

Anglican Sojourner Fellowship E-pistle #2

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

This is my second general newsletter to those who have expressed an interest in the development of the Sojourner Fellowship. I will attempt to include the first package of material for those who have expressed an interest since it went out on November 14. I apologize to all of you in advance. This is a clumsy way of sharing information, but it is important to keep everyone informed as we go along. Once the SF website is functioning and we have an interactive chat capability (see Sections below) it should make communications much easier for everyone.

I want to start by sharing a prayer with you:

Lord God Almighty, You hold all things in the palm of Your hand. You hold each of us individually and You hold us all together as a part of Your Church in this Sojourner Fellowship initiative. We ask that You will guide us by Your Holy Spirit in this work: Protect us, Prevent us, Inspire us, enable us that all may be done to Your honour and glory. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN

The Challenge We Face

As I have heard from some of you and as I have explored further the implications of creating a virtual church as an integral part of the mission of the Anglican Network in Canada, I am daunted by the challenge of what we are undertaking. At the same time I am even more deeply convinced that this is a remarkable opportunity. There are a huge variety of “virtual church” experiments underway on the internet. They respond to very different needs and circumstances. Many of them appear to be driven more by exploring the technology and the culture of the Internet than by the Message of the Gospel. In this fluid environment, I believe that we have the potential to make a significant contribution. In fact the challenge before us is to use our “orphan” situations as a source of strength instead of weakness. Part of becoming a fellowship of sojourners is to construct an outreach ministry that will serve to encourage, assist and build up the Church of Jesus Christ .

In order to do so we need to be very clear on our **purpose** and on the **principles** that will guide us. Here are some initial thoughts on those two subjects:

1. The Purpose of the Sojourner Fellowship Initiative

Our purpose is to create a virtual fellowship of faithful Christians living in widely differing circumstances and locations, connected to the Worldwide Anglican Communion through the Anglican Network in Canada and committed to sharing the Gospel, building up the Church, and supporting one another as disciples of Jesus Christ.

2. Guiding Principles

- a. Our Fellowship with each other is grounded in our shared relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour as expressed in our common faith
- b. Our common faith is founded on the revealed word of God in Holy Scripture consistent with the understanding and traditions of Anglican Christianity as expressed in the Jerusalem Declaration.
- c. Technology is a means not an end. The Christian faith and purpose of the Fellowship will guide the adaptation and use of available technologies
- d. The Fellowship is committed to creating a communication environment that is as simple and transparent as possible
- e. The Fellowship is committed to welcoming seekers while providing protection and security to its members
- f. The Fellowship is committed to connect faithful Christians and churches not to be a stand alone undertaking. It will both complement and supplement the physical church by seeking to build mutually supportive, seamless integration of the virtual and physical expressions of church both within and beyond ANiC.
- g. In order to serve the diverse and changing needs of its members, the Fellowship is committed to being user built and managed under the authority of ANiC.

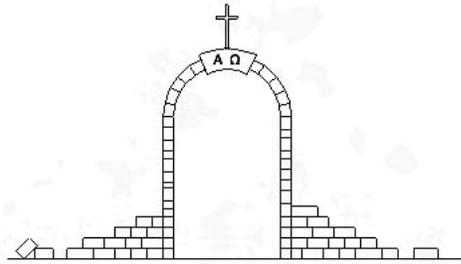
In the month since the initial newsletter was circulated, I have had feed back from a number of you on a variety of subjects, but based on principle g. above, I would appreciate as much input as possible on priorities for the SF initiative and especially on these draft Purpose and Principles statements.

Website Development

A major priority for me over the past month has been to work with a website developer in creating the framework for the Sojourner website. This is an entirely new area to me (which is one reason I am eager to find others who can help). I have provided the developer (Daniel Hartwig of Citrus Design) input in the following subjects. For each area, I would appreciate your prayers and your thoughts.

3. Website Logo and Motto

In looking for a visual image that will identify what a Sojourner Fellowship is all about, I turned to First Peter, Chapter 2 with its great affirmation that we are a “royal priesthood” though we are also sojourners and exiles. In particular I was struck by Peter’s affirmation: **“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** (1 Peter 2:4-5). I am no artist, and I could not find a photo to illustrate these verses, but I made a mockup of an image using CAD software as follows. This is a sketch rather than a finished Logo (Daniel will be working on that) but I would value your input on the concept and the scripture text.



4. Website Concept

Based on a couple of examples of other sites, it seemed to me that the best way of being invitational for a virtual church is to connect with the experience which most of us have when we visit a “real” church. The activities and services tend to be located in or identified with specific spaces. Why not use the same kind of identification for the virtual spaces of the Sojourner website? The aim is to provide a site that people will visit and regard as a place to go for belonging not just information.

5. Website Conceptual Framework

Based on the analogy of a physical church facility, I prepared the following outline of a possible framework for the website. The content is all highly tentative at the moment, but it indicates the general approach. Daniel and I are still in discussion as to how to do this on an incremental basis keeping things as simple (and inexpensive) as possible. I would invite your comments and input.

Home Page (Front Steps or Foyer)

- Welcome
- Invitation to Visit
- Who we are
- What we believe (Jerusalem Declaration)
- How we relate to each other in a virtual Environment
- Events and Opportunities
- What’s New /Interesting

Worship (Church Sanctuary)

- Daily/Weekly Devotions Material
- Sermons
- Music Links

- Prayer Resources
- Intercessory Prayer
- A Worship Blog that is member driven
- Contributions to the Fellowship.

Fellowship (Church Hall)

- Meeting place
- Getting to know one another
- Identifying common interests
- Link to chat room(s)
- Opportunities to become involved
- Bulletin Board.

Getting Together (Meeting Rooms)

This area will have linkages to social networking and to Skype etc.

- Meetings Board (Reservations)
- Guidelines for Meetings (open, members only, etc)
- Project meetings
- Bible Studies
- Prayer Meetings
- Fellowship meetings.

Pastoral Care (Home Visitation)

- Guidelines for accessing pastoral care
- Pastoral Resources

Administrative Support (Church Office)

- Inquires

- Communications (Newsletter)
- Membership Information
- Financial Information

Resources and Linkages (Library)

- Resources
- Archives
- Links

How Will the Sojourner Fellowship Actually Function?

One of the reasons for moving slowly and carefully is the need to answer this question. I am in the midst of researching lessons learned from other virtual church models, but, as I have indicated above, the most important input will come from those who can see themselves becoming involved in the Fellowship either as a primary place of belonging, or as an occasional member, contributor, or friend as we embark on this journey together.

An Advent Reflection and Prayer

This is the season of the celebration of the Advent of our Lord. We think of Joseph and Mary journeying to Bethlehem where they will face rude accommodations and then the hurried flight to Egypt. Truly they are sojourners as much or more than we could ever be. But their journey pales beside that of the Holy Child. How incomprehensively greater is his journey from his place in the Heavens to his birth in a stable. His incarnation, life, death and resurrection are the foundation of all of our belonging. In his coming is our redemption and our hope. As we each celebrate the birth of our Saviour, I want to wish you a very blessed Christmas and to look forward with you to a New Year of hope and fellowship in the service of our Lord. May the Lord God Almighty bless and keep you safe in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN

In Jesus Christ,

Mark

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