

Supercatechu Man ate



Faster than a speeding bullet . . .
more powerful than a locomotive
. . . it's a bird; it's a plane, it's
not like anything else we know!

Like Superman, the catechumenate defies easy description. It's formation, it's evangelism, it's scripture study, it's ritual, it's vocation, it's social justice, it's not like anything else we know!

So, what does the church do with something that is not like anything else it knows? Not surprisingly, our church bodies struggle mightily with this alien invader. Denominations are orga-

nized primarily by "program areas" (or some similar description) and so the ever present question is, "Where does the catechumenate fit?" As long as "the catechumenate" is seen as relating primarily to only one aspect of church life (i.e., worship, education, or evangelism), the struggle will continue for acceptance into the full life of the church.

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RETURNING TO THE FALLS

Mark your calendars for the 2007 Gathering, July 19 through 22.

We will meet again at the beautiful Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre high above the Falls in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.

The keynote speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, professor of homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. While his vocation includes teaching seminarians, Dr. Satterlee also spends most Sundays preach-

ing and presiding in congregations of the ELCA. He is author of many books including *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching*, *Presiding in the Assembly*, and *When God Speaks through Change: Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition*. He and Lester Ruth coauthored *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*.

The liturgist will be the Rev. Dr. Clay Morris, Liturgical Officer for Liturgy and Music in the Episco-

pal Church, USA. He is author of *Holy Hospitality: Worship and the Baptismal Covenant* and co-editor of *As We Gather to Pray: An Episcopal Guide to Worship*.



CONNECTING THE STAGES

It was with great joy that NAAC met again in Niagara Falls for the 2006 annual gathering. We have grown quite fond of the Mt. Carmel Spiritual Centre. They have shown us wonderful friendship and hospitality.

The keynote speaker was Maxwell E. Johnson, professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame. An ordained Lutheran pastor, Dr. Johnson was able to provide a wonderful "human outlook" along with theology to make us

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NAAC NEWS ON THE WEB

The past issues of *NAAC News* in color are available on the website and ready for downloading by way of .pdf. This issue will be posted on the Resources page of the site a month after it has been mailed to the membership.

Super Catechumenate

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It seems to me that this question may be the biggest stumbling block for the expansion of catechumenal practice — well, that and the absence of funding. Across denominational lines, churchwide budgets and staffing have been and are continuing to be slashed, while expectations for programs and service to congregations have increased. The result is “unfunded mandates” — denominational goals and objectives that lack funding for implementation. So, as program units are pawing at the budget pot, sniffing for a way to break in and nab a share of funding, necessity requires they fund goals and objectives that have the promise of providing strong, measurable returns in specific program areas.

The reality of this environment requires that catechumenal conversation must change in order to survive. Of this I became convinced following a meeting with the Rev. Michael Burk, Director for Worship in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We must find a way to broaden the appeal of the catechumenate in ways that will capture the interest of other aspects of church organization. Instead of

asking the question, “Where does the catechumenate fit?,” a more pertinent question is “How does the catechumenate strengthen education, evangelism, justice, vocation, mission, stewardship, and worship in congregational life and, by extension, in the life of the whole church?”

Perhaps roundtable discussions with leaders of multiple program areas would help to weave the catechumenate thread throughout the fabric of our churches. When the catechumenate is broadly understood as a process that does not end with the rite of baptism or affirmation of baptism, but indeed calls, nurtures, trains, and sends people into lives of Christian discipleship, it may then fall upon previously “stopped up” ears that would be opened to hear this Gospel word.

Michael Burk and Cheryl Dieter (Interim Associate Director for Worship, ELCA) presented a strong case, again, for developing “accessible language” for the catechumenate. Endless hours have been devoted to casual and formal discussion on this very question. Even so, the question continues to arise, and implementation of the catechumenate is fairly stagnant, at least anecdotally observed. If

language is a primary hindrance that prevents the church from bringing people to the River of Life, then maybe we need to finally kick this stumbling block out of the road. After all, Superman was also known as Clark Kent. Maybe the catechumenate needs an alias too.

Think about it. Clark Kent had all the same powers as Superman, but he was able to be places and do things that Superman couldn't possibly do, largely because people were so distracted by the cape, the tights, the boots, and that slick hair-do. In some places, it was okay, like among other superheroes for whom the cape and tights and all didn't cause a batted eyelash. But among cape-less people, the cape was in and of itself a deal-breaker for inclusion in the existing culture.

So, maybe there is a point in dropping the catechumenate “cape” (and tights and boots) so that the catechumenate's transformative powers might be able to take hold.

What do you think? Join the discussion at www.catechumenate.org.

Rev. Bev Piro
NAAC Board Member

THE PASSING OF JERRY CHRISTOPHER

One of the founders of NAAC, Jerry Christopher, died in Houston on November 3 following complications after a fall in his home. Jerry was an Air Force officer, had a 25-year career in broadcasting, served two terms as a Justice of the Peace, and spent the last 36 years of his life as an owner and general manager of a corporation. In June 1988, while still working at his corporation, he earned a

psychology degree in psychotherapy from Southwest University. He was a long-time catechist and worked with the Rev. Walter Guettsche in establishing the modern catechumenate. He was a member in Emmanuel Episcopal as Verger who organized all aspects of the service as lay assistant to the Rector. His service was always to the glory of God. He showed this through his passion for liturgy.

REVIEW: *The Hallelujah Highway*

If you enjoy finding out how things we consider “tradition” came to be and want to know who had influence in such matters, and if this interest spills over into things liturgical, especially the catechumenate, then have I got a book for you.

Hallelujah Highway does just that in regards to the development, loss, and restoration of the catechumenate over the centuries in the Christian church. This book is more than just a time-line of events, however. It gives brief synopses of how local customs in various places gave impetus for what we know as the catechumenate to develop. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s church was flexible enough to meet the needs of people in many circumstances who wished to become followers of Christ, while keeping to some fundamental principles. Without benefit of network meetings, conference calls or e-mail, in almost all the cases outlined in the book, at almost all times, the Church held fast to the belief that those wishing baptism were expected to demonstrate a change in their lives. It can be argued that these expectations were not expressed in a formal liturgical way in the Middle Ages when it was mostly Christian parents bringing their infants for baptism. It was interesting to me that while the ritual actions changed over time (for instance, Ambrose washed the feet of the newly baptized), and while the time of preparation fluctuated, and the dates of baptism were not uniform, what was essential for all the newly baptized over the

centuries and in every location is that they were expected to live their lives differently as a result of being baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection.

Catechumens found their lives investigated. Were they known to be people who lived piously? Did they honor widows, visit the sick, and perform other good deeds? These were all signs of a life transformed by Christ, leading people to seek baptism into Christ.

Eventually, with the development of manuals and ritual texts and their dissemination, ritual actions during the catechumenate

“Everyone who travels the highway of the catechumenate experiences death and resurrection. Easter . . . embraces those who die to their former allegiances and rise to give their hearts to Christ.”

began to become uniform, as did the Easter Vigil for the principle time of baptism. Such practices as the anointing of catechumens before and after baptism, the handing over of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, and their recitation before baptism became normative. Still, various local traditions developed, right up to and including recent times.

At the conclusion of each chapter, Turner gives a brief synopsis of the content under such headings as “First Interest” (usually some spiritual experience prompted people to inquire about the Christian faith), “Preparation for Baptism” (outline what processes were expected by various Christian ministers or churches), “Bap-

tism” (describing how and when this was done), and “Life After Baptism” (what was expected of the newly baptized). The chapters are short and very easy to read.

This book lifts up various people whose influence greatly shaped the development of the catechumenate. Among those are Peter and Paul, Justin Martyr, Origen, Ambrose and John Chrysostom, showing that whether one’s ministry was primarily pastoral, preaching or teaching, together, they worked to build up the body of Christ.

Turner, who states that his baptism as an infant shows that even from an early age his parents knew he would be a sinner, writes as part of the conclusion, “The death and resurrection story of the catechumenate offers hope to all those who walk in faith . . . our lives are enriched whenever we behold the divine touch of grace.”

Reading this book reminds me that whatever obstacles we face in the implementation and maintenance of the catechumenate in the church today, it is, after all is said and done, God’s ministry and God’s will be done!

Rev. Canon Stephen Harnadek
Secretary, NAAC

Paul Turner, *The Hallelujah Highway: A History of the Catechumenate*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2000.



CONNECTING THE STAGES

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think about catechumenal process. We were able to return home to our parishes with rich food indeed! His humor added a great dimension to his talks.

Worship was led by Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey with wonderful musical accompaniment from Barry Sames. It was an amazing time of celebration and reflection. Once again the workshops put us all in the centre of mixing together practice and theory that we could take home to our parishes.

During our annual general

meeting, changes within the Board were announced as well as conversation around ways the entire NAAC community can be involved in the future of NAAC. We all hope that the new direction we plan to go in will hold us all in the service of Christ and his kingdom.

This year was NAAC's tenth gathering and we were able to hold a wonderful banquet on Saturday night where we took a quick trip down memory lane. It was fun to see where NAAC has traveled and the various leaders

who shared their wisdom and insight.

Thanks to everyone who attended the 2006 gathering of NAAC. We hope you will be able to return next year and bring others to our annual event. It is a marvelous time to get together to support one another and get "new life" in our various catechumenal ministries throughout the world. Hope to see you all again soon.

Peace always,
Shirley Griffin

NAAC Site Coordinator

UNDERSTANDING THE RESISTANCE

Dan Benedict has written an important essay in which he surveys the "embrace and resistance" to the catechumenate. In the September 2006 issue of *Catechumenate*, his "North American Recovery of the Rites of Initiation" names eleven reasons for the rejection of the rites together with the way others "embrace [the rites] with reservation."

One of his reasons for the rejection

of the rites is the "attachment to notions of instantaneous conversion as making disciples and failure to take seriously the necessity of transformation of behaviour To date, few are willing to think of and work toward such deep channels of conversion." This idea took me back to July at our gathering as Max Johnson spoke of Donald Gelpi's work in conversion as taking place in four ways through-

out our lives, conversion that is affective, intellectual, moral, and socio-political.

It is difficult when those committed to the value and implementation of the catechumenate meet those who are not so convinced. Dan's essay is important reading and names the nature of the "resistance" and "embrace" with caution.

Clement Mehlman

FROM DOWNUNDER

"Institutional survival does not seem to me to be a worthy motivation for evangelism. Should sharing the good news not come naturally if it really is good news? . . . The Becoming Disciples process is about the most sensible and logical way I have heard to do this. We meet people on neutral territory, get to know them, hear their story and earn the opportunity to tell ours. . . . Inquirers come to see that the good news actually does offer something very positive for their lives." Rob Bos of the Uniting Church in Australia. Recommended website — <http://assembly.uca.org.au/TD/disciples> where you can subscribe to his monthly e-mail.

■ *"The Triune God, who has formed a new community in Christ's name, calls people to community through the community that bears God's name. Therefore, this process is both communal and public and specializes in corporate discernment . . . the catechumenate is concerned with the conversion of the community as much as it is concerned with catechumens. God is at work in the church to transform it so that it might be the body of Christ given to the world."*

— David Batchelder

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