

They asked

Episcopal Women's Caucus



Angel Project

and an Angel came.

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Having the experience of house Mass with Barbara (twice) was wonderfully freeing and uplifting. A fine, intelligent, friendly and spiritual person, she helped me sort through some longtime concerns, both personal and church related. I hope to encounter her ilk again—often.”

Carolee Yarborough, St. Luke's in the Meadow, Fort Worth

I felt that the visit by our Angel, Barbara Schlachter, gave hope to the ones of us in the Diocese of Fort Worth who are fervently praying for change and a closer connection to the larger church. She offered a different and more inclusive perspective on the faith that all of us are continually trying to strengthen and make more powerful in our lives. Barbara offered this experience in a very non-confrontational manner which, in itself, is a powerful testimony.

I first met her at our October Vestry meeting. She also preached at Trinity later during her visit and I took some new ideas about our spiritual/earthly journey to my heart and have used them in my life many times since then. I have quoted from her sermon several times and found her words to be as helpful to others as they are to me.

While it is probably true that several of the Episcopal churches in the diocese strongly resisted her outreach to them, they were the ones to miss a golden opportunity. The ones of us who did allow her to minister to us are far richer for the experience. After she spoke to the congregation at our Adult Forum, I felt that she really was an Angel sent to help us open ourselves to a larger faith experience.

My assessment is that the visit of Rev. Barbara Schlachter was truly worthwhile.

Charles Weidler, Trinity Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

We first met the Rev. Dr. Barbara Schlacter in early September, 2002, at the invitation of one of the local EWC officers. The format was a luncheon meeting for the purpose of introducing Barbara to 8 to 10 Episcopal Priests and lay people in the Fort Worth Diocese. We met one another and discussed possible opportunities that she might have to meet members of the several parishes represented.

Most of the conversation related to concerns the priests had about internal matters and the direction the diocese was headed. Barbara warmly listened in a quiet and supportive manner. Her understanding and loving support for their needs was very apparent and a highlight of the meeting.

Our next encounter was at our parish's October Stephen Minister education program, over which I presided. She spoke to about 30 Stephen Ministers and guests about Spiritual Healing. She presented a well received program not only from the perspective of a care giver, but also from the perspective of one with a life threatening medical illness. The presentation was outstanding.

Sylvia and I had the good fortune to attend the House Mass over which she presided in late November. This was a very personal and comforting experience. She brought with her the perspective of the experiences of other dioceses of the National Church and provided

understanding and hope for those present who expressed frustrations about our concerns. She provided the group with suggestions for mutual support and hope about how our diocese might in the future rejoin the mainstream of the National Church.

We have been blessed to have had such an outstanding and spiritual person as our visitor. We are indebted to those who generously provided the support for her visit.

Sylvia and Tim Stevens, St. Christopher Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

The encounter with an Angel in the Fort Worth diocese was healing, rather than divisive, as some imagined it might be. Those men and women who felt alienated from the national church to which they thought they belonged experienced enrichment and encouragement.

The visit was designed to be low key, and it was. As such it was a pressure valve that released hostilities and allowed laity and clergy to see that a spiritual call to ministry has no gender.

Being in charge of the Angel schedule was enlightening and rewarding.

Dr. Doug Newsom, Trinity Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

FIFTY-NINE HOLY DAYS IN FORT WORTH

by The Rev. Dr. Barbara Schlachter

**The Episcopal Women's Caucus' first angel reports on
her experience in the Diocese of Fort Worth and the
welcome she found there.**

This angel has flown home after fifty-nine days in the Diocese of Fort Worth. I arrived on St. Michael's and All Angels (transferred) and left on the Feast of Christ the King. Added to the three days I spent there earlier in September, it was a total of fifty-nine days, the canonically-allowed length of time a priest may function in a diocese other than her own without that bishop's permission.

The Rt. Rev. Jack Iker would not have given me permission because his position on the ordination of women to the priesthood is the reason I was there in the first place. Fort Worth is one of three dioceses that, more than 25 years since the canon on ordination was changed, still do not ordain women to the priesthood. The people who live there are divided between those who support Bishop Iker's position, and those who want to have ordained women serving in the diocese and to experience being part of the rest of the Episcopal Church.

It was to these latter, loyal people that I was sent. Some of them are members of the Episcopal Women's Caucus, and it was their request to the National Episcopal Women's Caucus that brought me there. I felt called to this ministry of pastoral presence. I had recently moved to Iowa from Southern Ohio and was between positions, so I had the time available. More importantly, I had been through a similar time in my life thirty years before when I helped found the Episcopal Women's Caucus. I spent three and a half years as a deacon going to any parish that would invite me to show them that a woman could wear a clerical collar and serve as well as a man.

In Fort Worth I felt in many ways that I was stepping back in time. Not only is the ordination of women a non-resolved issue in Fort Worth, but also inclusive language has far to go. In some services I felt I was at a mid-1950s liturgy. Women there are supposed to believe that they are included in the word "man"—as long as they aren't called to priesthood, that is.

The title for my article comes from an e-mail that one of the clergy opposed to the ordination of women sent to a public Internet site. He said that the Rev. Barbara Schlachter was "hanging out" around the Diocese of Fort Worth and wasn't it nice that the Episcopal Women's Caucus had nothing better to do with its money than provide me with a vacation in Texas.

Well, one of the things I most admire about Jesus' ministry was his ability to hang out and be available to people. I took that statement as a compliment. And if this clergyman had been English, he would have used the word "holiday" instead of vacation. That of course, comes from Holy Day.

And indeed, I did have fifty-nine Holy Days in Fort Worth. It was, however, not a vacation. The last time I checked under the rubrics of clergy wellness: preaching, teaching, counseling, planning liturgies, celebrating house Eucharists, encouraging the faithful and being generally available to all who wished to spend time with me individually or in small groups, is not considered vacation.

When I went for my three day initial "plunge" in early September, I returned amazed at the depth of the pain and anger I heard from both clergy and laity. I wondered if indeed I could offer healing and encouragement in the face of such despair. I wondered if I would in fact face hostility from those opposed. I asked for prayer from Caucus members and friends, and the parish where my husband is rector commissioned me for this ministry and joined in the prayers for me.

I believe in the power of prayer! I never experienced any hostility, even from those who were opposed to the ordination of women, and I was warmly greeted and received by people wherever I went. There was a hunger and a thirst to be part of something beyond their diocese that touched me deeply. There was a desire for the wholeness that the rest of the church has found in the ministry of ordained women. We lived that as fully as we could for those fifty-nine days.

There were a number of clergy in the diocese who were quite supportive of my being there and wished things were different so that they could have women colleagues. Even the most supportive, however, realized that an invitation to me to preach or celebrate constituted a risk with their bishop. My presence was a mirror for them—how far were they willing to go to support something they believed in? I do not judge any of them. It is an isolating place for clergy who do not believe as the bishop believes. In fact, it is a dangerous place. More than one clergy person has been removed from his position because he was too outspoken, and

In the Rev. Dr. Barbara Schlachter I met an angel, a messenger who brought good tidings to those of us in Ft. Worth who hunger and thirst for the full ministry of women and men. And the message she brought in a firm, loving, humorous, challenging, articulate, moving, and inspiring way is that we are all God's people and that women can minister to us in ways that are different from the ways of men. Having her in our presence was (and continues to be) a blessing for which we are all grateful to the Episcopal Women's Caucus. Her day of reflection for women was among the spiritual highlights of my life, and the people coming for communion after her sermon reflected hope and joy and a sense of connection.

One of our male parishioners said to her after her sermon and during her forum presentation, "I want to tell you that you are the best argument for the ordination of women that I have ever seen." That statement, I believe, represents exactly what the EWC hoped for in developing the Angel Project: the incarnational presence of an "angel" has allowed people of faith to experience the ministry of women in a way presently not allowed in our diocese.

Priscilla Tate, Trinity Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

I met Barbara Schlachter at Trinity Episcopal church. She was gently and peaceful, strong and wise. I was excited that my seven-year-old daughter and eleven-year-old son witnessed such a role model in a position of leadership.

I was surprised by how much her presence in Fort Worth meant to me. It was truly as if I was seeing an old friend, one who I had not expected to meet again. It was a reminder of years I spent in Dallas and Washington DC, where I had attended my aunt's ordination to Episcopal priesthood at the National Cathedral. It brought to mind many conversations about the masculine-feminine balance, and how God's decision to put us together was a mystery to some, but infinite wisdom to most.

Barbara's visit sent a powerful message. The National church had not, after all, forgotten about us here in Fort Worth. They had not written us off, or assumed that all was well. Barbara's visit communicated hope that there were possible solutions to reunite us with the Canons of the National Episcopal Church. My family sends their deepest thanks to the Episcopal Women's Caucus for designing and implementing the Angel project, and for sending Barbara Schlachter to Fort Worth. It is our hope that you will continue this and other projects which seek to unite us with the larger church.

Ruth Barnhouse Story

well. The Angel Project meant that St. John's was exposed to the first female priest most people had ever had the opportunity to meet. Nobody was struck by lightning. I think we should do it again.

Ann Marek, St. John's Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

It was a gift to invite people to my home to share and create a Eucharist led by a woman priest; one who I have come to admire and trust in a short time. Now I realize it was 'attended' by that larger body of people whose commitment and funding brought Rev. Schlachter to Ft. Worth for a time.

Marsha McClean, St. Luke's in the Meadow, Fort Worth

I met Barbara Schlachter on two occasions—both were meetings of our Book Club composed of about 15 Trinity women. She was the stranger who fit right in immediately. Her insights into our discussions were both helpful and interesting.

As a relative newcomer to the Diocese of Fort Worth and having come from the Diocese of Virginia, I found it reassuring to see the response of our small group to a woman priest. What was her background? How long would she be here? What were her reactions to Fort Worth? etc. They were not only interested but also eager to hear of her experiences. Her visit was not only helpful, it certainly made me feel connected once again to the larger church. I also had the pleasure of hearing her inspiring homily. I hope that many others at Trinity came away feeling the pride of hearing and seeing this gifted woman share her knowledge and background with us.

Sue Pratt, Trinity, Fort Worth

It is just too simple in every day life to lose sight of the fact that regardless of how often the attempt is made to make many of us feel unworthy because we want parity, the Diocese of Fort Worth is the true apostate. We wish only to follow the just path in line with the rest of the Anglican community. Rev. Schlachter's presence definitely helped me to feel connected to that larger community. For the first time within this church setting, I felt I was standing in the center rather than on the periphery—welcomed rather than simply tolerated. Speaking to Rev. Schlachter without fear of reprisal or judgment—to not have to explain certain feelings – to know that she recognized my heart—that was the crux of it. She simply understood. This gift I received—for I do feel it to be a gift—was precious. I do thank Barbara and all those who made it possible for her to visit the Diocese of Fort Worth. Both have given me hope that one day "angels" will not have to be imported.

BG Click, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Fort Worth

others have been forced out by vestries because the bishop chose not to support them.

I did celebrate the Eucharist once and con-celebrated another time in an Episcopal church. I preached in two different parishes, and there was a great deal of enthusiasm and support from the lay people in these churches. I attended two meetings of a deanery clericus, a book club, two meetings of a woman's guild, celebrated house Eucharists in the homes of people from four different parishes, led a quiet day, taught a class at Texas Christian University, had lunch with a number of clergy, including a group of clergywomen from Dallas, made several presentations during the week or on Sunday mornings, and met with many people over meals. One woman I had lunch with has experienced a call to priesthood. She told me that our visit was the first time she had ever talked with a woman priest.

I also met with Bishop Iker. When Dr. Doug Newsom, my scheduler, went to tell him I was coming, he indicated he wanted to meet with me as soon as possible after I arrived. That turned out to be October 31. Someone laughingly suggested I wear a pointy hat. Someone else replied that he would see one on my head whether I wore it or not.

It was obvious that he was not pleased I was there, even though I assured him I was not there to act politically but pastorally. My impression was that he is opposed to the ordination of women because if we were ordained soon all priests would be women. That has hardly been the experience of the dioceses that have ordained women, however. The feeling I received was that he sees ordination of women and homosexual persons as one and the same issue.

I read some of the Forward in Faith material about ordination of women and found it to be very selective scripturally. It does not allow for any cultural relativism or interpretation, nor does it admit standard Biblical criticism into its arguments. It believes that the Christian Church is called to maintain patriarchy. Christ is the head of the man and the man is the head of the woman, and only a man can be the head of a church. Obedience and control are big issues, and it doesn't take much reading between the lines to find a great deal of fear. Bishop Iker serves on the Board of Forward in Faith.

While I was there I also attended the Fort Worth Diocesan Convention. It was a celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the diocese since it divided from the Diocese of Dallas. It was apparent there was to be no discussion of any controversial items. At one point a woman from Sewanee addressing Convention about the University of the South was

stopped from talking about the Seminary. No one would be allowed to go there from Fort Worth anyway. Yet, there was much that was good about the Convention. It seemed to me to have a strong mission emphasis, and perhaps that is where some of the frustration and energy of the diocese is going—into good mission outreach to their companion dioceses in Malawi and Mexico and to Food for the Poor in Haiti.

I had gone to convention with considerable trepidation, but again, everyone was cordial, and many were very welcoming. The fact that there were about a half a dozen women deacons in clerical collars may have helped my reception. I also enjoyed a warm conversation with Donna Iker, the bishop's wife. I had been praying for the bishop and his family every day, and it was good to put a face to a name.

The report of the A045 Committee came out while I was in Fort Worth. It was received with sadness and a sense of betrayal by those who felt they had risked a great deal to tell what they wanted the national church to hear. What they said was not reported, and several clergy I spoke with felt they had gone out on a limb only to have the national church chop it off. I don't think that most people have any idea how hard it is to be a priest in the Diocese of Fort Worth and be loyal to the canons of the Episcopal Church. We have to find a better way to support the clergy and laity of this diocese.

One of the recommendations of the A045 report is to have a day of dialogue at the General Convention in 2006. First, not only would the deputies from Fort Worth not attend—they do not go to convention Eucharists but have their own—but no amount of talking is going to convince this group. The fifty thousand dollars the committee recommends be used for this dialogue would be put to better use sending in angel after angel, ministering to the clergy and laity of the diocese who feel abandoned and on the edge of being taken out of the Episcopal Church altogether.

My presence there, more than anything else, was a sign of hope, of connection, that people from the Episcopal Church care about the people of Fort Worth. Hope, healing, and empowerment was experienced by many. I was there long enough to begin to establish significant relationships with people. I hope that the Angel Project will continue. As long as we permit a bishop to stand in disdain of a national canon, we need to find ways to minister to the laity and clergy who want to be faithful to that canon.

I met many wonderful people whom I shall remember, continue to pray for and hopefully see again some day. These are bright, articulate,

passionate and faithful women and men, who bear for all of us the tangible sign that we are still a church that has a long way to go before women and men are on equal footing. There are lessons for all of us in Fort Worth, lest we get too confident that the battle has been won.

So many people I met there wanted me to know that they had lived in other dioceses and experienced the ministry of women, or that they had visited Episcopal churches while they were on vacation. They said that they always got this startled reaction from people, as if they must be one of those people who don't believe in the ordination of women. The estimate I heard several times is that the laity is probably half in favor and half against. The people that show up in our churches are probably at least the ones open to it. If someone shows up at your church and says they are from the Diocese of Fort Worth, please welcome them warmly and tell them you have heard there are some really great people in that Diocese.

I would like to end with a note of thanks to the Caucus for the opportunity to serve in this way, and for all the prayers said for the Angel Project. I also thank Katie Sherrod and Gayland Pool, with whom I stayed while I was in Fort Worth. Their loving presence, which included Gayland's fresh-baked bread almost every day, helped keep me grounded. Their four wonderful dogs, grandbaby, and beautiful home and gardens contributed to my sense of being cared for even as I was caring for others.

Encountering an Angel: *Fort Worth Episcopalians Speak*

My husband Gabby and I enjoyed our Sunday with Barbara Schlachter so very much. We picked her up and took her to St. John's for the Sunday morning Eucharist, coffee hour and the adult forum. Afterwards we were able to visit one on one over a delicious brunch at La Madelaine's.

When we arrived at St. John's, I took Barbara to the sacristy to introduce her to our priest. I introduced her as Dr. Schlachter and [the rector] David Klein immediately wanted to know her baptismal name. I then proceeded to tell Barbara what our priest's baptismal name happened to be. At the adult forum, I was requested to introduce my guest. Barbara was asked a few questions and everything went very