

Province 7 Christian Formation Meeting

Held November 8-10, 2010 at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas

Present: Teresa Rogers (Diocese of Kansas), Julie Steen (Diocese of Western Kansas), Sabrina Evans (Diocese of Oklahoma), Lou Taylor (Diocese of West Texas) and Jane Gober (Diocese of the Rio Grande).

We began with dinner on Monday night, getting to know each other and our different ministries. We met again for breakfast Tuesday morning.

The formal meeting began Tuesday morning at approx. 9 AM. Each member introduced themselves and told the story of how they came to be involved in Christian Formation. There was a discussion about ways to “legitimize” youth ministers in the Episcopal Church. Some church members do not see us as ministers because we are not ordained. We discussed continuing education options for Christian formation leaders. The Kansas School of Ministry has a calendar of activities listed on the Diocese’ web site (<http://episcopal-ks.org/index.html>). The Diocese of Alabama (<http://dioala.org/>) has a manual for new youth ministers. Scroll down on the left until you see “parish resources” and then click on Christian Formation. It can easily be adapted for other dioceses.

Diocesan Reports:

Oklahoma: Sabrina passed out many handouts on the upcoming camps, acolyte festival, new beginnings/happenings/vocare, safeguarding God’s children, and EYE. She shared that anyone in the diocese of Oklahoma who works with children must be recertified in Safeguarding God’s Children every 4 to 5 years. Anyone who is interested in the Episcopal Teacher magazine can get a copy by emailing cmt@vts.edu. She will be hosting a conference on Christian Formation for Older Adults (called Abundant Aging Conference) at Camp Allen in the Diocese of Texas Feb. 28- March 2.

Kansas: Teresa shared that the diocese has 45 churches. They do Godly Play, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and lectionary based activities throughout the diocese. Their youth program is strong. They have Happenings, MIQRA, and a Missionpalooza with the Diocese of Western Missouri. There was discussion of the MIQRA event that is held over Martin Luther King weekend every year in Topeka. The youth commission plans activities which take place while the entire Bible is read aloud. They also do Peer Ministry, New Beginnings and Church Camp. Each year there is a fall fun fest, which has inflatables, singing and movies. There is no teaching during the event, so it is a risk free place to bring un-churched friends and get them introduced to youth group.

Western Kansas: Julie said that her diocese is in a state of new beginnings at this time. She shared about the diocesan convention that was held in October. The diocese is very hopeful now, but has some healing to do. The entire diocesan staff will simply consist of a part time bishop who is also the largest parish’s priest and a comptroller who will begin working in January or February. The diocese is trying to work with the Diocese of Kansas on more things.

West Texas: Lou told us about the four camps that the diocese has now. There is Camp Capers and the Mustang Island Conference Center. They also share a camp in Colorado, and are getting space at

Broomswick (unsure of spelling). The diocese has 5 large churches, but most of the churches in the diocese are small. Lou reminds her diocese regularly that Christian Formation is not just about children. It is a lifelong endeavor. She does have Godly Play training. She told us that the Bishop does not currently plan to fill her position when she retires in December. However, she (with her bishop's permission) plans to find someone from the diocese to sit on this panel. Lou shared that dioceses can become "members" of Morehouse Publishing for \$500, and Morehouse will send a copy of everything they publish that year. She plans a dinner for all the Christian Formation Educators a few times a year. The dinner is used as a time to connect and be encouraged. The diocese always has a youth presence at their Diocesan Council meetings each year and tries to have a children's program at all adult events. They have a resource room that anyone in the diocese can use.

Rio Grande: Jane shared that her diocese has 50 congregations. They are unsure of what will happen with their diocesan camp this year because they are currently without a camp director. They plan to hire an interim. She told us that it is important to "weed out" old items, such as VHS tapes, and just buy DVDs. The churches in Albuquerque have a Good Friday Activity Day every year. They have changed their VBS from a "bought program" into a week of producing a musical. The kids do set design, music, drama, etc. This summer (2010) they did a play based on the book The Three Trees. She hopes to do something with the book God Said Amen next summer.

Website:

All members looked at the current Province 7 website (<http://www.province7.org/>). We "googled" Episcopal Sunday School and found that David Cook's curriculum comes up first. We hope there is a way to change the coding so that people new to teaching Sunday School do not think David Cook is the only thing that is offered. We brainstormed ways to make finding Episcopal Sunday School information easy. There was discussion about a blog based forum on building faith. We discussed the letter Julie sent out to all of the churches in the province last year. Perhaps we should update the letter and resend it each year. We feel that the Province 7 website should be updated at least four times a year. We looked at the Christian Formation page of the website. We think we should all send a picture to Lou so that Susan can update the page with our pictures and email addresses. We discussed the difficulties of doing "recharging" events for Sunday School teachers. They often see it as one more thing to do, rather than a time to refocus and encourage each other. We discussed having business cards with the websites of all of the Province 7 websites. It would be nice to have curriculum links such as Sharon's page, Godly Play, Candlelight Press, and Church Publishing.

In closing, we also discussed the following items: At diocesan conventions/councils that meet yearly, we should try to have a Christian Formation Booth with information for adult formation as well as children's. Churches without children can be encouraged to have Sunday School whenever grandchildren come to visit. Ideas for Adult Formation include Fishing Rodeos, Book Clubs and fruit and vegetable exchanges during planting seasons. We felt that Christian Formation needs to be re-explained. The school model of completing tasks is not really the best. Using fellowship and relationship to teach is a much better way. We discussed some books by F. Washington Jarvis, such as Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry, Building Home for Faith, Blessings of a B-, and Blessings of a Skinned Knee as good reads

for us and parents. Another good book is Seasons of Faith. We also discussed the value of Emergence Magazine. We will all continue to open people's eyes to the fact that Christian Formation is lifelong formation.

Plans for the Future:

Because of Lou's retirement it is necessary to find a new chair for this committee. It was decided that Sabrina Evans and Jane Gober will share the position. Julie Steen will take on the roles of secretary and treasurer for now. This needs to be approved by the Province's President, who is currently Max Patterson. We hope to meet again in San Antonio during the Province Seven Synod, which will be in San Antonio on Sept. 30th and Oct. 1st, 2011. We plan to have at least one conference call between now and then to check in with each other, and share ideas on different church seasons.

Jana Strukova:

After adjourning the meeting for the evening, the group met again after breakfast on Wednesday morning to visit with Jana Strukova. Jana is the professor of Christian Formation at the Seminary of the Southwest. She began our meeting by asking each of us to share our struggles with Christian Formation. She shared that the struggles we are having are shared all over the country. She had just returned from a conference, and learned that most people in Christian Formation want to move away from the school and program model. There is an emphasis on relationships, and on making Christian Formation a lifelong process. She encouraged us to plan activities that include all members of the Body of Christ. We want to be sure that activities are age appropriate for each group, but that does not always have to mean separating out into different rooms. The word "family" can have bad connotations for some people, but we want to encourage our parishes and dioceses to be the Body of Christ to each other, needed every part to function together. This idea of our church being the full body starts with a vision of where we are going and who we want to be, rather than a program. We are not leading a revolution to change our churches, but are trying to evolve into a safe, hopeful place for all members. We want to remember that Christian Formation is the responsibility of everyone in the church. At our annual meetings, we should have groups which include kids.

Closing:

There were some final discussions about how this group should continue. We serve renewable 3 year terms. No one should serve more than 6 years, though that does happen sometimes. It is good to have some overlap to help "train" the next group. We don't want to reinvent the group, so there should be some continuity. We agreed to try and meet together physically once a year, and to conference call at least once a year. Lou will be sure to get all of our website ideas to Susan. Please email a picture to Lou as soon as possible. The group adjourned at 10:30 AM.

Contacts: The following is contact information for those who attended.

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