

MY HOPE FOR THE MINSTER SAINT JOHN'S

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A Minster is an idea from late antiquity. It was a base community usually of monks who came to an area and built a church complex. There they began the rhythm of worship, formation and service.

Because they lived in community, they had stamina, patience and the resources needed to evangelize and live as servants in the surrounding countryside, which was a key strategy of the Minster concept. Outpost churches eventually sprang up, which helped to extend their reach.

A key function of the Minster was to preserve the tradition of Christianity as well as the values of the vanishing world of late antiquity. Much of what remains of the writings of the ancients comes through the work of such communities.

In addition to preservation, they also creatively engaged the realities of their times by teaching, inventing new products and improving the surrounding region. They had, as Al Mapp writes in his book, *The Three Golden Ages*, “a creative tension between tradition and innovation.”

Such must be the posture of the Minster Saint John's – digging deeply into the unspeakably rich tradition and using the technology of the present age to communicate the good news of God revealed in Christ. Such a combination is the legacy of Minster.

My notion is that in time, as we are formed and educated in the ministry of the towel and hospitality, our family homes become the outposts of the Minster Saint John's. There in the neighborhoods are those in need of servant ministry, encouragement and evangelism. Such work need not be invasive but rather the fruit of old-fashioned good neighbors. This kind of low-pressure evangelism includes liturgies such as house blessings where the neighborhood is invited. Resources such as Gertrude Mueller Nelson's *To Dance With God* might serve as a resource for a family living a liturgical life.

It seems to me that the notion of Minster has several anchor components that interface and overlap to produce a matrix for transformation.

People are the Church's first resource. The nurture of the faithful by word, sacrament and worship is in one sense all there is in the Minster economy. Worship, music (the choice of and execution thereof), reading by lectors, the work of acolytes, lay Eucharistic ministers, preaching, presiding, the quality of the orders of service and the thoughtful, careful preparation of the liturgy is essential as we meet more people there than any other time. Esthetics is one of the tools of the Spirit. The art of John De Rosen sets the standard of excellence for us. We, as staff/coaches and our lay colleagues must strive continually for the best we can offer to God as a reasonable and holy offering.

Prayer is the breath of the Church. Centering Prayer, the daily offices, healing services, spiritual mentoring all are necessary if our souls are to prosper.

Formation and educational offerings must be of the highest quality. Systematic planning so that we cover the Bible, Christian history and tradition and the integration of what we believe with how we live is essential. Much work is required if we are to approach acceptable standards in these areas. Education for Ministry (EFM) is one strategic intervention in leadership training. We owe the graduates the attention and discernment to find their place in the ministry team of the parish.

In servant ministry, our people deserve training, encouragement, and the example of their leadership and staff. Giving money, although essential, is not enough. The Memphis Boychoir, Memphis Chamber Choir, Jacob's Ladder, Planting Faith Ministries and other such works are the outward tokens of the expanding of our hearts. Saint John's sits in a unique place in Memphis. Small family homes, mansions, the country club, the university and Orange Mound surround us.

Someone has said that if we deny our people the ministry of the towel then we have taken from them a precious part of their Christian heritage. The liturgical washing of feet is a sacramental act that points to the countless sacramental acts of ordinary life.

In each of these venues there is a call to us. I hope that Saint John's will be a meeting place for the neighborhood associations surrounding the church. Already some are meeting there. Discerning our call to the University Community is an area untouched by our planning. Saint John's has a long association with the Orange Mound Community. This work needs evaluation and strategic planning that we may better serve those in need.

In addition to worship, Christians thrive best when they have a regular gathering of a small group to worship, eat, play, pray and basically share common life. Planning for this is underway, but much needs to be done. The future health of the parish lies in this area.

The Flower and Sacred Arts Festival at Saint John's has the potential to bring a laser focus to the standard of excellence in worship and liturgy. The morphing into the festival for all the arts will bring a yearly emphasis on the heart of our life of worship. I see this as becoming a signature event both for the nurture of the parish and also as an outreach into the greater Memphis community.

At present I am in serious conversation with the faculty of the Center For Family Emotional Process of Bethesda, Maryland about the possibility of establishing a satellite program for leadership training at Saint John's Memphis. Systems Theory and its application to the lives of individuals, families, churches, businesses and other human institutions is one of my life passions. Although there is no guarantee at present that this will happen I am cautiously hopeful. Why would this be a good thing for Saint John's? These four folk studied with Murray Bowen and worked with my teacher Edwin Friedman. Their skill in coaching and training pioneers in systems is, in my opinion, second to none. This program would give our people a chance to do intense work with their family of origin as well as discern the patterns of the systems they inhabit. In addition such a center would provide a less expensive continuing education opportunity for the clergy and other professions of the Diocese of West Tennessee as well as professionals in psychology and counseling. My hope would be to attract folk from law, medicine, business (especially family businesses) and anyone interested in the systemic nature of reality. Such a program at Saint John's will enhance and promote a sort of thinking that will bring quantum maturity to our leadership and strategic thinking.

It's crucial to develop an initiative for stewardship/planned giving and money management for individuals, families of the parish and the community beyond. This is a longer-range goal but I've had a conversation with someone about such a program housed at Saint John's that is premature to describe in detail. It would be at least a year away.

Evangelism is simply nothing more than one street person telling another street person where the food is. That requires that we find the food source ourselves and then become comfortable in finding our particular voice for sharing the good news of God in Christ. It may be that Cursillo could be such a vehicle for Saint John's. We need to think about that and explore who might go as an experiment. I likely need to go as a spiritual director. Those who have gone on The Walk to Emmaus can support this endeavor. Much work needs to be done to interface these two movements.

The maximum use of the existing facilities is a great hope of mine. The work of the architect and acoustician reveal the work needed on half-century buildings. I am encouraged that our Capital Campaign architect has so ably given us options for the maximum use of the existing complex. The sound challenges in the Parish Life Center are more pressing than we realize. When we worship there during the renovations of the Nave we must be able to hear. This will be costly, but essential.

My deepest hope for Saint John's is that we form a prism for the light of the Holy Spirit. Then, as the Spirit chooses, this light may be focused with unforeseen effects and for individuals, the assembled faithful and the greater community. I believe by envisioning Saint John's as the Minster model, and then by putting into place the necessary anchors to make it a reality, we might become that prism.

