

November 2006

Reflections on my Search for Transformation

Dear Theophilus,

Eight pastors, one advisor, three and a half years, and \$60,000 to look at the transformation of the Church. These were the ingredients of the Lilly Foundation group (we called ourselves Peer One) that wrapped up its odyssey last week at Oglebay Park in Wheeling, West Virginia.

Here's what I have taken away from the experience that took us to such places as Chicago, Seattle, and Egypt and brought us into conversation with several prominent writers, theologians and pastors.

Denominational differences melt away when you get to know people. We were a very diverse group theologically--Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Independent Christian, Nazarene, Disciples of Christ, United Church of Christ, and Pentecostal—yet we all got along great, the differences enriching our time together.

There is no place "out there" that has it all together. We witnessed a lot of churches and talked to a lot of religious leaders and the barriers and struggles exist everywhere. People are people. The grass may look greener on the other side but it doesn't mean it's any better.

There is no magic formula that works everywhere. What works in one place can seldom be transferred to another place. Ministry has to be unique to the context. Copy-cutting seldom works nor should it. Find what you need to do for your context and then do it.

Meaningful moments often happen by surprise and when and where you least expect it. Visiting a poor congregation on the outskirts of Cairo was much more enriching for me than attending a well-known and well-heelled mega-church on the outskirts of Chicago. Money and planning and large crowds do not necessarily lead to a deeper spiritual experience.

The experience of Christ cannot be limited by language or custom or geography. There is no one way to follow Christ. There is no one way to understand Christ.

Change is natural and it is needed. Every one of our experiences stretched us and prodded us to look at the future and what has worked and not worked in the past. We are in a new reformation and still not sure what form Christianity will take, and must take, in the coming year. The answer isn't found by looking back but by seeing ahead to what might be.

Transformation is not so much something out there to be found but something in here to be discovered and lived. We can work on things right here at home. It's a legitimate place to be. It is a great place to be. I imagine Christ might agree.

Thank you for allowing me, and encouraging me, to take this all-expenses paid adventure into the world of transformation. It has led me back to this place. Now let's see what might happen!

Regards,

Harry