

Can you believe this?

We are now beginning 2011 - A New Year - and most of our churches are still thinking and doing the "same old things". We keep talking about renewal and growth but unfortunately we seem to keep doing and thinking as we always have for the last ? number of years. I am sure you have heard this definition of insanity by Albert Einstein, "*The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results*". Think about this quote for a second and ask yourself, does this quote apply to the way your church functions?

When we consider the amount of change in the last two centuries, especially in America, it should not be difficult for anyone to recognize that change continues to occur. Major events have created amazing change just in the last century and it doesn't seem to be slowing down and, in fact, maybe increasing as time passes. It is also evident that many of these changes are still in progress like, equal rights for women, the complete end of racial prejudice, changing understanding of human sexuality, the end of colonialism, moving toward a global economy, etc. The slowness of these and others only suggest how hard it is for people to make changes as life moves forward. Changes in our religious understanding and status is also in flux. In America and around the world there are many more religious denominations and a significant increase in thousands of individual churches and other independent groups. With the expansion of travel and communication the world has a new awareness of a wide variety and inconsistent expressions of religious thought. In our own Anglican Communion we struggle with certain topics that threaten us with division. Because change happens differently in issue and time for individuals and communities and, with the encroaching global effect in every area of life, we will continue to struggle with change. I am certain that everyone must come to terms with the inevitability of change.

One of my former bishops in the diocese of Newark, The Right Reverend John Shelby Spong, wrote an entire book entitled, "Why Christianity Must Change Or Die". This book was copyrighted in 1998 and, like many of his thoughts, was probably ahead of its time. He discusses that "A new reformation of the church's faith and practice" is essential for survival. Some think that he is famous while others declare him as infamous, but I would not dismiss the title of this book as irrelevant to a truth we must begin to learn. In many ways I consider him to be a prophet in our time and wish that more people could hear his warning to all churches, especially those who simply want to sing that old hymn, "Tell Me the Old, Old Story" - the stories we love to hear. We forget the words of the prophet Isaiah 42:6, 9, "*I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations. See, the earlier things have come to pass, new ones I now foretell; Before they spring into being, I announce them to you.*" The early church told us, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" - 2 Corinthians 5:17. Clearly our experience of the Spirit must be new everyday!

Recently there are five books that Seabury Books has published and these five books are suggested reading for the continuing life of our Episcopal Church. They are printed in paperback and very reasonable in price so that everyone who sees the handwriting on the wall may purchase them and consider their content so that we may experience a new creation and move from the old to a newer time. They are all titled with the words, "Mission-shaped" in the title. The one about the Church - "church planting and fresh expression of church in a changing context" has a forward by The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams. This, I believe, emphasizes the scope of our interest and the need for a fresh global expression. Here are the titles of the set:

- Starting from Zero with \$0 - building mission-shaped ministries on a shoestring - by Becky Garrison
- Mission-shaped Questions - defining issues for today's church - by Steven Croft, editor
- Mission-shaped Spirituality - the transforming power of mission - by Susan Hope

- Mission-shaped Church - church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context - Foreward by Dr. Rowan Williams
- Mission-shaped Parish - traditional church in a changing world - by Paul Bayes, Tim Sledge, John Holbrook, Mark Rylands & Martin Seeley

For the last ten years at least, before my retirement at age 72, I constantly announced to all who would hear me that *"money is seldom the problem while people are usually the problem"*. When you consider that the first book in the mission series suggests that you can begin with 0 dollars and develop outstanding new ministries on a "shoestring", I believe my statement is well proven by the living faith experiences of others. Stephanie Spellers, who has an exciting book on "Radical Welcome", is one of those cited in this particular book regarding her work in Boston, an innovative new work in their Cathedral Church. She is coming in January to the Diocesan Convention of the North Carolina where hopefully her witness will encourage radical new ideas for the leadership gathered at this convention. Bishop Curry has prefaced things well in the December Issue of the "Disciple" with its theme, "Making Room in the Inn", including a booklet inside on "Gospel Based Discipleship". I only hope that ears will hear and spirits will be empowered for new things in North Carolina as we begin 2011.

Perhaps the church will change when each of us is willing to make changes beginning with Welcome and Hospitality. Change begins with each individual in the community of faith but many are reluctant to make changes in their own lives first. In the December issue of "Disciple", on page 10, there is an article called "Season in Bloom" by The Rev. Angela Boatright-Spencer. In this article Angela points out, *"If we don't love and accept ourselves fully, just as we are (while acknowledging that we still can grow and improve), then it's hard for us to love and accept anyone else. Other people will always be invaders coming to crowd us out of an already small margin of grace."* Welcome begins with God's love fully residing in us so that we can make room for others and genuinely act like All Are Welcome, as many of our signs declare. Welcome is basically hospitality as defined by the Rev. Canon Timothy Boggs of our Washington National Cathedral, *"Hospitality is not merely making space for somebody else, it's about letting people into your hearts and letting them change you."*

When we recognize that all people are capable of leadership and ought to be leaders in our congregations, we will have the resources to make our witness become a reality to establish the Realm of God in our time and place. This is what Bishop Curry has presented in the "Disciple" as "Gospel Based Discipleship" that is essential for understanding and executing our mission as the people of God. For over five years I immersed myself in the study of **leadership** and summarized what I believe is the essence of leadership in an acronym of five points:

- **L**earning **E**nthusiastically
- **A**ppreciating **D**iversity
- **E**ncouraging **R**elationships
- **S**haring **H**ospitality
- **I**nspiring **P**eople

LEADERSHIP is possible when we are committed to these activities for ourselves and others. On our website there is a series of articles that explains the details of what is necessary in "Learning to Live Well" and contains a summary of much of my learning to train leaders. <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/LeadershipIntro.pdf>

It is very important to know that money is never the beginning of anything. Without people who are enthusiastically committed to a plan with the will to carry it through, ministry cannot happen. After a plan is presented there is usually some money available to get things started, but no amount of money will do much of anything if there are no people causing and continuing the vision. People are always first and foremost in

everything that begins and continues. We need to be entrepreneurs in our growing Global Capitalism by establishing Community Development Corporations within our church corporations to establish ministries that provide the leadership and programs to service needs in our communities. The Polity of ECUSA (The Episcopal Church in the United States of America) is ideal for such corporate opportunities. We are, quite frankly, a well organized "franchise" in the way we function together as a church and provide the backing and solidarity to have the necessary respect in today's economy. Keep in mind that many of the leaders and founders of this country were a part of the Church of England that later was incorporated by many of these leaders as the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. It is this not-for-profit corporate structure that will energize and support our efforts to serve others as a Faith-Based community.

Under the first Covenant with the Hebrews, after the Noahide Covenant that applies to the whole of humankind, the prophet Zachariah said to Zerubbabel, *"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."* (Zechariah 4:6 NIV) The people of God understood and experienced this Spirit as the enabling force of accomplishment in their lives. It was the same with those who were empowered by the Spirit in the New Covenant mentioned in Colossians (1:27 NIV), *"To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* It is always people who are energized by that Spirit who foster the Realm of God in their time. The words of an age-old blessing continues to assure us today, *"May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen."*