



Do you ever have that feeling that as you are following along with the crowd, suddenly someone pushes you to the front, and then people start to ask where you are headed, and before you know it, you are a leader? Many of us stumbled into this profession. Some of us heard a very distinct call, others found that they enjoyed this type of ministry and seemed to have a knack for it, and before long, people were listening to them, catching their passion, joining them on the journey.

I've certainly experienced that myself, and I believe that we as NAECED, as an Association now find ourselves in that position. Last year I talked to you about how I believe we have "grown up" as an association. This year, I'd like us to think together about how we might respond to the call to be leaders – as individuals but also as an organization. In language about the size of congregations – pastoral, program, etc. there has been a shift from thinking about big churches as Resource Congregations rather than Corporate Congregations. I think this is an important shift because it places the emphasis on how the congregation can be a Resource – to the community, the diocese, and the wider church, rather than how the organization should be structured like a corporation.

I believe NAECED is uniquely situated to be a Resource to both the wider church and to every individual, congregation and community that shares its goals and dreams. With our growing size (well over 300 members!) and our growing visibility (exhibiting at General Convention, partnering with other organizations) and with our strength and stability – we are in a position to bring about change in the Church. I believe we have a responsibility – an ability to be responsive – to our members, to local congregations, to the changing nature of the profession of Christian Education, and to the People of God. We have a voice, we have people's attention, and it is time to use it.

We had a significant presence at General Convention this past summer. For the first time we had our own exhibit space – and it was perfectly situated – on a main corner, near Church Publishing and Church Pension Group, right next to other members of CEPVA (the Colloquium of Episcopal Professional and Vocational Associations). We were able to broker partnerships with our sisters and brothers in NNECA – the National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations – as well as a dozen other groups that share common interests and concerns. We were the place that had the beautiful Charter buttons, with the Ubuntu logo for General Convention. Gosh, we did a lot of business handing out those buttons! It brought literally hundreds of people to our booth and offered an introduction to NAECED. It also helped that we were well supplied with chocolate to hand out to everyone passing by.

In addition to our presence in the Exhibit Hall, we were well represented in legislative hearings (often at the crack of dawn!) – fortunately, the Education Committee (with Debbi Rodahaffer, Vicky Garvey, Barb Ross) met right next door to the Church Pension Group's hearings, where they were discussing employment benefits and a denominational health plan. Several of us divided our time between the two, able to speak up for issues of justice for lay



professionals and keep updated on resolutions concerning education and formation. We were present in the hearings for Program and Budget, speaking to the need to increase our limited funds for children's ministry, even as other program areas were suffering huge hits. We wrote legislation and saw it move through committee and onto the floor in both Houses – resolutions that declared the need for further work on Safeguarding God's Children, and renewing our efforts to live out the Children's Charter. We lobbied hard and educated left and right for the Charter for Life-long Formation. We used our extensive network to track legislation through the process, to lobby for resolutions that impact Christian Formation, and to speak to issues of justice, awareness-raising, and budget concerns. With ability to use the internet and Facebook, we were everywhere. We were generous with our exhibit space, hosting samples from Daily Practices written by some of our own association members like Gus Boone, as well as buttons from the working group on Older Adults. If in 2006, we got ourselves on the map, then in 2009, they drew a big red circle around us!

Our cooperative and collaborative nature has been a model in the church, which too often becomes territorial, scarcity-centered, lazy, or power-grabbing. Not NAECED! We have modeled collaborative partnerships since the beginning, it is who we are. So now we have the opportunity to continue that work in some new ways. Next month I will be staffing the NAECED exhibit at the Annual Conference of the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes. They meet in Austin this year, and NAECED will be a presence. NAECED continues to be a leader in CEPVA, we have at least 3 members on the Standing Commission for Life-long Christian Formation and Education, we are in partnership with Church Publishing, thanks to Sharon Pearson, and with staff of the Episcopal Church Center, including Jeffri Harre, Bronwyn Clark Skov and Ruth-Ann Collins. We have increased the presence of Vendors at our conferences, and are in regular conversation with publishers (some of whom are members) and with seminary faculty, including an invited presence at a gathering this coming August at Episcopal Divinity School to dream about the future of formation in the Episcopal Church.

So – what's next? Well, that is something we should discern together. I want us to consider thoughtfully and prayerfully how we might best use our voice for building up the Body of Christ, for reaching out to those who may not have felt included, who need a voice, who need to belong to something bigger and claim their place in the Vineyard. How might we best serve the Directors of Christian Education who are having their budgets or their entire positions cut because of the economic downturn? How can we reach out to volunteers who need affirmation that they have a ministry and a call, even if they don't receive a paycheck from the church? How can we identify ourselves so that those engaged in youth ministry might feel we have something to offer, and might find their gifts and interests welcomed here? What geographical or demographic areas of the Body are not represented in our association, and what can be done to correct that? Who can you invite into NAECED, not to build the number of members, but rather to lift up the ministries of the faithful? Who can you invite into a deeper involvement in the ministry of Christian Formation in all its holistic richness, knowing that God will provide?



Let's not be afraid to grow – not to grow to be strong to get our way, but to grow into what God might be calling us into – a new way of being the church together, modeling collaborative leadership, supportive partnerships, holistic view of ministry, and opportunities for change and growth for everyone.

There is a saying from the Hopi nation that has been meaningful to some of us pushed into leadership – it begins with “This is the Hour” and ends with “We Are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For.” I’d like to close by reading it, and ask you to listen to it with NAECED on your hearts, as I believe that currently NAECED is who we’ve been waiting for. May we each find new ways to live into our call, and may NAECED remain a strong, dynamic, leader for change in the Church.



This is The Hour...

"You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour.
Now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour.
And there are things to be considered:

Where are you living?
What are you doing?
What are your relationships? Are you in right relation?
Where is your water? Know your garden.
It is time to speak your Truth.
Create your community. Be good to each other.
And do not look outside yourself for the leader.
This could be a good time!

There is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.
They will try to hold on to the shore.
They will feel they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.

Know the river has its destination.
The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river
Keep our eyes open and our heads above the water.
See who is in there with you
And celebrate.

At this time in history we are to take nothing personally.
Least of all, ourselves.
For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves!
Banish the word "struggle" from your attitude and your vocabulary.
All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we've been waiting for."

The Elders / Oraibi, Arizona / Hopi Nation