

AC18 LAITY ADDRESS

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GOOD MORNING!

WHEN JEAN AND I WERE MARRIED 46 YEARS AGO, MY GRANDFATHER APPROACHED US BOTH AND GAVE US SOME ADVICE THAT DIRECTED OUR LIVES UP TO AND INCLUDING TODAY. HE SAID “WHEREVER YOU LIVE, LOVE IT, AND WORK FOR IT AND TRY TO LEAVE IT A BETTER PLACE THAN WHEN YOU CAME.

THUS BEGAN A LIFE OF SERVICE FOR BOTH OF US. MINE ENDED UP BEING A LIFE OF PUBLIC SERVICE - SCHOOL BOARD, HOSPITAL BOARD, CITY AND COUNTY COMMISSIONS, COUNTY ELECTED POSITIONS, AND SO ON. MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM HAVE A SIMILAR BACKGROUND, WHETHER IN ELECTED POSITION, CHURCH, BUSINESS, AND SO ON. AND I THINK YOU WOULD AGREE THAT ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS YOU DISCOVER UPON TAKING OFFICE IS THAT YOU NEVER KNOW THE WHOLE STORY UNTIL YOU SIT IN THE CHAIR! AND YOU ALSO LEARN THAT SOME OF THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH YOU ARE WILLING TO SAY ANYTHING IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT.

AS AN ELECTED PUBLIC OFFICIAL, I WAS SUBJECT TO VERBAL AND WRITTEN DESTRUCTION OF MY CHARACTER, ACCUSED OF VIRTUALLY EVERY CRIME SHORT OF MURDER. I SUPPOSE ITS HUMAN NATURE TO ASCRIBE OUR WORST THOUGHTS TOWARD LEADERSHIP WHEN WE ARE FRUSTRATED, OR ANGRY, OR FEEL THAT WE HAVE BEEN WRONGED. AS YOUR CONFERENCE LAY LEADER, I AM HEARING AND READING ACCUSATIONS AND DEGRADING COMMENTS BY CLERGY AND LAITY ALIKE.

SOME OF THOSE THOUGHTS, BOTH VERBALLY AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA, ARE SO FAR FROM ACTUALITY, THAT I FELT CALLED, THIS MORNING, TO SHARE SOME OBSERVATIONS AFTER 3 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE ON THE CABINET, WHICH BY THE WAY, IS ONLY ONE OF A FEW APPOINTIVE CABINETS IN THE US THAT HAS LAITY REPRESENTATION WITH FULL VOICE AND VOTE.

FOLLOWING GENERAL CONFERENCE IN FEBRUARY, IN CONVERSATIONS THAT OUR DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS WERE HAVING WITH THEIR CLERGY, THERE WAS A HIGH DEGREE OF ANGER AND SUSPICION WITH THE BISHOP, THE CABINET, WITH THOSE ON “THE OTHER SIDE”, AND THE DENOMINATION IN GENERAL. I, AND MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE LAITY TEAM WERE HEARING THE SAME CONVERSATIONS FROM MANY OF OUR LAITY. I UNDERSTAND THAT FRUSTRATION. BUT, THE LEVEL OF UNINFORMED VITRIOL BY BOTH CLERGY AND LAITY HAS BECOME ALARMING TO ME. I AM ALARMED BECAUSE I FOUND MYSELF DOING THE SAME. SO, HOW DO I SHARE WITH YOU, IN A CONCRETE WAY, HOW EASY IT IS TO FALL INTO THE TRAP OF DEMONIZING OTHERS WITHOUT KNOWING THE WHOLE STORY. WHAT EXAMPLE HAVE WE PROBABLY ALL BEEN GUILTY OF MAKING RUSHED JUDGMENTS WITHOUT THE WHOLE STORY. THEN IT OCCURRED TO ME - THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS - FOR ANYONE IN THIS ROOM THAT HAS HAD A NEGATIVE COMMENT OR POST ABOUT THE PROCESS OR THE BISHOP OR THE CABINET, LET ME TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO INFORM YOU HOW IT REALLY WORKS! AND I HOPE YOU’LL COMPARE THAT REALITY TO WHAT YOU MAY HAVE THOUGHT OR SAID IN A RUSH TO JUDGMENT.

ESPECIALLY FOR LAITY, LET ME TRY TO WALK YOU THROUGH WHAT I SEE AS THE ISSUES THAT ARE MISUNDERSTOOD IN MAKING PASTORAL APPOINTMENTS.

AND, LETS START WITH SOME BACKGROUND, OF WHICH MANY LAITY ARE UNAWARE:

1. ORDAINED ELDERS, PROVISIONAL ELDERS AND ASSOCIATE CLERGY MEMBERS ARE GUARANTEED APPOINTMENTS (OR AS THE DISCIPLINE PUTS IT -- SECURITY OF APPOINTMENT) AND A MINIMUM SALARY, - IN OTHER WORDS, OUR BOOK OF DISCIPLINE ASSURES ANY ORDAINED ELDER, PROVISIONAL ELDER OR ASSOCIATE MEMBER THAT THEIR ANNUAL CONFERENCE WILL PROVIDE A FULL TIME APPOINTMENT AS LONG AS THAT CLERGY PERSON IS IN GOOD STANDING. I THINK MANY LAITY ARE NOT AWARE OF THIS POLICY, AND IT IS ONE OF THE LARGER DISCONNECTS WHEN TALKING WITH LAITY - IN THE LAY WORLD, IF WE DON'T PERFORM COMPETENTLY, WE NO LONGER HAVE A JOB. I'LL NOT DEBATE THE POLICY HERE TODAY, BUT IN MAKING APPOINTMENTS, WE MUST FIRST BE SURE THAT WE HAVE A SPOT FOR EVERY PERSON UNDER THE GUARANTEE.
2. UPON ORDINATION, EACH CLERGY PERSON VOWS TO GO WHEREVER APPOINTED, IN OTHER WORDS, TO ITINERATE. THIS IS A LONG STANDING POLICY OF THE CHURCH. THERE IS A DOCUMENT THAT CLERGY CAN SIGN THAT DECLARES THEMSELVES AS LIMITED IN THEIR ITINERACY. THERE ARE SOME CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MIGHT REQUIRE A CLERGYPERSON TO REMAIN IN A CERTAIN CITY OR COUNTY (FOR INSTANCE A COURT ORDER THAT SPECIFIES IF THAT PERSON MOVES FROM THE CITY, THEY NO LONGER HAVE A RIGHT TO JOINT CUSTODY OF A CHILD). THE CABINET IS VERY AWARE OF THOSE WITH LIMITED INTINERACY AND TRIES TO ACCOMMODATE. BUT, THE TRUTH IS THAT MORE AND MORE CLERGY ARE DECLARING LIMITED ITINERACY. THIS IS A CLOG IN THE SYSTEM. AGAIN, I WON'T DEBATE THE POLICY, BUT ITS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO KNOW THE REALITY OF ITINERATION IN THIS DAY AND TIME.
3. MOST DIFFICULT OF ALL, I THINK, IS HOW CLERGY ARE EVALUATED. THE RULES HAVE CHANGED AND MOST CLERGY STILL IN SERVICE, TODAY, HAVE BEEN CAUGHT IN THESE CHANGING TIMES. WHEN I WAS A PREACHERS KID, 50'S, 60'S, EVEN THE 70'S, APPOINTMENTS OFTEN WERE BASED ON, "IF YOU STICK IT OUT, AND STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, EVERY 3 OR 4 YEARS WE'LL MOVE YOU TO PROGRESSIVELY LARGER CHURCHES AND, EVENTUALLY, MAYBE TO DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT. AND THAT SYSTEM WORKED DURING THE ERA THAT BISHOP LOWERY REFERS TO AS THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY ERA. AT THAT TIME, MOST IN THE COMMUNITY BELONGED TO AND ATTENDED CHURCH - IT WAS EXPECTED AND, WITH VIRTUALLY NOTHING OPEN ON SUNDAY AND FEW ACTIVITIES ON SUNDAY OR WEDNESDAY NIGHT, CHURCH WAS WHERE ONE WENT FOR FELLOWSHIP AND A SENSE OF BELONGING. FRANKLY, CHURCHES GREW OR HELD THEIR OWN REGARDLESS OF WHO THE PASTOR WAS.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY - THE ERA OF POST-CHRISTIANITY. ALL OF OUR CONGREGATIONS ARE COMPETING WITH AN ENDLESS NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVES TO CHURCH. THERE IS NO EXPECTATION TO BE A PART OF ANY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION. THE OLD MODEL FOR CLERGY EVALUATION NO LONGER WORKS. I WON'T SPEAK FOR THE OTHER CABINET MEMBERS, BUT WHEN I'M CONSIDERING APPOINTMENTS, I'M LOOKING FOR COMPETENCY. EFFECTIVENESS IS THE NEW MODEL. CAN YOU GROW A CHURCH - CAN YOU PREACH WELL ENOUGH TO FEED YOUR FLOCK - DO YOU HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO TEMPER YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS - IS YOUR CHRISTOLOGY SOLID AND UNAPOLOGETIC? CAN YOU HANDLE THE ADMINSTRATIVE SIDE OF THE JOB?

I UNDERSTAND THE FRUSTRATION OF OUR CLERGY CAUGHT IN THIS TRANSITION. BUT, THE LAITY WORLD HAS ALWAYS OPERATED UNDER THIS MODEL - PERFORM COMPETENTLY OR LOOK FOR A NEW JOB!

SO, HAVING A BIT OF BACKGROUND, LET ME DESCRIBE, TYPICALLY, HOW APPOINTMENTS ARE MADE (**DART BOARD**). JUST AFTER THE 1ST OF THE YEAR, THE CABINET MEETS FOR WHAT IS CALLED "INVENTORY", WHERE WE TRY TO NAIL DOWN WHO IS RETIRING, WHO HAS REQUESTED A LEAVE OF ABSENCE OR A MOVE TO ANOTHER CONFERENCE. DS'S SHARE THOSE PASTOR'S NAMES WHO ARE INTERESTED IN MOVING OR SPPR COMMITTEE REQUESTS FOR A MOVE. IN OTHER WORDS, WE TRY TO ROUGHLY FIGURE OUT HOW MANY CONGREGATIONS WILL BE OPEN (WITHOUT A PASTOR) AND HOW MANY PASTORS NEED TO MOVE.

THEN THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING MONTHS, WE CONSIDER EACH CHURCH AND EACH PASTORAL MOVE. (**APPOINTMENT CHART**) THIS CHART IS BEFORE US DURING THE ENTIRE PROCESS. AND WE ARE COGNIZANT OF IT CONSTANTLY, ESPECIALLY IF WE BEGIN TO SUBSTITUTE THE ORDER OF THE STEPS. DESPITE WHAT SOME MAY THINK, WE'RE NOT THROWING DARTS. WE SPEND FROM A FEW HOURS TO A FULL DAY ON A SINGLE APPOINTMENT. AS ONE FORMER DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT SAID, IT'S LIKE PLAYING 3D CHESS. VERY COMPLICATED, AND INTENSE - WE WANT OUR CLERGY AND OUR CHURCHES TO FLOURISH, AND THAT ONLY HAPPENS IF WE SPEND THE NECESSARY TIME TO TRY TO MATCH AS BEST WE CAN.

FOR VIRTUALLY EVERY APPOINTMENT, WE LOOK BACK OVER SEVERAL YEARS OF THEIR MINISTRY, HOW THEIR FORMER CONGREGATIONS GREW (OR DIDN'T), PROFESSIONS OF FAITH, HOW WELL THEY PREACH, ARE THEY GETTING MORE COMPETENT WITH EACH NEW APPOINTMENT. IN THE MIDST OF THOSE DELIBERATIONS, WE ARE INTERESTED IN THE NARRATIVE - WE REALIZE THAT LACK OF GROWTH, FOR INSTANCE, MIGHT BE BECAUSE THE PASTOR TRIED TO ESTABLISH A NEW FAITH COMMUNITY THAT JUST DIDN'T WORK OUT - A BOLD FAILURE CAN INDICATE A PASTOR WHO IS COMMITTED TO MAKING DISCIPLES. WERE NOT JUST ABOUT NUMBERS, BUT THEY ARE A STRONG INDICATOR OF COMPETENCY.

I ALSO WANT TO STRESS TO LAITY THAT, TOO OFTEN, IT IS THE LAITY THAT SUPPRESS FORWARD MOVEMENT OF A LOCAL CHURCH. AS YOU THINK OF YOUR OWN CHURCH, HOW RECEPTIVE ARE THEY TO CHANGE? MUST EVERYTHING REMAIN AS IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN? ARE YOUR CONCERNS INTERNAL, OR DOES YOUR CHURCH OBSESS WITH REACHING OUTSIDE THE WALLS? WE HAVE A NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS REPRESENTED IN THIS ROOM TODAY THAT HAVE A DESERVED REPUTATION FOR CHEWING UP PASTORS AND SPITTING THEM OUT - PASTOR AFTER PASTOR ARE NEVER GOOD ENOUGH, THERE IS ALWAYS SOME PROBLEM WITH THEIR PASTOR. VIRTUALLY EVERY ONE OF THOSE CONGREGATIONS ARE CENTERED ON WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CHURCH, WITH LITTLE TO NO REGARD FOR MINISTRY OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY ARE DYING - IS THIS YOUR CONGREGATION?

WE HAVE OTHER CONGREGATIONS WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE IS TO HELP GROW PASTORS. WHETHER YOUNG PASTORS EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS, OR MATURE CLERGY NEARING THE END OF THEIR CAREERS, OR SEASONED CLERGY AT THE HEIGHT OF THEIR CAREERS, THOSE CONGREGATIONS SEE THEIR ROLE AS SUPPORTIVE AND PATIENT WITH THEIR PASTORS. THOSE CONGREGATIONS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF THE DENOMINATION, HELPING MOLD CLERGY WITH PATIENCE, CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE IT'S OK TO MAKE A MISTAKE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY HOLDING THEIR PASTOR TO A HIGH STANDARD AND HELPING THEM REACH THAT HIGH STANDARD.

IF YOU TALK TO THE MOST SUCCESSFUL OF OUR CLERGY, ALMOST ALL WILL RECALL AN APPOINTMENT WHERE THE CONGREGATION HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS, BUT ALSO LOVED THEIR PASTOR ENOUGH TO ALLOW FOR MISTAKES OR FAILURE. IS THAT YOUR CONGREGATION?

SO, THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS IS TEDIOUS AND COMPLEX, WHILE ALSO FAIRLY STRAIGHT FORWARD. ALTHOUGH THE BISHOP HAS THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE EVERY APPOINTMENT, OUR BISHOP MAKES APPOINTMENTS BY VOTE OF THE CABINET. AND THE GUIDANCE OF GOD IS IMPLICIT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS. MORE THAN ONCE, WHEN WE ARE STUCK ON AN APPOINTMENT, WE HAVE STOPPED AND EACH PRAYED FOR A PERIOD OF TIME TO LISTEN FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE. OCCASSIONALLY WE HAVE STOPPED FOR THE DAY AND SPENT THE NIGHT PRAYING FOR GUIDANCE. I HAVE BEEN STUNNED BY THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE BISHOP AND CABINET TO MAKE GOD'S APPOINTMENT, NOT OUR APPOINTMENT.

IS EVERYONE HAPPY? ABSOLUTELY NOT - THAT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS ARE. I FELT CALLED TO SPEAK ABOUT THIS TODAY, BECAUSE OF THE INCESSANT CHATTER I HEAR AND READ FROM THOSE WHO ASCRIBE THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS TO OTHERS, JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T AGREE WITH THEM. NOT ONCE HAVE WE MADE AN APPOINTMENT TO PUNISH SOMEONE. NOT ONCE HAVE WE MADE AN APPOINTMENT BASED UPON THAT CLERGYPERSON'S STANCE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY. NOT ONCE HAVE WE MADE AN APPOINTMENT TO PUNISH A CONGREGATION. WE LIVE IN A DAY AND TIME IN WHICH VIRTUALLY EVERYONE IN THE PUBLIC EYE IS VERBALLY DESTROYED BY THOSE WHO KNOW LITTLE OR NOTHING OF WHICH THEY SPEAK. I HATE TO SEE THAT SAME VITRIOLE RAISE ITS HEAD IN CHRIST'S CHURCH.

BY AND LARGE, THE CLERGY AND LAITY IN THE CENTRAL TEXAS CONFERENCE LOVE CHRIST AND EACH OTHER. I ENCOURAGE US ALL TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO VILIFY ANYONE WITH WHOM WE DISAGREE. AS WE MOVE INTO A TIME OF VOTING TODAY, I WANT TO ENCOURAGE US ALL TO LET GO OF ANY ANGER AT "THE OTHER SIDE", OR DISTRUST IN EACH OTHER. WE ARE METHODISTS! WE HAVE A HISTORY OF DISAGREEMENT. WE ALL WILL VOTE OUR CONCIENCE AND THAT'S FINE - BUT LET'S BE AWARE OF HOW WE TREAT EACH OTHER EVEN IN DISAGREEMENT.

I CONFESS TO YOU THAT I, TOO, SUCCOMB TO THE TEMPTATION TO VILIFY THOSE WITH WHOM I DISAGREE. IN THOSE TIMES, I AM REMINDED OF LUKE 6, WHEN JESUS SAYS, *"DO NOT JUDGE, AND YOU WILL NOT BE JUDGED. DO NOT CONDEMN, AND YOU WILL NOT BE CONDEMNED. FORGIVE, AND YOU WILL BE FORGIVEN. GIVE, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. A GOOD MEASURE, PRESSED DOWN, SHAKEN TOGETHER AND RUNNING OVER, WILL BE POURED INTO YOUR LAP. FOR WITH THE MEASURE YOU USE, IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU."*

I THANK YOU, ONCE AGAIN, FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE CHRIST AND THE CENTRAL TEXAS CONFERENCE AS YOUR CONFERENCE LAY LEADER. WOULD YOU JOIN ME IN PRAYER:

GOD, HELP OUR CHURCH BODY TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING YOU HAVE GIVEN US. HELP US IN ALL OUR INTERACTIONS WITH ONE ANOTHER TO HAVE HUMBLE AND GENTLE HEARTS. GRANT US PATIENCE FOR ONE ANOTHER, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE. GRANT THE BODY OF CHRIST UNITY IN OUR DESIRE TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD. AMEN.