

Transforming Churches
Season 1

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH



Produced in collaboration by Office of Congregational Vitality
and the Office of Communication.

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Welcome to the Transforming Churches video series.

These six episodes feature a variety of Episcopal communities engaged in transformative work in their local settings in such a way that they invite people into deeper relationship with one another and with God. And in doing so, they also invite non-church members to join them on that journey. The purpose in telling these stories is not so that other churches can ask, “How can we replicate their experience?” Rather, it is to ask, “What do their stories have to teach us about our story?”

The following study guide is meant to encourage conversation within your local congregation. The questions are composed from specific quotations drawn from the videos. We hope that the stories which you witness here will draw you more deeply into your own congregational stories, as you grow ever more into the people that God is calling you to become.

May you be blessed in encountering the stories of these amazing faith communities... and may you be even more richly blessed in the conversations that these stories are meant to inspire.

The Rev. Bob Honeychurch
Missioner for Congregational Vitality
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Christ Church, Philadelphia PA

Convince them that we have just as much future as we have past.

Does your congregation live more in the future or more in the past?

How might you more fully live in the future?

If (the Neighborhood House) is supposed to serve the neighborhood, what is the neighborhood like today?

How well does your congregation know and serve its community?

People tend to come into a faith community through various portals or doorways.

What are the various portals or doorways you create to welcome people in to your faith community?

Doing justice work that is about being in a relationship, and not having it as a we/they situation.

How does your congregation engage in justice work in your community as a means to build relationships?

No matter who you are, you are fully welcomed here. That going to mean something different with every person that walks in the door.

What are the ways that people know that they are fully welcomed in your congregation?

Trinity Cathedral, Phoenix AZ

People come in here, and they know that we're taking church really seriously. What does it mean to you to "take church really seriously"?

I think our growth here at the cathedral has been in part because the people in the cathedral decided finally they were ready to grow. Is your community ready to grow? What will it take to get ready?

It's not just enough to speak Spanish. But it's important for us to be bi-cultural, to be able to understand what makes Latino culture tick, and what makes Anglo culture tick.

How does your congregation engage the various cultures (ethnic, social, generational, language, etc.) you find around you?

We have all kinds of people. They find their unity in the Prayer Book. They find their unity in common prayer.

What does it mean to you to find unity in common prayer? How do you express that in your community?

Part of the Church's liturgy is saying, "All are welcome."

What do you need to do in your liturgy to ensure that "all are welcome"?

Growth is kind of paradoxical. I find that churches grow inversely proportional to the amount of control the clergy are willing to give up. And the more we treat the congregation as the primary ministers of the gospel in the world, the faster the congregation grows. Basically our job is to equip them, and to get out of the way.

How can your church leaders "get out of the way" so that everyone can live into their baptismal ministry fully?



St. Jude's, Wantagh NJ

What I first noticed was a lack of children. There wasn't much joy at the time. And I find when there's not many kids in the church that there really isn't that much joy.

What does your community need to create more joy in your midst?

For me, worshiping Christ is a joyful thing... So, we've really worked hard to make sure that worship is a joyful experience.

What would make worship at your church more joyful?

It's important that this church be real to the surrounding community and the surrounding neighborhood... so that we're not a closed club with locked doors, but that we're an open organization with open doors.

How does your church avoid becoming a "closed club with locked doors"?

Everyone's welcomed people that don't look like them, dress like them, act like them, and might not perhaps hang out with them on the weekends. But yet they find a place on Sunday to be together as the Body of Christ.

Does this describe your local church? How might your church become a more diverse community?

The sin of clergy is often to look at membership and church attendance. Because the reality is that the biggest thing for me in this parish, when I look at how the church has grown, is seeing spiritually – how I see people who have grown deeper in their relationship with Christ.

**What are the avenues for spiritual growth which your church offers?
What's missing?**

St. Paul and the Redeemer, Chicago IL

St. Paul and the Redeemer is growing because we're really clear about what we're about, and that's welcoming everybody to this community.

Is your congregation clear about what you're about? How do you communicate that clarity?

Everyone is welcome to eat at God's table. We're intentional about how we do that – most obviously with our space, with the table that is wide open. There's no barriers to the table, there's no altar rail, there's no steps. And we welcome everybody to the table every Sunday without exception.

What does your physical space communicate your values as a community?

We think the Christian life is lived out in the world, that the way the people serve God's world is primarily in their vocations, with their friends, with their family, in the lives that they live.

How does your church equip people for their primary vocations beyond Sunday morning?

One exciting thing about this place is that we're willing to take risks.

What kind of tolerance does your church have for risk taking? How do you encourage people to explore new possibilities?

This is the kind of church where people can go who don't know all the answers, and who can bring their stories, and we'll listen to them, and accept them. We'll challenge them, and see if we can't grow together, but they don't have to believe a certain thing or act a certain way or dress a certain way to be here.

How does your community encourage people to bring their questions into your common life?

Thad's, Santa Monica CA

We knew that there would be folks who would never darken the door of one of our traditional parishes. We looked out into that market of people, and tried to create a spiritual, religious, Christian community that would help serve that constituency of people.

Who in your community is not being served by any church? How might that open up possibilities for your church?

Those three different constituencies in one room on a Sunday morning. We say, on purpose we have an uneven faith topography at Thad's, by design. We want to hold on to that. That's one of our standards.

How does your church provide a space for people at very different points in their faith journey?

Our focus on conversation extends out beyond Sunday, and goes out into the rest of the week... that's what we're really all about. And it's in our mission, vision, and values about being "Monday through Saturday followers of Jesus who worship on Sunday."

How does your congregation's "mission, vision, and values" shape all of your common life together?

We really haven't messed with traditional, orthodox Christianity. But what we've done is taken some of the language, and we've re-translated that language into the language of the culture, and made it more accessible. And that's the thing that really inspires me as a priest.

How does your church communicate the essence of the Christian experience in ways that make sense to the surrounding community?

So many people are hungry for spirituality. They've seen a very individualized spiritual practice is not sustainable over the long term. And in the Episcopal Church we're a forward-thinking, smart, progressive denomination, and so naturally have the ability to attract some of those folks.

How does your church invite people to deepen their connectedness and their spirituality at the same time?

Common Cathedral, Boston MA

The Church was already here. We just gathered the people.

How does your church recognize the reality that God is already present in the community around you?

We are able to be a lot more welcoming by not having a door that someone has to walk through.

What are the obstacles in your church (physical, organizational, attitudes, etc.) which prevent you from being more welcoming?

The biggest part of Ecclesia Ministries is to be part of a community, part of interacting with people again. You don't feel all alone.

How does your church build real community in people's lives?

We are a ministry of presence, so we're trying to meet them where they are – not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

How does your congregation meet the many and varied needs of your members?

I really feel like I get to be out here with the poor and the outcast, which is the kind of ministry that Jesus did on earth.

How does your church's ministry reflect Jesus' ministry? What might your church do to more fully live into the model of Jesus?





Vitality

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