

**Discipleship Model and  
Community Organizing Cycle  
Catacomb Churches**  
www.catacombchurches.org

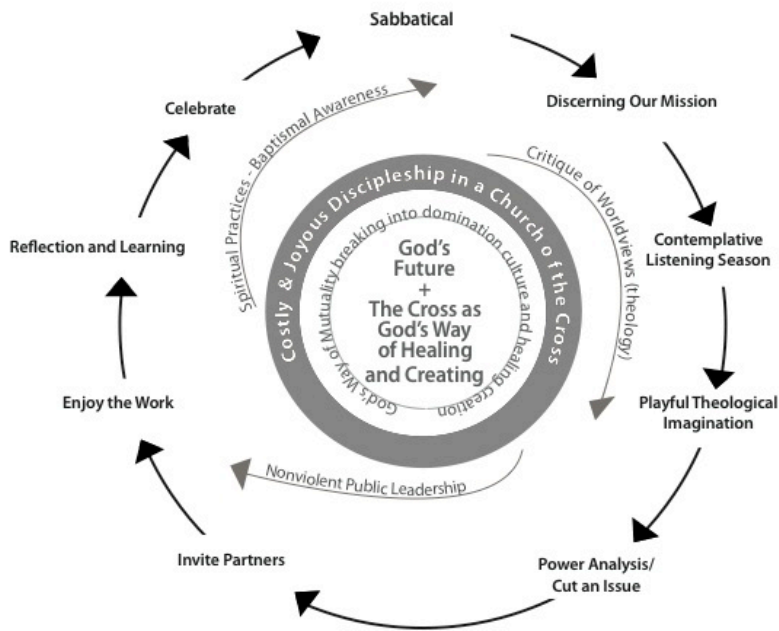
*Brief Introduction*

Wednesday, October 2, 2013

For more on Community Organizing in and by the Church:

<http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Congregation-based-Organizing.aspx>

**Discipleship Model &  
Organizing Cycle of the Catacomb Churches**



### **God's Future and the Cross as God's way of Healing and Creating**

God is committed to healing and creating the earth and its peoples. Fundamental to Christian belief is the idea that God not only created the earth, that God continues to create, but that God will one day bring the earth and its peoples to wholeness. Our participating in that healing is one way that God brings healing to us.

In Jesus we see the way that God works to bring this healing. The cross was not a dirty job that Jesus took care of for God, but rather expresses God's way of healing and creating: Because the earth is beautiful with its species, people and cultures and yet broken with injustice and violence, God suffers with and brings new life and new ways for humans to live together as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We call this a theology of the cross.

### **God's Way of Mutuality breaking into domination culture and healing creation**

We see Jesus as a nonviolent leader who reorients people from domination culture or empire to God's Way of Mutuality – the kingdom or reign of God.

Domination culture is a culture in which God is primarily seen as powerful. This reinforces and arises from our desire to have power over each other. Ultimately this creates a dog-eat-dog culture with vast inequities and injustices. In the midst of such a culture, Jesus began to reorient people to another way to understand God and another way to be human and live in human community. He called this the kingdom of God/heaven. God was actively reordering human community so that everyone had enough food, clothing, work and a safe place to sleep.

Jesus announced that God's kingdom was breaking into domination culture and actively subverting it and inviting others to come out of its influence. These people and the communities they form would be salt, leaven, light and seed within their larger communities.

### **Joyous and Costly Discipleship in a Church of the Cross**

The Catacomb Churches is a way to live out an *ecclesia crucis* – that is a church of the cross. To not only follow Jesus, but follow his lead as we are called to participation in God's healing and creation of the world.

The word church is a translation of the word "ecclesia," a Greek word meaning "those called out." The church has often not been called out of the larger domination/submission culture, but instead has been a supporter, cheerleader and chaplain to domination/submission culture.

We sense a larger movement of the Spirit who is once again calling those within the church as it exists today to come out of domination/submission and to join God in the healing and creation of the world. The church is called to join Jesus in entering into the darkness and pain of human individuals and communities and to find new and restored life precisely there.

This means that the church is invited not only to “be called out” of domination/submission culture, but to enter into it as well with a distinct vision, values and relational sensibilities so that we can participate with others and with God in its healing and creation.

This is a costly and joyous discipleship. It is costly because it requires us to die to the vision, values and relational sensibilities of the larger culture. These have been deeply internalized in us and do not die without considerable pain. This discipleship is costly because it invites us to live with full allegiance to God and God’s way of mutuality.

It is joyous because the vision and values of the larger culture is literally killing us and the created world. This discipleship invites us to live in hope as God’s way of mutuality breaks into and emerges from our world. Our participation in the God’s way of mutuality is one way that God is healing us.

Community organizing is a powerful way to invite and strengthen people in their participation in God’s healing and creation of the earth. It strengthens communities to develop capacities to handle their own issues, to fish together instead of giving a fish or waiting for a fish.

In community organizing we seek to bring real changes, albeit small ones, to the communities we serve. We do this by helping people who have been beaten down and distracted by domination/submission culture to recognize their self interests and to see how their self interests are connected those of others and the whole community. In this process people begin to realize their legitimate power - thus breaking down domination/submission culture.

### **Three Primary Disciplines of a Disciple of Jesus**

Jesus practiced and taught three major disciplines.

- Spiritual Practices
- Critique of Worldviews (Theology)
- Nonviolent public leadership

Jesus took time to pray individually, to fast, to pray with his disciples and to participate in the worship life as a faithful member of the People of Israel.

Jesus took time to critique his larger culture, the leaders of his faith community and how his people were responding to that culture.

Jesus took time to practice his skills in nonviolent public leadership and to engage in such leadership.

Jesus invites us to do the same. He invites us to take time with each one on a regular basis.

Each of these inform and support the other. These three practices have often been separated from each other. Some gravitate to the spiritual disciplines, others to theology, others to some form of public leadership.

Each of these primary disciplines are a central part of being human and to becoming more authentic to the person that God is making us to be.

### **Spiritual Practices**

Within these communities, people begin to discover their authentic baptismal identity and engage the larger culture with their authentic ministry – that is their own nonviolent public leadership.

This authenticity begins to emerge and deepen as our own God-given character, personality and gifts interact with Christian community, scripture, tradition, the practice of nonviolent public leadership and with the daily spiritual practice.

Core to these practices is a continually deepening capacity to look at life-as-it-is: a life which includes death and life, power and vulnerability, pleasure and pain and find that this life is fully embraced by God in Jesus. Since God embraced human life, and since God radically affirms our existence we begin to embrace our life.

Because our existence as human beings, with all these contradictions, is embraced, we begin to look at ways that we reject our life, try to gain power over others and help form and support a domination culture.

Because we are being daily reoriented to God's way of mutuality, we begin to participate in and invite others into this Way.

### **Critique of Worldviews (Theology)**

Jesus practices the critique of worldviews and how they form and deform human beings. He did so out of the Jewish tradition. Our practice of this is informed by the Jewish and Christian traditions. Christianity is not so much a religion as it is a *prophetic movement*. This prophetic movement grows from a unique perspective about larger culture, not to distance itself from the larger culture, but so that we may be responsible to, for, and in our larger cultural context. Simply put, God is a prophetic God who cares about the real condition of human beings, human communities and the earth.

Our theological practice grows from our appreciation of the beauty of the earth and its peoples and the story of God who sees, hears, and knows the suffering of the creation and human beings, and seeks to bring real-world change so that people may live a more full and joyous life. Lutherans call this a "theology of the cross." That what we see in Jesus life, death and resurrection is not just something that happened once but represents the way God always works.

#### **What is Theology?**

Theology is the practice of the critique of worldviews and how they form and deform human beings: we practice theology from the perspectives of the Jewish and Christian tradition.

#### **Heart of Our Theology**

- God is committed to healing and creating the world
- God invites us to participate in the creation and healing of the world
- Our participation is one way God heals and creates us

### **Theology of the Cross**

Because the earth is beautiful with its species, people and cultures yet broken with injustice and violence, God suffers with and brings new life and new ways of living together as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Therefore we try to discern through contemplative listening the ways that our larger culture promotes biases toward the powerful and powerless that maintain the status quo and to attempt to counter these biases with a deeper story.

### **Nonviolent public leadership**

Jesus is a nonviolent leader who despite his low status became a well-known teacher and called other people to their own leadership. Leadership is not an authoritarian exercise of imposing one's will on others. Rather it is Leadership is engaging a situation with one's authentic self so that other people and communities may become more authentic to God's intention for them.

In an age of terrible economic injustice and anger at that injustice, Jesus refused to be quiet, use violence, retreat into religiosity or to escape to a safe location. Jesus engaged his culture publicly in a way that invited ever-widening circles of human beings to participate in a change that God was bringing. He did so in a way that broke down barriers between people, and increased the interaction between and respect for people of different social locations.

Jesus' teachings and actions aroused strong passions in those who agreed and in those who did not. While he sought the healing of all he did not allow a comfortable complacency and privilege in a situation of injustice to be substituted for a real deep peace. Nor did he allow the people to excuse themselves from public leadership because they were deemed to be of low status. He engaged people in hope for a future based on God's promises that was fully conscious of the problems of the present.

We have been sent as he was sent.

### **Parts of the Community Organizing Cycle**

#### Sabbatical

- Rest
- Play
- Reflect
- Change the subject
- Listen deeply
- Exercise

#### Discerning Our Mission

- Theological Reflection
- Biography and storytelling

- Spiritual practices
- Group Values clarification
- Reflection on the Gospel
- How is God’s way of Mutuality breaking into our world now?

#### Contemplative Listening Season

- One-to-one interviews listening for “God in and with”
- Reading on the subject
- Research
- Listen and speak to a wide diversity of people
- What are the deep needs and fears of people about this issue?

#### Playful Theological Imagination

- What part does this issue play in the imagination of people in our culture
- What do public leaders and media say about it? What don’t they say?
- What level of denial exists about this issue?
- What is the story or narrative our culture(s) we tell about this issue?
- How do our cultural biases play a part in the formation of this particular issue?
- What are Biblical reflections on this or on similar issues?
- What are some theological reflections on this or on similar issues?
- How can we engage an issue that frees people up to see it a new way?
- Write a one page theological reflection on the issue

#### Power Analysis/Cut an Issue

- Who do we know that has influence on this issue?
- How can we get to know them?
- What is an objective change that we can advocate for given our limits and the limits of our influence?
- How can that objective change and the process we use bear public witness to the inbreaking of God Way of Mutuality?
- How can we use nonviolent public leadership to engage this issue?
- How can we involve the “wide diversity” to participate, including children?

#### Invite Partners

- Who shares our values on this particular issue?
- What are the networks of people we can reach out to?
- How can we build relationships and together-power so that other issues can be worked on later?

#### Enjoy the Work

- Continue to practice weekly Sabbath
- Pace the work given our sustainable capacity
- Practice self and other care: be clear about your limits and capacities
- Lead as saints and sinners
- Care for one another as we do the work
- Share the load in an equitable way

- Keep others informed about your part of the process

#### Reflection and Learning

- Reflect with the widest possible group of people.
- What went well?
- What could have been better?
- What was life giving for each person?
- What was life taking for each person?
- What can we change our community organizing process to better reflect our reality?
- Where did we see God's work in the process?

#### Celebrate

- Have a party
- Make a toast
- Pray
- Smile