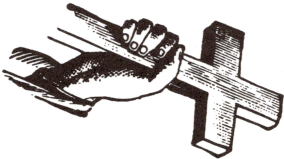


Today's church could look at itself and see whether the old club model is effective, or whether it needs more of the service organization approach. So many humans need the hand of their fellows, willingly given, without condescension, strings, or membership cards. Clubs are more concerned with orthodoxy, insiders and outsiders, than with services offered.



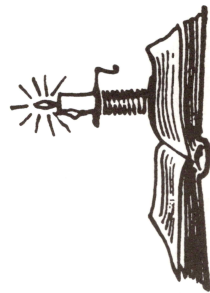
Many humans are considered outsiders by liveried churchmen: women, Gay and Lesbian people, divorced men and women, priests with wives and families, members of other sects, poor people, people of the other colors. It disturbs me that the church defines so many people as others, others who cannot be participants, others who are outsiders. The reality is that, to Jesus, there were no outsiders in the family of God.

One of the basic services that Jesus provided was belief in one's self. He entrusted his way to ordinary humans and asked them to trust themselves, to believe in themselves, and from this belief, to take his message to others. After all, it wasn't to the rabbis to whom he was born. It was to a carpenter and his educated wife. Not bad.

Another service Jesus had to offer was his way of walking in the street. His office was the roads and homes of the people. He was the itinerant salesman who found his customers where they lived and worked and played. That kept his message alive and real. He never would have been able to sell it if it didn't fit. It was *his* message so he could do with it what he wished. He brought it into Martha's home, into Peter's home, to the public well, to a tax-collector's home, to a soldier's servant, to a party at Cana. Not bad.

Today's Christian message, likewise, needs to be delivered by people with their feet in the street, by neighbor to neighbor, rather than solely entrusted to the hands of the distant churchman. And the churchman needs to be invited to walk in the street, to share the lot of his struggling fellows, to suffer or smile with the people who don't fit the model. At the end, the Pope and the PWA* cross into eternity together.

I have a lot of faith in the durability and adaptability of the message. "I will be with you all days, even to the end of the world." That's a strong warranty on a strong product. The best way to pass on the word is to offer it to any who want it. The salespeople and customers then form, not an exclusive club, but an inclusive service organization which brings us all one step closer to human unity and survival on this small world.



* People With AIDS

His service was always the way. His way was respect for one another, doing no harm to one's fellow, reaching out to one less fortunate, realizing that the person was primary, that all people deserved respect, that all are offspring of God. Nowhere did he ask if you were Jewish or if you had its mark on your body.

He approached and invited concourse with lepers, rabbis, Samaritan halfbreeds, beggars, rich men, wandering women, blind men, tax collectors, fishermen, short fellows, soldiers, wealthy sisters, families, and whomever else found his product salutary. He looked at the response in the heart, not at the trap-pings. The only ones he decried were the phonies: snake-children; painted, stinking tombs of death, he called them. Not bad.

What were some of the services Christ had to offer? On his cart were respect for one's self and for one's fellow; revenge as useless and destructive; more concern for one's neighbor than for rabbi-rules; peace; embracing *all* as fellows, not just one's ethnic counterparts; embracing a loving God; sharing one's goods and services with whom-ever needs them; adopting his approach as a way of being and living.

Recently, in a conversation with a friend, the thought occurred to me that the Churches so often see themselves as exclusive clubs: follow the rules and you can call yourself Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Assembly of God, whatever. There is little flexibility. Cross the line and you're out. Rules are rules.

A much more salutary model for Church is that of a service organization with a service to offer. Its customers are everywhere and of every stripe. It would embrace customers because of what they buy rather than what they look like on the outside. It would attract sales people because of what they believe rather than for their conformity.

Let me elaborate.

When Christ walked the roads, what was his approach? Did he ask lineage? health condition? genetic inheritance? stature? economic state? Or did he ask if one needed the service he had to offer? Did you want peace? Did you want forgiveness, healing? Would you like a relationship with a loving and parental God who wished people to call him Abba? (Abba, of all things. Dad. Startling. Some wouldn't even pronounce his name. And Jesus called him family.) Did you want a God who would have taken you under his wing as a mother hen her chicks? Would you like to live in peace with your fellow rather than worry about revenge? Would you rather keep your eyes and your teeth? Jesus offered a service to fill those needs. He offered the way.

A new note:

After much thinking, quiet reflection, speaking with friends, and listening to the spirit, I decided/discerned that I want to be Full-time Director of the Center. During the past 25 years, I have worked many outside jobs to support the Center and myself, & now I want to be Full-time here. The Center has much influence in this neighborhood, & stands as a beacon of hope to our people. We want to use this influence to turn the neighborhood around, to show the way for our neighbors to make this neighborhood a place people like. I will also continue my part-time teaching and my counseling practice. I enjoy both.

Our Board is happy with this decision and so am I. The time is right. We are now working on courses of funds for a salary & health benefits for my new position, and for monies to expand the Mobile Dental Service.

Prayers & blessings

Fr. Tom, John &
Dahlia

ST FRANCIS
NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER



Summer 92

St. Francis Neighborhood Center

**936 Whitelock Street
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Rev. Thomas Composto John K. Taylor, III
Directors

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