



**Church of the Redeemer
Visions of Ministry
May 13-14, 2011**

Record of Proceedings

Friday, May 13, 2011

Liturgy

After a light supper, the evening began with a Service of Light. Various members of the community took part in the liturgy.

Welcome and Review of Agenda

Andrew Asbil greeted everyone, thanking them for their time. Andrew introduced The Very Rev'd Peter Elliott, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver and welcomed him.

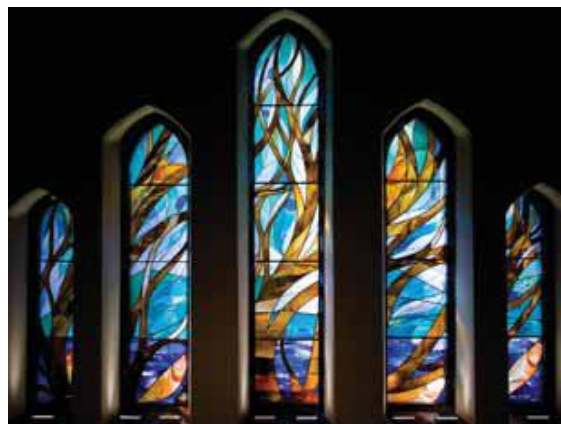
Marjorie Wrightson walked everyone through the agenda and explained where each of the 12 small discussion groups would meet.

Peter Elliott's Introductory Remarks

Peter Elliott displayed an image of the earth from space and spoke of the earth as being the icon of the 21st century. We are all in this together. He also referred to this image as the body of Christ.



He also referred to the Tree of Life stained glass windows in Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver. The windows celebrate the interconnectedness of all creation. We are all members of one another. It is a statement of truth about the human condition.



Peter also showed us two images from Assisi, Italy. One is of the grand Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, and the other is of the Porziuncola inside the basilica, which was the original chapel where St. Francis first understood his vocation.



Using this example, Peter called attention to the structure that has been built around the original site of the experience of the divine by St. Francis. He suggested we need to move away from the structure of the church and go back into what called us originally to be followers of Jesus.

The Woodcarver

Peter Elliott gave a brief introduction to the poem *The Woodcarver* and spoke about meeting Parker Palmer, a Quaker author, educator and activist he (Peter) had met while on sabbatical. After watching a four minute video in which Parker Palmer spoke about *The Woodcarver*, the community went off into 12 small groups to discuss the poem.

Presentation #1 – The Work Behind the Work

After the community returned from their small discussion groups, Peter Elliott commented that the woodcarver had to go into silence, forgetting about himself. Sometimes we just launch into the big issues. We need to contemplate who we are as disciples of Jesus. Our work Friday evening will bear fruit on Saturday.

Peter then spoke about Mission and referenced the reading in the Service of Light of Jesus appearing to Thomas. Anyone associated with Jesus was at risk. The disciples had seen the brutality of the crucifixion and were suffering what we would call post-traumatic stress. They would have expected Jesus to say “Why did you let me down?” or “Let’s go get them”, but instead his words were ones of peace. By not uttering words of revenge or retribution, Jesus broke the cycle of violence. He breathed the Holy Spirit on them and just as the Father had sent Jesus to end the cycle of violence, Jesus was sending the disciples forth to do the same. Peter suggested Thomas’ disbelief was that Jesus would come back speaking of peace, and not revenge. Only God can break the cycle of violence.

Jesus breathed on the disciples. Peter noted that the name of God, Yahweh, is like the sound of breathing.

Peter asked what it is that God is up to in the world. It is our job to figure it out and to be part of it. God is not limited to the institutional church.

Peter then gave us a brief overview of Mission through the centuries.

- During the Enlightenment the goal was to convert the heathen and spread Western culture. There were close connections between mission and colonialism.
- After World War II there was a shift. There were questions about where the church was during the Third Reich. The World Council of Churches met in Amsterdam in 1948. Mission needed to have a social dimension.
- Vatican II (early 1960's) – needed a bigger church organization.
- Late 1980's and 1990's – Missio Dei: God's mission in the world is to bring about shalom, new creation. How is God acting in the world, and how do we get to be part of it?
 - Mend the broken creation
 - Fragmentation between humanity, nature and God
 - Healing of self and creation
 - Restore all things to unity in Christ, but not to make all Christians
 - We all have personal journeys of growth so that we can be better people in the world
 - Peter recounted being with the Most Rev. Dr. Desmond Tutu in Vancouver when they encountered a protest by right-wing Christians against the Dalai Lama because he wasn't Christian. The Archbishop commented that God is not a Christian.
 - The mission of God is bigger than our institutions. We need to turn upside down how we think of church.
- Church as a Missionary Society:
 - A new society into which we are baptized
 - All baptized persons are called into the work of this missionary society
 - Calling the baptized into the activity of this missionary society is the work of liturgy
 - Counter-culture: create a new reality in the world
 - Peter explained a week ago he had attended the annual meeting of Cathedral Deans from North America in Houston, Texas. Christ Church Cathedral, Houston was left an oil well in someone's will. This generates revenue of about \$186,000 per month. The Cathedral bought the lot across the street and built The Beacon, a one-stop service for the homeless.
 - One session during the annual Deans' meeting was with 4 homeless people who told their stories and answered questions. On the wall behind where the homeless were sitting was an image of the risen Christ. This is an example of the new reality we can provide to people in the world.



Summary of Pre-Retreat Survey Results

Peter Elliott thanked Amy and Audrey for the summary they had produced of pre-retreat survey results. All were invited to take the one-page report home to read prior to presentation of more detailed results Saturday morning.

Closing Liturgy

The community joined in Peace Prayers at the conclusion of the evening.

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Morning Session

Liturgy

After sharing coffee and muffins, the community joined in a Celtic Liturgy. During this time the 12 small groups broke off to discuss the reading (1 Peter 2.2-10) in more detail.

Survey Results

Amy began by explaining that during a planning conference call Peter Elliott had suggested a few questions to start people thinking and to gather feedback prior to the retreat. Other members of the planning team suggested other questions and a 17-question survey was set up on SurveyMonkey.com. By the time the survey was closed at 6 PM on Thursday, May 12, 91 people had completed all or part of it. Amy then proceeded to walk the gathering through the slides that provided demographic information.

Audrey commented that the responses received provided a rich repository of insights about the community. Our sense of community is very important and it is a core thread through everything we do. Although we recognize we have challenges, we are working from a position of strength. We are grateful as a parish for the gifts we have in the community. Audrey then took the group through responses to open-ended questions.

In response to a question from the floor, Andrew Asbil replied that Redeemer has 1196 individuals (including children) in the parish, representing about 600 households. The list is culled every year before the Vestry Meeting by staff, including the bookkeeper. These numbers represent active members.

In response to a question from the floor about how Redeemer compares to other Anglican churches, Peter Elliott commented that we are aging, but so is the general population. Numbers of members, donations and participation rates have been going down across the country with most congregations losing members or amalgamating. In urban centres more

robust, diverse congregations are found. Redeemer seems to be an exception to the general downward trend.

Peter Elliott displayed a slide which showed changes over the last dozen years:

Givers	-12%
Parish Members	-19%
Baptisms	-26%
Confirmations	-26%
Parish Income	+7%
Active Clergy	+10%
General Synod Income	-42%
Anglican Journal Circulation	-33% (over 15 years)
Bishops	+4%

In response to a question from the floor, Audrey confirmed that we accept people as they are. We respect those who are not Christian and do not try to proselytize them.

A parishioner commented that the survey results had not met her needs because ideas were not creative. We are saying what we are doing, not what we could be doing. What do we mean by “God”? There should be more progressive ways to talk about hard issues.

In response to a request from the floor, Audrey confirmed there had been a few comments about the capital campaign and space. A PDF of all free-form comments can be made available in future for perusal by all.

Comments from the floor noted that the Anglican Church is not the only one to be in decline. A US study has shown that there is a decline of mainline religion and that “big box” churches are also declining. Other threats include young people being exposed to atheism among their friends.

Witnesses

The number of people who have given their Friday evening and Saturday to this visioning retreat is greatly appreciated. Four witnesses have come forward to document the process, ensure action is taken on the recommendations, and report back to the parish regularly on progress. These witnesses are Karen Clarke, Louise Greig, Joan Robinson and Marjorie Wrightson.

Open Space

Peter Elliott briefly described the *Open Space* concept developed by Harrison Owen. Participants were invited to consider the question “What are the issues and opportunities at Church of the Redeemer over the next 3 to 5 years?” Anyone who was prepared to lead a discussion on something was asked to write their topic on a Post-It note with their name, location and time for the conversation and place it on the south wall of the parish hall which had been designated the “Community Bulletin Board”. Discussions could continue over the

lunch period if necessary. Each group was given a standard form to document the conversation and next steps which would be presented during the afternoon.

Afternoon Session

Immediately after lunch Charles thanked the approximately 20 volunteers who had provided food, served and cleaned up during the retreat. Special thanks go to Rick who coordinated Saturday's hospitality, Sharon who was Friday night's crew chief, and Gus who prepared Friday's delicious red pepper soup.

Fish Bowl

Peter Elliott explained that he had taken a sabbatical in 2006. Before he left he was aware of anxieties in the parish, and there were things he wanted to say to the congregation. Upon his return he also wanted to talk about his time away.

Andrew Asbil said he was looking forward to the coming four months. Friday night Peter had mentioned that the name of God – Yahweh – is like the breath of God. Andrew recounted an incident when he was about 6 years old at night in bed when he seemed to become his breath and knew he was not alone in his room. That was his first inkling that God was. Andrew's sabbatical will be breathing room for him.

The last year has been difficult for Andrew. He turned 50, separated from his wife, and realized he had fewer years ahead of him than were behind him. He wants to use the four months to ask "Who am I?" "Who am I going to become?" "How do I want to spend the next few years as a parish priest?"

Andrew confirmed it is his intention to return to Church of the Redeemer. This is his dream job. He never wanted to be curator of a museum. This is an amazing, vibrant community which celebrates its faith and takes it seriously. Andrew feels good about where we are now in our programs and liturgy.

Peter asked Andrew what wakes him up at 2 AM. Andrew replied raising \$1.5 - \$2 million, and being on a vibrant corner but hiding ourselves, not appearing to passers-by that there is life inside.

In response to Peter's question about what he would want left behind when he eventually leaves, Andrew talked about the kind of footprint that would be left on our corner. He worries that the narrative of this community might be lost and that we might look inward and not blow the doors wide open.

In commenting on Stephen Reynolds' death, Andrew said it was a difficult journey watching and experiencing Stephen die. In some of the words of the liturgy, Stephen has returned. The community certainly misses his wisdom. Andrew misses Stephen around the staff table, reminding his colleagues why some words were written as they were. Andrew has been encouraged to see how the community is supporting Mary. In the future he looks forward and ahead to making room at the staff table for someone else.

Peter invited other members of staff to address their anxieties and hopes as Andrew goes on sabbatical.

- It is encouraging that people are coming forward to offer help over the summer.
- Pastoral Care has a plan for the time Andrew is away.
- The survey results show the community wants to assume more leadership in a positive, sharing way.
- Music slows down over the summer, giving staff an opportunity to reflect on what works, digest feedback, and think about what is on the horizon for the fall and future programming.
- Redeemer is bigger than any one person. Staff who are around can step in and get done what needs to be addressed during Andrew's absence.
- Staff all hope Andrew will have the time he needs over the next four months.
- Decisions are arrived at by consensus. Despite the fact Andrew will be away, the collective can continue to meet, discuss and make decisions. The hope is that meetings will continue and that staff don't revert into silos.

Andrew outlined the line-up for the summer. Liska Stefko, Jim Boyles and Tim Elliott will be the triumvirate in charge. While Liska is away on the mission trip with our youth and then on vacation, Jim and Tim will be in the office at least once a week on Wednesdays from 9 AM until after the noon Eucharist. Staff will meet Wednesdays for planning. Shirley Westmore, who makes everyone look really good, will be in charge of coordination. Andrew himself won't set foot in Redeemer during his sabbatical. His last meeting will be on May 31, and he will be back in the parish on October 1. All are asked to respect his time away.

Andrew will spend his time in 2 4-day silent retreats, serve one week as a chaplain at Chautauqua, 3 weeks in Québec with his children, writing, reading, and sleeping.

If there are any urgent messages that someone thinks need to get to Andrew during his sabbatical, they should be given to either Liska Stefko or Shirley Westmore.

Andrew was asked whether things would be different when he returned. Andrew admitted he comes from a family of workaholics. He knows at his age he doesn't have the energy he once had and knows he needs to work smarter, not longer. His children are now a huge priority in his life, but he also loves being a parish priest. The challenge is to find a balance between the two.

Although a 4-day week was suggested, Andrew realizes what applies to him also applies to other members of staff. How all staff and lay leaders work together and organize themselves is a collective decision. Andrew can't answer the question about afterwards until he's had time to reflect during his sabbatical.

Peter Elliott suggested on his first Sunday back Andrew just vest but have no other role in the Sunday liturgy. Perhaps 2-3 weeks later we could have a Sunday Forum at which time Andrew could update us on his time away.

In response to a question from the floor Andrew replied that he had one national church 3-day obligation in June – chairing a meeting of the Liturgy Task Force on alternate liturgies.

A parishioner commented on the notion that the rest of staff and lay leadership observe a similar period of reflection and discernment while Andrew is away. He felt parishioners shouldn't be ashamed to do ministry over the summer, and that he may be involved in some BBQ discussions about the upcoming capital campaign himself. Peter Elliott suggested we all consider some ways to create some space while still providing the glue that keeps Redeemer together.

In wrapping up the conversation, Peter Elliott spoke about meeting John Dominic Crossan a couple of years ago. Crossan commented on the fact that most people think the point of creation was the creation of humans. Actually the pinnacle of creation was the seventh day of rest (Saturday). Humans were created late on Friday afternoon, and we all know we don't do our best work on Friday afternoon! Everything in the created order needs rest. Humans need rest. Part of being is rest, and this is about justice. We need to respect boundaries around rest time. Peter prayed for Andrew and his time of rest.

Open Space Reports

Peter Elliott confirmed that the 4 witnesses were women and asked if the community wanted to add a man as a fifth witness. The group had no issue with an all-female witness team.

Peter commented that as individual groups reported some ideas might not yet have found their time. It is still important to hold onto them and in due course someone might well come along to champion an idea that hasn't found its home today.

One after another parishioners presented the results of individual open space discussions. These have been documented separately.

When the last report had been presented, Peter Elliott thanked everyone and reaffirmed that the witnesses would gather the material and feed it back to the community over time. Today was just the beginning. Peter Elliott summarized what he had heard as four major focuses that would be lived out through five practices. We are committed to building and growing at the Church of the Redeemer. Our four focuses are building community, discipleship, compassionate service and financial resources. Our practices are hospitality (especially to students and children), education (especially to adults and the intellectually curious), care and support of elders, generosity and integration.

Integration touched on the different services at Redeemer. A parishioner commented that it was important to recognize why each service was unique and distinct. Andrew Asbil clarified that we actually have 5 midweek and 7 Sunday communities.

Closing Remarks

Andrew Asbil mentioned that not long ago a new couple joined the parish. They started coming because a friend of a friend said this was a wonderful community. That friend of a

friend was an atheist who attends every Sunday. Andrew valued the honesty of the gathering and our ability to share our hopes and dreams.

Andrew thanked the planning committee for all they had done to make the retreat possible.

Andrew also thanked Peter Elliott for using his many gifts to pull us together over the last day and a half.

Closing Liturgy

The retreat concluded with a short closing liturgy.

Attachments

- Liturgy Booklet
- Agenda
- The Woodcarver
- 1 Peter 2.2-10
- Pre-retreat Survey Summary
- PowerPoint – Pre-retreat Summary
- Pre-retreat raw data, including all free-form comments
- Community Bulletin Board
- Open Space Reports