



2022 Mission Retreat

An Approach to Mission Based on the Remnant Theology

Welcome to all. I am very grateful for your presence and for the effort you made to come here and begin to cultivate a new mission work together. Mission has been a central concern for me for the 38 years I have been in active ministry in our church and movement. I've seen a lot of talk about mission and most of it has gone nowhere. My sense is that we might finally be in a place to begin something new that will lead to real change and a more effective approach to mission.

A new approach to mission requires new missionaries. People must be called by God to mission, they must be willing to do new things for the sake of the kingdom, and they must be willing to persevere against opposition. Mission is not program. Mission is people. For this retreat to mean anything, we must see ourselves as missionaries. This may be the primarily psychological change needed in our church and movement. We began with the idea that we were “continuing” the church. This gave us the sense that we represented some large structure and organization. The truth is that from the beginning of our movement we have always and only been missionaries. The main thing that has plagued our church is the failure to understand this truth.

I. What we want to accomplish at this Retreat

The goal of this retreat, and of the Remnant approach, is to plant new seeds that will grow. The goal is not to have a rousing conference that fires everyone up for a moment only to return to business as usual next week. The goal is to form a Remnant in the G-3, and among other faithful Anglicans that will focus on praying and working to renew our churches and our church.

Forming a Remnant means that not everyone will be joining us in the work. We will be a minority of the whole. What we do will be opposed by some and ignored by others. We won't try to sell our approach to those who aren't interested in it. That's why this retreat

was not advertised. This is a coalition of the willing. We will influence the whole church by our commitment to persevere in a new approach to mission anyway.

The goal of this retreat is three-fold:

1. To establish the discipline of weekly prayer and fasting for mission among our Remnant. In the Diocese of the Holy Trinity, we observe Wednesdays as a day of prayer and fasting for mission. We ask people to fast during the day in some way and pray the Litany for Mission at some point; Evening Prayer is usually when we offer the Litany. Real mission is movement of the Holy Spirit, not a human program. The willingness to persevere in prayer and fasting is the foundation for a new work of the Spirit. I invite you all to join us in this practice.

2. To create a community of conversation about mission that provides practical support for genuine mission efforts. As we pray and fast, we need to share our collective wisdom. Rather than present one grand program that all can follow, we will aim at providing practical support for the unique challenges of each mission situation. How can you reorient ministry and mission in your setting? We need to help people avoid the well-worn path of burnout and mission failure.

3. To share with all who have come an approach to mission rooted in the theology of the Remnant. In advance of this retreat, I sent out an essay that outlines the Remnant approach and its rationale. The Remnant approach has a biblical and theological rationale. It's not just one of many methods of "church growth." To adopt it, one must "get it" and commit to it.

I don't plan to repeat here what I said in my essay, although we can discuss any questions anyone has. My focus here will be to move in the other direction and focus on the practical points of forming a Remnant. What kind of things do you need to do where you are? And what can you actually do?

II. Two approaches to mission

The first thing we need to do is clarify what we mean by mission. I want to contrast two approaches to mission:

1. In the first approach, the aim of mission is to convert people to faith in Jesus Christ and help those who believe grow in their faith. The aim is conversion of the heart and spiritual growth. The main focus is on connecting people with Jesus Christ, teaching them how to live a life of prayer, and helping them understand what spiritual growth looks like and how to cultivate it.

2. In the second approach to mission, which is much more common in our church, the aim is to sustain our church franchise. The church mainly focuses on how to get people to “join our church.” The main focus is on convincing people that our approach to theology and liturgy are authentic and catholic.

The problem is that proving this contention does not lead people to faith in Jesus or to growth in prayer. And it doesn't work! It won't really lead many people to join our churches. It won't help sustain the franchise. We are typically the only people who read our own arguments. As my late friend and mentor Bishop John Cahoon once said, “We don't have time to waste answering questions that no one is asking.”

Authentic mission aimed at conversion and growth understands that the catholic and apostolic tradition is the means to the end of faith in Jesus and union with God. Consequently, our faithfulness to the catholic faith and the authentic tradition is most accurately assessed by whether it is producing within us a growing faith in Jesus and progress towards the Beatific Vision. When the tradition is seen as an end in and of itself it becomes the religion of the Pharisees, which falls into the condemnation of the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2. I mentioned this in the essay and will not read it again here.

To avoid the religion of the Pharisees, our churches must reorient their ministries around the work of spiritual formation and spiritual growth. We must begin to assess what we are doing by the fruit it is producing in us. This is the sea-change involved in a reorientation around Remnant theology.

III. A Real Missionary Remnant

A. To cultivate a real mission, the missionaries must be characterized by three things:

- 1.** They must have a love for Jesus Christ.
- 2.** They must have an ongoing experience of Jesus' presence and power in their own lives that is cultivated through a disciplined life prayer, lived according to the Rule of the Book of Common Prayer.
- 3.** They must have a real desire to share Jesus and their experience of him with others. They must want to lead others to faith and growth.

If mission is the sharing of our experience of faith with others, then mission must begin with the cultivation of our own experience of faith. Thus, the beginning of mission is that you must begin to cultivate the life of prayer and spiritual formation in your parish or mission Remnant.

B. Identifying and forming your Remnant

How do you identify and form your Remnant? Don't assume that the people who consider themselves to be the faithful Remnant in your church or mission will in fact be a part of a missionary Remnant. Ask these questions:

First, who is willing to join you in the practice of praying and fasting for mission each week? About a decade ago, I gave a mission talk at the national synod of one of the G-3 churches. After my talk, the Senior Warden of one parish asked to meet with me. He wanted to talk about how to grow his church, which was struggling. I told him the first thing he needed to do was to get a core group of members to commit to the discipline of praying and fasting for the church's mission. I told him this needed to become a regular and established activity of the church. He said, "I don't think I can get anyone in our church to do that." I said, "Then you are not serious about your mission."

Second, who is willing to join you in an ongoing conversation about how to reach out to those who are not yet there? Consistent prayer for mission leads to a conversation about mission and the willingness to test new mission activities. Space must be created in the church or mission for this conversation. Brainstorming, testing, and refining new approaches to mission requires time. This is the reason mission requires a vocation to mission. You do it because it is what you are called to do, not because you'll give it a try to see if it will help your church grow. You will pray and fast and experiment until God's forms you and leads you into the mission he is calling you to carry out. There will be failures and frustrations along the way. You will be tested, just like Jesus.

I've been at St. Matthew's for 36 years. Many of my prayers for mission have been answered over a decade or more. When I arrived in 1986, St. Matthew's was a very typical traditional Episcopal parish. We had no members under the age of 25 and only one couple under the age of 40. I prayed that God would send us mission minded younger people. I kept praying for this for the next fifteen years. The prayer was answered in a real way somewhere around 2003. I came to realize is that it was not a simple matter of God just giving us people. We had to be formed as a community that was prepared to minister to the people I was asking God to send us. Thus, the conversation about mission may reveal a need for training and growth in your church or mission so that you are ready for the people God will send to you or lead you to.

Third, in your church or mission, who is willing to follow you in a path of spiritual formation? The group that prays with you and develops mission approaches with you must be committed to their own progress in the spiritual life.

Though this point comes third in the logic of this discussion, it is the most important point. If the people praying with you and discussing mission with you are not at the same time focused on their own life of prayer and spiritual growth, you will not be following the Remnant approach to mission and your mission conversation will eventually reach a dead end. If you want to share your life in Christ with others, you must develop your life in Christ, both individually and as a community.

To bring people along on a path of spiritual formation, I am convinced that a church needs to establish a program of formation, a pathway for people to walk on, which you can invite people to join. Those who will follow you on this path are your Remnant. Those who won't aren't. It is that simple. This is why Peter, John, James, and Matthew were disciples, and why the Rich Young Ruler wasn't.

C. Our Pastoral Ministry framework.

We have developed a program for spiritual formation. We refer to it as our "Pastoral Ministry Program." It begins with a year-long class orientated around spiritual formation and emotional health. We call this class Pastoral Ministry 101. We just began the eighth year of this class. This year's class has twenty-five in-person participants and 13 online participants. The online participants are from northern California, Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, and North Carolina. This program has proven to be effective. People who complete it recommend it to others. It has grown by word of mouth.

Our first year 101 class leads to a second year 201 class, then a third year 301 class, then to membership in our "Order of the Holy Trinity" (OHT). Currently, we have 120 people in the program, and 40 people in our OHT. All the clergy and lay people from our diocese at this retreat are at in the program at some stage. You can talk with any of them about it. This has been the central means by which we have reoriented St. Matthew's Church and are now reorienting the DHT around the theology of the Remnant. You can't merely teach people about being the Remnant. They have to participate with you in the process of formation. You have to become the Remnant together.

We are willing to share this program with others. Let us know if you and your Remnant would like to participate in it. You can participate with one or two or three or four people. A rector alone can participate and get the flavor of it. All candidates for clergy in our diocese are required to be a part of it.

In summary: You first form your Remnant by calling people to pray and fast with you, to discuss mission strategies with you, and to join you on a path of spiritual formation. Your Remnant consists of those who follow you when you call them. Those who don't follow you

are not your Remnant. You don't avoid them or refuse to minister to them. But you also don't chase after them to get them to change their mind. You focus most of your attention on your Remnant. That is the first change the Remnant approach requires of you.

IV. Remnant Theology and Hospitality

Another litmus test of true mission is the ability of a church or mission to practice genuine biblical hospitality. What is biblical hospitality? It is not inviting your good friends over for dinner! It is welcoming the stranger; inviting the person who is not you to join you.

Now, my experience here is that hospitality has a sort of paradox to it. To invite the stranger into your social spaces presumes that you have social spaces to invite them in to. This raises a central mission question: Do you enjoy being together? Do you enjoy "doing life" together as a community?

Here's how Remnant theology applies to hospitality. Often, churches have a way of putting on a "church supper" or church gathering. Often, they put it on in such a way that no one other than those who are church members would want to come to it. Often, many of the members themselves would rather not come. Often attendance is promoted by guilt—"We are having a dinner and you really should come!"

Remnant hospitality is willing to challenge "the way we've always done things." It begins like this. Ask those in your Remnant group this question. What do we like to do? How do we like to hang out? Part of authentic spirituality is that the Remnant enjoys their life together in ways that are expressed in social gatherings—see Acts 2:46. What you like to do together may not be what the church is used to doing. Remnant theology build social gatherings around the Remnant—not around the whole church. Do what you like doing. The invite people to join you.

An example of change in the 1990's. The strategy here will differ from region to region. At St. Matthew's Church, in an area where young families are busy and do not generally want to have to bring food, we changed our dinners from potluck dinners to catered dinners. We realized that on a typical Friday night most families might go out and get a

hamburger and beer or glass of wine. So, we decided to offer catered meals with beer and wine available. We also have space for cigars afterwards. We were able to create attractive events that we enjoyed as a community and that were attractive to guests.

The details here are not as important as the principle. We began to do things we liked to do so that, given a choice, people would rather be with us than somewhere else on a Friday night. These events were naturally attractive to our guests. Start enjoying life together as a Remnant community; then start inviting people to join you.

Here we offer a note on what Bowen Family Systems theory calls “sabotage.” When you change your approach to hospitality, some people won’t like it and will oppose it. Perseverance in doing new things in the face of opposition is the key to change.

Some questions: Does your community enjoy life together? If not, what do you need to do to change that? And, do you welcome new people when they join you and take a real interest in them? Or are your gatherings mostly events that only you and your people would be drawn to?

V. The pursuit of people

This second question may be the most important litmus test of a vocation to mission. I call it “the pursuit of people.” This means that because you are called to share your faith in Jesus with others, you will take a genuine interest in people and want to get to know them and their stories. A few points:

A. You will take genuine interest in people’s well-being and spiritual health and growth for their own sake, not just because you want them to join your church. If you discover that you can give some spiritual good to someone who ends up not joining your church, you will be happy about it anyway.

This is a big deal. Many churches talk about wanting to grow, but don’t take any real interest in people when they come. This is usually because they want people to come to help them sustain their church, not because they have a genuine interest in the people. There is no

mission without a real love for others for the sake of Jesus. The paradox is that if you really care about people, they will be much more likely to join your church.

B. The pursuit of people leads into spiritually directive ministry. Spiritually directive relationships begin by getting people to tell you their story and their struggles. This opens the door for you to suggest habits of prayer or disciplines that might help them, and provides opportunity for you to connect their story with the narrative of the cross and resurrection. The things you suggest will typically be the things that you have found helpful. You are sharing your experience of Christ with others.

This contrasts with an approach that begins by telling others about our church, or, even, telling them about Jesus. Typically, “selling” the church or Jesus in this way puts up certain defensive barriers of resistance; unless you are talking with someone who is looking for your kind of church and is already sold.

Now, obviously, people will ask questions about the church and we will answer them. But after we answer them, we say, “Now, tell me your story.” Or, “Let me know if you would like to meet for coffee and talk.” Psychologically, when we take a genuine interest in people, it communicates that the church has a genuine interest in people. This, in turn, creates a greater interest in the church on their part. The logic goes like this: If whatever this church is doing produces people who love each other and care about people, I’d like to know what this church is doing. Conversely, when we begin by selling, when we don’t ask questions and don’t listen, when we appear to be a community that is mostly angry about things in the world and the church, we communicate a pre-occupation with our own concerns and a lack of concern for others.

This is the biggest contrast between mission as sharing Jesus and mission as sustaining the franchise. When we want to sustain the franchise, the main goal is to get people to join the church. We are always selling the church product. But when the main goal is sharing our faith, our main focus is on the people we want to share it with.

As you pursue people and get to know them, you can invite them down a path of spiritual growth. As you pursue people, share your faith with them, and teach them to pray, you are,

in fact, cultivating new members of the Remnant. This pursuit of people begins within your own Remnant group. Do you really know each other? This is one reason our PM 101 class requires people to write and tell their stories.

A note. Pursuing people is not chasing people. You are interested in them, but if they don't respond you leave it at that. You are available but not pushy. You'd like to get to know them, but you also want to be aware of your own need to be needed or your need to rescue. This is part of your own growth in spiritual and emotional health—becoming a healthier missionary.

A genuine interest in people and the cultivation of conversations about life and prayer comprises what I call a spiritually directive framework for ministry.

VI. What do you want people to do?

A big mission question is, what do you want people to do? Often, we say we want people to come to our church, but we have no idea how our mission to them will proceed from there. We sort of expect them to pick up the faith by osmosis. I mean, we get the liturgy. Why can they just see it and get it? Remember, in the early church, nobody even got to come the main part of the Eucharist proper until after they had been fully catechized.

Consider what do you want people to do and develop a specific pathway of formation. How will people become followers of Jesus through your ministry? How will they learn to live a life of prayer in your church? How will you form them spiritually?

In general, mission rooted in the Remnant approach will proceed in this way:

1. We will develop relationships with people and connect them to others in the community through social events and personal meetings.
2. We will invite them to an Inquirers Class for a basic introduction.

3. After basic introduction, you will invite them into a longer program of spiritual formation. This is PM 101 for us.

4. You will develop spiritual directive relationships with them. This involves meeting every month or so to talk about:

a. Their life of prayer. How they are praying and what struggles they are having with their prayer.

b. understanding life in terms of faith. What is God doing in the midst of their trial to help them grow in virtue and in the image of Christ.

5. As they grow in their faith and discover their gifts, they will begin to participate in the church's mission to others. They will become part of the Remnant.

Summary:

Let us briefly summarize the points that have been made:

1. You need a truly missionary Remnant

2. You need to call your Remnant and form it spiritually.

3. You need to build hospitality around the Remnant.

4. You need to take a genuine interest in people.

5. You need to consider what you want people to do and develop a pathway to formation in your church.

VII. Conclusion. Remnant Formation Difficulties.

A. The need to do things that are new.

1. Change will be required. You will start working with the Remnant, with the coalition of the committed and willing. This means you won't do what everyone wants you to do. You won't be a people pleaser. This means some people won't be pleased! But you need to keep doing it anyway.

2. You will experience opposition and sabotage. Success in reorienting the ministry and mission of a church can only be accomplished by people who are willing to persevere through opposition and sabotage.

From Edwin Friedman, a Bowen Family Systems Author: In our anxious, seat-belt society “the resistance that sabotages a leader’s initiative usually has less to do with the ‘issue’ that ensues than with the fact that the leader took initiative” (p. 3 of *A Failure of Nerve*). This awareness is what Friedman calls “The key to the kingdom.” A leader’s job is not complete until he or she has brought about a change and endured the resulting reactivity and sabotage.

B. How the Remnant can avoid being another inner circle or clique?

A clear distinction must be made between the missionary Remnant and the grumpy Remnant. Also, though the Remnant is doing new things and facing opposition, it remains kind and generous to those who are opposing the efforts. This is part of its own growth and formation and an essential part of its impact on the larger body.

C. How do we keep the Remnant from becoming inwardly focused?

This is a real temptation. We can note two errors in church: One is an excessively inward focus without mission. The other is an excessively outward focus without interior formation. The rector or leader must both form the Remnant and push it outward in mission. The outward push is a continual work.

D. What paradigm shifts and practical changes are needed in rectors and missionaries?

1. We typically think our job is to please and help people. This must change to an orientation that understands that our vocation is to challenge people and help them grow.

2. Challenge will result in opposition. We must learn to resist the need to make everyone happy. Opposition is the indicator that you are becoming an effective leader. Perseverance through opposition is the key.

3. A movement from a crisis orientation to a long term spiritual formation orientation. This means learning to resist the temptation to always respond immediately to people's perceived emergencies.

E. What are typical forms of systemic sabotage and how can leaders account for them and prepare for them?

1. Coalitions of opposition. "People are talking." Note. When someone says, "some people are talking," do not respond until the people in question reveal themselves and talk with you.

2. Some people may leave. You may experience discomfort. Managing your own anxiety and being comfortable with your own discomfort is the key to change.