

Leadership for Evangelism in the 21st Century
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Reflections on Evangelism in the 21st Century (as learned in community):

1. If we read the gospels, we find that Jesus is irresistible. As he traveled to and from local communities, and as he talked to people religiously different than himself, such as Samaritans, Roman Soldiers, Greeks, many either dropped everything or took significant risks to follow him. So how come we are not more interesting? How come our communities are not responding like those villages and towns to Jesus. The earliest disciples were effective, but had their own internal feuds, questions about boundaries, and other human distractions as we do? Yet the gospel also teaches us that we are enough, here, now, enough, to do what Jesus did – feeding, healing, reconciling, and raising the dead. It has never been easy for those in the Christian movement to follow Jesus, but we have, and the genius of our faith is that it is adaptable to the villages and towns to which it is carried. We all live in changing communities.
2. A “tool kit” is not a recipe or a set of gimmicks to draw people in superficially. The mega-church movement has shown that many people thus “converted” want more after 5-6 years. A “tool kit” is knowledge of our own contents and the needs of the people in those communities. There is an infinite yearning for authentic community in the world, and that yearning is a space in the human heart that can only be filled by God. Ironically, the best way we can strengthen our churches is to show (and shout) that we can give the world *more* than churches. Perhaps we need to see “faith communities” in more porous expansive terms that are inclusive of the many ways Christian people gather – dioceses, churches, chaplaincies, camps, community centers, families, etc. Would it not be wonderful if the Episcopal Church was known not simply for the size of its membership, but for the size (expansiveness) of our mission!
3. Part of mission/evangelism is to claim our role in teaching members of our own communities what it means to be a Christian in the midst of religious pluralism. How can we as Christians show intentional hospitality to our sisters and brothers of other religious traditions? How can we model a Christian faith that is not exclusivistic and oppressive, yet is also particular? Many of the reasons interreligious dialogue breaks down (for Christians) is a lack of clarity about who we are and what we offer for the world that is distinct, as well as how to form relationships across the boundaries of religious differences. We have now young adults who are more comfortable with the idea of multiple religious belonging. We also live in the most religiously diverse country in the world. How we are the church and how we do theology in the 21st century is inseparable from the reality of religious diversity. People in the pews and in communities encounter that

diversity. How do we help them make sense of their own faith, and support them in loving their neighbors? The fact that our theology and polity allow us varying interpretations helps dialogue across religious difference.

4. Lastly, how can we (the Episcopal Church) be a source of reconciliation in the church and in the world. We live in a world with a great deal of human suffering. Clearly, the gospel challenges us to respond to that suffering. How might we better focus on the role of agents of reconciliation? Some media depict us as caught up in internal strife, rather than as a church that addresses the needs of people? Obviously, there are many, many examples of effective ways that the church makes a difference. How can we live up those examples and create conversations about them?