



Thinking Outside the Box (While Loving the Box) **October 3, 2022**

I've been sharing with you some thoughts about Christian formation as a two-layered process. One layer involves learning in some sort of teaching setting and the other acting on that we've learned in acts of witness and service.

I shared with you that classroom teaching at the college and seminary level proved one of the most transforming moments on my journey. The other—launching a new congregation as the start-up priest, about which I wrote last week. What was it about that experience that proved so transforming?

First, the call itself. That vision of God hovering over the community like a mother hen, drawing people into divine love revised my concept of mission. It is not that the church has a mission; rather, it is that God continues on mission and we join in that mission as we discern how God is at work in our context. As Prayer C puts it, “Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us.”

Another dynamic that proved transforming—worshipping in a school building. We were directly engaged each week as a public assembly in the world. Teachers came and went on Sundays while we worshipped. School staff was required to be present each Sunday. Over those eight years, my concept of church got divorced from a physical church building. I came to see buildings as isolating and enclosing, separating us from our context.

Also, our launch team and core group were made up of people of nonEpiscopal backgrounds and some nontraditional Episcopalians. That atmosphere, free of “we don't do that in the Episcopal Church,” made for more spontaneous planning and for a prototyping mindset that welcomed failure as a learning experience. I am not disparaging our tradition; quite the reverse, our tradition is quite rich. But, we sometimes get the tradition confused with nontraditional ways of expressing it and resist the expression as if it were contrary to the tradition.

I've already written paragraphs about worship as mission (8/15, 22, and 29 of this year). That paradigm shift brought new energy to each worship experience, because each worship experience was an expression of God's saving love for outsiders. Worship got pruned and tweaked to make the boundaries more permeable and the content more clear for outsiders while at the same time preserving worship as an end in itself, the adoration of God and the nurturing of the faith community.

I'll save one other shift for a subsequent paragraph, attractional vs. missional church.

If you'd like to get more inside my story on this, The Rev. Katie Rengers,

missioner for new church development for the presiding bishop, interviewed me for a podcast on the national church website. You can hear that podcast at this web link.
<https://thegenesispodcast.buzzsprout.com/1207997/8507424-a-conversion-story>

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".

David W. Perkins+
Interim Rector