



ENCOMPASS

News and Events from the American Anglican Council Mission and Ministry Network

“Godfather of Sports” Priest Undertakes Creative Evangelism in Rural Texas

BY CYNTHIA P. BRUST, EXEC. EDITOR

As the Episcopal Church continues to struggle with fallout from General Convention 2003, and General Convention 2006 looms ever closer, it is far too easy to overlook passionate and committed ministry being carried out around us. The Rev. Mark Stockstill is living out the Great Commission with such passion and commitment, as well as creativity, serving as vicar for two mission congregations in the Diocese

of Fort Worth—St. Matthew’s, Comanche, and Trinity, Dublin.

Fr. Stockstill grew up in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and worked for several years in investments before attending Nashotah House seminary. He graduated last June at age 37 with a deep desire to undertake rural ministry.

“Canon Hough, our diocese’s Canon to the Ordinary, asked if I would commit to staying longer than two years, and I told him I wanted to serve St.

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Above: The Rt. Rev. Jack Iker, Bishop of Fort Worth (center) blesses an outdoor altar, joined by Father Mark Stockstill (left) and the Rev. Canon Charles Hough (right).

Are We Teaching Them the Way in Which They Should Go?



Photo courtesy of Christ Church of Atlanta, and Bill Lisenby, Photographer.

BY JENNIFER M. ABEL, EDITOR

Ask your average neighborhood teen whether he or she believes in God, reads the Bible regularly, and has made a personal commitment to live for God, and you would expect a mixture of answers, depending on the teen’s religious background. According to a recent study, Episcopal teens lag far behind other Protestant teens in their understanding of and adherence to the basics of Christian faith and, in fact, better reflect those teens with no religious affiliation.

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds... Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up... so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land...” Deuteronomy 11:19

a majority of Episcopal teens believe morality is relative, do not read the Bible, and do not regularly attend church or Sunday School. Their calendars are full of church activities and volunteerism—often more so than other religious teens—but, typically, there is no Biblically rooted, personal faith behind the frenzy of religious involvement. In addition, fewer Episcopal children are being baptized and confirmed each year, and even the national Episcopal Church admits there is an impending crisis if the Church does not begin actively recruiting young clergy and encouraging youth involvement in the Church. (As of 2003, only nine

percent of all Episcopal clergy were under age 40.)

Across all denominations, youth groups have to fight for even a small slice of teens’ time these days; still, the problem of “earning the right to be heard” remains, which too often means spending the weekly slot in the calendar trying hard to be “relevant” or “fun” at the cost of offering true Biblical teaching and Christian fellowship.

These trends should evoke enormous concern in any Christian intent on fulfilling the Great Commission—although the data (highlighted below) should also come as no surprise to those tracking the current crisis of belief in the Episcopal Church and in other denominations. Adults themselves have abandoned Biblical standards, so the failure of parents and youth leaders to pass on Truth to the next generation is only logical.

Although the situation is discouraging, there is a growing movement by Biblically faithful Christians to address the current problems, particularly in the Episcopal Church. Dedicated youth ministers and other leaders recognize

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Youth Statistics

	Episcopal Teens	Protestant Teens	All Teens
Believe in God	72%	90%	85%
Say Faith is Very/Extremely Important in Daily Life	40%	60%	51%
Morality is Relative	54%	41%	45%
Believe in Life After Death	35%	55%	50%
Read the Bible Alone One or More/Week	8%	32%	26%
Have Made Personal Commitment to Live for God	32%	69%	56%
Believe Most/All Adults Are Hypocrites	35%	7%	7%

*Notes: (1) “Teen” refers to youth aged 13-17. (2) For this study, Protestant teens composed a majority of “All Teens” so data in “All Teens” may be skewed higher. Source: “Portraits of Protestant Teens: A Report on Teenagers in Major U.S. Denominations,” by Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith. National Study of Youth and Religion, Lilly Endowment: 2005.

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the gravity of the situation and are taking intentional action to reverse the downward turn.

The Rev. Jeff Taylor, Minister of Family Life at Christ Church of Atlanta (an Anglican Communion Network partner), says dramatic renewal among youth must start with parents and be enhanced by the church. He explained that the Bible places primary responsibility for raising children in the “way in which they should walk” on parents. And as anyone involved with youth will tell you, if parents are not doing their job at home, teaching them at church, daycare or school becomes doubly hard.

When it comes to youth ministry, Taylor said that parents and youth ministers often forget the basic ministry method of our Lord: discipleship. And discipleship always means relationship—spending time with the individuals with whom you want to share the Gospel. As a consultant for numerous churches of various denominations, Taylor said he has found too many youth ministers who are self-focused and do not really *know* their youth. Without the relationship aspect, teens are left with programs and curricula which often turn them off and send them home—they do not feel cared for or connected.

“Be with them!” he recommends to youth ministers, explaining that teens “crave” these types of mentoring relationships. Taylor, who has been involved in youth ministry for 23 years, frequently makes a point to spend one-on-one time with his youth, during which he asks them about their lives and interests as well as about their relationships with the Lord.

Doug Molhoek, Director of Student Ministry at Potomac Falls Episcopal Church in Virginia, echoed Taylor’s emphasis on discipleship: “[Investing time one-on-one with youth] shows you care and that they’re not just another number ... [It shows] you value who they are,” he said, explaining that one-on-one time naturally lends itself

to greater opportunities for challenge and growth since the teens can be asked about their individual spiritual walks—something that cannot be done comfortably in a group setting.

Closely related to discipleship, an all-encompassing problem evident in youth groups everywhere is replacement of Bible-based and Christ-focused ministry with an entertainment, watered-down ministry approach. Both Taylor and Molhoek agree that too many youth ministers mimic the world and attempt to do the “coolest” thing with their youth. They each emphasized that effective youth ministry designed to make and equip young disciples must be Scripture-based. Both leaders offer weekly Bible studies that challenge teens to model their lives after Christ.

The Rev. Whis Hays, founder and director of Rock the World Youth Mission Alliance, also advocates Christ- and Bible-focused ministry for youth in his training of youth ministers, and, in an interview with the AAC, emphasized that the Gospel message does not need to be watered down in order to appeal to youth.

“Jesus is very attractive to young people—that hasn’t changed,” Hays said, clarifying that it is the “heroic sacrifice version of Jesus” – the Biblical Jesus – that appeals to young people, not a dummed-down version of Him.

The solution to reversing the problems among today’s youth is not simple and will require intentional effort and time. Hays said he is aware of at least five Episcopal dioceses that have begun seriously addressing the problems with youth ministry, and that two orthodox Episcopal seminaries (Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and Nashotah House) are both developing better programs for equipping future youth ministers. Ministries like Hays’ Rock the World (an AAC affiliate ministry) also address the problems by properly equipping youth for Christian leadership so they can then make disciples themselves. Hays advised that wherever youth ministry is working

Recommended Reading

Boiling Point: It Only Takes One Degree (2001) By George Barna & Mark Hatch

Unshakable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions About the Christian Faith (2001) By Peter Bocchino & Norman Geisler

Life on the Edge: The Next Generation’s Guide to a Meaningful Life (2004) By Dr. James Dobson

Beyond Belief to Convictions (2002) By Josh McDowell & Bob Hostetler

Parenting Today’s Adolescent By Dennis Rainey, Barbara Rainey & Bruce Nygren

well, the Church should bless and support those efforts.

Acts 29 Ministries, an Episcopal renewal ministry based in Atlanta, also supports a ministry which evangelizes youth as well as trains and equips youth leaders through conferences and seminars. Its most recent conference, YouthQuake ‘06, held in January in Ridgecrest, N.C., attracted more than 1,000 youth, and according to Mr. Doug DeBolt, Vice President for Communications, the response was greater than ever. The Rt. Rev. Peter Beckwith, Bishop of Springfield and chaplain for the event, said in the Spring 2006 Acts 29 Magazine: “It’s the best youth event I’ve seen in the Episcopal Church in 41 years of ministry. People’s lives were profoundly changed.”

The divinely-placed weight of responsibility for bringing up the next generation in the faith is a heavy one—but it is also a non-negotiable, Biblical mandate. Numerous resources are available to assist parents and youth ministers reach today’s “postmodern” generation for Christ (see sidebar above). Above all, parents and ministers need to pray and study Scripture, as one’s own relationship with the Lord fuels the passion and ability to share the Good News with young people. ♦



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

THE REV. CANON DAVID C. ANDERSON
AAC PRESIDENT AND CEO

As the time draws closer to General Convention 2006, tensions and rhetoric are on the rise while the leadership of the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) is drawing battle lines. Last month, ECUSA’s Executive

Council met and approved at least \$100,000 for the bishops’ ad hoc Task Force on Property Disputes, and the task force has said it also intends to raise money on its own. Episcopal News Service and other news outlets report that the task force is focusing on: “defending” property for parishioners; affecting legal precedents; and preparing to take hostile, punitive action against churches—and perhaps entire dioceses—that decide to disaffiliate from the Episcopal Church. Sometimes we read a passing reference to “resolving disputes” without litigation, but this solution seems at odds with facts on the ground.

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Answering the Tough Questions

First Peter 3:15 exhorts Christians to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have,” doing so with “gentleness and respect.” No doubt you have heard a few if not all of the statements/questions below in relation to the current crisis in the Anglican Communion. While these issues may be “settled” in the mature Christian’s mind, when asked about them by a skeptic, many still find themselves fumbling for words. In an effort to equip individuals to respond to these basic yet “tough” questions, the American Anglican Council has compiled the following question-and-answer set—the full version of which is on the AAC website. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of thorough answers but rather a springboard for further thought and study. We encourage you to examine Scripture on a daily basis and to walk a Spirit-filled life so you will be prepared “in season and out of season” to give the reason for the hope you, and we all, have in Jesus Christ.

† **Jesus never said anything about homosexuality.**

- There are 613 laws in the Old Testament, and Jesus never spoke about most of them. Jesus clearly stated that He came to preserve the law, not abolish it (Matthew 5:17-18).
- The full witness of Scripture upholds marriage as a sacred covenant. In addition, Scripture teaches that the only approved context for sexual expression is between one man and one woman in the bonds of marriage.
- Both the Old and New Testaments undeniably condemn sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage, including fornication, adultery and homosexual acts. (NT passages addressing homosexuality as sinful behavior: Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Jude 7.)
- With regard to sexual sin, Jesus raised the standard even higher than that of the Old Testament, saying that even thinking of committing sexual sin (lusting) was in itself sinful (Matthew 5:27-28).
- While Jesus showed great compassion and offered forgiveness for those committing sexual sins, He instructed them to “sin no more” (John 8:11).

† **Back in “those days” they didn’t understand about homosexuality or different sexual orientations.**

- All of the human conditions that we find today have been with us since the

days of humanity’s fall into sin—this is obvious in both Scriptural and secular writings.

- The Bible condemns all varieties of sexual sin, emphasizing that sexual expression is reserved for marriage.
- Claims of proclivity toward certain sins (e.g. pedophilia) do not mitigate the sinful (and sometimes illegal) nature of acting on such “drives” or desires.
- The issue of whether or not homosexuals are “born gay” is hotly debated among scientists. Nearly all scientists agree that it is impossible to pinpoint a genetic cause for homosexual attraction; rather, it appears to be caused by multiple social, psychological and biological factors. The validity of research claiming to prove genetic causes of homosexuality has been seriously challenged, and many scientists have dismissed such findings due to bias.

† **Jesus was inclusive. He accepted everyone. Why can’t you be inclusive? Why do you want to exclude people?**

- Jesus loves us (despite our sinfulness), but He loves us too much to leave us in our brokenness and sin.
- Jesus offers love, compassion and salvation to all who place their trust in Him, but those who do not believe are condemned (John 3:16-18). He desires that none should perish—but neither can He compromise the justice of God.
- The message and promise of the Gospel are centered on the transforming power of Christ through His death and Resurrection, which provides hope for all who receive His gift of grace.

† **I’m not going to leave the Church I’ve been in all my life just because they have a gay bishop in New Hampshire.**

- The crisis in the Episcopal Church is far deeper than the ordination of a non-celibate homosexual. Not only has the Episcopal Church changed Anglican doctrine with respect to morality and sexuality; but many Episcopal leaders, including bishops, also no longer uphold basic Christian teachings such as the divinity of Christ, His unique and essential role in salvation, His Resurrection, and the Gospel message of redemption itself. Is this the expression of faith that reflects your personal belief system as a Christian?
- The Episcopal Church has been hijacked by those who have abandoned 2,000 years of Christian faith and teaching.

- The crisis in the Anglican Communion is centered on the authority of Scripture, and it is a crisis that affects each and every Episcopalian. Each man, woman, child, congregation and diocese must “choose this day whom you will serve.”

Go to the AAC website to view the entire body of “tough questions,” or contact the AAC office to request a hard copy. Other questions addressed include:

- † “God is all about love. Why can’t you just love your neighbor?” (Why do you hate homosexuals?)
- † “Hooker always talked about the three-legged stool of Scripture, tradition and reason, so why do you want to completely ignore our applying reason today?”
- † “Isn’t this issue just like women’s ordination and civil rights?”
- † Questions on divorce, baptism, being judgmental, and the Bible’s view of women and slavery.

Note: These answers draw from Scripture as well as resources from Dr. Robert Gagnon, the Rt. Rev. John Howe, and the Rev. Dr. Peter Moore. ♦

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The spin from the Episcopal Church is deliberately disingenuous. The facts are that ECUSA spent at least \$500,000 in 2005 on property disputes; is rapidly building a war chest; and intends to use the courts to gain control of property and assets they neither paid for nor own, and to which they have no legitimate claim. There seems to be a clear tie between *Via Media*’s seditious plans to seize illegal and un-canonical control of dioceses following General Convention, and the vast sums of money ECUSA intends to raise. The biggest deception of all is the ridiculous assertion that the Episcopal Church is “defending” congregations. In fact, the national Church clamored to join three lawsuits in Los Angeles and was told by the court that they had no legal standing or claim whatsoever.

It is faithful churches committed to the historic faith and order and to traditional Anglican doctrine that are being forced to defend themselves in court at great sacrifice. I urge you to pray for hearts to be transformed, for cooler heads to prevail, and for true and fair settlements to be negotiated. ♦



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Matthew's and Trinity for as long as the people and my bishop allowed me to," he explained. "It's my calling."

During the last 10 months, "Father Mark" has concentrated on building relationships within his congregations as well as the communities in which he ministers. His short-term goal is to grow the two missions and help parishioners become accustomed to attending church twice a week. In his brief tenure, he has begun a weekly Bible study and a Wednesday evening Mass in Comanche.

"I kicked off the first Wednesday Mass in Comanche by cooking chili for everyone," he said. "If you're starting a new thing, you better feed people."

In order to foster a sense of community, Fr. Stockstill and his wife hosted a cookout at the vicarage during their second month on the job and planned a Mardi Gras party complete with roasted pig to lead them into Lent. These events, and Fr. Stockstill's visibility on the streets of the small towns, have made an impact on the communities.

"People are used to seeing me roam around in my collar—I sort of stand out since the majority of the community are Baptists, Methodists and Church of Christ," he noted. "My wife and I have season tickets for the high school football games, and I'm a member of Kiwanis."

This month, Fr. Stockstill has undertaken a new opportunity guaranteed to make him a household name in Comanche and beyond. He has agreed to serve as a sportscaster on the local country FM radio station – KYOX, The Ox – and his reports air several times throughout the day. In lieu of payment, the radio station gives St. Matthew's and Trinity a 30-minute spot each Sunday on both AM and FM radio.

Already, Fr. Stockstill has become known around town as the "Godfather of Sports."

"I've always loved sports," he said. "This gives me an opportunity to report on local and national sports and have fun bantering back and forth on the air. I played sports my whole life and coached my seminary team for two years. We only played one game a year, known as the Lavabo Bowl, against Seabury Western – Nashotah House won each year."

For the pre-recorded Sunday spots, Fr. Stockstill plans to present a Bible study on one of the lessons appointed for

that Sunday.

"I also want to introduce listeners to our traditional Episcopal hymns and help non-Episcopalians get to know more about our church," he explained. "For example, I'll explain about Lent, and I plan to play 'All Glory, Laud and Honor,' and use that to teach about Palm Sunday. I hope we'll start getting questions I can answer during the show following the Bible study so people get insight about our church."

Fr. Stockstill sees both radio shows as a great opportunity for evangelism as well as education.

"I want to reach the un-churched, and I also want to help others understand that we have fun, that we're human," he said. "Since the Episcopal Church has a small presence in the community, some people in town think we're a bunch of weirdoes – I want to help them see who we really are."

According to Fr. Stockstill, the controversy in the national Church has not caused division in his congregations.

"We're very conservative, and we know sin is sin," he said. "I preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ every week and focus on the unsaved."

Fr. Stockstill is fun-loving and energetic, and committed to a vision for the two churches he serves.

"My dream is that we can reach parish status," he said. "The diocese supports us as missions now, and we need to grow numerically and financially until we become self-sufficient and can contribute to the ministry of our diocese." ♦

The American Anglican Council is a network of individuals (laity, deacons, priests and bishops), parishes and specialized ministries who affirm Biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy within the Anglican Communion. In response to the Lord's calling and by His grace, we commit ourselves to proclaim the Good News to every person and to reform and renew the Church of Jesus Christ. We are uniting in order to fulfill our apostolic mission and ministry, working to build a faithful Anglican witness in the Americas.

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