



OUTLINING DREAMS IN STONES, Ministry Work in Angola

By Elizabeth Rotch

Angola is not a tourist destination, although statistics cite a 300 percent growth in the number of visitors between 2002 and 2009. Bear in mind, however, that prior to 2002, the country had been at war for more than 40 years. Huge numbers of people were displaced, and Angola today is among the countries with the highest landmine contamination, with more than 100 per square kilometer, according to the Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor.

Landmines, child mortality, and lack of access to education are real in Angola, but so are a belief in God’s goodness, a love of Jesus, and a hope for something better. That was the Angola we found in a small town close to the Namibian border in 2008. Two years earlier, Susan Lassen (St. John’s, Portsmouth) had connected Church of Our Saviour in Milford with St. André’s Church in Ondjiva. The New Hampshire church was looking for a way to reach out; the Africans wanted someone for whom they could pray. A relationship began to develop. With great enthusiasm – and little idea of what we would encounter – a small group traveled to Angola.

First, we discarded the lists of things we had thought we might be able to do for the Africans. Then we asked about their hopes, and we listened as they spoke of their dream of a new church. Long before we showed up, they had outlined the footprint of that dream in stones. We agreed to work with them, to share plans and to agree on “next steps” before we sent money.

We worked not through their diocesan office, but directly with the people on the ground in Ondjiva, particularly with Fr. Elias Mbala, a small but energetic man, who has responsibility for more than 20 congregations in Southern Angola.

At the same time, Dawn Formica was organizing another group from New Hampshire to work with the Mamas of the parish, enlarging and renovating the school adjacent to the church. It had never been used, because the roof had blown

off, and there was no money to replace it. The new building is named in memory of “Mama Dawn.”

In both cases, partnership was key. First, we built the relationship, then we could erect the buildings. A New Hampshire delegation has been to Ondjiva four times now.

Showing up matters. This year, we were able to see the school in session, classrooms clean and painted, children in school uniforms welcoming visitors, singing, showing off at the blackboard.

We also met children who live too far from town to attend school. Their learning happens under a tree, where the 18-year-old teacher pins up a single piece of paper for the lessons. We delivered a blackboard and supplies and the teacher will receive training and support in her efforts.

We took bed nets donated by St. James’, Laconia, to a family far out in the bush. On the way, we stopped at a village whose residents entertained us with song and dance. They are so far away, they told us, that no one ever stops. No one ever stops.

Though the buildings have been completed, the work is not done; the relationship continues, perhaps with your congregation’s involvement. To learn more about the Angola and Ondjiva ministry, contact Elizabeth Rotch at rotch.hill@comcast.net.

Elizabeth Rotch serves as the Archivist and Secretary to Convention for the Episcopal Church of NH. She is also an active member of Church of Our Saviour in Milford. This was her third trip to Angola as part of this mission work. Her photos accompany this article.



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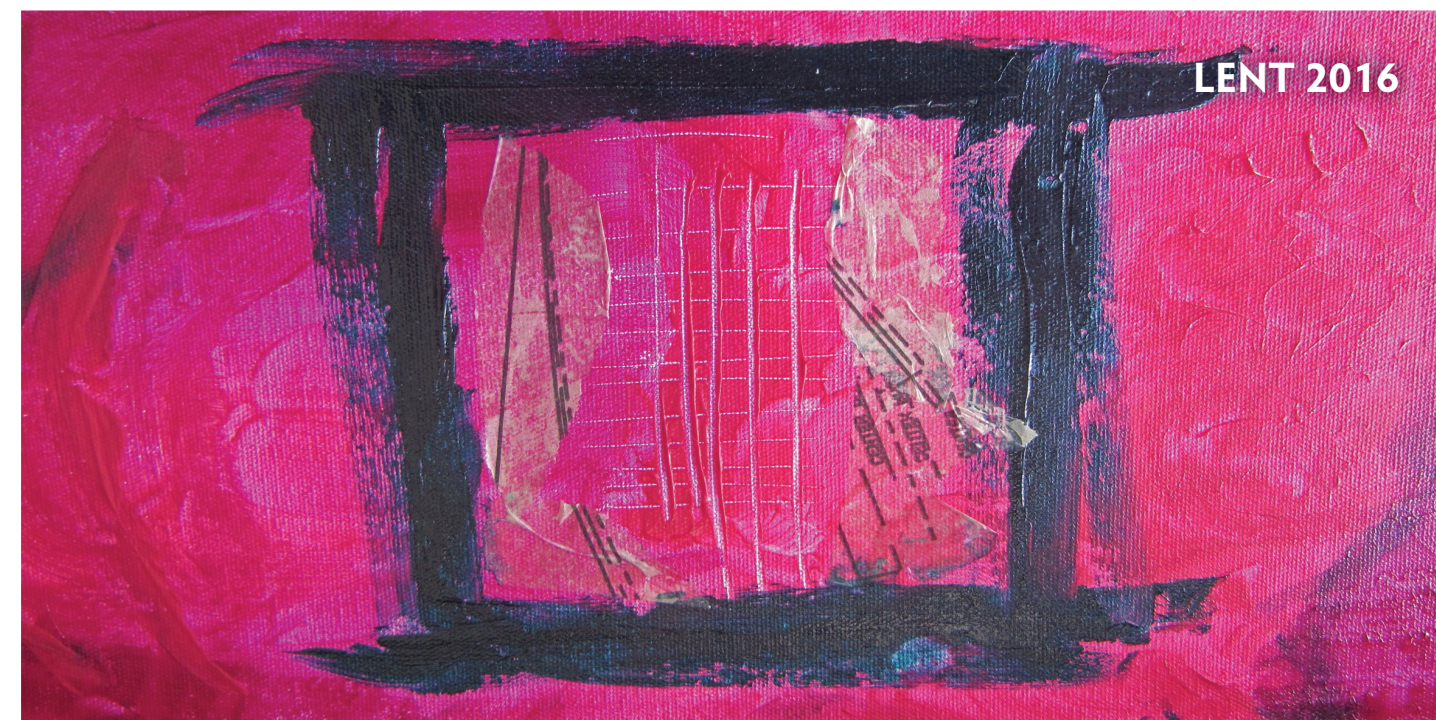
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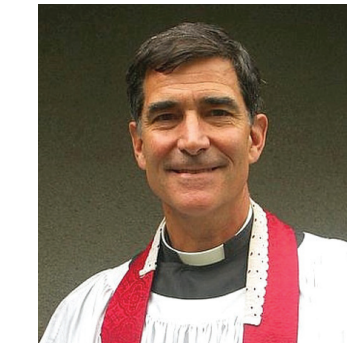


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Letter From Bishop Rob



Lost And Found

One of the peculiar treasures of my schedule is the annual trip to Lost Nation for the Advent Festival of Lessons and Carols. Nestled in a bowl, surrounded by mountains in Northumberland, sits the tiny wooden chapel of St. Timothy. Its only heat is from a cast-iron woodstove. Its only light is from kerosene lamps and flashlights. Each year the place fills with the sound of song and harp, the smells of wood smoke and wool, to offer prayers in anticipation of the coming of Christ. As we begin the readings, from the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis to the birth of Jesus in Luke, I bid prayers for the Church, the world, for children, and for Lost Nation. It’s hard not to add the word “this” to that prayer, for this

Lost Nation. Since coming home from my trip to Lost Nation, the meaning of that phrase has been much on my heart.

For a people or nation to be lost means to experience a gap, a split, between our ideals and our practices, between what we set out to accomplish and what we are settling for. If we had any doubt about the Prodigal Son’s condition when mired in the pig slop, it’s St. Luke’s phrase “he came to himself” that makes us realize that the most famous lost child in scripture was lost in spirit and soul as much as he was far from home. The gap between his identity as a cherished child of his father and the rake he had become was just too much to bear.

On the drive to St. Timothy’s, along Lost Nation Road, I noticed two farmhouses, not more than few hundred yards from each other. One displayed a large TRUMP sign, and the other an equally large BERNIE sign. What a gap! Here are two neighbors with wildly opposite understandings of what is going on in the nation and how that nation is to be governed. How do they get along? Can they? Is there hope for good old-fashioned neighborliness for them? For any of us?

Scientists and philosophers often conduct what are called “thought experiments.” Einstein imagined riding a wave, or particle, of light as it zoomed past a planet. On my long drives, I often conduct what I call “prayer experiments” where I imagine how God sees us. Consider this prayer experiment, if you will. What if we take a wider-angle view and see these two households in our Lost Nation as both sharing in the common identity we call humanity. They are both children of God, both dwellers in the same presence, which is God, both of the same flesh that God takes on in Jesus. In this prayer experiment, the physical households they occupy, their property boundaries, begin to melt away, and we see their differences embraced by God’s loving providence. Within that Presence, there are still differences—stark differences—but those differences begin to be transformed into something less constricting of who they are. We begin to see the two of them defined not only by the signs they display or the faces they present to each other, but in the light of their common humanity. They are drawn into the restoring dignity of God.

You may not take immediately to this kind exercise of prayer. It’s not easy. It’s not easy because it demands us to pause, to occupy the uncomfortable chasm that exists between us as human beings in a fallen world. And it demands us to relinquish certain passions that we might think are crucially important. It will be hard to find our way off Lost Nation Road until we learn to see the loving, death-defying presence of God filling the gaps between us.

I believe it’s just those gaps that Jesus came to occupy and to inhabit in order to heal our identity so marred and torn by sin. It’s striking that this year only thirty days elapse between the moment Jesus is baptized (January 10) and the time we read of his temptation in the wilderness

(cont. inside)

Gratitude for Contributions to the Bishop's Discretionary Fund

Bishop Hirschfeld extends his grateful thanks to all who made contributions to the Bishop's Discretionary Fund in 2015. With these funds, our Bishop supports international, national, state and local organizations working

together to advance God's mission in the world. Parishioners contribute funds during the Bishop's semi-annual visitation or by those desiring to honor his ministry in some way.

May 6 & 7 Lay Leadership Institute

Rundlett Middle School, Concord, NH

Learn more and register at:
www.nhepiscopal.org/lay-leadership
Registration opens March 1, 2016

Ordained Priests, in Service to the World

This fall we were excited to ordain five new Episcopal priests. The Rev. Winnie Skeates is serving as Vicar of St. John's in Dunbarton. The Rev. Kelly Sundberg Seaman is currently serving as the Curate of Sunapee, sharing her ministry between Newport and New London. The Rev. Tim Brooks is the new Priest in Charge of St. Paul's, Lancaster. The Rev. Reed Loy is serving in the Diocese of Maine as Assistant Rector at St. Alban's in Cape Elizabeth, ME. The Rev. Bill Cruse is working for Kaleidoscope Institute, a subsidiary of the Diocese of Los Angeles. Congratulations and blessings to them all.

Transitions

- The Rev. Richard Belshaw is the new Priest in Charge at Christ Church, North Conway, NH. He was previously at St. Mark's in Ashland.
- The Rev. Curtis Metzger is the new Rector at All Saints', Littleton. He served at St. Stephen's, Pittsfield most recently. He starts his new position April 1.
- The Rev. Randy Dales, our Co-Chaplain for Retired Clergy, is now Priest in Charge at Church of the Holy Spirit in Plymouth and Vicar for St. Mark's, Ashland.
- St. James, Keene is currently receiving candidates for the position of Rector and St. John's, Portsmouth has posted an opening for a Curate.
- The Rev. Sarah Rockwell is the new Priest in Charge at St. Andrew's, Manchester.



Bishop Hirschfeld imposes ashes during "Ashes To Go" in Downtown Concord, NH.

These openings can be found on the Transition page of our website.

(Bishop Rob's Letter, cont.)



Lessons and Carols, Lost Nation (l.), St. Timothy's, Lost Nation (r.)

(Ash Wednesday, February 10). In other words, there is hardly any gap from the bright moment when he is told that he is the Son of God and the moment when Satan tries to get Jesus to act as though he was less than who he was. Jesus always knows who he is, no matter who is telling him he is less.

It surprises modern day Christians to hear this, but from the earliest days of the Church, we were meant to read ourselves into these stories of Jesus. We are meant to read the story of Jesus as though we are reading our own biographies. We are meant to place ourselves into the scenes where Jesus hears the words from the heaven, "You are my child, my beloved, in whom my soul delights." With those words sounding in our ears, and being confirmed every time we receive communion, or pray, or serve others, temptation to become less than who we are is far less, well, tempting.

A Christian from the second century encourages just this kind of prayer experiment:

*Behold, the Lord is our mirror,
Open your eyes and see them in God's.
And learn the manner of your face,
Then declare praises to the Spirit.
And wipe the paint from your face,
And love God's holiness and put it on.
Hallelujah!*

(Odes of Solomon, circa 2nd century, C.E., Syriac)



We forget who we are, don't we? As though when walking away from that mirror after prayer or communion, we allow our reactive, more frightened, more anxious, more selfish selves, to dominate our better selves. As columnist David Brooks has described in his recent book, *The Road to Character*, there are within ourselves two Adams in conflict with one another—one selfish, frightened, grasping, always asking what's in this for me-- and the other more relationally-minded, understanding that I can only thrive and be fully alive when my neighbor, the stranger, is alive and thriving. (Actually, as Brooks himself points out, he got that description of the self from Saints Paul and Augustine). Christians traditionally have described Christ as the second Adam who seeks to dwell within us to heal our inner divisions.

It's not for me to say, really, who represents the first or second Adams among political campaigners in our Lost Nation. It's enough to say that both exist in myself and in all of us. My prayer for us all is that we take time in our congregations, in our worship, through Bible study, Adult Education forums, spiritual conversations with fellow parishioners or other friends in faith to be reminded who we really are, children of a God of expansive love and generosity. I pray that we might all have opportunities during Lent to "arrive at ourselves" again, and to come home to our truest self where we meet our friend and Savior Jesus, welcoming us to the self where he has been longing for us to return for years.

+Rob

2016 Lay Leadership Institute

by Judith Esmay

The 2016 Lay Leadership Institute is our annual opportunity to learn the basics of The Episcopal Church and to equip ourselves for ministry in the church and in daily life.

The Institute will again offer the threshold Basics Course, which is essential to lay leadership in a congregation. The Basic Course especially welcomes new and continuing vestry members.

Those who have already taken the Basics Course will have a choice of the following four day-long seminars:

- Bishop Hirschfeld will lead an exploration of liturgy in a seminar of interest to all persons who worship in church but especially to those who participate in defined roles as eucharistic ministers, altar guild members, lectors, ushers, choristers, acolytes, crucifers.
- A seminar on learning the art of narrative will train participants in storytelling, a skill that helps us make sense of the life we live and offer that life to others. Judith Esmay, Canon for Lay Leadership, and Laura Simoes, Missioner for Communications, will lead the seminar.
- Presenters from Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light will illuminate issues of sustainability and assist church leaders in the greening of church properties and practices. Their presentation will include information about calculating energy costs and sources of funding assistance.
- Our annual Wardens' Roundtable will focus this year on the conduct and potential of mutual ministry reviews, in exercises led by The Rev. Hannah Anderson, Canon to the Ordinary, and seasoned guide to critically important mutual ministry reviews in many grateful congregations.

As always, there will be plenty of time for networking with lay leaders from congregations all over our New Hampshire diocese. The Institute will begin with Friday evening dinner and a "Ministry Moth" program at the Audubon McLane Center in Concord, where we will hear inspiring and exciting stories of lay ministry.

Additional information and registration materials can be found at www.nhepiscopal.org/lay-leadership/. Registration begins on March 1, 2016.

Judith Esmay is the Canon for Lay Leadership at the Episcopal Church of NH. This is her seventh year of leading the Lay Leadership Institute, which she founded in 2009.

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Bishop Rob Hirschfeld