

**The Eleventh January Adventure
January 16, 17 and 18th, 2015
Epworth by the Sea**

Notes by Billie Sargent Conyers

Presenters: Nadia Bolz Weber, Minister, House for All Sinners and Saints, Denver, CO

Andy Root, PhD, Princeton Seminary. Teaches youth ministry, young adults, family, church, and culture (all with a deep theological bent) at Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, MN. Friend of Nadia's who was able to step in when Phyllis Tickle was unable to come.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, January 15th, Ritz Theatre:

Many find going to church a cultural commute. This was one of the motivations for Nadia defining her church differently from the "normal" Lutheran church.

She chose the Lutheran Church because of their view of grace, their recognition of mystery in the universe. Our failures are not the final word. Some kind of redemption comes out of everything...eventually. Beautiful things grow out of our mess-ups.

Grace is a gift. Honoring these gifts in real-time, forgiveness/mercy is a powerful force of grace.

Many churches feel they are stretching the tent when people come who do not fit the church mold. Not so with Nadia's church. Her church is not for those who are "nailing it." The tent is already stretched. She has created a culture of truth - of saying "their own junk."

Most worship services are like dinner parties, but speaking the truth shifts the temperature for bullshit. AA, which many of her congregants attend, teaches searching ourselves and being fearless in that search. In her church "I don't feel that I have to defend or protect myself. We take it all in without judgment."

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Friday evening, January 16th

Nadia:

For some reason I have no notes from JA's first night with Nadia. I can only assume that's because I had heard a lot of it the previous night -- and that she read liberally from her new book -- yet to be titled -- I decided to just enjoy hearing what she had to say and read.

Fortunately, Inez Korb has been kind enough to let me use her Nadia-Notes for Friday evening:

These are the words Inez wrote on Friday while Nadia spoke:

Confessing Our Faith, Confessing Our Sin as leaders.

AA Big Book 1st 164 pages

Culturally commute from life to church

Exhausting to try to not be me

(Martin/Zimmerman)

I'll go first. Make space for others to join confessional.

Preach from scars, not wounds

Amy and Bobbi Jo. Wheelchair. Death. Living big without legs.

Nervous laugh. Awkward.

Devoted because Amy saw her. Known by each other.

Facebook-the great project of the self

Fear of really, really, actually being known.

Uncool parts of us invited to sit at Jesus table (lame, poor, blind)

More transparency, more healing

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Andy: (Back to Billie's Notes)

The question "Who am I?" has been answered in many different ways. For years, it was easy: skills and abilities helped to find your **work place** and they helped to define you. Secondly, your love defined you as a husband or wife. Freud said: A healthy person can work and love.

The answer is not as dependable now. Fluidity in the work force creates multiple career changes. Not many gold watches handed out for long years of service. Americans on average change *careers* (not just jobs) every twenty months.

There is also fluidity in love and commitment to others and to relationships.

These two factors have had huge ramifications on churches, which, like everyone, is asking: ***What will life be like after the Baby Boomers?*** All we know for sure is that it will be different.

18-35 year olds are an endangered species in churches across the country. Participation in church is no longer viewed as a conventional way of life.

Our very definition of “who you are” has changed to “what you own”. Across the spectrum of those youth polled in a study examining morality and looking for a primary consistency in what is considered morally right and wrong, it was **not considered morally wrong to spend money** (unless it endangered the welfare of the family).

Make-overs/Reinventing oneself: Easy credit makes changing one’s life easier than ever.

We’ll be talking about generational conflict and how it’s going to become a real problem for churches, if it’s not already.

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Saturday, January 17th - Morning Presentation

Nadia:

Reverse engineering: Take a finished product and break it down into parts to find out how it works.

Why does Nadia’s church with traditional Lutheran theology have a congregation of “losers”?

The **post-modern era** is on the edge of a cultural shift: where is the locus of authority?

In the **pre-modern era**, which we’re in the process of leaving behind, but for our purposes we’ll still call traditional, there were not huge shifts of authority.

So, moving backwards:

The Enlightenment elevated human reason.

Authority shifted in the **Age of Progress** to be delivered through institutions, theological denominations, education, and hospitals (health care).

The Modern Era saw institutions having more authority than people had previously realized, who were discovering that institutions had more interest in their own longevity than in delivering their products or services.

The Post Modern Era emphasizes trusting your experience...all forms of reality depend on how you perceive...your perspective.

How do we construct authority when everyone sees the same thing differently?

We go to the experts! **Pugh Research Center and the Millennials**

How Millennial are you? Nadia says: "If you can google millennials simultaneously with my talking, you are Millennial. If you can't do that, or you didn't think about doing it, you don't need to take the Pugh Research Quiz. You're not Millennial."

Culturally conversant: Nadia is high in Millennial skills and attitude -- she's on the wave of the cultural shift. Some examples of **Pugh Research questions:** Do you have other body piercings besides ear piercing? Do you have tattoos? How important is it to lead a religious life? (The answers given are weighted differently.)

Always, it is an issue of authority. How much authority does the church have? Millennials don't have relationships with church but pray as much as their grandparents do and are interested in the deep questions of life.

Nadia, being a Millennial herself, describes her church as sharing trauma. With instant knowledge of other's suffering throughout the world, people are trying to make sense out of these things. They go to most churches; silence. Or the pulpit becomes a political soapbox. Or the pastor downloads some "home office" prayer.

Nadia: "We have to -- as churches -- respond to these happenings. At the House for All Sinners and Saints, after the Haiti earth quake we made Stations of the Cross with pictures found in newspapers and magazines. the dead, the half-

buried, those who lived. Everyone felt as though they had deeply experienced the anguish of the Haiti people by translating the images into Jesus' life milestones. (The slides of these Stations were fantastic!)

... When the 141 children in Pakistan were killed, our church built a shrine made with a children's Bible riddled with holes and torn apart. We added a statue of the eternal mother Mary along with a candle. We sent prayers. ... After Sandy Hook, we focused our Christmas text on Herod's killing of the children in his attempt to kill Jesus. After reading about this long-ago devastation, we read the names of each of the 27 Sandy Hook children who were killed. Then we paused and named the shooter as the last person. We prayed for them all."

"Our (Lutheran/Christian) traditions have containers which we can use to have a place to hold today's tragedies."

Nadia's church experiences things in their worship community. They talk about the truth that's happening in their lives.

Another example: A transexual, Lena Altman, committed suicide, and one of their congregation wrote a public prayer. But who would read it? The congregation took a vote and made the decision that Nadia would read the prayer. The church shares leadership in most decisions.

Leadership and authority look different in the Post Modern church.

Nadia mentions the Great Commission: Matthew 28. "If churches don't have new people coming into the church and sharing the gospel and responding to the message, they won't have 'fresh blood' to examine how they're talking about and discovering the message by asking questions."

Again **Post Modern thinking:** "The church which is less aligned with institutions will revert to the original message of the Bible."

Post Moderns flee from the idea of membership, yet the House for All Saints and Sinners (HFAS&S) has joined the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Home](#) (ELCA). When HFAS&S examined the four categories of membership offered by the ELCA none of them worked for her church. Nadia called the home office and asked if they could add a 5th category. The lawyer looked it up in the by-laws and said there was nothing against adding a category. So they added "participating members," and that's how all the members of Nadia's church are listed for official purposes. (No one has to take lessons, pledge money, or do things to become a member. Just show up when they want to.)

When they were supposed to give the requirements for membership, they wrote “must be able to fog a mirror with their breath” (not a zombie) and must be able to see their reflection in a mirror (not a vampire). Somehow, the ELCA took this “mission” church to heart, and granted it official sanction.

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Andy:

Millennial Anxiety: Is there something deeper going on? Millennials do not think about the ministry as deeply as they do technology.

Social Imaginary: Millennials think there are functional technological solutions to every problem. Technology can solve anything and everything. Andy uses the movie “Apollo 13” (“Houston, we have a problem.”) as an example. When Houston gets the word, they put all of the tools available to the astronauts in a box and turn it upside down on a table. Extraordinary how little they had in the way of tools, but somehow Houston managed to figure out how they could fix the problem, and walked them through the steps. Miraculously, everyone came home safe and sound.

We tend to look to church programs and ministers’ sermons as “technology” to solve the problem of getting young people to attend church.

In a questionnaire Andy distributed and used the results in a study, he posed the situation: In 72 hours, a meteor is going to destroy earth. What do you do? Andy said the response was something like “I don’t know, but someone will come up with something to save us!” The teens could not grapple with the mystery of our being because of our dependance on functionality.

Do we need better theology? More robust ministers? Theology alone cannot connect with people. The theological starts with live, concrete experience.

The famous German, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, worked with youth, and wrote *The Divine Imperative*. Power is in sharing our story of brokenness, sharing our experiences. Andy repeats Bonhoeffer’s story about how, as a headmaster, he dismissed a group of students. All but a little boy went on their individual ways. But the little boy had his head in his arms, and was crying. Bonhoeffer goes over to the youngster, puts his hand on his shoulder, and asks gently what is wrong. The little boy says that Mr. Wolf had died. After a few moments, Bonhoeffer asks the boy to tell him about Mr. Wolf, and learns that it is a dog the boy has had all his life. The boy tells about how he and Mr. Wolf had walks and adventures together. Afterwards, the boy felt much better for having eulogized Mr. Wolf, as it were, and was able to go to his friends.

Mark 8 is Andy's favorite Jesus story. When a boy is brought to Jesus by his father for healing, Jesus asks of the father: "How long has the boy been this way?" which was an invitation for the man to share his and his son's story. "But, teacher, if you are able...I believe. Help my unbelief."

Be kind to the person who might come to you. It's up to you to ask "how long" and invite them to tell their story. Believe in yourself and what you believe. Are you going to say something real -- not the sing the same old song?

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Q&A: Morning, January 17

Q: What is your understanding of the cross?

A: Theology of the cross: How God wants to be known -- from the cradle to the cross...Jesus as the face of God.

What does the cross mean? Forgive them. The cross symbolizes human arrogance allowed to play out. God bore the indignity. ... God takes it into God's own self, defeats it and comes out alive.

Peter was filled with remorse having betrayed Jesus three times the night Jesus was taken away. In post-resurrection accounts, Jesus offers Peter three chances to say "I love you" to heal Peter's wound. Forgiveness is inherent.

N: The redemption stories. To understand the cross, read backwards from the resurrection.

God is the cross of nothingness and new possibility. God takes what is dead and puts the life back into it. Out of the ashes of impossibility, God moves -- a new possibility.

Q: Nadia and Andy: Give information about your church:

N: 300 members; 1/2 time minister, cantor leads music and chants, children's liturgist, toddlers' caretaker; service participants are self-generated before each service.

A: 50-80 people.

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Saturday, January 17 -- Evening

Nadia:

Media Contact Information:

Church: houseforall.org
Website: sarcasticlutheran.com
Blog: patheos.com/blogs/nadibolyweber
Twitter:

Mark Driscoll (*Mark A. Driscoll is an evangelical Christian pastor, author, and the former pastor of Mars Hill Church, an influential megachurch in Seattle, Washington. He resigned on October 14, 2014. [Wikipedia](#)*): Post-modern rather than Emerging Christian.

Post Modern is more the term used now than Emerging Christianity. It reflects a sense of irony. There is not the same divide between reverence and irreverence.

T-Shirt produced by Nadia's church:
Radical Protestants (front)
Nailing shit to church doors since 1715.

They revised the term Stations of the Cross to Resurrection Stations.

Mary Magdalene -- When she saw the gardener the day after Jesus was taken down from the cross, she spoke to him and turned away. But she turned back when he spoke her name. It was then -- in that speaking -- that she knew it was Jesus.

At one of Nadia's services, they set up places at tables for people to write prayers on strips of cloth. After the allotted time, they tied the strips to fans, which they turned on, to symbolize sending the messages into the universe.

Nadia and congregants discuss why they are doing these things; why the things they do are important to the parish.

On All Saints Day, they set up tables for people to display icons of living saints as well as dead saints, and also for those friends and family who had passed away: pictures, a pair of jeans, other symbols of the person's life.

One Christmas, they created an Advent icon: Pictures out of Christmas advertising to create their holy symbol of a church window. They later used the icon in another project to symbolize their church.

Icon-ology: ancient images that don't smack of sentimentality.

The space/function time of the hymn has been replaced with Open Space: 10 minutes of silent prayer, or maybe to write prayers (what would you say to God?). It's all anonymous. The written prayers are read after the liturgy. In these messages, the truth of people's lives is revealed. This is the hallmark of their worship service.

An exercise: If God were to pass a corner where you sat as a homeless person, what would you tell him by way of a sign? There were a bunch of good sayings, but "Will work 4 Grace" was the only one I caught to write down.

Nadia said that in the starting days, they wanted to cook together after church to have a bite to eat. It took a lot of time, so they developed a service with a sit-down dinner. They had to stop doing that because strangers weren't comfortable eating "other people's" food -- not having brought anything themselves. So they added a community meal once a month after full liturgy.

Goals: Anti-excellence/Pro-participation

Matthew 24 (? I think that's what she said) In obedience with the commands of Jesus, Nadia gives individual absolution to congregants: "Do it in my name" as each person comes to receive the blessing, which is given by Nadia as part of her commitment to being an ordained minister.

Nadia: Jesus told "these boys" what was going to happen, but they were in deep denial. Washing of the feet: Nadia has a service to honor this love transferred. Jesus meets us while our feet are dirty.

To bring alive the 30 pieces of silver that Judas accepted to identify Jesus, each congregant walks up to a big container and drops 30 coins into that. After the coins are collected, the group gives the jar to a group they feel has been betrayed in some way.

Good Friday: One year everyone was given a purple tulip which they laid at the foot of a hand-made wooden cross. That evening, the cross and the tulips were taken by the congregants to the site of an act of violence -- a killing -- in the city. They chanted as they walked to the place, and people came spontaneously out of their homes to join the procession...a simple act of freedom that affected the community without trying to do so. Some things happen unintentionally.

Easter Vigil: 12 readings -- people sign up to tell the Station of the Cross stories any way they want. An hour of story telling, singing, dancing. Anything goes.

Other innovations: Serving the Eucharist as a sit down dinner party of bread and wine. Afterwards, everyone joins in to strip the room down.

When the vigil of Easter is over and the tables removed, there's a dance party. Nothing says "He Has Risen" like a chocolate fountain!

Litany of Saints: A book is kept in a special place and brought out to enter the names of people in the church have died.

Nadia's church sings without accompaniment, but found early-on they enjoy three/four part harmony. Therefore the songs they choose to sing are easy to sing and are usually the older hymns.

They sit in the round, which creates an accountability of presence. We trust you with the holy things.

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Andy -- January 17 -- Evening

Books: *The Relational Pastor* by Andrew Root

The Empathetic Civilization: The Race To Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis by Jeremy Rifkin

New energy ==> New communication ==> New Consciousness

The bones of history never break clean in societal changes.

A casual timeline:

1. Hunting and Gathering -- Early oral communication developed; mythical consciousness; cosmic storytelling. Lasted millions of years. A period of entropy (lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.)
2. Agriculture -- Learned to store energy of sun in seeds; reading and writing became communication tools. There was a religious consciousness. Everyone believed in God. Rise of the Priesthood as the manager of divine things, readers of sacred texts. Rabbis, priests.
3. Industrial Revolution -- Period of the machine. The printing press allowed mass ideological consciousness. Secular population was on the rise. Boundaries, ownership became important. The earth lost its mystery and enchantment.
4. WWI: The first fully industrialized war. The same people who read the same Bible and believed in the same God killed each other. A sense of the self was on the rise. Everyone began to read books. Psychology was created, and, with it, the theory of ego.

In Western countries, Christianity protected the way of life; people were encouraged by the governments to go to church. Billy Graham was born in 1918.

5. Second Industrial Revolution: Cars made us feel like individuals. People didn't depend on others. Rise of oil and multitudes of acres of land were cleared for parking lots.

In 1949, Billy Graham began his rise to power, and became considered the great American preacher. He took his preaching style from the newscasters on the movie news reels. Went to LA to start his first crusade. His America-first attitude attracted support of the press, and pastors everywhere took this attitude and became important in the community. Preachers stopped talking about Jesus and started talking about news headlines. It was the birth-time of global missions.

6. The Wave leads to electrical impulses with the arrival of TV and radio, and reinforces individualism. You can watch/choose what you want and have your interests and desires met. Individuals became obsessed with themselves, psychological languages and the rational choice theory. Rational Choice becomes a theory. Religious switching -- no denominational loyalty. Fluid.

Church ministry becomes about programs...magnets to attract people to this church rather than that church. The church has become a depressed market.

Big churches are getting bigger. Small churches are getting smaller. Big churches offer more programs. People turn-over where they go to church every five years. Churches are required to meet their interests to keep them. Programs work on numbers.

The pastor's job is to bring in more people. Pastors have to become more creative to attract people. Church becomes a way to learn through individual/therapeutic programs. This is the first time in history that numbers are so important to church success. Church becomes entertainment. Clerical garb changes from vestments to jeans and t-shirts. Evangelical pastors.

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How will the message move? It goes small, individualistic, relational to the individual. How do you influence people's interests? Check out the movie "Inception" with Leonardo diCaprio.

People feel that the church doesn't really care about them; it just wants them to be a member, a pledge unit, a number.

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We're coming to a new day. We are in desperate need of new energy. We actually need each other. A communication system to connect us is in place with the internet, sharing files and information.

We are at a time where we're moving into not individuals but into personhood -- a person is the relationship. We are the relationships that make us.

Church is a community of persons that share each others' lives. Community that comes together to share their personhood and Jesus' personhood. We share in the personhood of our neighborhood.

Today people often feel that the church doesn't really care about them, but just wants them to be a member to count. New: friendship evangelicism.

Andy -- January 18 -- Sunday Morning

The importance of Relationships; Relational Ministry

Sometimes it's better not to try to fix things for people, but to just be there for them. 200-300 years ago, all needs were met inside the family: religious education, intellectual education were at home. If you wanted to eat, you needed your family.

Now every one in the family lives in separate worlds: family members set out for work, for school. Families don't understand each other's experiences. Pluralization of life's worlds: Education, work, recreation, religion.

As individuals, we have to go into and out of these worlds -- as do all the members of your family. It all becomes very fragmented. It's up to us to construct relationship.

Andy showed an excerpt from the film "Little Miss Sunshine" in which the brother discovers he can't be an Air Force pilot because he's color blind. Watch it if you can.

Field of Cultural Totality:

Family	Government
Society	Economy
Religion	

Going back 50-70 years, the dominant cultural spheres were family and religion. Now, economy dominates the cultural screen; society next; family is about the same at #3, then government. Religion is the smallest sector.

Families are so busy. Church workers feel it's up to the parents to get the children to church -- like it was "before" -- but priorities have changed, with the family economy -- as well as national and world economies -- as primary. Listen to the news; what gets the most time? The economy.

Going to church has little corporate value anymore when it is compared to other extracurricular activities; playing the violin or speaking a foreign language hold more cultural esteem. Both the economy and society are competitive.

What we expect of church is that they are to provide relationships.

But what is relationship? We tend to use our relationships to influence others as a means to an end. The point is not the relationship. In the church, it's new people, giving units, workers. After all those needs is relationship, which is considered a tool to reach an end. Now, before you go to prayer, you check it out on google.

The problem with the church is that we need our God to become real enough to be aware of his presence us when we're alone in the night. We need Jesus to be there to share our humanity. There the relationship is the end product. Full humanity is the goal. Someone to suffer with us; someone to recognized our humanity. An experience of sharing each other's lives and to dwell in the questions. To join with someone in this place of broken dreams.

The church is -- or could be -- the place where people share their brokenness to bring about new possibility.

Question and Answer Session (*Andy had an airplane to catch, and so this was held before Nadia made her Sunday morning presentation. Nadia herself did not feel well -- had eaten something that had "not agreed with her".*)

(Did not write down the question.)

Nadia's answer: There is a deep hunger connected to church being (or becoming) relevant and relational. People want to find people who share this desire and to share a meal and pray together.

Her church is not able to accommodate visitors. This was a considered decision by the congregation to stay small. (In one year's period, they had over 1,200 visitors, and there is no way their space can accommodate the great interest to see what they're doing.)

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Question: Respond to violence in the world vis a vis religion.

Nadia: Graham is bat-shit crazy. We have to speak the truth about violence in ourselves having a connection to world violence. Church, as people of God, can't sit in ambiguity on violence.

Andy: Defeatist post-modernity: There is nothing real at all. Religious differences as a language game doesn't work. We are looking at things with multiple points of view.

Maybe we'd learn by entering into each other's space and sharing humanity with each other. Our particular truth claims are important and should recognize each other's truth claims -- to recognize each other's humanity.

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Question: What is a Pastor's role?

Nadia: It is a pastor's responsibility to create spaces for people to come together and to be a community of prayer. To give them a place to narrate their experiences.

Andy: Minister out of humility, not arrogance.

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Question: Does God want to be worshipped?

Nadia: That question feels weird to me. That's not the way I think.

Psalms 139 contains the elements of worship: All in creation has a place and performs a purpose as it was intended by the Creator. God is praised by human beings who are also created for a purpose by God. All that is praise is being what God intended us to be.

We call it worship and borrow the words from generations of the faithful to recognize God as Creator and we as the creatures.

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"Every practice in our church has a value. We recognize what that value is. For instance, Agnes, who does 40% of the work in our church, places obviously fake plastic flowers on the alter. Nobody likes them, but they are left there because everyone values what Agnes does and who she is.

This may be co-dependency, but it's okay if you recognize it as such and why you do it.

Nadia continues... "Change things by swapping out one thing for another. However, unless you understand WHY you change/do things, how it connects with the values of the congregation, it is meaningless."

Another example: How does your church choose hymns? Because they match the text of the service? because they're easy? because of the harmony? In our church, we sing without accompaniment, but we discovered that we like to sing in 4-part harmony, so it's important to us to choose simple hymns that have good harmony. It is our pleasure...our gift to God.

Whenever your church makes a decision, go through the process of identifying WHY and how valuable it is to your church community.

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Question to Nadia: How to you make assignments of roles in worship?

Nadia: “We don’t have committees. If we have a project, we announce we’re having a ‘liturgy guild meeting’ to plan ‘lent services.’ We don’t have a ‘liturgy guild,’ but anyone interested in helping with lent (or whatever that is the code word for) services knows to show up. We don’t have permanent groups to do things. We find that people are happier helping if it is for a specific task with a definite time-line for which they’re volunteering. They do it, and it’s over.

“For different participant roles in the service, we have the parts in folders where they can be seen, and people are invited to choose a job if they feel like it: reading the gospel, leading the songs, etc. People are happy to do it for the service they’re (already) attending.

“We ask strangers if they want to participate. It makes them feel -- instantly -- part of the group. One of the most moving readers we’ve ever had was a transvestite who volunteered to read the gospel the only time he came. When he read, it was like an angel had come to bless us.

“Our trick seems to be no long-term commitment. We have so much involvement because no one is required to be on a long-term committee or “job” commitment.

“The thing is most churches think they have to have committees and jobs. Things have changed. We have to adjust to what people want to do. Like the telephone booth disappearing. Some might conclude that because there are no telephone booths handy, no one is making telephone calls anymore. Right? Wrong! Cellphones. More calls than ever. Another dinosaur: Blockbuster. Nobody watches videos since Blockbuster closed? Of course that’s not it. Netflix pushed them out of the way. Better ideas. Better delivery services. Give the people what they want.

“We don’t have pledges in our church. The closest we’ve come to a Stewardship Campaign is a T-Shirt with “This shit ain’t free” on it. Check out You Tube: Stewardshipforhouseofsaintsandsinners. (A hoot!)

“We are now 100% self-supported without pledges or stewardship campaigns. Electronic giving comes in every month. Evangelicalism springs forth from the believer whose life has been changed...not committees.”

Question to Nadia: What did you take-away from your Church of Christ background?

Nadia: Luther coined the phrase “Priesthood of All Believers.” Male-only. We don’t want you to be like Christ. We want you to pee like Christ. But the “everyone is in this boat” thought is there.

Q&A being over, Nadia read again (wonderfully) from her upcoming book to close out the final session.