



Anglican Joint Synods | Mission in Motion

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CALLING AND FORMING HEALTHY CLERGY

This third and final Continuing Forward workshop (Oct. 12) at the Anglican Joint Synods was entitled “Calling and Forming Healthy Clergy.”

The session was originally scheduled to be presented by Abp. Chandler (Chad) Jones (presiding bishop of the Anglican Province of America) and Fr. Glenn Spencer, rector of All Saints Anglican Church, Charlottesville, Virginia. However, Fr. Glenn was unable to attend due his medical emergency, so his written talk was presented by Fr. Sean McDermott, curate at All Saints.

Abp. Chandler Jones

How DEUS Forms Priests

Today we offer some ideas that we hope will inspire the rest of the G-3 – the recent Diocese of the Eastern United States APA experience. The most imperative thing to emphasise is that the cultivation and formation of priests is quintessential to our present and future mission. Without an increase of well-formed and properly qualified priests capable of mission work, the Continuing Church will not be able to stabilise or advance in any meaningful or substantial way. Faithful capable priests equal spiritual formation of the faithful, enriching of current congregations, and the extension of our missionary way with Church planting of new congregations.

The recruitment and formation of new priests must be priority one – and the DEUS has made vocational discernment and training a central theme and principle. No priest, no Church. As the priest is, so goes the parish, the Diocese, the jurisdiction. The priest is frankly everything – he sets the culture, attitude, tone, tenor, theology, praxis, and effort of the local parish. Two aspects are most outstanding, 1. the need to call more better clergy, 2. the process of doing so.

For the past 15 years, the DEUS has taken a different approach from the previous history of the Continuum. Our main thrust has been recruit, form, and fund, recruit, form, and fund! We have proactively sought out priestly vocations by

engaging young men in our parishes and even men outside of the G3 who are interested in ministry and have demonstrated an interest in orthodox Anglicanism. Our clergy have to be willing to engage and invest in young men who seek us out, and we must develop an eye for prospective vocations as well.

The Parish as a Priestly Nursery

The parish is the focal nursery of priestly vocations, and it is most particularly within the local parish that vocations can be discerned and encouraged. Personal relationships are, of course, of the esse of such spiritual and theological formation. How the Rector and parish clergy relate to a prospective candidate is key.

Once men have been identified and counselled, our Diocese steps in to provide financial support for seminary, now to the tune of \$18,000 per candidate per degree, upon application. Our parishes have taken it upon themselves sacrificially to support men for seminary directly, in many cases covering most or all of the cost of a seminary education. Such investment is absolutely necessary if priestly vocations are to be fostered and achieved. We can have no expectation of developing priestly vocations unless we are willing to provide the necessary financial backing – and both parish and Diocese must step in to support a man who offers himself, his whole life, to the ministry of the Church. Funding translates into formation.

Our academic standards have also been dramatically intensified. The DEUS now requires the completion of a master's degree in theology from an ATS accredited seminary or its equivalent for priestly ordination, no exceptions. Like nothing else, this has raised the quality of formation and the bar of excellence for ordinands in our Church. Seminarians preparing for the priesthood are required to enter a two-year master's level theological degree programme or the three-year Master of Divinity degree programme in a conventional accredited and duly-recognised seminary. It may be residential or, more often, online.

However, candidates must also complete training in areas of orthodox Anglican formation - theology, pastoralia, liturgy, history, dogmatics, and moral and ascetical theology - which are rarely afforded in a conventional seminary. This additional work may be done during the diaconal period under the Rector of the parish through focused readings approved by the Board of Examining Chaplains, or through an orthodox seminary setting. The fruit borne of this more disciplined approach speaks for itself.

As noted, we require that candidates for the priesthood must be men who pray, study, and work in a local parish while in seminary. Conveying 'priestcraft' or apprenticeship is thoroughly vital and can only effectively take place in a local parish under the mentorship of the Rector and other clergy. The formation 'on the ground' in a real Anglo-Catholic setting is irreplaceable. It is only under the tutelage of a rightly-formed Rector can a future priest learn the details and intricacies of Anglican pastoral, catechetical, and liturgical ministry. In truth, a postulant needs two seminaries, one for academic formation (the seminary) and one for Anglican ethos (the parish). Our Lord has blessed this endeavour.

Improving Formation is Paramount

The need for the Continuing Church to upgrade the quality of priestly formation is paramount. We all know the history of the Continuing Church from years and decades ago. Too often, too many men were ordained because of their availability and not their capability. We must be reminded that a possible outcome of the discernment process is that prior to ordination, a man may conclude he is not called to the priesthood. This means the process worked. That is, in

fact, the entire purpose of discernment – and it is best for the soul of the individual and for the Church if a man is given space and time to determine that he is not actually called to Holy Orders. In such a case, the discernment process has done its job.

Why did we feel we needed to do things differently?

In time past, we struggled with

- priests who were not formed and fashioned in our Anglo-Catholic and Continuing Church Tradition, and thus were not entirely committed to the APA and the Continuing Church in its theological and ecclesiological vision and mission,
- priests who were ill-equipped to lead, preach, liturgise, teach, and organise, thus placed in a unhappy situation, a disservice to them and to the Churches they attempted to serve, and
- priests who were unable through lack of formation to retain membership and activity in the Churches to which they were assigned.

The solution, which has been tremendously effective, was to implement the policies articulated above, a new approach. Over the past decade and a half we have ordained at least 25 priests, many of whom were under the age of 45 when ordained. We even have what I call the ‘millennial movement’ of priests because they are all so young! When I was priested at age 25 in 1996, I was the youngest priest in the Continuum. It is splendid beyond measure now to be an ‘old man’ and see the youth of our clergy.



Fr. Glenn Spencer (as read by Fr. Sean McDermott)

A General Priest

When I think of Florida, I always think of NASA and its great achievements and when I think of NASA, I frequently remember meeting General Bruce Medaris. Who is General Bruce Medaris? Well, if Oppenheimer dropped the bomb on Japan, Bruce Medaris (who was Warner von Braun’s boss) landed us on the moon. Fact. But what a lot of people don’t know about the general, who came to be known the Rocket Man, is that he was also a priest in the Continuing Church. We can talk more about Fr Bruce Medaris at another time.

But tonight, where Bruce Medaris and his cohort of scientists were focused on launching rockets into outer space, we are interested in the process of selecting, training, forming, and launching capable men into the Catholic priesthood. What does it take to successfully launch a man into priesthood? That is our theme.

Now General Medaris learned that it took a tremendous amount of energy to launch a rocket into outer space. And interestingly it took more energy to get the rocket beyond the gravitational field of the earth than it expended for the rest of the mission. The first giant step wasn’t taken on the moon, it was getting the rocket into orbit — the attaining of what they called “escape velocity.”

Preparing Men for the Priesthood

Those of us who care about the education and formation of priests have a similar problem — helping men through the first phase of the process, metaphorically speaking, to attain sufficient will and energy to contemplate leaving a known way of life in order to explore, test, and discern the potentiality of a life-long vocation in the priesthood. Fortunately for us we are not going “where no man has ever gone before,” but rather we are following a known path that has been well tested and proven for two thousand years. What we want to accomplish is to provide the Church with good, capable priests who are attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving. Practically speaking, all I can really do is to show you what that path looks like at All Saints. So let’s do that.

Just as any profession of trust and responsibility requires stages of development in which the novice is given assignments of increasing complexity and responsibly, so preparation for the priesthood begins with simple tasks that grow in complexity, size, and weighty responsibility over a substantial period of time.

Aspirants to the Priesthood

The first, small step (which to some may feel like a giant leap) is a conversation with one’s rector about the possibility of a vocation in Holy Orders. That conversation may lead the rector to suggest that one enter the diocesan aspirancy program.

This is where mentoring with an able, experienced, and mature priest begins in earnest. It takes a proficient and successful priest as well as a fully functioning Anglican parish to support, nurture, and bring to maturity skilled and well-formed priests. And the proficient rector knows that if we want priests who are attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving, we have to start with men who have already proven themselves to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving.

Of course there are many men who fit that bill who are not called to Holy Orders. We have four men back at All Saints who went through the whole aspirancy year I am describing to you with excellence who finally decided that they were not at that time called to Holy Orders. (And not one of them would tell you that wasted their time.) And as I’m sure you have already heard, that is what we call a success.

But the main point is that an effective discernment year, an aspirancy year, is the step that equips the Church and the aspirant to come to some decisions on where to go when the year is completed. Our aspirancy year requires the man to read seven or eight books assigned by the Examining Chaplains and to write simple reflection papers that are submitted to the Board in a timely manner and in a proper form. The papers are then read by each chaplain and commented on. In our case, at All Saints, the aspirant will share his papers with the parish clergy in order to deepen our personal time with the man.

We meet with our aspirants frequently to talk about their work, what they’re learning and what questions they may have as well as other personal and fun things. We really want to know our boys. We have three priests and one deacon, and we spend a lot of time together as a group and individually. When it comes to the Aspirants’ readings we are interested in what theological or personal assumptions have been challenged by the texts. Frequently fundamental Christian beliefs

and practices such as prayer, forgiveness, Christology, and worship are cast in a new light by the texts and we want to have conversations about their challenges and insights.

Broadening the Aspirant's Perspective

But in addition to intellectual formation we require our Aspirants to serve on the Altar guild and take responsibility on a rotational basis to prepare the Altar for Sunday Services. At All Saints this is a requirement, not a choice. Not only is the aspirant responsible for preparing the Altar for worship, but they are also required to learn how to care for the eucharistic vessels as well as to launder and iron and properly fold the sacred linens used in the Mass. There are deep secrets to learn!

This service takes the aspirant from the ironing board to the Altar: it builds his actual competence, it deepens his personal confidence, and while doing so, his understanding of the Mass blossoms, and he demonstrates attentiveness to the tasks and personal responsibility for getting this necessary work properly completed on time in a cheerful manner.

But that's not all, our aspirants are also required to begin serving at the Altar, learning how to efficiently perform the basic tasks carried out by laymen such as Lay Reader, Acolyte, Thurifer, and Crucifer. He is instructed in the proper use of the voice in worship, as well as the importance of posture and movements in the mass. All of our aspirants are instructed in these jobs and we encourage them to come in and practice in the church to build up their confidence.

We want all our aspirants to feel supported and so we make time for additional instructions and for personal time with our priests to talk about their feelings and to listen to their questions. And remember that these men already have a lot of responsibility in their lives — in their jobs, in their family, and toward their wife and children. We are looking for men who are already successful and known to be good men, intentional and responsible in their life.

Better than Rocket Science

This may seem like a lot of tasks for an aspirant to be responsible to perform over one discernment year, but keep in mind the level of energy it takes to achieve what rocket science call "terminal velocity." And also remember, this isn't rocket science. It's way more important than rocket science! Your priest is the center of the sacramental life of the parish and families. The priesthood is not a self-help program of recovery for failures and drifters and certainly not grifters. If you want attentive, responsible priests, you have to begin with men who are already attentive and responsible in the here and now. At All Saints we work with gold.

The Chaplains, based on the evidences presented to them, must make an initial judgement concerning the aspirant's maturity. Maturation deals with personal habits, mental stability as perceived by the chaplains, conduct, hygiene, social skills, humor, and his work ethic. The maturing adult has a "settledness" on a variety of fronts including faith, family, and finances and if that is lacking the Board of Examining Chaplains ought to not to move forward with the Aspirant.

But if the Aspirant has demonstrated authenticity, then unless there are grave, demonstrable causes, he should be recommended to the Bishop Ordinary to be enrolled as a Postulant. If the Bishop chooses to enroll him then the clock begins to tick on his ordination to the Priesthood — five years. (This paper is close to three-quarters finished so don't worry!)

Educational Preparation

The APA requires the Postulant possess an earned undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university as well as an earned Master level degree in Theology from an accredited seminary or divinity school approved by the Chaplains. The new Postulant should apply to seminary only in consultation and with the consent of his Chaplains and his rector who will practically continue to be his prime mentor.

Over the next three years or so the Postulant will take thirty-some post-graduate level academic classes that are required by our Canons. And just like with the first eight books he read, he will continue to share his papers with us and we will read them. The whole process rolls on with greater complexity and weighted responsibility. In addition to his seminary training the Postulant will continue all the other responsibilities already mentioned above.

Once he is made a Postulant one more time-consuming duty will be added. He is required to served on vestry, usually in the role of secretary, in order to gain real experience of vestry meetings as well as the practical application of Anglican polity and canons by a proficient Rector who is leading the monthly meetings.

A couple of years into seminary, once the Postulant has satisfied the Chaplains that he is prepared to stand for the Canonical Examination, he may apply to be scheduled. Once he is happily ordained to a deacon our man usually has a semester or possibly two left to finish off his Master in Theology.

Pastoral and Liturgical Formation

Pastoral formation and Liturgical formation now move to the foreground for our man. Course work and practicums in pastoral counseling, meeting management, homiletics, marriage preparation and marriage counseling are among many other various dimensions the work of parish priests in the Anglican tradition. Though the appropriate course work is required, the practicums, the day in and day out of life within a functioning parish with an efficient Anglican priest is *sine qua non* of Anglican formation.

Liturgical Formation is acquired partially from course work in liturgical theology as well as special knowledge and proficiency in various liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer, but the lion's share of Liturgical Formation will be the actual work of worship in the parish under the direction of a well-formed Anglican priest — including the selection of hymns for Sunday Services, the use of the voice in reading lessons, saying the Daily Office, preaching, as well as celebrating the Holy Communion on Sundays and Feasts.

An overlap between priestcraft applied to the Liturgy & Pastoral Care is the preparation of a man and woman for Holy Matrimony and the manner in which it is celebrated in our Church, as well as knowledge and understanding not only of the theology, but the way in which the various liturgies are celebrated: Holy Baptism, Preparation for Confirmation, the Visitation of the Sick, Communion of the Sick, Burial of the Dead, the Burial of a Child and manner in which to hear a death-bed confession.

Once again, a functioning parish with a proficient Anglican priest is *sine qua non* of Anglican formation of the Postulant.

Conclusions

Well that it, for now anyway. Time is up. But let me make just one more point here: This isn't rocket science, its way more important than rocket science. Try finding out what it will take to get a Saturn Rocket whose weight is equal approximately to four-hundred elephants from here to the moon is the kind of weighty task we have before us. And definitely, you're going to want to know what that will cost too. Correct? Today, one Saturn Rocket will cost about \$30 to \$50 billion dollars. One.

When a Saturn rocket is launched in the middle of the night down here in Florida it is so dazzling in its brightness as it lifts off to the higher heavens that night into day. This is what Catholic priests are called to do: to drive away darkness, not by attacking darkness, but by beaming the radiant glory of Word of the Father made Flesh upon his whole creation, his habitation, his community, his family, and his parish which is the true instantiation of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

