

PRESENTATION FOR MONTREAL AND OTTAWA CONFERENCE
STEWARDSHIP NETWORK

By Eileen Lavigne

FEBRUARY 11th, 2010

First of all I want to thank you for granting me the opportunity to attend the event in Florida – it was a wonderful experience, very moving at times.

I am going to attempt to combine 3 days of program into this one hour – to do that I'm leaving out the social events. I'll tell you about them later. The theme of the event was "Steward Leaders in Changing Times"

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

We had the privilege of having Ron Klusmeier as our music leader – he had prepared a special booklet for the event – he also led us in a very moving exercise – he told us to take the music we already have and to build on it. His presentation set the tone for the worship times that we would have throughout the conference.

As our call to worship today I have selected the phrase "Come let us build community" Hymn 395

Prayer: Thank you Lord for bringing us together today and for the opportunity to learn and work in community – we pray that You would guide all our thoughts this day and we give Thee thanks for all Thy blessings. Amen.

The following is one of the activities that Ron led us through

Please use the following as a meditation – the questions are on the chart –

Paul Sales plays 3 hymns – 1. Identify the song 2. Where did you first hear it? And 3. – What does it mean to you? Think quietly about these for a few moments.

This was followed by Ron telling us his story – a story of a young boy who followed his dream to be a musician. He spoke of his son Marc, who was to

be our worship leader the next two mornings. He told us we should always be ready to tell our story – to share what God has done for us.

To tell my story would take all day so I'll give you the nutshell version – the miracle version – when I was born the doctors told my parents I had too many birth injuries in order to live so they sent me home to die – but God had another plan and I'm still here doing what I feel called to do. Thanks be to God.

Hymn # 52

Tuesday morning began with Worship – as it was Advent the theme was “To Come” and the thoughts were “Something Old” and “Something New” – the question was “What are the things you cherish the most?” He stated that children are the weather vanes of the church. He told stories of children helping with fund raising – how their efforts are rewarded by the amount they raised being matched.

Our first theme speaker was Tony Robinson from the United Church of Christ – he guided us in putting Stewardship in Context – the stewardship of the church of Jesus Christ – the whole church – its health and vitality.

We examined the church Then and Now – I'll give you a few examples but there were many more.

Then	Stores closed
Now	Stores open

Then	Church sermons were quoted by the media and others
Now	No reports

Then	Church time on radio and television – free
Now	We have to pay for it

Then	No sports on Sunday
Now	Lots of sports programs

Tony had us look at a helpful distinction

The technical problem vs the adaptive challenge

Moving from a technical problem to an adaptive challenge is stewardship.

Tony has written a book about the Book of Acts along with a co-author – he told us Acts is a very important book in the Bible.

Another area we looked at is how do we make the church more accessible for all people

- for people with disabilities
- for people who want to learn
- for people who want to know the mission of the church
- for people who want to know what the church is about

He referred us to a book by Phyllis Tickle called “The Great Emergence” (I did some further research on this part and found on page 14 of the book this statement “Like every “new season” this one we recognize as the Great Emergence affects every part of our lives”

If you want to understand this area more fully I recommend you read the book.

Following a break we looked at the following:

1. The purpose or mission of the congregation.
2. Stewardship as a spiritual practice.
3. What is God calling us to do now?
4. When we communicate financial need remember to talk about church’s mission and purpose.

Be energetic and excited when asking for more funds for the church. Have people tell their stories of faith in action. Tell challenges that are ahead.

Stewardship is a spiritual practice.

Following each theme address our Moderator, Mardi Tindal, drew the speaker’s thoughts together for us and led us in some final comments. She is very talented in using poetry to do this – the poem for this section was “The Wild Geese.”

In the afternoon Peter Steinke was the theme speaker – I must admit I found him hard to follow – I kept losing his train of thought but I did my best – I understand some others found him hard to follow also. One of the areas he spoke about was emotional systems – he listed some triggers of anxiety in the church – they are money, sex and sexuality, space construction, lay leadership, staff resignations and major upsets. Anxiety is a real problem in the church and in families today. When we're contemplating change make sure you provide HOPE.

Our Moderator's comment: - Whatever we do counts as its' part in God's new creation.

We spent time in silence thinking about the one thing God is calling me to do as part of God's new creation – then we shared our thoughts with another person – we were cautioned to listen carefully – the poem this time was “Working Together” by David Whyte.

To end the day's program there was a panel presentation with our day's theme speakers. This was our time to ask any questions we had.

Worship Wednesday morning – the theme was “Come and Grow in us” – Questions we meditated on were: “What is it you want?” and “What is it you need?” Marc read us a story about the need for a baby after telling his personal story of trying to have one. Worship ended with the words “I need this baby from Bethlehem” I found this worship very emotional and moving because I could relate it to my personal life – the hymns used also moved me.

Our Wednesday speaker in the morning was Mike Bonem and he spoke about Leading from the second chair – 2nd Chair Leadership – we looked at the question “Am I a Second Chair Leader”

What is a Second Chair Leader – “A person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value throughout the entire organization”

Am I a good subordinate? We want the chair to give us a good reference – we must continue to dream the dreams God has given for us – we spent time looking at our role as second chair leaders – question “Do we support one another?”

Our Moderator's question was "What question do I need to bring to God as a result of this morning?"

She used the poem "Paradox" by Gunilla Norris in Sharing Silence.

Wednesday afternoon was our Moderator's turn – she started off by using the poem "Invocation" – Unfortunately I forgot to write down who the author was – she referred to the book by Phyllis Tickle also "The Great Emergence" – this book speaks of the change in theology.

We heard about true abundance – about true leadership that has integrity.

Life and leadership was another point – she referred us to Psalm 139.

The soul's order can't ever be destroyed – we are in the soul's backyard.
Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope

Standing in paradoxes is what leadership is about – we ended this section by singing "Deep in our Hearts" –

Thursday morning our Moderator was the speaker once more –

HOPE
WHAT WE TREASURE
APPROACHES TO TRUE HOPE

SPIRIT LED LEADERSHIP SEEKS HOPE

She told stories about getting to abundance which illustrated God's abundance and the power of shared leadership

She referred to the plan of Wondercafe where a new person is accepted and then welcomed

She encouraged us to trust that Jesus meant it when He spoke of abundant life.

She referred to the story of the feeding of the 5000 – it spoke of Compassion, Responsiveness, Scarcity, Abundance, Community – How

many loaves do we have to offer? Jesus trusted there was a higher power behind Him.

She referred us to the writings of Jean Vanier and her mentor Parker Palmer.

She stated we must learn to live in community – the community of abundant life.

In our table groups we discussed stories we knew of that illustrated getting to abundance. Some people shared their story with the whole group.

To end this section the poem “The Terma Collective” from “The Box – Remembering the Gift” was used.

Ron then shared with us again – he told us that when some people receive Communion they place their hands in such a way that they form a Advent and Christmas cradle. He stated that Communion is a symbol of peace.

The next section was called Conference Intergration – it was led by our Moderator – She began with the poem “Logos” by Mary Oliver in her book “Why I Wake Early” – She mentioned another book entitled “Thirst” – written also by Mary Oliver.

She had us meditate on the question “What loaves and fishes have you received from these 3 days and how will I share them back home?” We shared these answers in our table groups.

Next question: “What loaves and fishes have you discovered in your own self – within you – what gifts will you give to others?”

The time we spent in table groups was very helpful – I was amazed on 2 occasions to find that my answers were very similar to those of my new friend, Betty. She is from California – Carolyn and I spoke with her several times. Others I shared thoughts with were Stephen Maybee and Bill Steadman. I had heard of Stephen but never met him – Bill of course is from Toronto office.

I feel this is an important question for us all to consider and I shared with Bill some of the many ways Steve Sharlow had encouraged and motivated me – Bill told me every committee needs “thinkers and doers”

I was amazed at how our Moderator used poetry to draw the whole event together –

POETRY
MUSIC
STORIES

Final poem – “A Blessing for Longing” by John O’Donohue.

For our closing worship the story of Jesus going to the other side of the lake was used. We were told it is better to stay in our home town and tell the story and rebuild the world one thing or person at a time.

So how do we get this message out to our Presbyteries and congregations – this is something that I feel is very important for us to do – one workshop for a congregation may be gathering and examining the changes in their own church – the Then and Now – and what can we do to turn the Now into a positive situation remembering always to give people a sense of hope –

Another workshop could be ideas and tools for getting to abundance. Our Moderator shared several with us – and we all discussed this in our table groups. We don’t celebrate our successes and we need to do this. I could relate this to the Stewardship Conference that we had to cancel recently – and how I had kept telling people that we had to celebrate the successes and what we had achieved during the time leading up to the cancellation date.

What I have shared with you is only the tip of the iceberg – I am very passionate and dedicated to getting the message out there by doing whatever I can – I know that Carolyn has shared information with Seaway Valley Presbytery – I gave a brief summary at Ottawa Presbytery – so in the future I would like to see presentations given at Montreal and Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbyteries.

I feel it is very important for us to have people concerned about stewardship in our conference at this event. The event in 2010 will be held from November 29th to December 2nd at the Sirata Hotel, St. Pete Beach, Florida.

The theme and speakers will be announced shortly. I will let you know the details when I receive them.

I would be very honoured to represent our Conference again but I suggest that the decision be made by the end of June so we won't have the hassle arranging flights as we did this time.

Shalom