

Plan for the Mission of St. Gregory of Nyssa

by co-founder Rick Fabian

December 1977

You have stripped off your old behavior with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its creator; and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised or the uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything.

- Colossians 3:9ff

From the beginning God made people to share his own life of love, and in living that life together to find their true selves, and his purpose for them. This common life changes form with times and places, but it is one life, because God wishes people of all times and places to become one in him. For this purpose he made covenants, and called prophets, and sent his Son at last to draw the whole world to himself. For the same purpose he charges his Church to gather out of every nation and language, filling her treasury with things new and old, because the variety of her common life makes her a sign to the peoples of the Day when God will be all in all.

From the Statement of Purpose of All Saints' Company, 1974 et seq.

The Present Need

Every great Church reform movement has set out to uncover the roots planted by Jesus in the early Church, refreshing the connection of later Christians with this vital source, and extending its influence to new people in new times. The Church has embarked on such a movement again in our own day, beginning with liturgical reform on a scale unparalleled in four centuries.

This reform, which is now only in its opening stages, must lead to a rediscovery of our apostolic roots in every areas of Christian life, and thus to a transformation of all the participating churches. Every historic liturgical reform has so affected the whole of Christian community life. But whereas earlier reforms helped separate the Church into rival denominations, the modern movement is reviving the sisterhood of the churches, and revealing our common relation to our common source. It is also restoring the oneness of the Christian ministry, as laypeople and deacons resume the responsibilities they anciently shared with presbyters and bishops. In short, the present reform aims to reunite the Church, and to bring the message of a Whole Church to our divided world. This is a revolutionary program, and calls for new approaches to help carry it out.

The most powerful tool for Church reform is music. Each previous reform has brought a new infusion of music into the Church's life, conveying the reforming ideals into the

hearts of churchfolk, and drawing unchurched people in great numbers into the new movement. The present reform has got well underway without a satisfactory musical vehicle, and the need for it is increasingly clear. This reform particularly deserves a musical approach, not only because music makes theology popular, but also because music is the readiest means of sharing among the churches. No means could be more effective for uniting the churches in a common mission to tell the world about our common life in Christ.

Our Goals

All Saints' Company proposes to begin an experimental mission of the Episcopal Church in San Francisco, dedicated to St. Gregory of Nyssa. This mission will reach many who are not now committed to the Episcopal Church: young people, inquirers, lapsed and alienated Christians. St. Gregory's will especially serve musical people, offering them a leading role in its corporate life, and developing the potential of music for Christian liturgy and mission.

Within ten years St. Gregory's Mission will build a community of laypeople and clergy faithful to the Jewish-Christian revelation of the common life:

1. A common life of hearing the scriptures, praying, and celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments;
2. A common life of service following Jesus' teaching and example, enabling members to respond individually and corporately to human need;
3. A common life of dedication to the Gospel, and support for the Church's work; and
4. A common life of mission, calling others to find their community in Christ.

Our General Approach

Our approach to these goals will be experimental in three general ways:

1. We will break new ground to recover the vital roots of Christian tradition that can nourish Christian living today. For this purpose we will draw on resources unfamiliar to many Anglicans - including Byzantine, African, and Jewish Christianity - as established Episcopal congregations are less free to do.
2. We will develop the competence of laypeople in every aspect of Church life. For this purpose we will employ historical knowledge and modern insights into the working of social groups, in ways, which established parish structures do not readily permit.
3. We will develop the maximum potential of music for common prayer. For this purpose we will use more music of higher quality than that usually provided for parish use, drawn from various new and traditional sources. We will also explore new functions for music in congregational worship and Christian mission.

By such an experimental approach, St. Gregory's Mission will develop forms of worship and structure sometimes unlike Anglican norms. However, St. Gregory's will function actively within the Episcopal Diocese of California, in consultation with the Bishop and diocesan organizations, and in cooperation with other Episcopal churches working in San Francisco. St. Gregory's will be a pilot mission of the Diocese, different but not separate, and will offer the Episcopal Church an opportunity for fresh experience and dialogue to explore her mission for the future.

Here is how our goals and our approach will shape St. Gregory's Mission in the four areas of Christian community life:

I. Liturgy

Because God has called the whole world to himself, every man and woman is on a journey towards God. These journeys are as many and different as the creatures God has made, and at the same time they are one common journey because of the common end. Thus we share our journey not only with those like us, but also with those whose experience and ways are different. And as in navigation sightings from many points help ships to steer their true course for port, so the sharing of these very differences helps us to attain our common end.

Christian tradition is the sharing of a journey. Its purpose is not to preserve our experience, but to enrich it with the experience of those before us and beside us who approach our common end from different directions. This is its purpose for individuals, who further their own journey by sharing in the company and common life of the Church. This is also its purpose for each of the churches, whom it guides and quickens by the vision of God in the others. Thus the churches hand on tradition, not by imitating or conserving what they have done before, but by sharing their experience with those who do not know it, and accepting the same gift from other Christians in return. By sharing in the universal Christian tradition, the churches offer individual men and women the company and guidance of all Christians on their common journey. Without this sharing they offer only dead habits and failing visions to steer by. For there is no Anglican or Roman or Byzantine or Protestant Way to God. There is only the True and Living Way, which is Christ, who is all things, and in all things.

St. Gregory's Mission will celebrate the Eucharist and office daily, at an early evening hour suitable for working people. This liturgy will offer an opportunity for community prayer and reflection at the end of the day, and a natural gathering point for friendly relaxation afterwards. Thus the hour will also serve single people, who too often return from stressful work having no one to share with, and spend their evenings alone.

St. Gregory's will use the Proposed Book of Common Prayer, and will pioneer further renewal of Episcopal worship. Whereas established congregations usually employ the new rites to continue a Latin or English style of Anglican liturgy, St. Gregory's will choose forms that emphasize our continuity with Jewish and early Christian prayer life, which is the deepest core of our tradition. First of all, we will recover the

congregational character of Jewish-Christian worship, and will borrow appropriate usages from Byzantine and African Christianity to express this character fully. Furthermore, St. Gregory's will revive much of the popular early "cathedral office" style and format, which is currently a prime focus of liturgical scholarship. This "cathedral office" will be the basic pattern for regular worship at St. Gregory's.

Instead of relying on selected layreaders to represent the people, our whole membership will learn to exercise the fullest possible ministry of the laity, assisting the presiding clergy according to early Christian custom. Liturgical duties will be shared out on a casual or rotating basis, in which newcomers will be included, and the whole laity will cooperate with the clergy in all important liturgical actions. Intrinsically representative functions will be performed by clergy, who are precisely the representative members of the congregation. St. Gregory's Mission will seek the assistance of Deacons, and will give them their full and ancient liturgical function, as few Episcopal churches yet choose to do.

St. Gregory's mission will use good congregational music at all services, because singing brings people together as nothing else can do. Unaccompanied chant and hymns will be our daily norm. In addition, communal congregational dance, absent from Anglican worship since Puritan times, will resume its natural liturgical place with us.

St. Gregory's will also explore new liturgical forms using music to serve the Gospel. We will commission new compositions in congregational style, and revive the early oratorio plan on an experimental basis. The early oratorio, a popular preaching service in which music presented the scriptural substance for the sermon and devotions, should be timely now that the growing public taste for "early" music makes more scriptural settings available for evangelical use. A cooperative oratorio series involving several San Francisco parishes could be tried, if other churches found the plan attractive.

For these purposes St. Gregory's Mission will use liturgical space and movement in many ways new to Episcopalians. This aspect of our plan is important, because spatial arrangements profoundly affect the experience and interaction of all groups. Therefore St. Gregory's will seek a flexible space for worship, and will use furnishings fitting our distinctive liturgical life.

II. Service

Jesus forgave sinners, healed the sick, welcomed outcasts, and laid down his life for his friends; and his Spirit moves men and women everywhere to love and to serve as he did. Christians follow his example, not only because he was good and noble, but because we believe the love he showed us is the foundation plan of the world and the true principle of our being. Through sin we lost sight of this principle, and wrestled darkly with our pain and fear, destroying one another and wrecking our world. But God revealed his loving plan to us anew, in a way even our blindness could see.

In Jesus God himself came to serve us. He came because he is love and will suffer even death to rescue those he loves from ruin. He came because love cannot send another to do its work: love comes itself.

Christians are not surprised, therefore, by scientific studies which show that helping others is a human psychological necessity, essential for self-worth. Like Jesus, we are all made to love. As we follow his example we fulfill our nature and realize God's loving plan for the world. Yet in the Church today, as in secular society, this basic need to love is widely frustrated by fears of incompetence. People believe that only professionals can help, and that their own efforts will make others' problems worse, and trap them in failure. For this reason congregations often cast their clergy in professional roles, in the hope that these will bear the helping ministry of the parish. However, this arrangement makes each parish an economic base for one member to do pastoral work, and is hardly an efficient design for Christian service. Worse yet, it reinforces many laypeople's despair that they themselves can be competent to love and to help.

Instead of entrusting its pastoral program to professionals, St. Gregory's Mission will help all members of our congregation to fulfill their own need to love in the context of their own lives. Pairs of laypeople will share pastoral duties within the community of St. Gregory's and the congregation will meet regularly to support members' efforts at living by love in the world abroad. All members will share responsibility for hospitality to newcomers and outsiders. In this way no member will have to handle pastoral problems alone; and those who receive our help will understand that it comes from a community of love.

As part of the regular community meeting, St. Gregory's congregation will celebrate the sacraments of healing and reconciliation in a context that supports giving and forgiving in daily life. Lay pastoral visitors will carry the Eucharist to sick and shut-in members, following early Christian custom. At all services members will contribute their own intercessions, so that the service work of St. Gregory's may be guided by our common prayer.

III. Dedicated Members

The service of St. Gregory's Mission will be open to all baptized Christians, but the Mission will have a clearly defined membership. In this respect it will differ from many Episcopal Churches.

Studies show that membership is a crucial issue in all community questions - task, leadership, survival, etc. - and that confusion over membership paralyzes groups. Churches commonly avoid a formal approach to this issue, partly from a worthy desire to put individual enrichment before institutional needs, and partly from fear that defining membership will make it harder to add new members. As a result, however, membership is handled informally, and often covertly. An informal distinction frequently appears between those who give money to the Church, and those who give time; and each group feels threatened and used by the other. Consequently the church's active membership is

small and resists outsiders, including new members, for fear of losing power. And the leaders - and hence the whole body - have only limited authority to accomplish goals. It need hardly be said that avoiding the issue thus frustrates mission more than it helps it!

St. Gregory's Mission will have only one class of members, who pledge both time and money to the Church. The congregation will adopt a formula making clear the minimum contribution of each kind, and this formula will be applied without exception. Furthermore, our double basis for membership will be made clear wherever a divided membership might otherwise suggest itself. Meetings to devote (devoting) time will also have a financial content, geared to mission, and vice versa. All members will participate in the liturgy, in the pastoral and hospitality programs, and in the administration of the Mission. Newcomers and visitors will be expressly invited to help on a casual basis, but only members will carry regular responsibilities or leadership. Friends who contribute money to St. Gregory's will be invited to contribute time as well, and so to become members.

Families and children will be welcome at St. Gregory's Mission on the same basis as other members. The congregation will assume responsibility for nursery care and other family needs during the liturgy and community meetings, so that all adult members may participate fully. All baptized children will communicate with their families, and will consume the bread remaining after the Eucharist, following ancient custom. Religious education for children will be offered when the congregation can provide it.

Musicians will exercise a leading role at St. Gregory's, but will not constitute a separate membership. They will function within a congregation that includes non-musicians as well. The goal of St. Gregory's Mission is more musical congregational worship, and requires cooperation between musicians and non-musicians. Non-musicians will be encouraged to sing along with the rest, while musicians will have opportunities to contribute their special skills to enhance the worship of all.

IV. Mission

A. The Problem

Episcopalian hearts sink at this word. Our church has the poorest record for mission of all Anglican bodies and all major American denominations. Our people believe it lies outside their competence; our structures do not support it. Other churches require missionary giving as the first test of a congregation's good standing; but our canons encourage even missionary congregations to put self-sufficiency ahead of expansion. Other missionaries, including the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel missionaries who founded our church, work in labor-intensive pairs, with support from established Christian groups; but we have jettisoned this New Testament pattern for the late medieval one, in which pioneer clergy fend for themselves alone, with neither community nor money to help them, while manpower and resources cluster in wealthy places. By these means we have fallen from 50% to 3% of the American population in two centuries, and

only one Episcopal diocese even kept pace with the population in the "boom" years following World War II.

Nevertheless, most dioceses have congregations whose individual missionary record is far better than our national standard, and there are signs that a fresh pattern may emerge in our church. It would be appropriate to build this new pattern in California, which has the highest proportion of unchurched people in the United States. St. Gregory's Mission will adopt an experimental approach in this area as well, in the hope that our experience will prove useful for future missions, and a contribution to a new missionary strategy.

B. Work

To an aching, confused, and violent world, God sends his Church to proclaim his loving plan, and the good news of what he has done for us in the life and death and resurrection of his Son. This news has the power to change lives, and even to change the world. For it is the news not only that sin and death are destroyed, but that what destroyed them is the love of a man who laid down his life for his friends. The Church's chief mission is to be herself a sign of this love to the nations, drawing them to God because of what he has done in her. Her most valuable testimony is her testimony to the victory of love and forgiveness in her own life. Community is thus the heart of Christian mission, and will be the heart of St. Gregory's approach.

The quality of a community's life is obvious first of all in hospitality, because members treat outsiders much as they treat each other. For this reason hospitality will receive constant attention at St. Gregory's Mission. Members will assist newcomers at the services and welcome them at other gatherings. Newcomers will be invited to read lessons in the liturgy and to participate as much as they wish. At community meetings, the group will acknowledge individual members' acts of hospitality and service, and will discuss what community support is most appropriate.

St. Gregory's Mission will help all members learn to proclaim God's good news, both by expressing love in their own lives, and by talking with others about their Christian faith and experience. Our teaching ministry will prepare laypeople to be adult and responsible members of Christ's Church. The scriptures, the sacraments, and ascetical questions will be addressed in the context of human issues inside and outside the Christian community. Laypeople will learn to criticize thoughtfully and informedly, so that they may speak with honest conviction about Christ and his good news for the world. At the same time our common participation in works of service will ensure that pastoral responsibility has an active influence upon theology for laypeople and clergy alike.

Preaching the gospel will be a frequent and regular part of the liturgy at St. Gregory's Mission. Laypeople as well as clergy will deliver sermons on the scriptures, and will share their experience of prayer and Christian life with the congregation.

C. Structure

As the central feature of our community approach to mission, St. Gregory's will adopt the pattern of team ministry mentioned in the New Testament and followed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel missionaries who established our church. Two full-time vicars will share the congregation's liturgical and pastoral leadership. This missionary pair will provide intensive work for the Mission and support for one another at the founding stages, when such work and support are most needed and especially productive. They will also provide a working community at the heart of St. Gregory's assisting the congregation to develop a community style suitable for the whole Mission.

The Vicars may invite volunteer clergy to help them, sharing collegially the clerical functions at the Eucharist and elsewhere. This team will meet regularly to carry out the task of clergy at St. Gregory's Mission. Together with the lay members of St. Gregory's they will explore and develop the authority and responsibility of both clergy and laypeople for Christian mission today.

The membership of St. Gregory's Mission will meet regularly as a community, sharing the common life of Christ in the Eucharist and in works of love in the church and the world. This community meeting will appoint its own executive groups with authority to carry out policies approved by the membership. Every executive will work with the support of other members, who will provide help when asked for it. Clergy will help lay members to define their tasks, and lay members will support the clergy as they carry out clergy tasks. In this way authority and responsibility will be joined, not divided: members with responsibilities will have authority to do their work; and those who have authority over any matter will be responsible for its execution.

The Vicars will have responsibility and authority over the liturgical and musical life of the Mission, the membership of the clergy team, and the ministry of clergy and laypeople at the Eucharist and other sacraments. They will preside as President and Vice-president of the community meeting, and of all official meetings of the Mission. In these matters they will be responsible to the Bishop, according to Episcopal tradition and canon.

D. Finance

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). The Bible speaks more about money than about any social institution except kinship, because the power of money is pervasive and problematic. Money receives its existence and value entirely from human relationships, and nearly all serious relationships employ it. But because it is a flexible and powerful medium of communication, and because it is closely connected with survival, money arrangements tend to control and even supplant other relations and commitments. Groups and institutions must use money deliberately for the right purposes, or inevitably it will serve others.

On principle, therefore, a missionary community should plan to use money for mission and service before everything else. Those aspects of its life directly connected with mission and service should receive the strongest financial support, and missionary giving

should be the motive of fund raising. In this way money would express the church's true priorities and would help to maintain the group's goals and efforts in the same direction.

When a congregation starts life, however, the demands of survival are so pressing, and at least in the Episcopal Church the money available from other congregations is so small, that the church's true priorities do not effectively shape its budget. Survival costs are met first, in hopes that the congregation soon will become self-sufficient and will have money to spare for mission thereafter. Meanwhile the power of money works constantly to reshape the church's priorities according to its actual budget. Survival and self-sufficiency become the congregation's motive and goal; and when the budget eventually reaches a surplus the extra money is spent, not on mission, but on further investment to strengthen the congregation's ability to survive.

A financial solution alone - more support money for mission churches - will not solve this problem. The whole pattern of missionary economy must be established from the start, if a congregation is to support mission as well as its own costs when it is flourishing and secure. Moreover, it must grow steadily in all areas of financial responsibility, since a client church is the very opposite of a church geared for mission. Under present Episcopal canons, beginning a congregation with such a new budgetary pattern may require outside help; but this help must come in such a way that the congregation grows in self-support and missionary giving at the same time, rather than opposing one to the other. All Saints' Company will help St. Gregory's Mission to get started in just this way.

To meet the high cost of a team ministry at the outset, when it is most beneficial and most difficult to afford, All Saints' Company will aid St. Gregory's Mission according to the following formula:

1. All Saints' Company will provide the services of two full-time clergy for St. Gregory's Mission. These clergy will be paid out of missionary contributions to All Saints' Company.
2. Thereafter the congregation will increasingly assume control of its own missionary giving. The congregation's contribution will continue to rise and will be used to pay St. Gregory's clergy. At the same time the congregation will pledge an additional \$1000 to a missionary project of its own choice, and will increase this pledge annually. Thus within ten years St. Gregory's Mission will support the cost of its own team ministry, and will give an amount equal to half a clergyman's salary to support mission elsewhere.
3. The Bishop will authorize All Saints' Company to appeal for contributions to establish and support its work at St. Gregory's Mission. All Saints' Company will give account to the Bishop of all money raised by his authorization.
4. Either All Saints' Company or the Bishop of California may terminate this agreement at any time upon six months' notice. Should the Bishop waive notice, All Saints' Company will pay for Sunday clergy supply to St. Gregory's Mission during the same six month period. Should All Saints' Company waive notice, St. Gregory's Mission will reimburse All Saints' Company for expenses by an amount equal to one half of the contribution due for the same six month period.