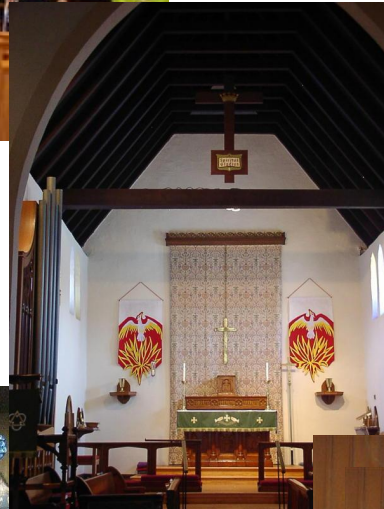
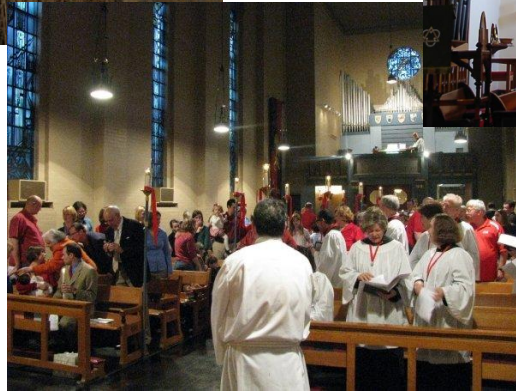
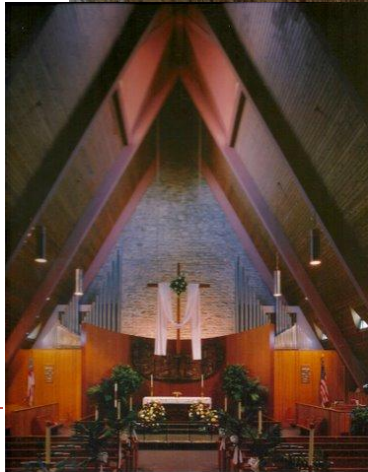
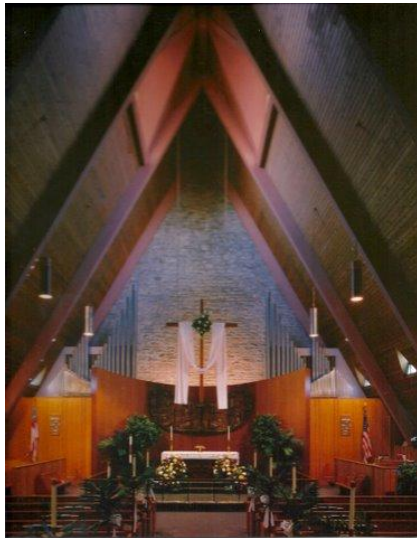


A conversation among Vital Metro III congregations



July 17, 2010
Convocation
Meeting





Congregational Vitality

A conversation at Metro III Convocation

Some Terminology First

- ▶ **ASA** means “average Sunday attendance” a better measure of congregation size and vitality than “membership.”
- ▶ **“Emergent Church”** a term applied to congregations which are developing worship forms and practices that express their emerging understanding of Christian Faith.
- ▶ **“Fresh Expressions”** is the term sometimes applied to such congregations in England
- ▶ **Parochial Report** the data each congregation files with diocese and Episcopal Church Center which are used in studies.



Terms, continued

▶ Modernism.

- ▶ This is what most of us in this room grew up with, a view of the world governed by ideas of progress, absolute truth and science.
- ▶ Things are either true or false, historical or mythic, good or bad, rational or irrational.

▶ Post Modernism.

- ▶ Dichotomies are out, ambiguity and “hybridity” are in.
- ▶ Authority and tradition are subject to scrutiny, new valuation of experience over reason, community over institution, justice over authority.
- ▶ “It’s Complicated”





Some Authors to look at

Phyllis Tickle's *The Great Emergence*

- ▶ Claims that every 500 years there are times of great cultural upheaval
- ▶ In these times, such as
 - ▶ Fall of Jerusalem,
 - ▶ Fall of Rome,
 - ▶ Era of Great Schism,
 - ▶ Reformationthe church “has a big rummage sale” and undergoes huge change
- ▶ We are living in one of those times.



Brian McLaren

- ▶ Author of *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN*
 - ▶ Represents a “new wave” within American Evangelical Christianity
 - ▶ Embracing ambiguity
 - ▶ Open to ancient worship forms
 - ▶ Sees Christianity as about social justice, not just personal salvation.
-



Diana Butler Bass

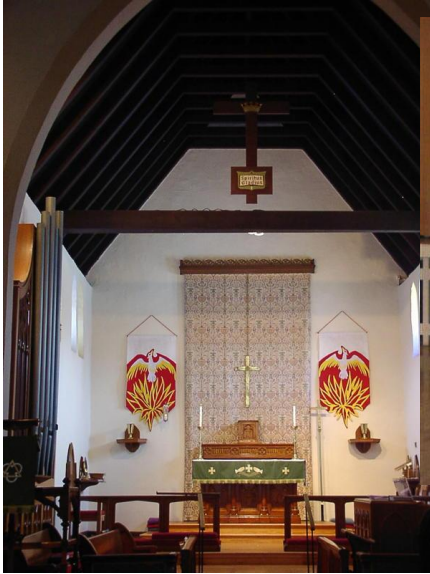
- ▶ Describes her religious autobiography in *Strength for the Journey: A Pilgrimage of Faith in Community*.
 - ▶ Engaged in research on “Congregational Vitality” and published findings in *The Practicing Congregation* and a collection of essays from different congregations called *From Pilgrims to Nomads*.
 - ▶ *Christianity for the Rest of Us* describes changes in mainline Protestantism in her lifetime and shows “Signposts of Renewal.”
 - ▶ In *A People’s History of Christianity* she highlights strands of the tradition which often are overlooked.
-



Marcus Borg

- ▶ Not obviously about church growth but great for helping people give words to what they believe:
 - ▶ *The Heart of Christianity*
 - ▶ *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*
 - ▶ *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*
- ▶ With John Dominic Crossan:
 - ▶ *The First Christmas*
 - ▶ *The Last Week*
 - ▶ *The First Paul*





What follows is mainly from Diana
Butler Bass

Rethinking Mainline Protestant Decline

- ▶ More and more people are taking part in more than one religious tradition.
- ▶ More and more people are engaging religion online.
- ▶ It is not true that “conservative churches are growing” and “liberal churches” are declining.
- ▶ Media depict churches if at all as places where people are in conflict (usually over sexuality) or places of scandal and hypocrisy.
- ▶ DBB sees congregational vitality in mainline traditions where there is a clear sense of mission and an embrace of intentional practice.



The New Old Church

- ▶ **Holy Communion in Memphis holds a Sunday p.m. service**
 - ▶ Church filled with candles and plants
 - ▶ Instrumental music and Celtic inspired versions of evening prayer and communion liturgies.
 - ▶ People are invited to light candles at the intercessions as a symbol of their prayers
 - ▶ Holy Water available
 - ▶ Liturgy evolves and changes, focusing on awe, mystery, hospitality
 - ▶ Liturgical leaders pray and plan together for an hour before worship



Church of the Epiphany in DC

- ▶ Past Decline
 - ▶ Long history of social justice ministry, close to White House
 - ▶ Congregation dwindled
- ▶ Leadership vision of “Ministry to downtown” rather than just to members.
 - ▶ Embraced diversity
 - ▶ Began food ministry
 - ▶ Developed “Welcome Table” food and bible study and worship ministry
 - ▶ Line between “the homeless” and “members” melted
 - ▶ “Radical Hospitality” & real diversity
 - ▶ Ministers to downtown workers by offering lunchtime services, labyrinth walks, places to eat lunch. “Downtown Common”



Some enlivening Christian Practices

- ▶ Hospitality
- ▶ Discernment
- ▶ Healing
- ▶ Contemplation
- ▶ Testimony
- ▶ Diversity
- ▶ Justice
- ▶ Worship
- ▶ Reflection
- ▶ Beauty



Congregational Vitality

- ▶ Not a program or a magic bullet
- ▶ Not necessarily about growing congregation (although intentional congregations usually grow because they are not fighting or burning out and are clearly authentic)
- ▶ Not about conversion but about bearing witness
- ▶ Involves risk, change, commitment
- ▶ Involves listening to the culture, to the tradition and being clear that Christians “are different”
- ▶ About being disciples not volunteers, pilgrims not tourists.
- ▶ About personal and communal transformation.



Iona Community Prayer

Breath of God, breath of Life, breath of deepest yearning.

Come Holy Spirit.

Comforter, Disturber, Interpreter, Entuser

Come Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Friend, Lamplighter, Revealer of truth, Midwife of
change

Come Holy Spirit.



Some Congregations

- ▶ [The Crossing](#) (Boston, MA)
- ▶ [Columbia Hope Church](#) (Columbia, MO)
- ▶ [The Gathering](#) (Maplewood, MO)
- ▶ [St. Gregory of Nyssa](#) (San Francisco, CA)
[Palm Sunday at St. G's](#)
- ▶ [Church of the Apostles](#) (Episcopal/Lutheran) Seattle





Some Resources

Like 'em or hate 'em, they show people trying to be faithful.

Some Websites

- ▶ [Anglimergent](http://anglimergent.ning.com/) <http://anglimergent.ning.com/>
- ▶ [Emergent Village](http://www.emergentvillage.com/) <http://www.emergentvillage.com/>
- ▶ [Rejesus](http://www.rejesus.co.uk/) <http://www.rejesus.co.uk/>
- ▶ [Food pantry at St Gregory's](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PwKqzmnuEc&feature=related) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PwKqzmnuEc&feature=related>
- ▶ [Sara Miles talks about Food Pantry](http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcasts/videos/hidden/news/re-imagining-the-food-bank)
<http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcasts/videos/hidden/news/re-imagining-the-food-bank>
- ▶ [Huffington Post Religion Page](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/) www.huffingtonpost.com/religion/
- ▶ [Belief.net](http://www.belief.net) <http://www.belief.net>

