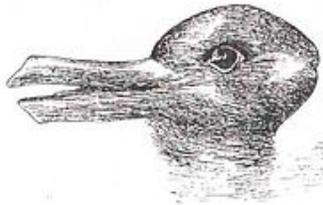


The Case for Planting Anglican Churches:

How Evangelical Congregations Can Impact the Current Church Crisis in America

Rev. December 17, 2014

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn's, landmark work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, introduced the idea of *paradigm shifts*. The essence of a paradigm shift is that we can see the same information in a different way. What do you see in the drawing? Look again.



Facts lend themselves to different interpretations. There is enormous power in seeing things differently. Businesses, government, the non-profit sector and even churches find significant opportunity for innovation as they view their organization and practices through more than one lens. In the church as well as business, paradigm shifts allow challenges to become opportunities.

One of these shifts is the recognition that in spite of church buildings on many corners, America is no longer Christian nation, a representative of Western Christendom; but is now a vast mission field itself. The Barna Group recently released numbers indicating just how big this mission field has become.

To put that in context, if all those unchurched people were a separate nation, it would be the eighth most populous country in the world, trailing only China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the remaining churched public of the United States (159 million). (<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/698-10-facts-about-america-s-churchless#.Vljs-8J0xdg>)

The United States has now become a nation of staggering spiritual need and must certainly be the recipient of a dramatic movement of evangelism and church planting.

A second paradigm shift affects the nature of church planting. Until now the primary model has been geographical. We plant churches of our own tribe (local church or denomination) in a new

geography. But what if we began to plant churches “on top of” existing churches that will reach new demographics with different styles of worship and ministry? This strategic focus of targeting unreached people groups has dominated cross-cultural missions for years.

A third paradigm shift is the recognition that in this new environment, we can have far more strategic cooperation across denominational lines that will result in dramatic improvements for the stewardship of Kingdom resources. Could we actually plant congregations of other tribes in our own buildings and move beyond simple lease agreements to strategic partnerships for ministry?

Christendom No More

Like the proverbial frog in the kettle, the American church has found itself in a dramatic recession. A significant study of religion in America over the previous 50 years is written by Robert Putnam and David Campbell of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. After the 1950's, when 60% of the population went to church regularly, we experienced the shock of the 1960s and then two aftershocks. The first aftershock was the alignment of conservative Christians with the Republican Party, e.g. the Moral Majority; and the second aftershock was the rejection of religion by young people, partly due to its coupling with conservative political philosophy. David T. Olson in, *The American Church in Crisis*, describes the dramatic decline of mainline churches and the crisis that is brewing that suggests mainline church attendance, which has been in decline, may be about to go over the precipice. On any given weekend in 2005, 9.1% of the population attended an Evangelical church, 3.0% attended a mainline church, and 5.3% attended a Catholic church for a total of 17.5%. John S. Dickerson paints a similarly depressing picture in *The Great Evangelical Recession*. Dickerson compares Olson's data with the population growth of individual states and points out that in California, home of Saddleback Church and many other super megachurches, Evangelicals actually had a net loss from 2000 - 2005 of 3.1% of the population attending an Evangelical church.

The rise of megachurches suggests kingdom growth, but that is not the reality. We don't find the megachurch to be a panacea for robust faith. As the Executive Pastor of a large congregation I supervised a staff of thirty. In that season our church grew, but we found that most of our increase was from other churches that were losing their people to us. This is what Peter Wagner, years ago, referred to as *feeder – receptor* churches. Small churches (*feeder*) lost people in the direction of large churches (*receptor*) that could offer higher quality programming with more variety. Recently, in a conference setting, David T. Olson followed up on his book mentioned above with the observation that in spite of the growth of some megachurches in Seattle (like Mars Hill Church, estimated to include 13,000 attenders before its fall) the

churched population of the Seattle area has dropped by 50,000 people. Olson notes that the death rate of churches (reported at 3500 per year in the US) will likely remain the same.

The variable that is critical for the survival of any species is the birthrate of new offspring. For the church species to survive, three types of births are necessary. First, attracting and connecting with young adults and families so that there is a significant natural birthrate. Secondly, seeing substantial numbers of people become new followers of Jesus. And, third, planting sizeable numbers of strong new churches. New churches, by their very nature, produce the first two types of birth. New churches have a much younger age profile than do older churches and new churches have two to four times the conversion rate of new Christians than older churches. New babies, new Christians, and new churches, are required to keep the church species healthy and strong. (*The American Church in Crisis*, 124)

In challenging times we can hunker down and hope for the best or we can engage in the new opportunities that a changing culture provides us. In *The Lord of the Rings*, a fearful Frodo says to Gandalf, I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.” Gandalf responds to his young friend, “So do all who live in such times; but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world”

The first paradigm shift (from America as Christendom to America as mission field) is somewhat self-evident, but it is also borne out by the numbers. The second paradigm shift looks to new opportunities for mission by identifying unreached people groups in America. Who might be receptive to the gospel in this new season?

An “Unreached” People Group?

Although it has been a challenging half-century for all churches in America, it has been especially so for mainline liturgical congregations. The Hartford Institute for Religious Research has compiled data from the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* that has revealed this dramatic decline of mainline liturgical churches. Formerly formidable powerhouses of American religion, these denominations have suffered great losses. From 1965 to 2005 the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has declined by 46%. The United Church of Christ has plummeted 41%. The Episcopal Church has lost 34% of its adherents while the Reformed Church in America has dropped by 30%. The United Methodist church is down by 27% and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reports a 15% loss.

Without establishing a cause and effect relationship, the denominations that have lost the most members are coincidentally the same denominations that have moved left on the theological

spectrum. In the area of the authority of Scripture, particularly revealed in their positions on human sexuality (including the ordination of active homosexual priests and bishops) they have disenfranchised great numbers of their adherents. Some churches have pulled out of their denominations at a terrible cost, because ecclesiastical structures include the denomination's ownership of the churches property. Some individual Mainline Christians have sought to affiliate with groups of orthodox liturgical Christians, but robust Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian or Lutheran churches have not always been easy to find. Many people have given up and don't attend anywhere, making them one of the larger unreached, unchurched, or dechurched people groups in the United States.

To bring this into better focus on a local level, we recently did a study of our local demographics and psychographics through the Percept organization. The data revealed that there are about 17,000 people within a three mile radius of the church who prefer a liturgical form of worship. When attendance at liturgical churches within this radius is considered, there are large numbers of people who are not going to church anywhere. One may not be able to reflect on their motivation with certainty, but it seems many fit the description above of those who prefer orthodox Christian theology in a liturgical setting.

In addition to this significant group of "unreached" people, there appears to be a growing interest among young people and others for an alternative to contemporary worship led by a soft rock band. Robert Webber saw this years ago when he wrote, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, *The Younger Evangelicals* and his *Ancient-Future* series. He addressed the question of worship in a postmodern setting. It is his feeling that the rich symbolism of the ancient church must be recovered in the affirmation of water, the pulpit and the (communion) Table. He notes that postmoderns also have a strong appreciation for music in communication. Baptism provides the rich symbolism related to the death and resurrection of the Lord. Some churches are moving to a weekly celebration of the Eucharist as it expresses the depth of meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the anticipation of his coming again to fully establish his kingdom. Others have affirmed the meaning of the Christian year in telling the metanarrative of the gospel. The arts have become important in their effectiveness in communicating the truth of the Word: including drama, storytelling, dance, banners, wall-hangings, etc. (Darrell L. Guder ed., *Missional Church*, 108-114).

Eddie Gibbs, of Fuller Seminary, references conversations he has had with Baby Boomers who have left conservative evangelical churches to attend liturgical churches. He writes that:

They informed me that they had tired of celebrity-based religion, built around the personality and communication gifts of one pastor, and had gone in search of a church

where God is the center of attention. For them the centrality of the table in place of the pulpit was of special significance. They also find Christian symbols and rituals deeply meaningful, providing refreshing and evocative means of communication. They react to the deadening and, in some traditions, deafening wordiness of much contemporary evangelicalism. (Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 155)

Todd Hunter, formerly the leader of the Vineyard movement and Alpha USA, tells the story of his personal journey in this direction in his book, *The Accidental Anglican*.

What does the existence of this significant group of unchurched/dechurched people have to do with Evangelical Christians other than compassion for their plight?

Kingdom Vision

What would happen to the church in America if we moved beyond our current focus on denominational progress and embraced the deepest levels of Kingdom cooperation. Consistent with our feelings about “prayer”, everyone is in favor of the Kingdom of God. However, in reality there is more Kingdom rhetoric than actual cooperation. While we speak of all Christians everywhere with grace, we focus on our own tribes. Our denominational systems reward denominational progress. Our resources are poured into the expansion of our own tribe.

We have begun a journey at the local church level that has taken us in a different direction. North Sound Church is located in a beautiful seaside community in suburban Seattle. We are about 10 minutes from a major north-south highway and 15 minutes from the Interstate. Some time ago we debated amongst ourselves about the purchase of property adjacent to the Interstate that would position a move from being a prosperous local church to a growing regional congregation. But we decided that was not our calling. We wanted to drill deeply into our own community and we pondered and prayed about what that might look like. We considered planting neighborhood churches, but felt the population density was not high enough to sustain them. So we eventually asked, “Who in our community is not being reached by existing churches?” We discovered the numbers mentioned above and had clarity regarding our first church plant. Within our community there were three groups of people who would be attracted to an Anglican church: dechurched Christians, from mainline churches that had left orthodoxy; baby boomers who tired of contemporary worship and celebrity preaching, and young people, who wanted to capture the mystery of ancient-future worship.

I met with Bishop Todd Hunter, of the Diocese of Church for the Sake of Others, and discussed what it might look like to partner in starting an Anglican congregation “on top of ourselves”, that is, in our building, sponsored by our non-Anglican congregation, through gifts of finances

and people from our church. We explored it for a few months; met with key congregational and denominational leaders; and began to work toward a launch. We were most fortunate in that we had a resident church planter in our congregation who was coincidentally moving toward a desire to serve in an Anglican setting. He had completed the church planter's assessment, and his preparation for the plant. Bishop Hunter approved this young man and his wife as Anglican Church planters and we reintroduced them to our congregation as such at our 10th anniversary celebration. This effort was a joint endeavor of our church, Bishop Todd Hunter and the Diocese of Church for the Sake of Others; and the Diocese of Cascadia, under the leadership of Bishop Kevin Bond Allan. The Grand Opening service was held on October 4th of this year with 150 people in attendance. Meeting on Saturday evenings this new congregation has stabilized at just under half the attendance of its first service and is growing strong financially and in its draw for our community. Of particular interest is that we are attracting the three primary target groups for the new congregation.

An Evangelical church planting an Anglican congregation is not just a conceptual construct. It works! And it gives witness to the power of living out the Gospel of the Kingdom. Imagine what can be accomplished for the Kingdom if we move beyond models of denominational competition toward strategic partnerships. I have been helped by the book from the Harvard Business School, by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, called *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* (2005). They lay out a framework for moving from the "red ocean" of competition into the "blue ocean" where competition is irrelevant. In the church world our goal is not to take folks from other communities of faith. It is to have an effective strategy that seriously seeks to minister to those who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ or have left the church for any of a number of reasons.

Kingdom Stewardship

It is difficult to find definitive data on the cost of planting a new congregation. There are a number of variables including the mode of church plant (whether it is a pioneering effort in new territory or the hiving off of people from an existing congregation) or a denominational distinctive about how it should be done. However, it is self-evident that when a new congregation is able to be planted on top of an existing congregation there are dramatic savings of Kingdom resources. In our Evangelical tradition we are used to one congregation occupying its own facilities (often empty), but perhaps we can learn from the Latter Day Saints who have as many as three separate congregations in the same building.

An Evangelical congregation can plant an Anglican church in the same facility because there is such a dramatic difference between a contemporary service and a liturgical service. Typically

the Evangelical congregation will not “lose” many people to the liturgical expression other than those who are encouraged to assist in the startup.

Now consider the savings: the new church plant has essentially no initial facility costs. Renting a space for a new congregation can be prohibitive. (We currently pay \$70,000 a year to rent a conference center for Sunday morning, but also own a little white church that is perfect for an Anglican service). The offices of the new church are collocated with the sponsoring congregation avoiding the need to purchase office space through the week. The administration of the existing church supports the church plant with the full range of office equipment, computers, copiers, etc. One receptionist covers both congregations. Specific expenses can be shared as appropriate.

In addition to his connection with the Anglican Church in North America and its Dioceses, our Anglican church planter relates to our staff as a team mate where he finds encouragement, coordination, and mentoring in his ministry. We have the value of his unique insight on our ministry. Our Anglican church plant also has the opportunity to partner with us in community outreach. At some point they may want to move out on their own, but the current synergy of efforts is amazing.

Kingdom Theology

Some Evangelicals may be impacted by the Kingdom stewardship of the lower costs associated with planting Anglican churches co-located with Evangelical sponsoring churches. However, they may have pause over planting new congregations with some perceived significant theological differences. I do not want to minimize what may be very different understandings of important practices, but it is good to remember that one of the fundamental reasons for partnership is to come alongside brothers and sisters of like faith who have actually suffered for their commitment to orthodox Christian theology. Perhaps we can consider the formula adopted by some churches of: *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas* (commonly translated as "in necessary things unity; in uncertain things freedom; in everything compassion"). There are three issues that likely require the most understanding: infant baptism, the Real Presence in communion, and Episcopal authority.

For Evangelicals, especially Baptists, starting congregations that baptize infants may be a challenge. In my training for ministry I was influenced by two Baptist scholars that I had the privilege of studying under. Interestingly both had written extensively about baptism. One was a New Testament scholar and the other a theologian. Both indicated that they felt believer's baptism was standard New Testament practice. However, both reached out to affirm the importance of Christian unity. George Beasley-Murray, my Greek professor, concluded his 400

page treatment of *Baptism in the New Testament* with an appeal for unity in the church. He writes:

There is more, however, to be said on this matter. It lies in the power of Baptists to take a significant step towards the establishing of closer relations with the other Churches: in respect for the conscience of our fellow-Christians and the like charity, which we trust will be exercised toward us, could we not refrain from requesting the baptism of those baptized in infancy who wish to join our churches and administer baptism to such only where there is a strong plea for it from the applicant? This would leave room for freedom of conscience for those who believe they should be baptized, despite their having received infant baptism, but it would involve a change of policy with respect to the majority who come to us from other Denominations. (392)

My theology professor, Dale Moody, wrote in his doctoral dissertation, at Oxford University, on baptism. He considered the Anglican and Baptist forms of baptism and writes: “Flexibility on both sides of the debate could lead to one of the most significant steps toward Christian unity since the Reformation ...” (*Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity*, 300).

The point of both Baptist scholars is that believer’s baptism should not be abandoned (for many reasons), but we should extend charity in affirming the baptism of those who underwent the rite as infants, and who live out their faith today. Could we extend grace to 1,500 years of practice and together work for a fuller understanding of baptism and discipleship for all Christians of all stages of life?

Another point of concern for some Evangelicals is the Anglican understanding of the Lord’s Supper. Unfortunately, it seems many Evangelicals have believed the Anglican position is similar to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in which it is accepted that the communion wafer and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. Anglicans affirm what the Scripture says, “This is my body” and “this is my blood”, but this concept of the Real Presence is relatively undefined. While Evangelicals would traditionally use the language of “ordinance” (something ordained by Jesus) over “sacrament” (an expression of grace) many Evangelicals would affirm that the Lord shows up through his Spirit in a special way when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.

The other hurdle for some Evangelicals is that of episcopal authority. The Anglican tradition, affirms the role of Bishops as expressions of authority within the church. However, in my experience it appears the Bishop functions much like the District Executive Minister, Superintendent, Secretary, Coordinator, President of the denomination, etc. Should the

authority that resides in the Bishop really be off putting to a collaborative strategy to reach the lost?

Practical Matters

Fundamentally, the commitment of an Evangelical congregation to plant an Anglican church should be approached as a gift for the Kingdom. It is not a *quid pro quo* arrangement. At some point in the future Anglican congregations may be able to plant contemporary Evangelical congregations and the gift can be reciprocated, but that is not primarily what giving is all about.

The sponsoring Evangelical church will commit to providing a place for the Anglican church to meet. It will give office space and administrative support. It may offer significant financial contributions to the budget of the new congregation and offer people from its own congregation to become part of the core team for the new church. Some may be SWAT team members (Servants Willing and Temporary) who will help with the startup but return to the sponsoring church).

The Anglican Diocese will work with Evangelical congregations in recruiting qualified Anglican church planters and will cover all the ecclesiastical oversight necessary for ministerial credentials. The Bishop will coordinate with the local church pastor to provide a level of joint mentoring as necessary.

All of the specific practical arrangements will be covered by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Evangelical congregation, the Anglican church planter and the Bishop.

Summary of Benefits

The thesis of this article is that we can do innovative, effective, low cost, church planting by identifying unchurched/dechurched people groups within our communities and cooperate using facilities, people and other resources of the existing congregation to dramatically improve the effectiveness and stewardship of church planting. A good place to start is with our brothers and sisters in the Anglican Church in North America. We should do this because it:

1. Affirms Kingdom values
2. Executes a missional paradigm
3. Dramatically lowers the cost per plant
4. Allows us to go deep in one geography (a rekindling of the concept of *parish*)
5. Develops the synergy of partnerships
6. Witnesses to kingdom cooperation in the local community
7. Meaningfully relates to the worldwide communion of Christians

8. Makes church planting more accessible
9. Effects cooperation in assessment and training
10. Reaches the lost, the unchurched, and the dechurched
11. Creates connections with other Christians of orthodox theology

Useful Resources

Perhaps the most significant study of the last 50 years of religion in America is written by Robert Putnam of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and David Campbell; *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us (2010)*. It is a story of dramatic decline, especially among mainline churches. Similar concern is expressed by the analysis of David Kinnaman in his book, *UnChristian (2007)*, which looks seriously at this generation and David T. Olson's book, *The American Church in Crisis (2008)*. This latter book talks about the dramatic decline of Mainline churches and the crisis that is brewing that suggests Mainline church attendance, which has been in decline, may be about to go over the precipice.

Who Stole My Church (2008), by Gordon MacDonald is helpful in understanding the culture of communities that serve an older population. I have been helped by the book from the Harvard Business School, by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, called *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant (2005)*. They lay out a framework for moving from the "red ocean" of competition into the "blue ocean" where competition is irrelevant.

The Innovator's Dilemma (1997), by Clayton M. Christensen, speaks of the need to consider new paradigms in order to move forward and just how difficult it is for large organizations to change perspectives. James Davison Hunter, of the University of Virginia, has written a fascinating work called *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World (2010)*. One of his main points is that Christian world changing will not likely be accomplished by the political muscle of the Christian Right or the Christian Left, but rather in making a difference as a "faithful presence." We increase that faithful presence as we partner with each other in the proclamation of the gospel and in community transformation.

In church planting we are recognizing the importance of a return to the basics. Small groups and huddles (smaller groups of the same gender meet for more intense discipleship) are one of the keys to effective ongoing relationships and discipleship. We grow large by growing small. (See *The Starfish and the Spider (2008)*, by Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom). The power of relationship in the journey to faith and discipleship is becoming increasingly apparent. (See *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus (2008)*, by Don Evertts and Doug Schaupp and *Evangelism Without Additives (2007)*, by Jim Henderson.) The

importance of relationship based ministry is born out in *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (2006) by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger.)

Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America (Gospel & Our Culture) (1998), ed. Darrell Guder) is a handbook for an incarnational approach to ministry that is not facility centric, but relational and service oriented. This is a key to church planting as well. The old "attractational" model of growing a church is no longer as effective in post-Christian America. There are still places in the USA where folks are drawn to the church with "the best show in town", but unchurched people are not impressed. We find that getting into our communities incarnationally through service and building relationships is a key to meeting people's needs.