

The NEWS

“You want to have shorter vestry meetings? Have no chairs.”

— Andrew Weeks

Parishes learn the rules of attraction at “The Magnetic Church” workshop

By Mary W. Cox, editor

“Episcopalians,” says Andrew Weeks, “are good at using words that just kill people’s enthusiasm.”

Weeks, whose evangelism workshop “The Magnetic Church” was this year’s Bishop’s Spring Conference, gave participants fair warning: They were to unlearn six of those “killer” words — should, must, task, job, right and wrong — and would be loudly hissed by everyone in the room if they used one.

Lay and clergy teams from 49 congregations, 185 participants in all, gathered Feb. 16 and 17 in the Schofield Chapel at the Duncan Center for a lively and energizing presentation that provided much to unlearn — and much more to learn — about becoming an inviting and welcoming church.

Weeks, a self-described “cradle gothic Episcopalian,” told the story of his own journey from a being a person who “knew about God” to a personal encounter with God and a calling to be a full-time lay evangelist. A church where he was truly welcomed by people who truly cared about him made possible the transforming events in his life, he said.

“My job is to equip you” to be that kind of church, he told the group.

He promised that “you’ll go home knowing one of two things: You’re already doing evangelism and

you didn’t know it; or you’ll find something new that you are called and equipped to do.”

Churches that don’t want to grow will die, Weeks warned, but added that “church growth” as a primary goal of evangelism will fail. The goal is offering the opportunity for people to experience the love and power of God in their lives.

“People out there are in bondage,” he said, “and we have a responsibility to answer that call.”

He led the group in laughing at their own negative images of evangelism — “confrontational,” “coercive,” “money-money-money” — and their fears.

“What are you afraid of?

Rejection? There are people who won’t like you for the stupidest reasons, so you might as well give them a really good reason.”

“At its core, evangelism is nothing more than walking together,” he said.

Weeks outlined a number of factors that will help a church be successful in attracting and incorporating non-churched persons into the life of the congregation: willingness to risk change, a strong sense of mission and identity and a focus on hospitality, with emphasis on

God and faith in daily life. Quality worship, whatever the worship style; an eye-catching, well-placed church sign; and a well-designed, up-to-date website are also essentials.

“Be Episcopal,” he said. “Don’t try to be the community church... be outrageously, excellently who you are.”

The workshop was peppered with specific suggestions for small, effective changes:

“You want to have shorter vestry meetings? Have no chairs.”

“Have lay readers practice.”

“Have 10-year-olds read 10-year-olds’ prayers.”

“Get the announcements out of the middle of the service — it’s really bad theater.”

“Light stained-glass windows from inside.”

“Don’t have visitors stand... it puts people on the spot. Instead, have greeters stand.”

“Paint the inside of the doors red, too.”

A portion of the workshop focused specifically

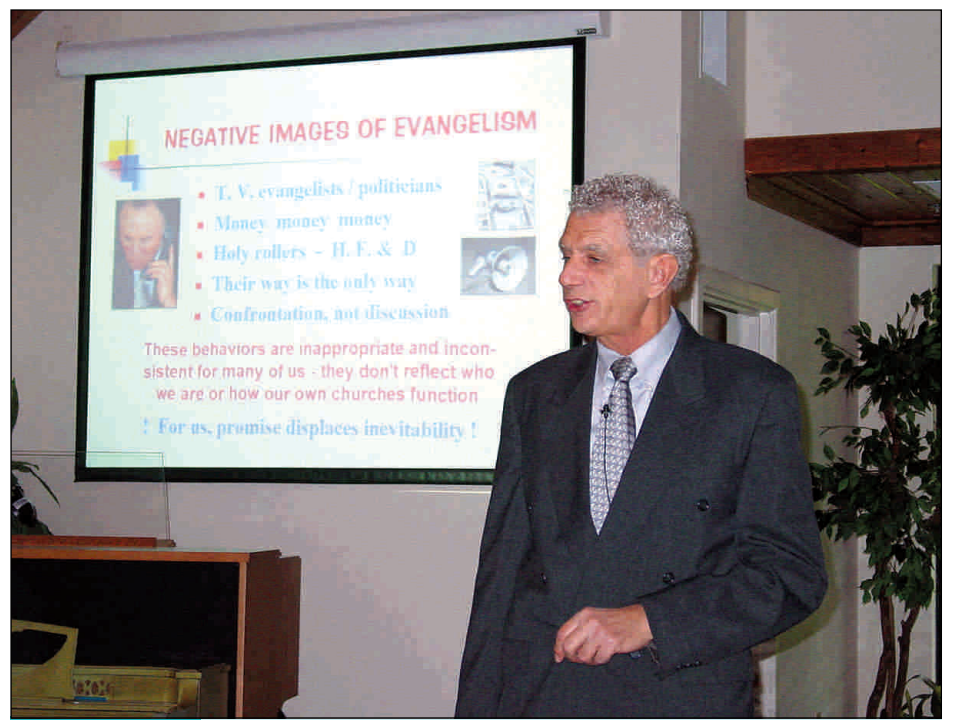
on all of our publications....”

— Chapel of the Venerable Bede, Coral Gables

• “We moved the announcements from before the peace to the beginning of the service and it seems to be working... Our bulletins have fewer inserts and are more reader friendly... We included an index of the front page of our newsletter... We invited Fr. Jeff Beebe [rector of Meadow Park Church, a new church plant in northwestern Broward County] to be our guest preacher at the Easter Vigil service”

— St. James-in-the-Hills, Hollywood

• “We made a new banner for the church (with nice big letters), we are in the process of making three new signs, we have moved a welcome table to the front entrance of the church, stocked with name tags, and timely



DON'T'S

• Andrew Weeks reminds participants at The Magnetic Church of some of the evangelism techniques that don't work.

Save the date for Bishop's Spring Conference 2008

• The next Bishop's Spring Conference will be held Feb. 29 and March 1, 2008, at the Duncan Center.

The theme is “Creating a Spirit of Generosity”, and the facilitators will be the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, bishop of North Carolina and William E. Wrenn, missionary for Congregational Development: Stewardship and Evangelism for the Diocese of North Carolina.

on the ministry of greeters, as small groups spread out around the Duncan Center grounds to practice “evangelism greeting,” playing the roles of visitor and greeter and paying attention to what worked and how they felt.

“You may have one only opportunity to represent God to this person,” Weeks said. Greeters need to “get beyond packaging” and treat each newcomer as “a three-week-old child of God,” he urged.

Participants also had a hands-on opportunity to

critique each other’s printed materials — bulletins, newsletters and brochures — looking for clear, understandable communication. Attractive design, consistent image or logo throughout, and no “mystery words” were some of the guidelines Weeks suggested.

He sent participants away with some parting suggestions:

“Fire all your committees and replace them with teams — committees talk about,

teams execute.”

“Let’s be willing to acknowledge our dependence upon God.”

“Go back and paint something!”

“Risk being foolish for God... you will infect people with your newfound graceful silliness.”

For more information on “The Magnetic Church” and how to schedule a workshop for a congregation, go to www.magnetic-church.com.

What did the participants “paint” after the workshop?

Andrew Weeks challenged participants in “The Magnetic Church” to “go back and paint something” and to be “working on something” by the following Tuesday. Nearly two months after the workshop, what are kinds of changes are congregations making?

• “The Sunday bulletin has been made more user-friendly, with an explanatory note at the beginning referring to the Red Book of Common Prayer and the Blue Hymnal. Within the text of the bulletin, ‘BCP p. xxx’ has been changed to ‘page xxx’... We’ve changed the font to Verdana (sharper, cleaner looking) and now use a font size of 11 instead of 10... We have moved Coffee Hour from the kitchen to the part of the patio immediately outside the Chapel door. The result is that more folks linger for Coffee Hour when it’s ‘right there’!... One of our members is a graphic designer. She is working on some sort of logo to use consistently

info about the church, we had a booth at the Marathon Seafood Festival (with our new banner!), I [Deacon Debra Andrew-Maconaughy] have gone on the radio (that really helped), and we are forming a newcomer committee.”

— St. Columba, Marathon

• “We looked at our bulletin and changed a lot of the ‘mysterious words’... we omitted Sursum Corda, Preface and Sanctus and page designation #S-129 since it was redundant and no one could find it anyway. We also wrote out Book of Common Prayer instead of using BCP, which visitors probably were scratching their heads about. We spelled out where the parish hall was when we invited visitors to the coffee hour... 5 and also encouraged members to be greeters.”

— St. Paul’s, Key West

• “Our newly formed Building and

Grounds Committee decided the first thing to do to let people know the cathedral is here and alive was to paint the concrete columns of the perimeter fencing and the patio walls near our garden in an eye-catching South Florida color. The impact was immediate. One person from The Grand condominium building (located right next door) attended our Sunday service and told the dean he never knew the Cathedral was there. We’ve also pressure cleaned the patio and walkways and will be pressure cleaning the front entrance and walkway.”

— Trinity Cathedral, Miami

• “The Saint Joseph’s Magnetic Church team held a meeting the week after the conference to pool notes and ideas from which we will springboard our implementation. We brainstormed the following ideas:

Create a process for visitor follow-up
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