Wesley Frensdorff

The Dream

A Church Renewed
The late Bishop Wesley Frensdorff of Nevada had a vision of a renewed church, freed from self bondage to become the lively, joyful people of God. His vision is radical in the real sense of the word, and many readers among the church's so-called liberals, as well as the so-called traditionalists, will find the ideas challenging. This pamphlet is offered not as an "agenda" but as words to be considered prayerfully, studied, discussed and, perhaps, where readers are so moved, acted upon.

The material here presented was taken from text and notes of four addresses given by Bishop Frensdorff during 1981-85 and published as chapter one—"The Dream"—of the book, *Reshaping Ministry*, from Jethro Publications, 6066 Parfet Street, Arvada, Colorado 80004. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

—Joel
Wes Frensdorff was known for his pioneering work in total ministry development and that is indeed the focus of this volume. However, the vision of total ministry is much broader than generally perceived. It has implications for justice, ethics, stewardship, evangelism—everything involved in being the church. It is the purpose of this first chapter to see the substance of the book that more encompassing vision.

Wes put forth his dream for the church on numerous occasions. We have text and notes on four such addresses or sermons delivered at major church events during the period 1981-85. The sermons are, of course, tailored for the specific occasion and they are full of the little asides, anecdotes and stories characteristic of Wes—his playfulness and his humor. However, the dream, which is the core of each address, is, in substance, pretty consistent.

I have, accordingly, lifted the dream from four sources, distilled it into one version and edited it for print rather than preaching. In this form it is more of a poem than a sermon. But the flow, the choice of words, the turn of a phrase remains. It is, I'm confident, an accurate rendering of the Frensdorff dream.

—Charles R. Wilson
Let us dream of a church
in which all members know surely and
simply God's great love, and each is
certain that in the divine heart we are all
known by name.

In which Jesus is very Word, our window
into the Father's heart; the sign of God's
hope and his design for all humankind.

In which the Spirit is not a party symbol,
but wind and fire in everyone;
gracing the church with a kaleidoscope
of gifts and constant renewal for all.

A church in which
worship is lively and fun as well as
reverent and holy;
and we might be moved to dance and
laugh;
to be solemn, cry or beat the breast.
People know how to pray and enjoy it—
frequently and regularly, privately and
corporately, in silence and in word and
song.

The eucharist is the center of life
and servanthood the center of
mission:
the servant Lord truly known in the
breaking of the bread.
With service flowing from worship, and
everyone understanding
why a worship is called a service.

Let us dream of a church
in which the sacraments, free from
captivity by a professional elite,
are available in every congregation regardless of size, culture, location or budget.

In which every congregation is free to call forth from its midst priests and deacons, sure in the knowledge that training and support services are available to back them up.

In which the Word is a sacrament too, as dynamically present as bread and wine;

members, not dependent on professionals, know what's what and who's who in the Bible, and all sheep share in the shepherding.

In which discipline is a means, not to self-justification, but to discipleship and law is known to be a good servant but a very poor master.

A church
affirming life over death as much as life after death, unafraid of change, able to recognize God's hand in the revolutions, affirming the beauty of diversity, abhorring the imprisonment of uniformity,
as concerned about love in all relationships as it is about chastity, and affirming the personal in all expressions of sexuality;
denying the separation between secular and sacred, world and church, since
it is the world Christ came to and died for.

A church
without the answers, but asking the right questions;
holding law and grace, freedom and authority, faith and works together in tension, by the Holy Spirit, pointing to the glorious mystery who is God.

So deeply rooted in gospel and tradition that, like a living tree, it can swing in the wind, and continually surprise us with new blossoms.

Let us dream of a church
with a radically renewed concept and practice of ministry and a primitive understanding of the ordained offices.

Where there is no clerical status and no classes of Christians, but all together know themselves to be part of the laos—the holy people of God.

A ministering community rather than a community gathered around a minister.

Where ordained people, professional or not, employed or not, are present for the sake of ordering and signing the church’s life and mission, not as signs of authority or dependency,
nor spiritual or intellectual superiority,
but with Pauline patterns of “ministry supporting church” instead of the common pattern of “church supporting ministry.”

Where bishops are signs and animators of the church’s unity, catholicity and apostolic mission,
priests are signs and animators of her eucharistic life and the sacramental presence of her Great High Priest,
and deacons are signs and animators—living reminders—of the church’s servanthood as the body of Christ who came as, and is, the servant slave of all God’s beloved children.

Let us dream of a church
so salty and so yeasty that it really would
be missed if no longer around;
where there is wild sowing of seeds
and much rejoicing when they take root,
but little concern for success, comparative statistics, growth or even survival.

A church so evangelical that its worship, its quality of caring, its eagerness to reach out to those in need cannot be contained.
A church
in which every congregation is in a
process of becoming free-
autonomous—self-reliant—
interdependent,

none has special status;
the distinction between parish and
mission gone.

But each congregation is in mission
and each Christian, gifted for ministry;
a crew on a freighter, not passengers
on a luxury liner.

Peacemakers and healers
abhoring violence in all forms
(maybe even football),
as concerned with societal healing
as with individual healing;
with justice as with freedom,
prophetically confronting the root causes
of social, political and economic ills.

A community: an open, caring, sharing
household of faith
where all find embrace, acceptance
and affirmation.

A community: under judgment,
seeking to live with its own
proclamation,
therefore,
truly loving what the Lord commands
and desiring His promise.

And finally, let us dream of a people called
to recognize all absurdities in
ourselves and in one another,
including the absurdity that is
LOVE,
serious about the call and the mission
but not, very much, about ourselves,
who, in the company of our Clown
Redeemer can dance and sing and
laugh and cry in worship, in
ministry and even in conflict.

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