

**Courageous Change: Part One**  
**The Kellogg Lecture 2011**  
**Episcopal Divinity School**  
**May 5, 2011**

*Lecture by Bonnie Anderson, DD, President of the House of Deputies of The Episcopal Church*

It is a pleasure and honor to be with you at this distinguished seminary. EDS is a courageous seminary. Known for commitment to living the Gospel values of justice, compassion and reconciliation. EDS attracts innovative and brilliant faculty, staff and students. EDS is not afraid of change.

This place is right for talking about courageous change. We have seen EDS live into that paradigm for over 150 years. Here are a few excerpts from a document called, "Timeline of our School" created by Fredrica Harris Thompsett:

- In the 1880s ETS was the first seminary to teach historical biblical criticism (which at first had been condemned by the House of Bishops).
- 1965 After students and faculty join a civil rights march in Selma, AL, Jonathan Daniels and Judith Upham stay on in Selma for the spring term with approval from faculty.
- 1968 Robert Bennett, first black professor, hired by ETS.
- Early 1970s faculty vote to admit openly gay and lesbian students.
- 1975 EDS hires two Philadelphia ordained women priests.

So thank you for inviting me to be here today. There are a lot of courageous people in this room. I pray you will be generous as some of my remarks may strike you as naïve in light of your own experience with change.

The lectures I have prepared for you have technological exclamation points. My colleague, Sean McConnell and I have developed some media illustrations to punctuate the spoken word. These will be added throughout the lectures today.

Let me introduce my colleague Sean McConnell to you. I am very fortunate to work with this gifted person. Sean brings extensive experience in technical stage production to his ministry. Prior to receiving his B.A. in religion and philosophy and his M.Div from CDSP he was founder and CEO of a tour and production company for alternative rock bands (Tears for Fears being one). After seminary Sean worked as program producer at GraceCom, the media ministry of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

Sean now serves as Canon for Communications in the Diocese of California. He is chair of TEC Standing Commission on Communications and Information Technology and he recently retired from the board of Episcopal Communicators. He was also the Technology Coordinator for the 76th General Convention. Sean is a lay person who understands the call to baptismal ministry as his primary vocation and brings his many skills and gifts to his ministry. It is a pleasure to introduce him to you.

I am happy to see so many long-time friends here. Most of you know my “context” but for those who don’t, I grew up in California, but have lived in the Detroit area for over 35 years. That is my home place.

In case you don’t know Detroit, here is a quick intro to Detroit with Eminem:

Why courageous change:

The topic for these lectures is “Courageous Change”. All of us gathered here know that the world is changing and fast.

There are many ways to deal with the kind of rapid societal change we have seen in the last few years. A lot of people deal with change by avoiding it, hoping that it won’t affect them. But if our style is avoidance, eventually change will catch up with us whether we are active

participants or passive by-standers. Since we believe in a dynamic God, and by our baptism we participate with God in the quest to reconcile the world.

So we as the baptized, instead of standing by and watching change happen, we are called upon to use the change, even create the change that we believe will bring about a reconciled world. In order to use the change, in order to actually create proactive change we need primary tools:

- We need to be courageous

We need to draw upon the courage that is bestowed upon us at our baptism – and we need to always ask God to help us be courageous

- We need to analyze external forces
- we need to understand power
- we need to be skillful leaders

A foundational organizing principle is this: Identify a unity of purpose

Thankfully, our baptism has done that for us and we are unified as the holy people of God and called upon to be active. In other words, we have a job to do in this life and our primary vocation is to fulfill our baptismal promises.

Here's how I look at it: our venue for organizing is The Episcopal Church and our target for change is the world. Sound like a tall order? It is, but the obstacles before us are no match for the power behind us.

To do this work we have to be faithful, and smart. The tools of our trade are courage, power and leadership. Our home base is our Christian community of worship and prayer. That is where we get our juice. But our work is in the world. I will talk about change, courage, power and leadership. Some of what I will say is practical, other parts of it is theoretical.

From time to time during these lectures I will interject theological footnotes. Here's the first one:

The symbol being used in these lectures as the “theological footnote” symbol is a photo of a petroglyph in Three Rivers, New Mexico. The creation of the petroglyphs between about 900 and 1400 AD are attributed to the Jornada Mogollon people. You will see this image throughout the lectures.

I have observed that, for the most part, the church has gotten it wrong about the ministry of the laity. We, laity, clergy and bishops, have conspired, although I like to think, unknowingly, to define the ministry of the laity as what we do at Church—read, acolyte, be on the vestry, light the candles, sing in the choir, prepare the altar, lead prayer. Don't get me wrong, these things are very important and they are the activities that affirm our faith, develop our Christian community and support our home base—our congregation. If we lay people do these churchy things really well, someone will usually ask us if we have ever thought about being ordained.

We are all missing the point. The real job of the laity is to reconcile the world. Out there. The congregation is where our Christian community thrives—it is where we live, pray, worship, become renewed. It is our proving ground, where we practice resurrection, where we learn about ourselves and how to become whole human beings. And if it is a true Christian community, it is where people hold us accountable to the promises we make at our baptism.

We have some intrinsic difficulties to overcome. Seminaries can help here. Most clergy don't even know what we lay people do in the world. Our parish priest might know what our jobs are, but they don't really know what we do. They don't know our mission field. Where does our support come from? Where does their support come from? It is supposed to come from the community—it's about relationship.... we really don't know each other and our Church has no language for telling the truth to each other.

Sometimes I wonder if the laity are valued. I recently had a letter from a woman who was writing to me because of something I wrote about the ministry of the laity on the opinion page of the New York Times. In her note to me she said the laity of the Episcopal Church are seen as the “Losers and Lepers”. That description stuck with me. Thankfully, I don’t think it is universally true. But this lay person did.

But as lay people even we forget that we are the ones who fund this Church, we are the ones who call the clergy to serve with us. We are the ones with the clergy who elect our bishops to serve us. We even forget that without us, there would be no Church. Who would come to a church of all priests, deacons and bishops? Even they would grow tired of each other. Without the laity the sacraments would go undelivered, there would be no one to hear the sermons.

The laity are the backbone of God’s Church and if we ignore the wake up call of our declining numbers, our Church will be irrelevant pretty soon.

So what can we do?

First, let’s take a look at how we can turn this situation around. First the context in which we do our life’s work. It serves us well to understand the external forces that surround our context.... So what current change is going on in the great “out there”?

- International security threats were as common as traffic signals – red – yellow green, but now even that has changed... no more colors of threat, just words.
- The world population is growing exponentially; currently at almost 7 billion
- Climate change and unnatural disasters like oil spills and radioactive pollution.
- The economy: As Bruce Jones of the Brookings Institute says, “The U.S. is no longer the CEO of the Free World.” An increasing lack of trust in financial leaders runs rampant.
- And of course technology which changes so fast even the 12 year olds get confused.

Remember when blackberries and apples were fruit? At the end of 2008 there were 271 million cell phones in the USA. 4.1 billion cell phones worldwide.

I just reduced the clutter in our den by 70% when I got rid of those old video tapes that were bigger than the Book of Common Prayer.

The Episcopal Church is changing.

- 87% of TEC is “non-hispanic white”
- 61% of those who attend church are women
- 33% of Episcopalians have college degrees, 32% have graduate degrees
- 30% earn \$100,000 per year or more

Contrary to what many people believe, everyone in our church is not old. The fact is:

- 60% of Episcopalians are 49 or younger. Only 13% are 65+.

Kirk Hadaway, research specialist for the Episcopal Church tells me that just 10 years ago the Episcopal Church had 2.3 million members. In 2009 it was 2.0 million.

- Since 1999 our membership has declined by 300,000.

Although the number of ordained Episcopal clergy has increased during the past decade, the number serving congregations dropped by 800, from 6,062 to 5,262.

In terms of overall religious affiliation, on the data collection sheets where people check the box that illustrates their religious affiliation, do you know what box has a significant increase? The box that says “none”. When you hear the term “nones” from social and religious trend statisticians they aren’t talking about women religious.

They are talking about people with no religious affiliation.

But you know what?

The rate of volunteer involvement, “people doing good” actually increased during the recent economic downturn and Churches are the most prevalent place where people volunteer for community service. Census bureau stats show that the rate of Baby Boomers volunteering will be surpassed by Generation X (1965-1981) in the next few years. For Generation Xers, Episcopal Relief and Development is a big draw to our Church.

What do you think our church will be like in 50 years? Relevant?

Will our Church be relevant in the lives of the marginalized, the poor, the wealthy, relevant in the lives of the people of God in a way that continually calls us all to realize baptism as our life’s first vocation and our commitment to follow Jesus as the most important promise we will ever make.

The other side of that inspired deep hope is the real possibility that God’s church will be irrelevant except, perhaps, to a small sect of followers.

Generally, people are confused, afraid, want to make a difference. Our church and people that would love our church are looking for courageous change that inspires a prophetic vision and requires active participation. Remember, change happens – we will all be affected by it. Participate and use it as a tool for keeping our baptismal promises, or be a bystander?

How many people here are retired? I want to ask you something – what are you retired from? Baptismal ministry? Causing trouble? Speaking up? Being prophetic? Making a difference? Bringing about a reconciled world? Praying, loving, worshipping. Guess what, you are not retired – you are set free to be courageous with abandon. Remember our Church’s prophetic voices of times past? Where are the prophetic voices of our Church now? Who are they? What are they saying? You are prophets. You can’t retire from that.

God compels us to do God's will. That is dangerous work and it takes courage and leadership.

Frank Wade "retired" priest from Washington who was chaplain to the house of deputies in Anaheim in 2009, said this is one of his meditations: "That old revolutionary, William White held the notion that God's energy passes through laity, priests and deacons as well as bishops."

Imagine a church that really lived like that.

So first things first. The church needs to be a movement. Right now we are an organization. We have a critical mass of 2 million ministers. But right now the church is stuck in an organizational model. What does that mean?

Planned change models today have a limited vision. Parker Palmer describes the drawbacks of the "organizational model":

"The organizational approach to change is premised on the notion that bureaucracies—their rules, roles, and relationships—define the limits of social reality within which change must happen. Organizations are essentially arrangements of power, so this approach to change asks: "How can the power contained within the boxes of this organization be rearranged or redirected to achieve the desired goal?" That is a good question—except when it assumes that bureaucracies are the only game in town.

""The genius of movements is paradoxical: They abandon the logic of organizations in order to gather the power necessary to rewrite the logic of organizations."

The organizational model pits entrenched patterns of corporate power against fragile images of change harbored by a minority of individuals, and the match is inherently unfair. Constrained by this model, people with a vision for change may devote themselves to persuading power holders to see things their way, which drains energy away from the vision and breeds resentment among the visionaries when "permission" is not granted.

When organizations seem less interested in change than in preservation (which is, after all, their job), would-be reformers are likely to give up if the organizational approach is the only one they know.”

“When the language of change becomes available in the common culture, people are better able to name their yearnings for change, to explore them with others, to claim membership in a great movement.”

God’s church can be objectively viewed as an organization with arrangements of power, a bureaucracy with rules, roles, and relationships that we accept as our social reality use as our venue for seeking justice and working towards realization of our baptismal promises.

If we keep on doing things the same way, moving the organizational boxes around, the trends of decline and the rise of the “nuns” have little chance of being turned around. The Church needs to change from organization to a movement. We have a recent example:

The Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief established in 1940.... a somewhat successful fundraising organization moved about 12 years ago from being an organization to a movement for sustainable development supported by the Episcopal Church. In 2000, The Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief, changed its name to Episcopal Relief and Development, did work on how it wanted to recreate itself, wrote new by-laws and went to work on becoming a movement.

Today Episcopal Relief and Development works in 40 countries and last year touched the lives of more than 3 million people directly. Episcopal Relief & Development has 30,000 volunteers in 17 countries in Africa alone. It’s a movement.

With our huge expensive front office in New York and old corporate model staffing, we fit Parker Palmer’s analysis of an organization with an obsession about being an organization living in an organizational model. Palmer says, “Our obsession with the organizational model may suggest something more sinister than mere ignorance of another way. We

sometimes get perverse satisfaction from insisting that organizations offer the only path to change. Then, when the path is blocked, we can indulge the luxury of resentment rather than seek an alternative avenue of reform—and we can blame it all on external forces rather than take responsibility upon ourselves.”

Blame on external forces and turning an unseeing eye toward responsibility is a passive aggressive characteristic. News Flash: Our church has some of those characteristics.

For example: Here is a not too uncommon scenario:

Clergy and laity elect a bishop; we give the bishop a year or so, dress him/her up in beautiful robes with matching hats, feed them fattening potluck dishes, and hang on their every word. As the adoration wears thin, we start complaining—not directly to them, because we are afraid of all the power we have ascribed to them and we have no language for truth-telling. We are afraid the power we have given them will be turned on us in a punitive way (especially if we are clergy) and we have developed no language for accountability and evaluation—a process that should go both ways. How are we supporting each other in our ministries?

Getting ourselves out of this passive aggressive mode will require us to create and inhabit a new culture. The culture is one of courageous change. That’s a tall order because as Parker Palmer has noted, “There is a part of human nature that would rather remain hopeless than take the risk of new life.” But we have a critical positive edge here. We are called to new life by our baptism. The impetus for our courageous change is the baptismal covenant. We aren’t afraid of new life, are we? We are the resurrection people. So we will choose not to remain hopeless.

How does the church become a movement?

Understand and embrace our baptismal ministry, employ courage, power and leadership and get going on our journey of purposeful change.

Just unbuckle your seatbelts, and put on your bungee cord.

So what is courage and who are the companions of courage? They are not Dorothy, the Tin Man or the Scarecrow.

C.S. Lewis reminds us that “Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point.” Courage animates all our virtues. — honesty, confidence, humility, compassion, integrity, valor. Without courage, all these virtues lie dormant. Individual courage builds from memories created by life events—events we witness where someone we know, love or admire is courageous. Or a time when we ourselves stand up for something that really matters to us.

The memory becomes the story of a defining moment that is incorporated into our spiritual selves and becomes a cornerstone of our morality or our moral courage. Moral courage defines us at our core and prompts us to act in spite of fear.

Joy Cushman of the New Organizing Institute writes, “Every change maker I’ve ever met has a story about when he or she first stood up for something that really mattered. When was it for you?”

When we don’t “exercise” our courage, like an unused muscle without regular use, courage is weakened and slowly recedes. Without regular use our courage becomes harder for us to conjure up, less available to us. Finally if we aren’t regularly courageous our courage dries up and “courageous” becomes only a memory of how we used to be.

Courageous acts are infectious. We get courage from each other. Like the truth, we know courage when we see it and It is hard to witness a courageous act and not be courageous ourselves. That “courage contagion” becomes an important foundational element in proactive change. Beginning with individual courage, inspired by defining moments in our lives, one person acts and others are inspired and en- courage to do the same.

Acts of courageous change are not unknown to the people affiliated with this seminary. In fact, over time we as a church have a history of courageous acts. Some of you in this room know all too well that courageous acts which elicit change, that demand change, are most often a challenge to an existing power structure.

Here I would like to interject a concern—What has happened to the lost art of speaking up? Where did it go?

Have you ever been someplace, a meeting or event, and spoken up about something—unpopular, but necessary to name—at the break or after the meeting someone comes up to you and says, “I am really glad you spoke up about X. I feel the same way.” Well, my response is, “Then why did you leave me hanging out there all by myself?”

Conversely—it is crucial that we speak up for others, with others and on behalf of others. All the time.

We know well that being courageous is not easy. The resistance to change can present real threats, because as I said, courageous change most often challenges an existing power structure.

When the power structure is challenged and poses the possibility of real change, “redistribution of power” looms on the horizon. It is when the power structure can envision a change in the power structure....people feel threatened, and get nervous. The wake up call is sounded, the alarm bells go off, the red lights start spinning and resistance goes into a full court press. Resistance can take many forms.

I recently sought counsel from my friend Harvey Guthrie about the seemingly hierarchical power structure in our church and the incongruity I see between in the hierarchical model of leadership and the value of the voices of all the baptized as outlined in our catechism.

Here is what I asked him:

Me to Harvey: One of the many things I don't get is the "hierarchical, top down" symbols and language when other words like "baptismal ministry" and "priesthood of all believers" get bandied about, often in the same discussion—like it all fits together. Hierarchical conjures up a pyramid power model for me, whereas baptismal ministry leads me to a circular model.

Harvey to me: "Bishops are just descriptively part of who we are as a community."

When Christianity became the religion of the empire, bishop came to be understood in ruler/power terms, rather than Jesus/rabbi/disciple terms. But just as the prophets came along in ancient Israel to question kings who understood their role in ruler/power terms, so monastics and reformers and John XXIIIs and baptismal ministry movements have come along consistently to question those terms.

We are a hierarchical church (and the vast majority of Christians are in hierarchical churches), but faithful hierarchs and their communities are called to heed prophets and reformers as they question ruler/power terms. In so doing they are witnessing to God's saving powerlessness.

Harvey went on to tell of a time when he preached at the ordination of a bishop on July 25. He says, "it drew my attention to the collect for that day, St. James day: "We remember before you today your servant and apostle James, first among the twelve to suffer martyrdom for the Name of Jesus Christ; and we pray that you will pour out upon the leaders of your Church that spirit of self-denying service by which alone they may have true authority among your people." That's, as I see it, what hierarchy grounded in baptismal ministry is about."

In addition to resistance, courage is often called to face a loneliness experienced routinely by people advocating, enabling and embracing courageous change.

The pain of loneliness is not to go unaddressed when we talk of courage, speaking up, taking action and living a life of baptismal ministry. In her 1952 autobiography, "The Long Loneliness", written by Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement and newspaper of the same name. Dorothy Day says, "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."