
Spread Good Gossip!

An article from the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler

It is often said, negatively, that churches have too much gossip in them. Especially in smaller communities we hear that people go to church just to hear whatever the latest local gossip is. We hear that bible studies turn into conversations about gossip. We hear that people listen closely to the prayers so that they can gossip about who is in trouble.

Thus, we also hear the common warnings: Don't gossip! Stay away from gossip! Be careful of gossip! (These warnings often seem to come from the people who like gossip the most!)

However, I disagree with the warnings to avoid gossip. Instead, I have always advised my congregations, and my staffs, to pay attention to gossip. Rather than avoiding gossip, pursuing gossip and understanding gossip are exactly how we learn what is going on in our communities. If we avoid gossip, priests are sometimes the last to know what is going on with the people we love.

In fact, I take it a step farther. I believe we are meant to be spreading gossip, not avoiding gossip. But not just any gossip! We are not meant to be spreading the negative gossip! Gossip is powerful stuff. When we tell something to one person, we are really talking to at least ten or twenty more people; because that one person will inevitably spread the message around.

Instead of avoiding gossip, then, we should be planting good words to be spread around. Instead of saying something negative or bitter or sad or angry that will be spread around, we have the ability to say something good and honorable and true that will be spread around. We have just as much ability to spread good gossip as we have the ability to spread bad gossip! And spreading good gossip is more fun! It is what furthers the kingdom of God.

At its root, the word "gossip" is related to the word "gospel." "Gossip" may have referred to a "Godparent," or "God-sibling," —one so close to us, in God, that he or she knew a lot about us. But I believe that both words come from the earlier word, "god-spell" which means "good news." Thus, I claim that the word "gossip" is supposed to mean "gospel!"

Each of us has the ability to spread some sort of gospel. Words are powerful. What we say to people, with words, will affect the way that person behaves internally. And what we say to people, with words, will almost always be repeated somehow to others. Rather than be afraid of that repetition, I like to depend upon that repetition. Rather than avoiding gossip, I prefer to spread good gossip!

It takes practice. Sometimes we've had a bad day, and our spirits sink to the negative and to the despondent, or even to the bitter and angry. More bad words, however, will make the day worse. My advice is to practice the good words. Speak them aloud to people. Spread good gossip! In the Spirit of God, you will be spreading the gospel.

