

DOCC statement from the Rev. Hunter Huckabay, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chattanooga TN

It is impossible for me to be genuinely objective about DOCC, and I may as well be honest about that from the beginning. In my opinion, the DOCC program is the most powerful and effective way of presenting and offering the Gospel that I have ever experienced. DOCC is not a substitute for the Church, nor is it the Good News itself, but it is a wonderful way of proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I learned about Jesus Scenes from John Jenkins, when I was on the staff of Trinity Church, New Orleans, and he was Dean of the Cathedral in Jackson, Mississippi. We had very little adult Christian education at Trinity at the time, and I had heard about a new and fresh approach to Bible study that John had developed. I called John and asked about this approach, and he said "It is not something that you can read about or that 'can tell you about. If you want to learn this method, you need to come up to Jackson, sit in on a group and experience it." I did that and was much impressed. I went back to Trinity, and with the rector's approval, started an adult group of about 10-12 handpicked people and we did Jesus Scenes each week for an academic year. It really caught on with those folks, and after taking the summer off; they wanted to start again in the fall. About a year later, John was called to be Rector of Trinity Church, and I was privileged to serve on his staff for an additional year.

I moved on to be the Rector of the Church of the Ascension in Lafayette, Louisiana. John and I stayed in touch, and after a few years heard that he had developed a fine Christian Education program, called DOC, which incorporated Jesus Scenes. Prestine and took a group from Ascension to New Orleans for a training session at Trinity Church. It really connected. DOC (later to become DOCC) became the vital center of our Adult Christian Education at Ascension. When I moved to Chattanooga in 1986 to become Rector of St. Paul's, we began the DOCC program as soon as we could. In my opinion, it was the keystone of our Adult Christian Education. Considering our time at Ascension and St. Paul's together, Prestine and I have been involved with DOCC for about 30 years.

One of the most important effects of DOCC at both churches was that it helped to build real community within the parish family. Both Ascension and St. Paul's are downtown parish churches, rather than suburban or neighborhood parishes. Parishioners did not come from a particular neighborhood, but from all over the area. More often than we realize, members of a downtown parish see each other only on Sunday, and then only during worship or Christian education classes, or maybe for a few minutes at coffee hour. This can result in pleasant, but superficial relationships. On more than one occasion, I have heard parishioners admit that they felt intimidated or at least uncomfortable at coffee or other parish functions because they didn't really know anyone. Once a person has experienced DOCC, they do not feel that way anymore. They now have lasting relationships with people from their small groups, people with whom they have shared close moments, people who know and accept them for who they are. DOCC groups are not exclusive, not cliques, but they do provide the opportunity to know others and to be known. My experience was that this quality strengthened the parish family, and helped many people to genuinely feel a part of the church.

John has asked me to share some thoughts and opinions about our experience with the DOCC Program and I am glad to do so. Please bear in mind that these are just my thoughts and opinions, and as such are certainly subject to disagreement and/or criticism.

Involvement of the clergy, especially the rector—I think it is extremely important for clergy, and

preferably the rector to give most, if not all, of the presentations. It is not that the rector is necessarily more intelligent or more eloquent than lay people, or other clergy, but this sends a clear message that DOCC is important~ that DOCC is a priority. Except on a couple of rare occasions when we were offering more than one DOCC program, I always served as presenter. It takes a genuine commitment to give those talks week after week, and that challenged me and helped me grow. It also gave me the opportunity of developing a rapport with the group who were taking DOCC. As you share personal experiences in the presentations (and the presentations are never given or received in exactly the same way) a closeness develops between you and the larger DOCC group that strengthens your ministry as a priest.

Planning, Training, and Preparation—An effective DOCC Program does not happen by accident or chance, but is developed through the intentional work of planning, training, and preparation. It is a time and energy consuming process, but well worth every bit of it. **Selection of facilitators** needs to be done carefully and thoughtfully. Choose good listeners, and if possible, people with previous DOCC experience. Year by year, we found it helpful to have our current facilitators be on the lookout for people in their groups who might make good facilitators in the future. When we needed to add new facilitators over the years, this provided a list of possibilities.

Training of facilitators is very important. If at all possible, we took our new facilitators to the training conferences provided by the DOCC leadership headquarters. On rare occasions, we found it necessary to do “in house” training where we prepared our own facilitators, but always with the understanding that they would attend an official training conference when they could.

Selection of facilitator teams needs attention. We made an effort to pair more experienced facilitators with new facilitators, and if any indicated a preference for working together, we took that into consideration. After the facilitator teams were formed, we told them which small-group rooms were available, and as far as possible, gave them their preference of rooms. That usually made everyone happy.

Preparation of the small groups is crucial and needs to be done with great care. When people signed up for DOCC, we asked them to take the 32-point Myers-Briggs Personality Survey, and used that information to form the small groups. In particular, we tried to balance the number of extroverts and introverts in each small group, as well as the temperament types. Most people found the survey interesting, and no one ever objected to taking it. If anyone ever had, we would not have insisted and would have accepted them into DOCC. We added a special presentation session in which we looked closely at the information from the Myers-Briggs Survey. We talked about it in terms of how God has created us with great diversity and yet called us into unity in Jesus Christ. We used Romans 12:4-10 and First Corinthians 12:12-27 as texts for this session. This usually made for one of the liveliest small-group discussions. Prior to forming the groups, we had a meeting with all the facilitators, went over the list of applicants, and asked them to point out any possible conflicts of which they were aware so that those could be avoided. We found that to be very helpful.

Celebrating the Holy Eucharist—We found that there is great benefit in celebrating the Holy Eucharist with the entire group several times during the DOCC year. Our opening session always began with a Eucharist, usually offered in a more informal setting at the church—the courtyard or other outside location, or the room where the presentation was to be given—not in the nave and done without vestments. We would begin with the Eucharist, then move into the introductory session. At the Christmas break, we would celebrate the Eucharist around the dining room table at the rectory, then have drinks and dinner together. For our final session we would again celebrate the Eucharist in the rectory dining room, then have drinks and dinner together. I would pass the consecrated bread and wine around and members of the group would communicate each other. We passed the peace at the end of the service, and it would always go on for quite a while. Sharing our central act of worship as a part of DOCC was a wonderful community building experience. It brought us all closer together.

Importance of Prayer—In my opinion, prayer is an integral part of DOCC and sets the tone for the entire program. I began each presentation with a minute or two of silence, asking each person to set aside the cares and tensions of the day and to be especially aware of God’s Presence with us. After the silence, I would offer prayer for each person there, for their families and for the program that evening. Each of the small groups concluded their session with prayer and our facilitators’ wrap-up session ended with prayer.

Maintain (Stick To) the DOCC discipline—At times, particularly with experienced facilitators, there is a temptation to cut corners, Do we really have to have a start up session to prepare for **the** DOCC program this year? We all know what to do. Or maybe it was ‘Can’t we just skip the wrap-up session tonight? It’s late, I’m tired, and I’m ready to go home.’ We found that it is important to follow the structure and discipline of DOCC as closely as possible. Whenever we took shortcuts, there were consequences.

Session on Stages of Grief—the Grief Process—I neglected to include this anywhere else, so I’ll just stick it in here. A number of years ago, we added a session on Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ Stages of Grief, and talked about the grief process. We included this as part of the unit on Active Listening, It is extremely helpful, we believe, for anyone involved in any kind of ministry to be familiar with the stages of grief. If one lives long enough, everyone experiences a significant loss, and grief is a reaction to significant loss. When we are dealing with someone who is experiencing grief, active listening is perhaps the best, most helpful response we can offer.

I will end this as I began. DOCC has been a wonderful, powerful part of my life and ministry—and there is no way I can be totally objective about it. I highly recommend the DOCC Program to anyone who is thinking about being a part of it. Thank you, John Jenkins, for this very significant gift to us and to the greater Body of Christ.