
Building Community Three Feet at a Time



Members of the Community of St. Anselm in the Crypt Chapel
at Lambeth Palace.
(The Rev. Salmoon Bashir, top left)

In 2017, one of the best things happened in my life. I accepted a call to serve as a resident member in the Community of St. Anselm (CoSA) in London. CoSA is an Anglican religious order of young people, and it is one of the priorities of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's ministry. For one year, 15 resident members from different parts of the world come together and dedicate themselves to deepen their relationship with God and one another through prayer, study, and service to the poor. They learn how to be a beloved community by living together, breaking bread together, sharing and receiving, traveling together, and even arguing about things like what or how to cook.

I was one among those 15 resident members from 9 different countries, and various Christian denominations. We lived on the grounds of the Lambeth Palace which is the residence of Archbishop of Canterbury and a house of prayer for centuries. Brothers and Sisters from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, non-denominational, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Brethren, Baptist, and Lutheran churches joined this community. In that year, I experienced the power of community, the power of love across differences, when we all came together and shared our lives with one another. When people who are different in so many ways – in their praying styles, theological and political views, social and economic demographics – choose to come together to listen to one another and pray for and with one another, breakthrough happens. The power of such community where things which divide us become secondary and the values which unite us matters the most is transformative. That year taught me the beauty of seeing every person as a beloved Child of God and hearing their stories of joy, sadness, anger, hope, also Cricket, and favorite football teams (or should I say, soccer!) and our common connection to one faith, one Lord, one Baptism. After all, the first two words that come to mind when hearing the word “community” are common and unity.

When we look at the early church (even with all the disagreements they had at the time) we notice that they formed and lived in communities, prayed for one another, continued their fellowship, and opened their doors for each other. As it is written, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The early Church lived according to the model given by Jesus, i.e., in communities. They chose to share their lives with one another irrespective of their disagreements, and by doing so they encountered Jesus on each step of their journeys even in a time of persecution and trials. The examples of these lived communal experiences can be found all throughout Church history.

In my last position as Chief of Staff at Fearless Dialogues, we used to animate an experiment called “3 Feet Challenge.” The challenge was about how we meet and have fellowship with those who come in our proximity of three feet. I wonder as we are entering from this summer season of rest and restoration to the fall season of

growth, harvest, and change, how do we reenter into our communal lives. Maybe by opening doors for unlikely members of our communities? How about instead of trying to change the whole world, we see the person who is within three feet from us and build a community centered around love and sharing, of giving and receiving. While one person cannot change the entire world, one person can change the three feet around them by creating communities who care for one another. I wonder what community will be like when we offer unconditional love, break bread, and have fellowship with those who come within the proximity of our three feet, taking one day at a time and building the body of Christ three feet at a time.

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