, find a student and ask.) We actually paid a student to do that sort of work for about two weeks, and we now have a Hoot Suite account; but then she got a real job.

I also met, first, with Rick Thomas from the Purdue theater department and, at his recommendation, Cory Kent from the Victory Christian Center, to discuss how we might use media in our worship space. To discuss how we might support using this space for large non-liturgical gatherings. (Melissa Gruver the assistant dean of students for Leadership and Civic Engagement, and Katy Bunder, the Executive Director of Food Finders, used this space to launch a freshmen service project last August. That was awkward.) How might we support using this space for large non-liturgical gatherings? How could we get my sermons back on-line? How much that might cost?

We will continue to work on all "that". It is simply not acceptable for us to be pleasantly incompetent in new media; which is just not that new anymore.

Next, you've probably seen the little poster in our hallways of Steven Colbert in front of a picture of Pope Francis with Colbert's quote, "Then why don't we all just become Episcopalians at this point?" The point being, in Colbert's staged outrage, if Catholicism is going to move left, why don't us Roman Catholics just go ahead and convert to the Episcopal Church. My question exactly.

Which brings me to what was my second proposal last year that we deliberately attempt to attract disgruntled Roman Catholics to the Episcopal Church. Thanks to Anna Rauh, the effort even had a name, "Exploring Catholic Traditions Within the Episcopal Church". We thought we could find a couple of disgruntled Roman Catholics to lead a focus group to help us decide on what approaches might work. There are even a couple of RC names still in our nametag rack. But the focus group never happened. Even with Benedict XVI as Pope, the emotional pull of the Roman family was more compelling than the reasonableness of an Anglican mentoring community.

Still, we mused ahead, advertising on WBAA and hosting a book group, which featured the life story of the liberal Roman bishop who ordained me, Walter Sullivan, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Richmond, Virginia. It was helpful for some of you all to learn where I came from in the Roman church. In terms of attracting any new members, it was a flop.

Now there is a far more congenial figure at the head of the Roman Catholic Church. I love his concern for the poor. I find it odd that Roman Catholic nuns would work to make it harder for those Baptist and Jewish women who work for them to obtain birth control. I hate that the Indiana Catholic conference supports HJR-3.

But I think we're done with that for a while.

The last thing I proposed last year was to build on our relationships with the Purdue LGBTQ community and to exploit the Episcopal Church's support of gay rights. We would end up bringing Bishop Gene Robinson, the retired Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, to the Purdue campus and to this church. Conceived in a moment when it appeared HJR-6 would appear on a 2013 ballot, the timing of his appearance was still perfect.

What might have been a presentation hosted by the usual suspects and tolerated by the university, became a moment of diversity education embrace by the academic community. Supported by Lowell Kane, at Purdue's LGBTQ Center, the Director of Purdue Convocations, Todd Wetzel, the Purdue Student Union Board, the Vice-Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, the Vice-President for Student Affairs, and last but not least the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, led by our own Mark Thomas, (give Mark a round of applause please) the events of October 27 – 28 were remarkable, wonderful!

Bishop Robinson was as funny and as engaging as he is on "The Daily Show" or "The Colbert Report". Even better was his personal warmth at the Good Shepherd Holy Eucharist, with Purdue's GLBTQ community, and the pastoral care he showed all the others in his audiences who had to figure out not only what it meant to be a married gay man, but also what the heck an Episcopal bishop was. Many got their copies of God Believes in Love: Straight Talk About Gay Marriage signed by the author. I got our parish register signed by the Bishop. Gene Robinson got one of our "We Make Queer Boring" t-shirts.

I thought it would be a great event. It was even better.

That worked. I don't see how we can top it.

Of course, there are still the same 93 of us.

If we want to boost attendance or improve our membership numbers we should, apparently, host a "Workshop" each Sunday at Food Finder's Food Bank. Replace me with Amy Gaulke, Food Finder's volunteer coordinator. "Workshop" continues to be extraordinarily popular, and, with Jubilee Christmas, remains a signature congregational event.

For our 93 communicants.

Honestly, I am not as fixated on that number as it would appear. But here's why it matters. The diocesan grant, that was once much larger than our pledge income, is now smaller than our pledge income. (Well, if you add in mortgage support, the total diocesan support is a smidge larger.) The contributions of our regular members have offset that diminution of diocesan funds.

It is harder to fund a non-profit operating budget, a church budget, than it is to support cause funding. Our on-line, web based fund raising is still clunky. With every contraction of the postal service, we find it harder to manage alumni address corrections. We depend today and will depend even more in the future on our members pledges, and on our members love for the work of this intergenerational community with the 30,000 or so lambs, sheep, and shepherds.

For whatever we may be officially, an "organized chapel mission", pastorally we are those folk who minister to and with Purdue's students. Those students who have grown up in the Episcopal Church and are still her members. Those students who are searching for a community that embodies some new way of being they have just discovered. Those students who have abandoned religious thought and practice but still seek what is true and good.

Whatever we may be officially, pastorally we are those folk who minister to and with Purdue's faculty and staff. Higher education began in temples and monasteries. We ask how faith affects their work. Every syllabus is a creed of sorts. We are those folk who provided pastoral care to Purdue's faculty and staff, those who labor in the business, the factory that higher education has become.

Whatever we may be officially, we minister to and with the institutions that are the university and the diocese. We minister to the university as it speaks of what is valuable to each successive generation. We minister to the diocese so it may know the world into which the gospel will soon be preached.

At the risk of being repetitive, we do this work mindful, as Kierkegaard was in his critique of the Danish church, that we are not simply an audience, evaluating the performances of actors who must both achieve a truth and entertain the critics, but that we are the players. We are the players, out on the stage of life, listening for a word spoken by a voice from the wings, living a life full and free.

Here are the lambs.

Here are the lambs, and the sheep, and the shepherds . . . and our annual awards.

The annual chaplain's report is also part award's show.

We have two awards that are given annually.

The first is the Nellie Johnston Award. Nellie wove our altar cloth; and drank a medicinal scotch every afternoon in her room at Westminster village. She is memorialized in this award by her daughter Kathleen Johnston, a remarkably generous, selfless Purdue professor and church leader who is also deceased. Kathleen gave us the upstairs kitchen. The Nellie Johnston Award is given annually to one of our adult (however that might be defined) members who has demonstrated a particular leadership gift during the past year. I am giving away two of these this year. The second is the Angela Falzone Award, named after one of our early student senior wardens, and it is given to a student leader each January.

Anna Rauh is the winner of our Nellie Johnston Award this year. In spite of a surgery, Anna has continued to diligently serve as our senior warden. She embodies one of our best traits; the ability to try something new! If it doesn't work, or if something we're doing stops working; we can drop it! A couple of things Anna has done that we probably already have taken for granted are the sheets at the nave door explaining Episcopal worship, and the gift bags that we pass out to our visitors. I am delighted to be able to present her with this token of our appreciation this morning.

Gerry McCartney is also a Nellie Johnston Award winner this year. We don't pay our organists. We don't pay Carolyn. We don't pay Gerry when he subs in. I thought the least we could do for all his time over the run of the years is give him an attractive paperweight. Which is really, probably, the least we could do! On a personal note, as a former Roman Catholic religious of certain age, Gerry knows a lot of the songs I know. He plays some of them from time to time. Then time collapses, and I'm back with big glasses and long greasy hair. Groovy. Thank you Gerry for all your help.

Our Angela Falzone award winner this year is our Episcopal Student Association President Kelsey Anderson. A convert to the Episcopal Church (Kelsey was confirmed this year with Sarah Cooper and Catherine Wallace) Kelsey has served us on our vestry. Kelsey's particular "good deed" this year was her navigation of the new and increasingly complex demands involved in simply existing as a Purdue student organization. There was both much for her to do, and much she had to do to persuade her ESA peers to go to all those **blank** meetings. She is also pretty normal. Which is sometimes rare in church organizations, but is a trait I value. As Kelsey prepares to graduate this spring, we are happy to give her a big plaque.

Our Annual Meeting will take place immediately after the service. Bring your coffee and donut upstairs. Have a soda or a bottle of water. A bag of Cheetos.

An organizational meeting of the new vestry will follow immediately after that in the nave. There will be an election of vestry officers, and we will decide on the date and time of our first meeting of the year.

AMEN