

Going Forward in Love: Recommendations from the Discernment Process

From: The Rev. Tricia de Beer and Members of the Discernment Committee
To: The Vestry and Congregation
Date: Dec. 21, 2006

A Preface from the Rector:

In the call process the search committee asked how I would settle the unresolved issue of worship stemming from the addition of a third service. I said at the time that I thought worship issues often point to broader areas of concern within the parish. Although canonically, decisions about worship ultimately rest with the rector, my goal would be to help the congregation identify the issues and to search for solutions together.

In the last year, that is what I have done in seeking the close help, support and advice of the Discernment Committee, vestry and the wider congregation. Last February we began the discernment process with the guidance of the Rev. Larry Peers, a consultant from the Alban Institute. The Discernment Committee consisted of co-chairs Connie Parrish and Mary Etta King, and the membership included Shoba Reginald, Betsy Wilkinson, JoAnne Setzer, Julia Francis, Bill Vogeles, Don Brezinski, Joe Kraemer, Jack Manes, Sally Zimmerman, Mary Ucci and Janet Needham. Larry helped us frame the presenting issue and craft a process in which 118 people participated at the discernment day and in two smaller groups. A written survey also gathered the thoughts of over 60 people. **The predominant message in all of these conversations was that there was a deep desire to come together as a community.** We were concerned about how we could come together to welcome, nourish, empower and serve one another and others who have yet to join us. By June we had identified some key values that seemed to be in tension with one another. They were:

1. How can we connect the generations AND create an environment which is developmentally appropriate for children?
2. How can we schedule Sunday and other times to meet the needs for fellowship which is relaxed and unstructured AND provide quality time for Christian formation?
3. How can we provide music which speaks to those who love more formal choral music AND to those who prefer congregational participation or more informal music styles?
4. How can we reach out to those who have not yet joined us AND meet the needs of those who are here now?

This fall, we expanded the committee with the addition of Linda Kukolich, Evelyn Haussein, Susan Emanuel, Mary Ayzajian, Jim Neumann and Melanie Blower, and created four working groups, each of which explored options for living with one of these tensions and

presented their findings to the congregation at a forum. Approximately 45-60 people attended each of the forums and gave their feedback on the presentations.

On Dec. 9th, 13 people from the Discernment committee met to seek a direction to present to the vestry. While we have tried to be quite detailed in the future shape of our Sunday morning experience in order that all could visualize what these changes might be, we realize that all the details are not foreseen. As we live into these changes we will necessarily be adjusting as we go along. We are also aware that these recommendations include change that will be quite straight forward and relatively quick to implement, and others which will require a more expanded time frame to accomplish. We intend to provide several opportunities to discuss these recommendations with the whole parish as we go forward.

- Dec. 20th Vestry begins conversation with Discernment Team
- Jan. 7th Congregational comments and questions invited at Parish Breakfast
- January Children are encouraged to give their input on the shape of liturgy
- Jan. 14th Congregational comments and questions invited again, 4-5:30 p.m.
- Jan. 17th Vestry discussion and vote regarding endorsement of rector's recommendations
- Jan. 21st Post the decision
- Jan. 28th Annual Meeting Announcement

I believe that we have carefully considered the perspectives represented in the people of Redeemer and that the recommendations reflect a way forward that will strengthen us to better come together as a community and move forward in love. I am grateful for all those who faithfully participated in this process and devoted many hours to listening, reflecting, and crafting a new possibility. I believe that God has been faithful to us. Our recommendations follow.

In Christ,
The Rev. Tricia de Beer

1. Change the Sunday service schedule to include two services, as follows.

8:00	Rite I service
8:45-9:30	Options for occasional breakfasts, meditation, prayer and reconciliation groups, pre-liturgy education, committee work
9:00	Music warm up
9:30-10:30	Rite II service* (character of service is described below)
10:35	Coffee and Refreshments. Generally unstructured. Occasionally could have mission news, or Sunday School sharing. etc.
10:45	Children's Sunday School starts
11:00-11:55	Adult Education

* The character of the 9:30 service will be as follows:

Throughout the year:

Liturgy teams will encourage the intergenerational nature of this service. The altar will be on the floor. The children will be invited to draw near for the liturgy of the table.

Sermons will generally be intergenerational and kept to 15 minutes or less. There will be one reading in addition to the Gospel. The use of the Creed and Confession will vary seasonally. The psalm could be said, or a hymn may be substituted.

The adult choir will sing between one and two times per month, allowing other groups such as the band, children's choir, family choirs, and occasional choirs or ensembles to offer their ministries. The choir will generally be vested and will be seated in the chancel pews, at least until we have addressed the architectural issues. Generally, congregational singing will be emphasized; there would be one anthem per service.

Communion will be at the rail and at two stations on the floor.

The service will not be more than one hour in length.

In Pentecost, Epiphany, and Easter seasons:

We will have a crucifer, but no torch bearers. There will be no processional, and the recessional will be for children only.

We will use a variety of liturgical texts, such as the Prayers of the People and Eucharistic prayers. Music will be more contemporary than traditional.

In Lent and Advent seasons, and on Festival Days:

We will have a crucifer and torch bearers, a processional (with the children and banners sometimes), and a recessional.

Liturgical texts will be taken generally from the Book of Common Prayer. The blend of music will lean more toward the traditional than the contemporary.

2. Begin planning for the addition of a third service within the year.

In order to accommodate the growth we anticipate and hope for, we need to begin now to plan how we might add a third service at a time other than Sunday morning.

Congregational studies suggest there is a barrier to growth when the church goes beyond 60 - 70% full. (See Alice Mann, Raising the Roof, p. 126.) Given current average Sunday attendance and sanctuary capacity, and at present growth rates, I project we have perhaps a year or two before we hit that barrier.

- The sanctuary main floor holds about 300 and the balcony holds about 50 worshipers.
- The two later services currently serve approximately 170 worshipers (Fall, 2006 average Sunday attendance versus average Sunday attendance of 154 in 2005).
- In the Fall of 2006, we increased average Sunday attendance by 16; it would be fair to expect an increase of 25 in the next year.
- We have capacity for comfortably seating 35 additional people at the second service.

Our planning for a third service must address the character of that service and work out how to support it musically and otherwise. One possibility would be to explore a Sunday evening service (possibly prior to or after Youth Group). Research shows that whatever space we use should not be less than half full. A new service should only be started when there is a sizable group committed to support it,

3. Plan occasional special services such as Evensong, Reconciliation, Healing, or Youth services.

These services would take place outside the Sunday morning schedule.

4. Maintain the current practice of honoring the spirituality of children and the particular ways in which they can participate in worship.

Redeemer has a charism, a special gift, in the way it values the spirituality of children and pays attention to their developmental needs.

Whatever we do must preserve that gift and may require us to establish a covenant between adults and children about how we expect children to be children in church as they worship.

5. Create quality programs for adults both on Sunday morning and at other times during the week.

Redeemer has asked for and demonstrated a hunger for consistent quality adult formation programs, some on Sunday mornings and some at other times during the week. In addition to evening programs like "Connect", we hope to have opportunities for retreats focused on spiritual growth.

6. Expand Fellowship opportunities.

We will plan for four parish breakfasts per year, perhaps scheduling them between adult education offerings. We will continue the annual fall parish retreat. In addition, we will aim to hold three parish-wide events a year (such as the ice-cream social) as well as several events for smaller groups (such as the picnic for families with pre-school age children held last summer).

7. Examine architectural space options which will support Redeemer's worship in a way that maximizes the sense of participation of the gathered community.

Our current architecture is inflexible and does not allow for the creation of viable smaller worship services. Worship and other spaces present problems for people with disabilities and the current sanctuary limits how musicians can be more physically part of the community space. In addition, the sanctuary acoustics need attention and lighting is inflexible. Visibility from the back is difficult for anyone seated at the main sanctuary floor level. The Great Hall and other ancillary meeting spaces may offer additional capacity to augment worship and fellowship

We recommend investing time and money to study and resolve these shortcomings and maximize our opportunities to enhance worship.

8. Develop a systematic ministry to newcomers.

Currently our work of welcoming the stranger is ad hoc, and there is no clear procedure to incorporate newcomers. Bulletins are cumbersome and formidable for newcomers and old comers alike.

A Newcomers Team could ensure that newcomers are welcomed warmly and given a follow-up call within 24 - 48 hours. Research suggests those who are contacted in the first two days and then introduced to seven people tend to adhere to the community. This requires a small group of people who care about genuinely welcoming those sent to us by God, and who are thoughtful about how to help people come into the community of relationships. Clergy should be involved in follow up, but generally not in the first couple of weeks. Unless there are particular pastoral needs, clergy should visit after the person or family has had a chance to decide to stay.

In addition to the Newcomers Team, we envision enlarging the liturgy team to include the function of greeting newcomers and having a table in the entry with relevant information. Acknowledgment of new members will take place annually along with regular evaluation of our ministry to newcomers.

9. Create regular opportunities for people to identify and explore the stewardship of their gifts.

New visions take new energy, and new willingness to give of one's gifts. It is also part of being an empowering congregation. Providing regular opportunities for discerning gifts is an important part of a creative future.

We will develop a formal process for discerning our spiritual and personal gifts for leadership. Leadership will respect our individual capacity and willingness to give and leaders will be encouraged to grow into and out of leadership roles.

10. Develop a process for identifying, managing and resolving our conflicts and differences

Living in community is never simple. Conflicts are inevitable and part of growing relationship. Having a clear process for resolving conflicts and tensions is a healthy and important dimension of caring for the Body.

As part of our commitment to “radical welcoming” and to developing diversity, we will build on the model of existing covenants now in use and endeavor to create an understanding of how we might recognize and accept our differences. We will develop a Reconciliation Policy that establishes healthy methods of discerning, airing, addressing and resolving interpersonal conflicts, differences, and concerns, and provides worshipful space for reconciliation.