



## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH THE GENERAL CONVENTION

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### **Reflection given by Bonnie Anderson to The Living Stones on the occasion of their 15<sup>th</sup> Birthday 2/9/09**

Thank you. I have sincerely enjoyed being here with you.

I would like to tell you a little about why I am an Episcopalian.

I grew up in southern California in a Hispanic neighborhood. My parents were divorced when I was 7. Being in a Hispanic neighborhood, the only non-latino, a roman catholic with divorced parents, made me a bit of an anomaly. But my neighborhood was the place where I was fully embraced, welcomed into homes at dinner time particularly. I did not have a natural big family, really just me and my mom, but I learned about how big families talked about problems and how big families celebrated. I was made welcome and loved in that community.

I found out when I moved away from that neighborhood that the Catholic Church did not much care if I went to church every Sunday or not. It was my neighbors who cared if I went to church and in my new living place, there was no community in the Catholic Church for me and I soon drifted away.

Years later, my neighbor in rural Pennsylvania asked me and my family (which is my husband and three children – small then, grown now) to go to church. It was an Episcopal Church. As I sat there waiting for the service to begin, I thumbed through the prayer book and found the Catechism. Being a recovering Roman Catholic I was very familiar with Catechism. In the Catechism, in answer to the question, “Who are the ministers of the Church?” I read that in this church the ministers are the laity, the bishops the priests and deacons. And you know what? My heart started thumping in my chest and I believed what I read and I said, “Where do I sign up?”

My family and I were welcomed, literally embraced, and I was brought back to my experiences of a loving community that knew how to solve problems together and to have wonderful celebrations. So from my early life in a poor, community of marginalized people, to my later life, being called to the ministry of the laity and called to a church that says that ministry of all the baptized is what it is about, finding other people who believe what it says in the catechism and the baptismal covenant, I find myself here with you tonight.



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Here we are tonight together. We gather to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday of Living Stones. In much of the Hispanic/Latino community the 15<sup>th</sup> (quince años) birthday celebration is the celebration of a young girl, who is called the Quinceanera, becoming a woman. It is a “coming of age” party so to speak. The nina becomes a seniorita.

It seems to me that this is a quinceanera celebration. It is a time, as in all quinceanera celebrations, for reflecting on the past 14 years and for looking toward the next phase of life. It is a rite of passage.

I have enjoyed being here with you. Keeping in mind that my reflections are purely intuitive and observational, here are a few things that strike me about Living Stones:

1. You have developed and perfected a learning model that is inclusive, well implemented and, in itself, provides a transferable skill to offer to the baptized who seek to live their baptismal promises. It is a model of shared authority and power. It is a circular model being exercised in a hierarchical system.

Your learning model as I observe it is this:

Presenting the situation, clarifying the information, posing questions, listening to others who perhaps can see the forest for the trees, then reflecting together.

My question is this:

Is this model used with the ministry teams/mission developers/diocesan staff? If not, why? If so, what are you learning from wider use of this learning model of shared authority and power, and what can be brought back to Living Stones so the Living Stones community can have the benefit of your experience?

2. I admit that I do not know much about the structure of Living Stones as an organization. But it does seem to me that after 15 years it is probably time to do some intentional reflection, re evaluating, reassessment and goal setting. While I have been here I have heard that the “total ministry” model is flexible enough to fit many unique situations. I would push on that just a bit and wonder if it might be helpful to concretize exactly HOW the model is flexible and adaptable. You have indicated that there are approximately 30 dioceses (give or take) using “non-traditional” ministry models.

They way I see it, the Total Ministry model provides a collaborative structure for ministry. Again, a circular model of shared authority and power. It appears that Living Stones has been primarily focused on



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getting the structures set up and refined. I was surprised to see that the BMERs focus primarily on the structures – how to set them up, get them established, support them. I was curious if there are BMERs about the *mission* of all the baptized. What do the structures enable you to do beside be supported in a worshipping community? Supported for what? Living Stones is an incredible resource for empowering the mission of the baptized in the world.

The story of me that I told you a few minutes ago became a story of us it went from just a story of me to a story of us when I became an Episcopalian. Each of us has this story. We all have stories of self and stories of us. But the next story is the story of commitment. It is a story of action. What are we being called to do? The promises we make in our baptismal covenant are promises of action.

**Continue** in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.

**Persevere** in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, **repent** and **return** to the Lord.

**Proclaim** by word and example the good news of God in Christ.

**Seek** and **serve** Christ in all persons, **loving** our neighbors as ourselves

**Strive** for justice and peace among all people, and **respect** the dignity of every human being.

In the structures that Living Stones has so carefully created for ministry support there are exciting stories of mission and ministry to be shared. More than anything I would like to affirm your work, your ministry to God's Church we all love so much. I encourage you to keep your eye on the prize and to make sure you know and all agree on what the prize is.

There are new and innovative ways of doing mission and ministry. Maybe the next birthday of Living Stones will celebrate the transformation of the whole church into a church that makes good the words in the catechism: "Who are the ministers of the church?"