

Good morning and thank you Joyce for inviting me to St. Andrew's!

I managed to 'fly under the radar' for the first 35 years of my life! If I had leadership abilities, I was 'hiding my light under a bushel'. It was easy to do - I was raised in a big family (I have 6 siblings), I attended a large church, high school and university and when I chose my job I picked an international company and I chose a position where I did not need to manage, organize, motivate or interact with fellow employees on a daily basis. I was a field auditor, and most of the contacts I did have were adversarial! Sadly, I loved my work :-<

A decade later, I found myself on the doorstep of Grace Episcopal Church in Medford. Here I was in my mid 30's, I had given up on God and the Catholic church soon after I left college, and I was struggling in a marriage which had turned me inwards and isolated me from family and friends. I was hurting and I was desperate. I knew I had to make a change - I had to find connection and community, and God!

And I did find this and a new liberating faith which I did not experience growing up. . My new parish family embraced me, nurtured and encouraged me, and. I've made life-long friends through our common belief and dedication to our church. I am passionate about welcoming newcomer's to the Church, and it is because of what I experienced and continue to experience each time I walk thru the doors of my church. I found where 'I' belonged!

Today we are in the Sunday between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost. Ascension Thursday is one of those feast days we don't do 'well' in the Episcopal church since it doesn't fall on a Sunday! ☺ It celebrates the ascension of Jesus Christ in his resurrected body into heaven. This Sunday in between the two feast days is really a period of waiting, waiting, waiting for the outpouring of the spirit on Pentecost. And Pentecost, the birthday of the church, was the beginning of a new creation, a new mission for the Church – and that mission is to share God's life thru Christ. We are beginning to hear it in the Gospel of John which Joyce read today:

Jesus says:

“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world”

“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world”

The season of Pentecost which will continue until Advent is focused on the work of the Spirit – as you know, the color of the season is green (for growth). Our church stresses vocation,

mission, evangelism and other works. It is fitting that I am here speaking with you just before we enter this season of 'work and mission' in the church!

So, what does this mean for us today?

To take you back to Grace Church – although I had found this wonderful group of people in my new church home, I began to realize that this parish was really struggling. I found a small church which had been declining in membership for years. It was a place that (like me) had turned in and was not turning 'out' into the world. . But, I heard many glorious stories of Grace Church's past – how the church had been a 'beacon of light' to the city and was known for so many things – it's Fairs, it's work with the military and it's work in the community– the church had had a real identity and place in the city!! Everyone seemed to want it to prosper again, but no one seemed to have the tools or energy to collectively make that happen.

I became part of the Vestry pretty quickly – I was young(er) and new blood!! I wasn't chosen for my leadership skills since I had none at the time. ☺ We struggled thru the next years and I can best describe it

5 years ago, we found ourselves in a real crisis – at this point I was the Sr. Warden. We no longer had the financial resources to support our parish- we had no money!. Our full time priest really had to move on because of this.

Grace Leadership made some tough practical choices which come with crisis like this

But more importantly, we reflected on what had held us back- over the past 20-30 years, and there were a number of reasons.

- One was that we expected our priest to 'do the work' and the heavy lifting with ideas and initiatives –it was a priest focused church
- Our core group of leaders did not 'practice what we preached' by recognizing the gifts of all those who were coming through our doors and integrating them in to our parish. We really did not KNOW these newer people.
- We had to come to terms with the fact that we did not have the tools which would help us with organizing and following thru on work which we said was important to us
- We had not reflected enough on the changing world and church – what made Grace Church a presence in 1960 or 1970 was NOT what would be today.

- Lastly (but most importantly) we had not trusted in God and were unwilling to take risks

The ONLY WAY, we could transform our church was to transform our lay leadership. It became a priority to choose a priest who would be a partner in our transformation and our focus would be the training and organizing of our parish leaders.

We were blessed to find that pastoral leader and we found The Leadership Development Initiative (LDI)...

Thru LDI we learned practical ways of creating strong teams and running meetings, setting goals and measuring our success and failures with a concrete 'campaign, AND we learned to tell our stories and build relationships within our churches and outside our walls. This was probably the most important thing for me: to find my voice, share my story and be willing to 'share' in ministry.

Grace Church has now sent 3 teams to LDI. I was part of our first team which was GreenUp CleanUp (an initiative to clean up parks in Medford) – I am happy to say we are running our 3rd GreenUp CleanUp this year and we are now known as the 'Green Church' in Medford. Our environmental initiatives have blossomed in these past few years and have become a focal point for the longer term mission of the church.

Our LDI2 team ran Let's Go Medford (based on Michelle Obama's campaign to end childhood obesity). It was so successful that the city of Medford has taken it on as an annual event which we are acting as consultants this year. Our LDI3 team is working more internally on a Time/Trade program.

3 very distinctive campaigns – all successful in their own way. Mainly because a small group of parishioners worked together, shared their faith, told their stories invited others in and HAD FUN!

LDI WILL change you, your team, your parish....and as we found outit changed our city. LDI helped the parish begin to define our mission and find new and creative ways to reach out and share God's love!

Some of you may think your church is on the right track, you may think you are just in survival mode, you may have decided it is time for your parish to turn out and not in or you may want to share Gods love in a new way in your community. LDI can help you!

So as we move towards this church season of Pentecost, we will emphasize the work and mission of our Church, and we will proclaim Jesus in our daily lives by service to our neighbors.

“And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world”

“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world”

Amen!