

God, Life, and Everything "When Things Go Wrong"

Last week, things went very wrong in the Episcopal Church's Diocese of Maryland. One of its bishops (a suffragan bishop which is sort of an elected assistant bishop) was involved in a fatal hit-and-run accident.

The bishop in question left the scene of the accident but then returned approximately twenty minutes later. As yet, nobody seems to know what she did during that interval - whether she just panicked or what. However, there is no denying that she had been arrested some years ago for a DUI.

This may not rise to the same level of scandal as, say, child abuse, sexual abuse or embezzlement - all things which churches have had to deal with among their various clergy - but it is tremendously serious, and it is a stain on the entire church.

We as a collective body continue to pray for the man killed in the accident, for his family, and of course for the bishop and all others affected. Even as the church and the law seek to find out what happened and how to assign responsibility, it is important to extend God's love to all involved.

But I don't really want to focus on what went wrong or how the accident happened. I don't have enough information, and it's not my place anyway.

What I want to look at is how the *church* has handled the situation once it became aware. As soon as the diocesan bishop (the head bishop of the diocese) found out the basic details, he put the suffragan on administrative leave. He stated that, since there was a good possibility of criminal charges being pressed, it was virtually impossible for her to exercise her ministry effectively.

Next, he made sure that the diocese knew what was going on. He spoke to the press. He called a special meeting of all the clergy of the diocese (my cousin among them), and he gave them space to ask questions and express their feelings.

I have little doubt that this is not the extent of what the diocese will do to address this tragedy.

And that's the point I would make. When things go wrong, you can mitigate the disaster or you can make it worse. Trying to hide things always makes it worse in the long run. Keeping quiet generally makes things worse in the long run. Twisting the story makes things worse. Attacking the victim makes it worse. And so on.

The right way is to acknowledge what is going on, accept appropriate responsibility, keep everyone informed, seek to remedy any harm done to the degree possible, and work to make sure that nothing like it happens again.

I believe the Diocese of Maryland is going about it the right way. Things went terribly wrong, but they kept in sight what is important - not trying to deny or hide but facing the truth head on.

I certainly wish this accident had never happened. Heck I wish there were never any accidents or abuses in the world.

But there are. And the lesson - especially for those of us responsible for the care of others - is to lead by example even when it means repentance and taking responsibility. Especially when it means repentance and taking responsibility.

So pray for everyone involved. In the midst of it, however, see also the positive. Maybe it's not much, but sometimes that small act of accountability is enough.