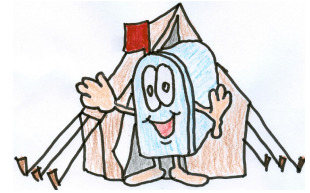




# Tent Talk

Newsletter of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers  
[www.pcusatentmakers.org](http://www.pcusatentmakers.org)



Tentmaking: A Ministry of Choice – A Choice for Ministry

Eastertide – 2011



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**2011 TENTMAKER CONFERENCE**  
**Nov. 4 through Nov. 6, 2011**  
Friday dinner through Sunday Lunch  
**STONY POINT CENTER**  
17 Cricketown Road  
Stony Point, NY 10980



## 2010 TENTMAKER CONFERENCE REPORT

by Davis Fisher, Episcopal Priest

"I'm an Episcopal priest serving a church in the Diocese of Chicago, and my tent is that I'm an electrical engineer." So went the introductions – a Presbyterian minister from Western New York who worked as a computer programmer for fifty years; a PCUSA (Presbyterian) minister serving in an ELCA (Lutheran)/PCUSA hybrid congregation and working as a public school teacher near Lake Tahoe; an Episcopal priest from Nevada who'd worked in real estate mortgage titles; another Episcopal priest who spent his days as a bond trader. These were some of those gathered – clergy who had long combined professions in the marketplace with their lives as ordained clergy.

Scattered among the clergy who had combined ordained ministry with secular work for many years were people looking for models on how to bring ordained ministry together with a non-ordained career:

- ▶ seminarians and recent seminary grads
- ▶ clergy whose congregations could no longer financially support an ordained person on a full-time basis
- ▶ traditional clergy looking for new and exciting ways to live out their ministry
- ▶ representatives from denominational bodies and seminaries looking for ideas about the future of ordained ministry.

All were gathered for ideas and support that focused on how to live out ordained ministry when a congregation is not the sole financial support of the ordained person. Over forty people met for "The Time Is Now: Tentmakers in the Emerging Church" in November 2010 in Mundelein, IL.

There was no one path the tentmakers had traveled. Some had begun their careers in ordained ministry as full-time parish clergy only to have the shape of their lives changed in such a way that they had moved from full-time church work into a secular profession. Others had gone to seminary after long, established careers outside the church with the express intention of becoming clergy and continuing to do whatever they were doing before. Still others had combinations of jobs and calls that morphed and combined into a "Holy Spirit meandering" of a holy life well lived. Many spoke to the fact that their role as ordained clergy was deeply informed by their outside work, just as their work outside the church was formed by their call and life as ordained clergy. The two forms of vocation were symbiotic and mutually beneficial. Many perceived their tentmaking as one vocation, lived out in the church and in the world.

A theme throughout the conference was the role tentmakers might take in the future of the church. In his “virtual” welcoming address to the conference, Episcopal Bishop of Chicago Jeffrey Lee underscored the change that is taking place: “The institutional life of the church continues to change at a dizzying pace.” He went on to say that tentmakers are “leading the way into new forms of ordained ministry for living out holy orders.”

Identifying with conference participants and anticipating cutting-edge outcomes from the conference, Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori wrote in a supportive letter to the conference, “As an experienced tentmaker, I would welcome a report of your deliberations, outcomes and recommendations to see how these can benefit the wider church, especially as we explore new forms of Christian community and supporting and equipping all God’s people for ministry.”



Phyllis Tickle & Davis Fisher

Phyllis Tickle – the innovative Christian writer, thinker, and author of *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* – keynoted the conference: “Emergence Christianity is going to look more and more to the tentmaker for its pastoral support, and both tentmakers and the Church at large need to be cognizant of those imminent shifts and prepare for them.”

According to Tickle, tentmaker clergy will be most at home in the Great Emergence because they span the boundaries between

Sunday and the rest of the week. Their engagement with the world of work outside the church places them in a unique position to interpret the gospel beyond their places of worship as well as within their places of worship. This spanning of church-world boundaries characterizes new ways of “being church” in the Emergence. Tickle sees tentmakers as the advance wave of the future church’s use of clergy.

The interactive portion of the conference focused on two reflection questions and the generation of action items. Provocative insights and outcomes include the following:

### **Reflection Question 1: How might tentmakers fit into the future of the church?**

- ▶ Tentmakers allow for smaller and more transitory Christian communities, and they also require congregants to take a much more active role in shaping and leading the church.
- ▶ Tentmakers offer alternative ways to envision and provide ministerial roles, such as engaging with co-workers outside the church who wouldn’t otherwise encounter clergy. (With foresight, former Episcopal Bishop of Chicago Bill Persell had remarked at the 2005 tentmaker conference, “Today many people are less likely to be found in an institution of religion or in a church, so the workplace may be the place where the real evangelism of the gospel can take place effectively.”)
- ▶ Tentmakers are inherently interfaith and inter-denominational because they often minister to persons who aren’t inside a church.
- ▶ Perhaps, in the future, more clergy will be required to have some sort of outside skill/profession before entering ordained ministry. (As Persell speculated in 2005, “With more and more ministries and congregations that cannot pay clergy on a full-time basis, I could envision an ordination process where a marketable skill or profession would be a requirement for entering the ordination process of a diocese.”)

### **Reflection Question 2: How can tentmakers contribute to being church outside the church walls?**

- ▶ Tentmakers elevate the priesthood of all believers by being priests outside traditional professional roles. Bishop Lee described tentmakers as, “walking, talking, sacramental signs of the priesthood that Jesus lavishes upon all the baptized.”

- ▶ To be a tentmaker requires some sort of dual competency, so tentmakers relate immediately to workplace challenges and the difficulties of living out one's faith in the marketplace.
- ▶ Tentmaking ministry is very much based in being present to counsel and discern with people encountered in daily life. Pastoral care often happens in the context of other conversations (not in specific pastoral counseling sessions).
- ▶ Tentmakers often see their "congregation" as a broader and more fluid population than a given church parish.
- ▶ Tentmakers still require denominational accountability as well as institutional support and involvement.

The final main discussion of the conference focused on practical, actionable steps that tentmakers could take to support tentmaking ministries and to live out those ministries within our churches. Participants voted on the top action items. These included:

- ▶ Provide individuals and congregations with a realistic vision of tentmaking ministry by serving as models and teachers.
- ▶ Call the church towards broader and more flexible views of what constitutes both church and clergy.
- ▶ Work with preparatory bodies (seminaries, discernment groups, dioceses/presbyteries) for the ordination of tentmaking clergy.
- ▶ Connect with tentmakers within other denominations to get a fuller sense of the breadth and diversity of tentmaking vocations among clergy.

Not surprisingly, tentmakers at the conference acknowledged that they are on both the outer fringe and the cutting edge. Tentmaking ministry will continue to evolve as the church continues to "emerge."



2010 Conference Attendees at "The Time is Now: Tentmakers in the Emerging Church" at Mundelein, Illinois

### **DON'T MISS THE NEXT EXCITING TENTMAKER CONFERENCE**

Mark your calendar for November 4 - 6, 2011 and plan to be at Stony Point Center, a National Conference Center of the PC(USA) in Stony Point, NY. Details to be forthcoming!

## **NEW LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM**

On April 15, the Theological Student Loan (TSL) Loan Forgiveness Program application became available. This program serves those called to part-time and/or temporary pastoral positions in small (150 member or less) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations. Eligible applicants will be graduates of an ATS-accredited seminary with educational debt who are serving a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation in a part-time or temporary called position. The applicant will be eligible for a \$3,000-\$5,000 forgivable loan to be applied to their educational debt. The loan will be forgiven upon completion of an 18-month period of service. The loan is renewable with a maximum lifetime benefit of \$15,000. TSL/Loan Forgiveness will provide up to 40 \$5,000 awards in 2011. Awardees will be selected in late July.

This program was developed to complement the Board of Pension's Seminary Debt Assistance program, and seeks to serve applicants who are not eligible for that program (The Board of Pensions Seminary Debt Assistant Program is for full time, 30 hrs per week or more, called and installed pastors), to incentivize service to hard-to-call churches, and to provide relief to pastors burdened with educational debt.

We hope you will be thinking about the potential this program has for recruiting pastors to serve hard-to-call churches. The TSL/Loan Forgiveness application is available at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/financialaid/theological-student-loan/>

Applications are due June 15, 2011. For questions, contact Laura Bryan, Associate for Financial Aid for Studies at 888-728-7228 ext. 5735 or email at [laura.bryan@pcusa.org](mailto:laura.bryan@pcusa.org).

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