

**From “Report of the Rt. Rev. Daniel R. Morse, Bishop,  
The Missionary Diocese of the Central States  
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## **EXHORTATION**

The Reformed Episcopal Church stands at the crossroads in today’s world. We are by any definition a small church. The National figures will probably show around 130 parishes and missions and some 10,000 baptized members. This by any standard of measurement is not large or significant. Some people think that such a small organization ought not to exist. That we should fold up our tent and become part of some larger, more significant enterprise. By comparison, the Episcopal Church today has over a million members and some 7000 parishes and missions. This means that the Reformed Episcopal Church is about 2% the size of ECUSA. In 1886 those figures were quite different. Our Church was a little over one fourth the size of the Episcopal Church. What happened in the one hundred and thirty-five years since then? The Episcopal Church decided to devote itself to the mission of planting new parishes all across this nation. Conversely, during that same period of time the Reformed Episcopal Church chose to withdraw behind her walls and hide out from the wickedness of this world. Rather than seeing this country as mission field to be planted, watered and harvested, previous generations chose to let others do the work. Thus by 1982 the Reformed Episcopal Church had around 70 parishes, 68 of which were east of the Mississippi river.

In 1981, our Church began to recognize that we are not being obedient to Christ if we failed to do what he explicitly commanded. We realized that we must be about the building up of the kingdom of God and that there is a Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria for every generation. So we set out to, on faith, seek ways to expand our Church.

In 1991 the General Council organized what became the Diocese of Mid-America, and by 1996 it had grown to 22 parishes and missions and was invited to merge with the Synod of Chicago—the oldest Diocese in the Church.

Our growth continued, some years faster, some years slower. Sometimes we added a significant number of parishes, other times we spent our time trying to strengthen what we had added. So, we added St. Michael’s Broken Arrow, OK, St. Stephen’s Montrose, Co, St. Thomas, Little Rock AR, St. Thomas of Canterbury, Houston, St. Matthias, Katy, TX, All Saints, Shreveport, St. Stephen’s, El. Paso, Christ Covenant, Sevierville, TN, St. John’s, Birmingham, Trinity, Mason, OH, Christ the King, Dayton, OH, King of Glory, Moorhead, MN, Holy Cross, Alpine, TX, and St. James, Memphis, TN, St. Simon’s, Fairhope, AL, not necessarily in that order.

More recently in 2009 we welcome 4 new parishes.

1. All Saints, Raleigh, NC—transfer from the ACA
2. St. Peter, Norge, VA—new mission work
3. Anglican Church of the Resurrection, Shalimar, FL—transfer from the UECNA
3. Trinity Anglican Church, Evansville, IN—transfer from the UECNA

There have been sacrifices on the part of a great many people. Clergy had to work secular jobs in order to get missions off the ground—a number still do! In many cases our wives had to help by working in order to meet family needs. This is still the case in many instances. To those wives present today, I want you to know that you are appreciated and that we couldn’t have gotten to

this point without your loving support. But here is my point and I hope it is an encouragement to you.

It takes unique men and women to do what you have done and are doing. It takes a pioneering spirit and a firm resolve to hang in there during the hard times to attempt to build a work for the Glory of God. A number of our clergy are still bi-vocational. Sacrifices are still being made. Many of you who have made real progress are still at the stages where your compensation is, at best, minimal. It is easy to get discouraged. It is easy to become defeated. If you focus on the immediate you will lose heart. You have to remember the Dream. You must hear in your ears and heart the words of our Lord telling his disciples and by extension, each of us to be his witnesses.

A few years ago, our Presiding Bishop Leonard Riches appointed a Task Force on Mission. It was charged with “articulating a philosophy of mission for the Reformed Episcopal Church; with defining mission objectives, priorities and strategies and recommending appropriate structures and agencies for the fulfillment of denominational mission efforts.”

Let me remind you of some of their findings. The biblical goal of the mission of the Church is given to us in St. Matthew 16:18 “I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

When He commissioned His disciples to carry out their task, there were no trust funds, there was no financial support for the expansion of the Church, There were no committees or boards. There was only a vision, a Dream if you please. Twelve disciples, with a dream and they changed the then known world.

At the heart of Jesus’ Commission was the mission of the Church. “Going into all the world, you are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things which I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20. The central imperative of the Great Commission is to make disciples. This means bringing men, women and children into relationship with Jesus Christ so that they might believe on Him as their Savior and become part of his body, the Church. These converts were to become students and faithful followers of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And, they in turn, were to be taught to share the message of salvation in Christ with others.

This commission is at the heart of the mission of the Church. It is best understood by paying attention to the linguistic emphasis of the action words Jesus uses. *Going* is a past participle which is best translated *having gone*. This tells us that our mission occurs wherever the members of the church are located. This is followed by two present participles, *baptizing and teaching*. These participles indicate continuous action. Because the new converts are to be taught to observe all that He commanded, therefore his command includes the *having gone* coupled with the *baptizing* and the *teaching*. *Baptizing and teaching* are the resultant activities which flow out of the ever continuing process of *having gone*. The entire act of mission has a cyclical effect.

Matthew 28 not only describes the mandate that mankind is to be converted to Jesus Christ and then relate themselves to each other and become responsible reproducing Church members, it specifically outlines the process.

Disciples make other disciples, who in turn are involved in the actions of going, baptizing, and teaching. All of this must take place in the context of and under the authority of the visible Church. It is never an individualistic endeavor. The Visible body of Christ is always at the center of this mission. Integration into the visible body of Christ is always the goal of mission. In the New Testament, the

mission of the Church is constantly measured in quantitative terms. Precise figures are given regarding the number of converts. This is quantity. These numbers are always based on those who are baptized, not those who made a decision.

Baptism is the entrance rite into the church, the household of faith. Once people are baptized, we are told in Acts 2:42-47 that they continued steadfastly in: 1. The Apostle's Doctrine; 2. Fellowship; 3. the Breaking of Bread (Communion); 4. The Prayers—The liturgical expressions of the worship of the Church. These four activities measure quality.

New Testament growth is always expressed in terms of quantity and quality. They are never separated because they are both aspects of the same reality. Quantity and quality go hand in glove. They do if it is biblical mission. And we see that from what we find in Acts 2:41-47.

In vs. 41 They were added to the Church. We are also told in that same verse that they were baptized and furthermore they gladly received the word. Then in vs. 47 we are told they grew in numbers; they reached out to the community, and according to vss. 42-46 we find that they were instructed by the church, they participated in the sacramental life of the church, They were also taught to be Worshipers and the result of this was their continuance in the Church.

This is our mission every bit as much as it was our Lord's first disciples.

This principle is demonstrated by the historical record in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2. On the Day of Pentecost, the first Church in Jerusalem, made up of the 120 members, added 3,000 converts in one day. These 3120 members in turn, reached into the urban community of Jerusalem gaining favor with people, and, day by day, the LORD ADDED to their number the people who were being saved. This being saved was a continuous process in which the Church became the Goal and the Agent of their evangelistic mission.

Most churches have reduced themselves to being participants in the great American religious supermarket. Oh, you don't like this style, then try this. You don't like that minister? Try another one on for size. You don't like the size of the parish or the people in it? Then go somewhere else. Look for youth groups, look for family activities, look for whatever makes you feel good. And we are told that if we want to grow our churches, we have to do what everyone else is doing. Why? Because we live in a society which has fixated on the glorification of self and asks the principle question of what is in it for me. This society portrays the good life in terms of glitz, glamor and gain. This is the reality in which we live. And unfortunately the Church of Jesus Christ has, for the most part bought into servicing that mentality. Is it any wonder then, that there is an almost overwhelming temptation to focus ministry on the sensual, the temporal and the horizontal. After all, we are told this is how you reach them. And you know, every bit as well as I, that ministries that cater to the sensual tend to flourish. And because they are successful in terms of numbers, we are called upon to conclude that this is the right way to do mission. But I would suggest to you that we dare not lose the focus of what God has called for us to do, and that we must be careful in the way we do it.

For the last 150 years this country has operated on the premise that people have to be entertained into the Kingdom of God. From the time of the Gospel tent shows and rallies to the present entertainment evangelism being substituted for the transcendent Worship of the Lord, this has been the case. And the arguments are on the surface most reasonable. We have to attract people into the Church, we have to speak their language. We have to adapt ourselves to meeting this new and different society where it is. We won't compromise the message, just the forms in which the message comes.

But it is right here that the fallacy comes into play. There is a failure to recognize that our Lord's mandate not only describes the necessity of converting mankind to Jesus Christ, it also describes the **process**.

Evangelism is not to be done in the context of the worship of the Church, but ought to be the result of that worship. Disciples who have been first instructed and then baptized, who participated in the Eucharist and the liturgical prayers of the Church, become equipped to share the gospel with those who are outside the Church. Once those people are converted they are to be brought into the church for their instruction, their incorporation in baptism, their fellowship with Christ in the holy Supper, and then they are instructed in the elements of proper corporate prayer.

Now this provides the whole focus on our mission as Reformed Episcopalians. We can't be participants in the world's religious supermarket. Our product is not for the consumer. This doesn't mean that we fail to reach the consumer with the gospel, but the Worship of Almighty God is not the vehicle to do this. Personal evangelism by the disciples as they go outside the church is the proper vehicle. It is right here that we need to get busy in the right way. Pastors, I'm speaking to you. If this proper form of mission is not going on, we need to make sure it is. We need to communicate with each other, share our teaching tools, compare notes, so that we can provide proper instruction. That instruction then provides the tools to our people to enable them to do the work of mission.

Now a word to the lay delegates. The people of God have the responsibility to receive the word they have been given and to reflect it where they live. Your going involves being the light of Christ wherever you are—at home—at work—at play. The success of your parish, the growth of your parish depends on you every bit as much on you as on your pastor, but not necessarily in the way you think. It depends on your pastor being faithful to the Scriptures, and in the proper administration of the sacraments. It depends on your pastor equipping you so that you do not become a religious consumer, but a real recipient of the grace of God and having received it, it is your responsibility to reflect that in the world where you live. It is a two way street. And when this is done rightly, the Church of Christ will increase in numbers and in quality.

Here is an interesting observation. Eighty-seven per cent of converts to Christianity were converted through the life and witness of their family, neighbor or friends. It is clear, that this is the most effective means of reaching men and women for Christ and bringing them into the Kingdom of God.

Now I would suggest to you that this is our niche—our domain—our specialty in today's society. Yes, we are a small Church. Yes, we do not have vast resources. But we have precisely just what we need—obedience to Christ's command to evangelize and then disciple converts, teaching them to become worshipers of the Most High God.

I have a great desire to see every city, in this country have more than one Reformed Episcopal congregation. And, I suppose that some people might think I have a flaw in that I see no reason why the Reformed Episcopal Church can't be the largest Anglican body in this country over time.

Quite frankly it bothers me right down to my shoes, that the Episcopal Church has 7000 congregations while the Reformed Episcopal Church has only 150. Any student of the historical facts will discover that after our founding we chose to hide behind our walls rather than be obedient to Christ's mandate, Conversely, especially during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Episcopal Church devoted herself to precisely the kind of mission I have described to you. Oh, yes, that

has since changed and so has the mission, but earlier, there was obedience to the mandate on their part, but not on ours. Now this has changed and our church has been moving forward however slowly for the past decade. Our new diocese is a living testimony to this.

I used to tell people that the only goal I had was to leave this Reformed Episcopal Church in better condition than I got it. And perhaps I might have been content with that, but I have been compelled to re-evaluate that goal. It simply is inadequate. Why? Because it doesn't address what God calls his people to do—to be reflectors of his glory—to bear his message to a lost and dying world—to make disciples and worshipers of the Most High God.

So my brothers and sisters, let's be obedient to him and do this mission His Way, for His Glory and in His good timing. Furthermore, I would challenge each of our parishes to develop a view of mission and ministry that envisions the reduplication of parishes. Let each parish commit themselves to add a new parish over the next five years in their area. If we do this, we will see this portion of His Church grow and prosper.