

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
abhorring 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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