

We are prayer warriors. Some go, some pay the freight, some provide the seed, some buttress with prayer. Are not all missionaries?

We have teachers who minister to their students by modeling both compassion and integrity in the classrooms of their schools. Is such a one a missionary? Yes! In the MSJ he or she is. This person might not be recognized as such in the formal, structured church, but as an MSJ? Right down our alley.

We now have as many "ministries" as we do parishes. I hope we always have this kind of balance. Yes, it is strange, but it is what one would expect from various types of people drawn together by the Spirit from diverse pasts and experiences, from different church bodies and ministry endeavors into the one vision of the MSJ.

Some may wish to describe us as a Missionary Society that merely specializes in the least, the lost, and the lonely. Our calling is that, but larger than that. Yes, we are on the streets, behind prison walls, at the hospice, and at the homeless shelter. We do all that. We indeed go to the poor in Africa. But we are more than that. We aren't just the Salvation Army with liturgy. We have upscale people. We better. We have "normal" parishes. Filled with normal people. Praise God, we do. We would be sorely impoverished if we were merely beggars trying to help the least, the lost, and lonely.

We love the Church, her doctrine and her worship, we love God's people, we love the Gospel, we love the Word of God, we love the Sacraments and how they restore and transform the lives of the lost, "and such were some of us" who have had our lives changed through the Spirit-empowered Sacraments. And we can take them into places where the institutional church has not always taken them. An MSJ and only an MSJ, a mobile society, neither a diocese nor a structure like it, can do what we are doing. God has confirmed us in what we doing, who we are doing it with, and to the people we are reaching,

I believe that two passages in St. Luke's Gospel are central to who we are. Luke, chapter ten, verse two speaks of harvesters (as does John 4: 35ff), and missionaries are harvesters of the seed God has sown in the hearts of those hungry for him. Harvesters of clergy? Yes, to some degree, but more so harvesters of real people, real folks, wherever they may be and wherever our missioners find themselves.

But the context of our work, our harvesting, is found in Luke, chapter four, where Christ announces to the people of his home town the Call laid upon him: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (vv. 18-19) That is the context of the Calling of the MSJ. The fields are white unto harvest, the Master declared, pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest send forth MSJ's into his field.

+ Frederick G. Fick
Feast of St. James the Apostle
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Bishop Frederick Fick's Vision for The Missionary Society of St. John the Evangelist: its Roots, its Calling, its Place in the Church.

What is a Missionary Society? It is the people of God who have heard the Master's Call. In the end, whether it was the Macedonian Call, the Call to the Jesuits to evangelize the New World, or the Call to missionary work that drove the Anglicans of the past to take the Gospel around the world, it is the Call of the missionary. So, that is what makes us a society of missionaries.

We respond to the Call. We hear, we go and work today. It's the Call. A unique aspect, a very special aspect of who we are and what we are, who we have been and will be, God willing, even long after our deaths, is this profound sense of Divine Call.

It was the Call that drew us into catholic life from our various and sundry evangelical pasts. We followed that Call into the Charismatic Episcopal Church, and attempted to live it to its fullest in that context. It was also this Call that caused us to say to the CEC: We MUST move on, toward the center of the Church Catholic and within that stronger and more stable expression of the Faith, rebuild healthier, more open lives (both our own and the lives of our people), and then roll up our sleeves to fulfill the Call that God has laid upon us from the beginning.

It was the Call that caused us to take off our collars, put on our jeans and build our own churches, sometimes remodeling buildings or building them from scratch. Pouring foundations, raising walls, laying tile, putting in sheetrock and wiring late into the night, working side by side with our parishioners. It was the Call that caused our priests to do this job in addition to their regular "secular" work week. It is the Call that drives us to do incredible things without benefit of finances, endowments, or pension funds.

It is the Call that sends us to the streets, to prisons, and to Africa. It is the Call that makes a Fr. Francis sleep on dirt and eat fish heads in sweltering heat to train and equip lay leaders and clergy in Africa for five and six weeks at a time. It is the Call that allows poor, hard working people to financially support these African teaching missions, and to have him know that they are with him as much in their prayers as in their financial support. They have heard the Call as clearly as he has, and they have responded in faith, sacrificially.

Our guys, at least many of them, attended seminary, at their own cost, on their own time, some while working full-time. We built our parishes from absolute scratch. Everything we are and everything we do is done because we are driven by the Call of God upon our lives. Sensitive to the Holy Spirit in a special way, we have been fools for Christ and His Church.

We began as refugees from the Charismatic Episcopal Church. I used to balk at having to even say that. No more. We exist because we cannot deny our common history, our common dreams of Spirit-filled, evangelical Catholic worship. We are different, because we have traveled different paths, lived different lives from the others from The Episcopal Church or the Anglican Continuum or elsewhere.

We are the result of a brotherhood, a common view of a PEOPLE-first, Spirit-first, Catholic-first kind of focus. We are different. Not necessarily one bit better than any other Christian or any other Anglican, but we are unique. Ten to fifteen years of traveling our path, living OUR lives has produced this. It is what it is.

We are grateful for our reception as members of Forward in Faith, North America, which is a constituent member of the Anglican Church in North America. We are grateful for our reception as members of Forward in Faith, North America, which is a constituent member of the Anglican Church in North America. We are classic High Anglicans in our hearts and our theology. We treasure all that has been “good, true, and beautiful” in the rich history of Anglicanism, but particularly the thought, sermons, prayers, and example of life of the 17th century Caroline Divines, of such godly men of such godly men as Lancelot Andrewes, Mark Frank, John Donne, and George Herbert. We also treasure the example of the Church Missionary Society, which inspired young priests, including Frs. Henry Martyn and William Henry Temple Gairdner, as well as Frs. John and Charles Wesley and their circuit-riding heirs, to travel to distant continents, to preach the Gospel and to celebrate the Sacraments, according to the Book of Common Prayer, especially those who left distinguished careers at Oxford or Cambridge because they too heard the Call.

As a Missionary Society, our approach to clergy education and training is a bit more flexible than the traditional models. We have many priests who have received residential seminary training, many who studied in non-residential seminary or directed distance-learning programs, and some who undertook a strenuous Reading for Holy Orders program under proper academic and ecclesiastical supervision. We have a substantial number of MDivs, MMin, MAs and even a Ph.D. or two among us. But our passion for preaching the Gospel affects our economy regarding the "right" education and training for ministry of our ordained clergy. For some that has been (and will continue to be for most) attending a traditional seminary, but for others, the Lord's road has not been through a formal seminary, but in a life of anointed ministry, sometimes decades of it. Walking with God, bringing people to Jesus, training them up in righteousness, and living the private life of a humble servant while at the same time doing very public ministry. Our educational program for these veterans of the mission field is to see that they are deeply grounded in any area which they may have missed out on in their initial education. Nevertheless, these men are us too, and we will continue to welcome them, equip them as the saints they are, and send them out again with a firmer foundation in the Church and fresh fire for “The Gospel in the Catholic Church.” (ref. *Abp. Michael Ramsey's fine book of the same title*)

This next section is admittedly a part of our past, but is also central to "getting" who we are and is a huge part of our future, a future which is built upon the past but which promises more than we now experience or can even envision in terms of ministry and unity. What we draw on is our past, but our individual pasts and our common past is more than our experience in the Charismatic Episcopal Church, and we have just begun to use the lessons of the past to point toward a future. It has been a rough road for us personally as indeed, everything we have done

these past almost three years has been not only to heal our guys, as we could, from the past, but also to push, shove, and kick ourselves into the future. That future will contain new forms of ministry, in areas that some of us never dreamed we could penetrate, but always carrying the life changing Gospel to the diverse cultures and circumstances into which Christ will lead us.

First, and let's face this head on, we are Gospel-centered. At the beating heart of the MSJ is the saving Gospel of Christ: a full gospel of repentance from sin, belief in Christ's saving work on the Cross accomplished for all men for all time, personal confession of that saving faith, the Sacrament of Baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and a life of making manifest the divine nature which we have been made partakers of through the mercy of God (2 Peter 1:4) and assisted by the grace and power of the Sacraments; a life of passion for Christ as Savior and Lord -and his Great Commission, of growth in personal holiness, and of corporate mission and celebration of the Mysteries of the Church, anticipating the Day when the whole Church, united once again, shall rejoice and be fed at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

Likewise, we are Spirit-filled. We cannot dodge that either. No, we are expressly NOT Pentecostal nor what the Charismatic Movement has evolved into either. We are Prayer Book Catholics, worshiping liturgically “in spirit and in truth.” Our worship is expressly Spirit-filled, as is our preaching and our entire ministry, in every way imaginable. We are Bible-people too. We really are. We draw upon it as the mold for our thoughts, quote it in our daily conversations, and preach it in a fashion unlike many others in the Anglo-Catholic world. We love the Word of God and cannot live without it; it is food and drink to us, as necessary to us as our next breath. We try to avoid the Three-Stream designation and yet, we cannot avoid the reality that most of us began as evangelicals and charismatics traveling “the Canterbury Trail.” We will likely continue to draw those making a similar journey, and I like that about us.



Also, the MSJ is not just a parish-centric Society. Our missionary effort, held by lay and clergy alike, is driven to take the Gospel, not just with our lips but in our lives, to the ends of the earth. Because we are missionary, we do have parishes, yes. But much more, because we are a Society within the Church Catholic, we are very limber, much more able to move quickly and decisively in ministry, especially in places where the Gospel has long been dead in the local churches or in places where there are no churches. This accurately describes the “quick response” and flexibility which characterizes a Missionary Society over a fixed structure such as a diocese: we are behind prison walls in Kentucky; we are on the streets of Cleveland; we go to Africa; we go wherever the Call requires us to. We are missionary. We run. We teach. Along

the way, we pray our offices, we celebrate the Eucharist, we catechize, we baptize, we confirm: all the usual "church" stuff, but our parishioners are much more likely to be those who have never tried Christianity or who have tried the structured, formal church and may never have experienced what they receive from our missionaries: a passion for Jesus and the Gospel of Salvation that not only redeems, restores, and transfigures their lives, but makes them hungry, bursting to tell others what Jesus has done for them through the power of His Word and Sacraments. We make missionaries of our people, because the same fire of the Spirit that has fallen on us falls upon them, and they can't help it.