

A New Beginning for a New Tomorrow: Buildings for a New Tomorrow Symposium Changes

The Episcopal Church Building Fund (ECBF)* formerly held an annual multi-day conference called Buildings for a New Tomorrow (BFNT). The conference was an important source of new ideas for ways in which participants could use their buildings and property.

That gathering still exists, but in a new form. ECBF is collaborating with four other denominations—Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, the United Church of Christ, and Presbyterians—on one-day regional symposia that take place in conjunction with other church conferences as an add-on event. For example, the most recent ECBF symposium took place in Dallas/Fort Worth just prior to the Southwest Regional Assembly of the Disciples of Christ.

The Rev. Canon Ruth Woodliff-Stanley, Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Colorado and Interim President of ECBF, says, “We were determined to keep the content fresh and create the next generation of BFNT.”

The Next Generation

That included a complete overhaul of the way the symposium works. “We worked with a consultant to develop our pedagogical methods and introduced many changes,” Ruth says. This year’s tag line is: “Now What?: A Symposium on Repurposing.”

They moved away from the traditional, keynote-speaker conference model, and invited three influential and inspirational individuals to present “fast-paced lecturettes.” They also reworked the discussion to encourage “cross-hatch conversations” that integrated information from all three of the speakers.

The Rev. Janet Waggoner, Canon to the Ordinary from the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, was a discussion facilitator at the event. The afternoon was dedicated to applying what they learned in the morning to participants’ specific issues in “App Labs.”

Janet says that they worked toward tangible next steps. In her App Lab, “We made an extensive list of resources people have found useful and wanted to share.” She says that they moved away from storytelling to help each other in a more direct way. They worked together to help each other determine “the next step that will help you get from where you are to where you need to be.” She describes that method as empowering: “It helped people to gain confidence. They already know what to do in their own contexts.”

Truly Ecumenical Common Ground

ECBF has been developing ecumenical relationships for the last decade, but the BFNT project represents true collaboration among denominations. Ruth says that they came together and asked, “Why are we all re-inventing the wheel? It’s time to come together and make this event fully ecumenical.” So, ECBF “handed BFNT into the collective.”

There are many advantages to this new model: Resources can be pooled, costs can be shared, new ideas can be presented, and different methods can be attempted so that BFNT can be valuable to a wide variety of institutions that are all facing similar issues.

Janet says, “We realized we can’t always do things the way we’ve always done it.” She appreciates “the openness from leadership on down and from grassroots on up to risk trying new things. That freedom is a space in which people’s gifts and ideas are honored. We’re in this together.”

“What we have in common is substantive and greater than the things that are different,” Ruth says.

Future BFNTs Near You

Ruth says she anticipates that there will be a number of BFNT one-day regional symposia around the country in 2017. “The next one may be in southern New England.” She says to keep checking in <http://www.ecbf.org> for information about when and where the next one will take place.

She also expects that there will be a national, multi-day event held every two to three years. “The lead denomination will probably rotate,” she says. “It’s invigorating to learn from each other as we do the planning.”

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