



## **Thinking Outside the Box (While Loving the Box)** **September 6, 2022**

I once heard a presenter at an Episcopal evangelism conference (now there's an oxymoron), say that new believers should be in structured Christian formation for two years before they witness to their faith. Thinking I had mis-heard, I engaged him in conversation afterwards. I had not mis-heard.

My objection: Christian formation, growing more fully into Christ's image, does not happen only in a structured learning environment like a class or seminar. Christian formation also happens as a result of our service and our actions. A new believer has natural energy and enthusiasm around their experience of God's love in Christ. Engaging others in conversation about their faith will be vital part of their maturing as Christians. Telling them they cannot share their faith until they are properly instructed would be akin to telling a talented artist they can't touch a canvas until they take an art class.

As one who has engaged in Sunday School and Bible and theology classes from childhood through seminary and beyond, two of my most profound moments of change came about outside such settings—eleven years as a seminary teacher in New Testament and Greek and eight years as the start up priest for a new Episcopal congregation.

For the next couple of weeks, I want to share more with you about that—Christian formation as both structured learning in a class, group, or seminar setting and Christian formation as a by product of engaging in mission, witness, and service.

Jesus obviously led his first followers in both ways. He taught them. But, he also had them with him in his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing and involved them in those ministries as well. Formation through teaching and action.

Peace,

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