

Provincial Synods – Prov IV
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We have been created for abundant life: “I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly.”¹ Abundance is a sign of the presence of the Reign of God in our midst. When we’re doing what Jesus commanded, loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, abundance flows down like Amos’ waterfall of justice. Abundance is both spiritual and physical: the hungry are fed, prisoners set free, and people live together in peace because there is justice. That is God’s mission, of which we are servants and ministers. The church is an instrument to transform its members and the whole world toward that vision of the Reign of God.

For many years, mission theologians have said that a mature church has three defining characteristics.² It gives evidence of being self-extending, self-governing, and self-sustaining. That doesn’t mean it has no need of other parts of the body of Christ, but it lives in a generous and interdependent relation with other parts. It has the capacity to give life to new communities of faith. It’s a cell that receives from other parts of the body, and in turn shares its gifts with them. A mature church is a companion in Christ to other communities; it exists in solidarity, and is growing toward the full stature of Christ. The gifts it has were given to “equip the saints for the work of ministry... until all come... to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”³ A maturing church has faith that God has provided what is necessary for the mission of God in that place. When a church is growing toward that ideal, it’s finding abundant life as part of the mutually responsible and interdependent body of Christ.⁴

This way of looking at the church reflects the Trinity, three members in one community, each with its own being, and all integrated in one society, giving abundant life to one another and the whole world.

Being self-extending (self-propagating) means that the church, as Christian community, can transmit the faith to new generations and in new or changing contexts. Members have confidence in teaching others. They work to transform themselves as well as the larger society, to build the Reign of God on earth as it is in heaven.

We can relate these three characteristics to the Five Anglican Marks of Mission⁵ that are increasingly helping us to understand our part in God’s mission. The first Mark is “to proclaim the good news of the Reign of God.” The second is “to teach, baptize, and nurture new

¹ John 10:10b

² Henry Venn and Roland Allen were significant proponents of what were originally Paul’s methods. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_church_mission_theory

³ Ephesians 4:11-13

⁴ Cf. http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto_mutual1963.html

⁵ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm#sthash.U6LBF1XK.dpuf>

believers.” Both have to do with expansion and growth of the Body of Christ, equipping new partners in God’s mission as agents of transformation toward the Reign of God.

Being self-governing is related to the capacity of the body of Christ to function together, collaborating for God’s mission. No part of the body believes it’s more important than another, and all the parts work together in solidarity with one another and with the wider world. Members are accountable and responsible to the body; they consider and respond to the needs of the least, and participate in growth toward the full stature of Christ.

The third and fourth Marks are related to self-governance. III: respond to human need with loving service; IV: transform unjust systems of society, challenge all forms of violence, seek peace and reconciliation.

Self-governance can mean how we make decisions. TREC is recommending several items related to self-governance, like a General Convention that functions as one body, instead of divided into two houses. Governance is also related to how the body uses and shares resources, whether financial, human, or other kinds, and how we account for that use to the larger body. Governance also has something to do with self-control, and how we build and maintain systems of justice within the body – like Title IV, or equal access for both sexes and the disabled, and working to end racism. A self-governing church also seeks to change unjust systems outside the church – in the laws of our different nations, systems of justice, migration policies, or by addressing modern day slavery.

Being self-sustaining doesn’t just mean that a Church has enough financial resources to carry out its ministry. It’s an attitude that believes that the gifts God has given are sufficient to exercise ministry in a place. It’s a faith orientation, and the habit of seeing abundance rather than scarcity. It is continued growth in faith and capacity to partner in kingdom-building transformation. Self-sustaining churches collaborate for the health of the larger body, they’re creative and entrepreneurial, they’re unafraid of necessary risk, they change to serve God’s mission. Such churches follow Jesus to Galilee, into the local neighborhood as well as the wider world. They understand that everything in God’s creation is interrelated, and each part has its own gifts and the vocation to seek the well-being of the whole.

Being self-sustaining is related to the fifth Mark as well, which defines our role in assuring the integrity of the environment, the earth, the planet that is our home.

A church that is growing in self-extension, self-governance, and self-sustainability reflects that in dioceses, congregations, and the provinces of the Anglican Communion. All share the responsibility to increase the possibility of abundant life for every human being and part of creation.

These ideas apply to every congregation, whether small rural fellowships or Episcopal megachurches. The transformative possibility of Christian community is a gift that needs to be present in a community for the long haul. Sustainability may look like partnering with Lutherans, Moravians, Methodists and others, or being an intentional house-church that sends members into the community as transformation agents, or discovering how a parish school or

other community ministry can partner with a worshipping community for mutual growth and sustainability. Episcopalians have a long and successful history of starting community ministries and spinning them off – yet many of our lesser-resourced dioceses, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean and Taiwan, have learned to maintain those partnerships for mutual abundance.

Ultimately, the function of this synod and of General Convention is to consider how we can increase that capacity for abundant life in every community and context. The budget we will consider in Utah needs to be grounded in a dream of growing capacity for abundant life in every part of The Episcopal Church, and the larger world. We should be asking questions like, “How can we increase the capacity for transformation in every member of the Church? How can we encourage each part of the body in moving toward being self-propagating, self-governing, and self-sustaining?” Some of this work belongs to congregations, some to dioceses, and some to the wider church – and it’s our job to discern which gifts are needed where, and then share the resources we’ve been given for the well-being of all. We are meant to be growing toward mutual responsibility and interdependence, rather than living in the world’s competitive, scarcity model of resource distribution.

Let’s consider some examples of what God’s vision of abundant life looks like through the lens of the Five Marks of Mission. It is God’s mission, and we are the ministers, working toward mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ.

Mark One: Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God

This certainly includes Christian formation, equipping believers as agents of transformation in the church and in the world. Members are formed in local communities, and dioceses and the general church share responsibility for equipping lay and clergy leaders for this work. We are trying new forms and methods, and there is urgent need to figure out how to share the theological education resources we have – within and beyond TEC. When seminaries and formation programs fail to share resources and opportunities, we’re not being interdependent or mutually responsible. Increasing the capacity of the whole body will require working for the good of the whole, not only the individual parts.

We can also live more interdependently when we’re planning and considering our dreams for the future. The provincial strategic planning process in Ghana has distributed the leadership responsibility to the bishops and dioceses. One is responsible for the planning process, one for education, one for community development, another for ecumenical and interreligious relations, another for real estate and investments, and so on. It’s a form of shared leadership that uses the gifts of each part of the body. It obviously requires plenty of trust and communication, but it is a self-organizing movement in a Church with little provincial (churchwide) structure. We don’t really have a parallel. Executive Council and staff strategize about sustainability and MEZs; some provincial networks do more limited planning for a region.

We might learn something from Ghana’s example, for if shared leadership were better integrated across this Church, we could expand the vision and possibility for abundant life everywhere. For example, how might the Church as a whole better support the work of indigenous ministry? Self-organizing collaboration is already at work, e.g., as the bishops and

dioceses of Province VIII have come together to assist Navajoland's growth toward sustainability. Shared leadership is already helping Province IX move toward long-term sustainability, through partnership between churchwide funding and local programs. The challenge is that it's always at the mercy of the latest General Convention. We are beginning to think in larger and longer-term frameworks. If each part of the body is growing toward self-propagation, self-governance, and self-sustainability, we could expect that it will be expressed in greater willingness to be mutually responsible and interdependent so that abundance is available to all.

Executive Council and TREC are urging us to build greater accountability in sharing financial resources as well as the structural and leadership resources needed to ensure that each part of the Church can thrive. That means being mutually responsible for contributing to the abundant life of the whole body. We're even beginning to consider how diocesan boundaries might be adjusted to do that. This will sound like heresy to some, but those aren't just decisions for two or three dioceses who want to unite – we're all responsible for seeing that each part is healthy and growing. Part of the Good News is that our health, wholeness, and holiness depend on how we love and care for our neighbors in other parts of the Body.

Mark Two: Teach, Baptize, and Nurture New Believers

We also need a broader vision about how the faithful are gathered. New forms of Christian community are emerging, and they don't all need church buildings. Today, some function in schools or public buildings, some meet in parks or in the woods, and others come together in the midst of social ministries like a food pantry or laundromat,⁶ or as dinner church or common cathedrals on the streets. Faith communities that are growing in numbers include a large percentage of the congregations outside of the U.S., those everywhere that are ministering with migrants, and those that are focused outside of themselves, on the needs of their neighborhoods rather than only on their own members. In recent years we've experienced a change in the theological orientation of growing congregations. Today the most progressive churches are likeliest to be growing, and the most conservative least likely – pretty much a complete reversal from ten years ago. New communities of faith and those in new or changing contexts are also likely to grow.⁷

These changing contexts are a reminder that it's time to consider revising our Prayer Book. A self-propagating, self-governing, and self-sustaining church is always in the process of reformation. We clearly need better Spanish language translations of our common texts, as well as German, French, and Italian – and the Convocation in Europe is already working on the last three. We also need forms and language that are better “understood of the people,” as the English Reformers put it. That doesn't mean we should throw out the best of what we have. But notice some of what we lack: there is no explicit statement in the baptismal covenant about our responsibility to care for the earth on which all life depends. Our nearly 40 year old Prayer Book (middle-aged, not *new*) began to address changing language for human beings, but it still lacks much of the diverse biblical range of names and images for God. It's time to consider a revision

⁶ Laundry Love <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2014/03/12/love-and-laundry-ministries-offer-hospitality-to-homeless-guests/>

⁷ http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/new_facts_on_growth_2014.pdf

or reform. Somebody asked me recently when we are going to revise our “standard hymnal,” meaning the 1982 book. Even though we have several others, there is need for greater range and diversity. One of the hallmarks of Anglicanism is the ability to root the gospel in a local community and let it grow and adapt.

Mark Three: Respond to Human Need with Loving Service

As a Church we are learning to hear people crying in the desert and improving our ability to see the least of these. Note how both Mississippi and Louisiana have been transformed by responding to the devastation of Katrina. Our work as a whole church will be shaped in coming years by the post-2015 development agenda that is slated for adoption in September. The MDGs have guided our work as a concrete version of what it looks like to move toward the Reign of God, and they’ve been very helpful over the last 15 years. They’re about to expire, and they’ve taught us a lot from their expectations of accountability. The new development agenda will consider poverty in every country, not just developing nations, and it will focus on sustainability. It will include Native American reservations, the Mississippi Delta, and Appalachia, along with sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh. We will continue to focus on poverty and economic inequality, which is growing in the countries of our Church and around the world. We’ll keep expanding our attention to human trafficking and modern slavery, through ER&D, EMM, and partnerships between parishes, dioceses, churchwide structures, and neighbors nearby and far away. We are all related, and our well-being depends on the well-being of all our neighbors. When one part of the body suffers, we all do; when one part enjoys abundance, we can all rejoice.

Mark Four: Transform Systems of Injustice, Challenge All Forms of Violence, and Seek Peace and Reconciliation

Most forms of injustice are related to the unequal distribution of physical resources and power or agency – when certain groups of people are excluded from resources or rights that others enjoy. The prophets have always railed against such systems of division. Speaking and acting together for transformation is a spiritual opportunity and a concrete way to confront the world’s violence and injustice. Statewide public policy networks⁸ bring together people of faith to share a vision of a just world with legislators and community leaders. The Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina and 50th anniversary observances of many civil rights milestones are examples. As one body, this Church advocates for an end to the death penalty, to see that hungry children are fed, and using peaceful methods for conflict resolution.

When we pursue peace in our local communities, when we confront structural racism in our families, churches, and cities, when we reject violent reactions to conflict, the effects ripple out far beyond our neighborhoods. Those small glimpses of the Reign of God build hope and courage for the long journey, and they motivate peacemaking in other parts of the world.

Mark Five: Safeguard the Integrity of Creation and Care for the Life of the Earth

The earth is our home, the garden God planted us in as caretakers and stewards. As human beings, we are related to every other creature and species on this earth, and they to us. Our well-being is connected with the well-being of every other part of creation. When we contaminate the air, oceans, soil and rivers, we are inviting sickness and suffering for ourselves

⁸ Several new ones have developed with assistance from this triennial budget

and others. It's our responsibility to care for God's body of creation, and we cannot avoid that responsibility without consequences. But when we take up God's mandate to care for the earth and its resources, we begin to see signs of abundant life as we love God and what God has created – all our neighbors.

Like the other Marks, this aspect of God's mission is both local and global. Our will to restrain our appetites and live more lightly on the earth will mean more abundant life for others. The work includes planting gardens as well as advocacy to address climate change.⁹ There is urgent need to work interdependently for restraint on the part of nations and global institutions, lest our collective appetites literally consume the earth's lifeblood and life's breath.

The Five Marks of Mission continue to teach and challenge us as interdependent parts of the body of Christ. Synods and Conventions offer unique opportunities for collaboration and mutual interdependence that can lead to more abundant life. In this triennium the larger church has fostered partnerships to develop "Mission Enterprise Zones," and expanded opportunities for Young Adult Service Corps participation. Both are examples of how together we can seed, encourage, and expand new mission initiatives. You can find many more in the Mission Report to the Church!¹⁰

We have opportunities to deepen our interdependence in sharing resources of all sorts – financial, leadership, or other gifts for God's mission. The whole body is meant to aid the growth of each part toward mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ. Growth toward being self-extending, self-governing, and self-sustaining isn't only for dioceses and provinces – it is the goal for TEC and for the Anglican Communion. God has given unique and particular gifts to each part of the body, and when we are working together for good and the well-being of all, we are marching toward the Reign of God. We exist for that vision of abundant life. Siyahamba! ¡Marcharemos!

⁹ <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/04/15/1377990/-Does-someone-you-love-suffer-from-Climate-Change-Denial-Disorder-VIDEO?detail=email>

¹⁰ <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/report-church-2015>