

Ministry White Paper
The Rev. Scott Petersen
Asst. Rector, Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
revpetersen@gmail.com / 561-427-7722
www.goodsheponline.org

To Learn more:

*CDO Profile: ID # 9508-3408

*Linkedin Resume: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/revscottpetersen>

*To see a portfolio of documents related to my ministry and this white paper click <http://www.box.net/revpetersenresume>

*I briefly address the following questions in this piece. The responses should give at least an indication of my application of Christian theology in the priesthood and my hopes going forward. The questions addressed in this Ministry White Paper are: **Where is the church's hope? Who is called to do ministry? What is the priest's role in leading ministers? What does it mean to be a "member" of the parish? What are my thoughts on the "E" word? What are my hopes about the next parish?***

An introduction of sorts...

When I did Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Goodwin House, I found a wonderful keepsake which still sits on my desk at church. I was there for ten weeks following my second year at seminary. Goodwin House is an elder care facility where I ministered to those at Goodwin House's advanced care and Hospice floor. I found the following item at their little second hand store. The store was full of knick knacks that came mostly from those who had... well... died. When I saw it I remember laughing out loud. I had to buy it.

The keepsake is an old desktop nameplate. It didn't have a name on it. Instead of a name on the bronze metal plate there was the following engraved reminder "God is not finished with me yet." There it was. It was a true statement as ever as I heard it while I was making my way toward ordination. What made my buy it though was not the true and humorous reminder, but also the fact that the metal plate that held the reminder was actually falling off the wood. There in visual form was my ministry. There it was: "God is not finished with me yet"-- and just holding on. As I have been in ministry in the church as a priest, it seems more and more true. The church is continually in transition and often lives into the "not finished yet" and just holding on. The disciples and the heroes of scripture all reveal their very real human nature by hesitating at times in following God and just seeming to hang on when doing so. And what accelerates the profundity of my little trinket is that all of us... the Church... the heroes of scripture...the local church have received the message in part from those that have gone before us. The trinket sits on my desk still and I hope always. It is humorous but very real reminder of my place and ministry in God's church.

So what follows are my thoughts about the following questions. I wrote them as a way to better articulate the thinking which guides my call as a priest. It is also a way for others to get a glimpse into who I am. They are just thoughts. They are neither complete nor finalized. God, after all, is not finished with me yet...

Where is the church's hope?

The church's hope is in Jesus Christ. It is often said that Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The Gospel account certainly bears this out. Jesus is discovered in scripture in communion with the outcast and downtrodden. He comforts the marginalized. Jesus is also discovered in the Gospels in debate with the priests. To he or she who believes they have "it" Jesus challenges. To the man or woman who has lost sight of God's grace, Jesus gently reminds. Our hope then, as it is to be lived out in church is in Jesus Christ. As a priest in Christ's church the call is to reveal this truth. It is an opportunity to share God's love with people where they are. For some (and even from time to time I need to hear this myself) God's love needs to be transmitted in a loving way that will challenge. Too often, in a culture that teaches that we should be pulling ourselves up by our boot straps, we can begin to believe that we are running our own show. Here the message must seek to afflict. It is virtually impossible to "seek God first" if one is convinced that he or she is running the show. The message then "afflicts" the believer so that he or she once again sees they are a child of God. For others (and like the first, from time to time I need to hear this message myself) the message must comfort. To the one who has forgotten that God loves them the message must strive to remind. In sickness, financial reversal, mourning, and difficulty the hope that is to be expressed in Jesus Christ is the message that God has not forgotten them. The hope expressed "comforts" the afflicted. In any church at any time there is the need to stay focused on our hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ.

Who is called to do ministry?

Ministry is the responsibility of the baptized. Too often the sphere of church becomes the limit of ministry. This means that it can be perceived that the only people called to Christian service are those who might wear a collar, be Wardens of the Vestry, or prepare the Altar on Sunday. While being clergy is an important role it is not everything. The same is true of the Vestry and Altar Guild. Worship itself is a wonderful opportunity for the baptized to participate but even that has limits. When we come from the mindset that the church is limited only to the ministry by the Clergy, Vestry, and Worship Ministers we begin to stray from the significance of baptism. We begin to stray from the profound implication found in our very Baptism that God has not only called us to be His but that through our baptism we are sent out into the world. Baptism by its very nature is transformative. As one of our central sacraments the church the baptized dies with Christ and is raised in Christ's resurrection. It is the moment when the weak and marginalized discover that while on their own, they may still be weak and marginalized, but they are now, through baptism, the recipients of God's great call. It is by His strength they are now called to minister. God becomes our great strength and calls all in the church to live out that call through worship, service, and stewardship.

Personally I am well aware with the audaciousness of call. Certainly, as I have grown in my specific call as priest there have been moments in my pure humanity I have questioned what God was thinking in calling me. There have been moments when I have said something along the lines of “you want me to become a priest...me?” Yet it is in our baptism that God calls us. It is in our baptism that God leads us. It is through our baptism that God transforms us if we are willing to follow.

This turns the idea of gathering at church to do ministry at worship on its head. While there is the opportunity to do ministry at worship, the bigger story is that we gather at worship in order to prepare the baptized for ministry in the world. The gathering of the community, therefore, rather than being the end of Christian service, is actually the leaping-off point of ministry. The emphasis of any church worship should be the teaching, caring for, and raising up of the community to bolster the courage of those gathered so that they become better aware that they have been called to lead/live out/ and transmit the gift that they have become God’s people in baptism.

What is the Priest’s role in leading ministers?

Certainly from the administrative end, the priest’s role is to lead the church with the Vestry. From that body of leaders comes the vision. The vision is the imagined direction the parish will go in leading its common life. From that body of leaders will also come the budget. The budget dictates the space from within which the common life may travel. The priest and the vestry lead the parish which influences the scope of ministry from which the staff, ministry heads, and the people take their direction.

The question though deals in a greater sense with the priest’s call to lead leaders. One of the priest’s chief roles is in helping the body of the church understand their call in Baptism. That means the priest’s call is in encouraging all those he or she comes in contact with to live into their ministry. From a systems approach this means the priest and parish leadership develop an approach to leadership which demonstrates, teaches about, encourages, is open to new ministry, fosters mentoring, and ultimately allows new members the opportunity to grow into established roles of ministry.

What does it mean to be a “member” of the parish?

In some places in the Episcopal Church a “member” is defined by as anyone who shows up. While definition might be varied as to what constitutes “membership” there are realities which lend themselves to defining a “member” as a person who regularly worships, ministers, and offers stewardship through regular giving. If we do seek to be a church that welcomes all who come through our door I think we severely limit both our responsibility to those who find us and our need as a corporate entity by not having a pronounced and systematic expectation of what “membership” means. In most parishes there is a need to define, teach, and encourage what it means to be a “member.”

One of the responsibilities of a parish as a Christian community is to teach, preach, and demonstrate the call (and joy) of Christian living. As much as we might try there are many who will not discover Christian living by osmosis. As with any new thing there are those who need to see it, hear it, learn it and ultimately must make the choice to live it. “Membership” is no exception. Our first responsibility is to teach, preach, and demonstrate that at the core of our Christian practice is Worship, Ministry, and Stewardship. These are, by their very nature, instruments or practices of transformation. In Worship the one discovers more intimately God who has called them to the community and learns the faith. By getting involved in ministry they will come to know their community and in doing so, discover that they are not alone and that our joy is not complete until we give it away. In Stewardship they recognize, sometimes for the first time, their blessings. Our trusting God by giving away a portion of our blessings strengthens our trust in God as the giver.

By *not* defining “membership” as Worship, Ministry, and Stewardship we also limit the reach and scope of Christ’s church. The Church does not live in a vacuum. The church does not exist for its own sake. We have a corporate call that includes our own worship space, salaries, and ministries, but also includes a corporate responsibility to attend to the needs of the wider church and the world. If we are too timid to ask that people who come to our church to also move toward the expectation of Worship, Ministry, and Stewardship, we are also limiting the church’s future reach.

What are my thoughts about the “E” word?

I hesitate to even write the “E” word. It is a word that has become politically loaded. The word is Evangelism. I’m not entirely sure why it has become *so* politically loaded and even distasteful to some in mainline churches. Every week at most Episcopal churches the priest or deacon reads the Gospel. What is interesting is that in its original sense the word Gospel and Evangelism are intimately related. Gospel comes from the old English godspel (glad tidings.) Godspel was the rendering of the Greek word Evangelion which means Good News. So at its core, the “E” word means Good News.

One of the reasons it may have become so politicized is that Evangelism became associated with proselytizing. Proselytizing carries with it the idea of winning over or coercion. These two words I think need to become separate again.

As I have mentioned before, the Christian faith as expressed through the Episcopal Church is about transformation. We have our hope in Christ. We are made new through Baptism. We come to better know God through our faith communities. This means we do have something to offer. We have “Good News.”

If we have Good News then we should strive to share it. In this day in age I don’t think this means we should go knocking on doors or yelling from street corners. Producing tracts does not seem to be the way forward either.

In thinking about it, those means of knocking, yelling, and handing out tracts used to be the accepted way to get information out into the community. Salesmen went door to door. The news was once shouted then sold on corners. Written literature was (and can still be) a way to engage people. In our day in age these are not the proscribed means of engaging our community.

While person to person contact is still the most genuine and effective way to invite a person to discern the faith it is not always available. If you have something valuable for people to discover then it seems that one should make the effort to share it. In our day an age, any church needs to engage the community through the medium's that are accepted. That means utilizing the internet, having a interactive web site, harnessing email, and finding creative ways of entering the community to become known.

In the 1950's it was effective Evangelism to open the doors of the church and wait for the people to come in. In the 1950's the culture supported, even promoted, the idea that church was the place to go on Sunday. It is no longer the case. Opening the door is not enough... The church's challenge in 2009 is to enter into peoples mind enough so that our future members become curious enough to find our open doors in the first place. Our efforts as a church should focus on getting people through our front doors and to then be prepared to welcome them when they do.

The Good News is that God is still good. Our good news is that as a church God has not finished with us. The good news of the Good News is that it continues to call, enrich, and transform. The good news about our call is that the God who calls communities to step out in faith to re-discover their communities and invite people to their door is the same God who will leads us to discover them.

What are my hopes about the next parish?

There are no perfect parishes as there are no perfect priests. There is no perfect community for me to love and serve just as I will not be the perfect answer to any community who calls. Yet we are to be guided by hope. My hope for my next parish revolves around its mission, its sense of self, and how it supports the role of priest.

Mission: My hope is to be called to a community that is comfortable in their own shoes yet who also wish to share what they have. So many communities get comfortable and then seem to forget that we become transformed in Christ not simply for our own sake, but for the next person down the line. God calls a community not simply for itself, but also for those future members who are seeking the very same community. The call is to keep those future members in mind. Those future members are in a sense already a part of the community but simply not known yet. Our task as Episcopal Christians is to find, invite, welcome, and integrate those people into our parishes. My hope is to find a Episcopal community who has begun to sense and has expressed as a community (not simply a few individuals) a desire to share what they have and are willing to go through the work to do so. The work is the challenge. It takes a common vision to reach out. It takes collective insight to prepare a community. It takes building internal systems which

will allow growth to happen. It takes a willingness to reach out and a willingness to allow those future members to take on roles in the church. It takes a collective willingness to live into the spiritual life of sharing our time, our talent, and our treasure.

Sense of self: One of the great gifts that I have received being at Good Shepherd is to be in a community that has a sense of humor. My hope is to be called to such a place that has a sense of humor. I think that it is an often understated but essential quality in church life. I have appreciated being in a place where it can be expressed. Granted, the work of ministry is not always a time of mirth. There are both challenges in doing the work of parish life and the seriousness of being a sign of Christ's mercy to those in difficulty. Yet, at the same time humor is essential. We often feel the most relaxed when we can laugh. Being relaxed allows us to be ourselves...our fallible, faithful, interesting selves. Having a sense of humor then for me is not simply being able to tell a joke in church but the expression of who we are. I think it boils down to not taking ourselves too seriously while taking the message seriously. All communities are different but it is my hope to find one that has the ability to laugh in its DNA.

Support: Ministry is not done in a vacuum. We often find Christ in community. Most of us further experience God in community. We need each other. Certainly a priest does not make a church. It is the community with the priest who makes church. The priest is simply one role of many that is lived out in the community. A priest's role is to celebrate the Eucharist, preside in liturgy, preach, care for the sick, love the community, teach, and lead... not necessarily in that order. A priest though can not do what he or she is called to do without his or her community. Personally, after all, being a priest is not my only role. I am an individual, a father, and husband. My hope is to be welcomed into a community that has a strong sense of those other essential roles a priest lives. It would provide a fair living understanding that I am my family's chief breadwinner. It would understand that my children and wife are their own persons. It would support and encourage my need as a family man and individual to rest (Sabbath), vacation (to vacate), and development (continuing education/ sabbatical.) None of us can do on our own what we are called to do together. I seek a community that is willing to support the role of priest without sacrificing the other roles which by their very nature give life to it.