



Keep Calm and Follow God's GPS (Global Positioning System)

Moments of Grace
April 18, 2015

I have just returned from an Archdeaconry Youth Conference, *Keep Calm and Follow God's GPS*, at the Parish of the Ascension in Mount Pearl (it was moved from the Parish of St. Augustine due to a water main issue). The speaker was Ireland's Scott Evans (www.scottevans.ie), a very passionate and faith-filled youth leader. About 50 or so attended and I thank the organizers for making this happen and commend the Avalon Archdeaconry for their interest in ministry to young persons, knowing this is not the first such conference they have hosted. This time included a combination of music, talk, worship, food and sharing appropriate for young adults and high school students.

I deeply appreciated the way the conference organizers shaped the gathering with creativity and vision. The contemporary worship and language was a most effective way to connect with that group least represented in our church today: young adults and teenagers. Even the title – *Keep Calm and Follow God's GPS* – used language easily understood by young persons. For some time now I have pushed our church to give greater consideration to the role of young adults, high school students and children and to allocate resources appropriate for them. It did my heart good to see the energy at the conference today.

If I have a principal criticism of youth ministry in the church right now it is that some of what we are trying to do is past its "shelf life." For too many adults, youth ministry is about their own memories of what it was like when they were younger. But that world has already passed away. Young people are confronted with choices and realities now that were not imagined just a few years ago.

If we as a church are to be important in the lives of more young persons we need to understand that the questions the church asks are not always the questions they ask. As a beloved teacher of mine, Dr. Frank Cluett, was fond of saying (with apologies for my imperfect quote!): *"Nothing makes the church less relevant than answering*

questions no one is asking.” If we really aspire to be relevant to our younger generations we must be prepared to accept that religion for them today might not be about **what** they believe but about **how** they live. The truth is, many of them are not sure what they believe and are still working it all through. But that does not mean they should feel excluded from the community of the church. Perhaps our invitation to them should be one of welcome and acceptance. *“Come, journey with us, and let’s figure this out together.”*

In one of his “Integrated Chats,” Scott Evans spoke of Moses and David in our Old Testament in a way that brought both personalities to life for me. He talked of their humanness and weakness in the presence of God’s call. Rather than painting these Old Testament characters as larger than life with no doubts, Scott presented them as all too flawed but in the end faithful. He was very effective in weaving their stories with his own story, and with our stories.

And that’s what I take away most strongly from today: the power of finding one’s own story in the eternal story of God and his plan for us. The good news is that we don’t have to be perfect, or even perfect in faith, to be part of that.

There’s a lesson in this for us when it comes to our younger people. Young adults really do need to know that they have a place in the story we tell. That might even mean a change in direction for some churches. Perhaps all of us need God’s GPS to find out where we really are and to show the direction to where we need to be.

With my every blessing,
+Geoff