

## INTERVIEW WITH KEN JENSEN

*- Hi Ken, it is good to see you again after so many years. After stepping down as a bishop in the EOC you have pursued a teaching vocation within the Roman Catholic Church. How did that come about?*

Thanks for having me. I believe that shift had to do with me reaching my ceiling. I hit that point where I got beyond my gifting when I got called to serious pastoral issues in my role as a bishop. As a theologian, teacher, apologist, and speaker, I 'm pretty good. As long as I was functioning in those gifts, I was doing OK; but when it came down to actually pastoring the people, the works, and the churches that were built... as long as everyone was happy it was fine. But if there were people that were struggling, or confused, or mad at someone, I was never very good at handling those situations. I didn't have the patience for it. I would ask myself: "Why do people have these problems, why do they get so upset?" We also bumped into other ecclesial entities that believe we should do things this or that way. That also became confusing for our people. Where to go, where not to go? I didn't have the gift for all that problem solving. When I couldn't solve pastoral situations within the church that paid my salary, I felt the Lord saying that maybe it was time for me to leave-- so that the Indianapolis Church was forced to actually decide what to do, rather than have someone decide that for them. After I left, I re-assessed what I should do now; and after some reflection, I realized that I should do what I've always been good at: teaching, inspiring, encouraging, and leading people to faith. The Catholic Church opened up a door for me to do just that. It was refreshing to me to just be a part of something, rather than always having to explain why you exist as the EOC. Doing the hard work of everything from "shovelling the coal" to making decisions at the top was a lot of work! In the Catholic Church, I could just "be," and use my gifts; instead of being in charge of the whole thing.

*What is your relationship and function in the Roman Catholic Church?*

I went into the RCIA (Catholic catechesis) as a simple catechumen. In the beginning, they asked me if I wanted to come in as a priest; but I said: "Don't you have to be celibate and have a church for that?", so that idea was dropped. I wanted to hear how the Catholic Church taught the faith through its catechism; and I was very positively impressed by how that was done. However, I did find myself helping with the teaching somewhat. (It's always been hard for me to shut up and just listen.) So, eventually the parish priest said: "You should be teaching somewhere;" and he put me in contact with Cathedral High School, a Catholic college preparatory high school in Indianapolis; and they basically hired me on the spot. I took that as a clear sign of the Lord's care for me; and I have really enjoyed teaching full time. It has been energizing and a lot of fun. In life,

sometimes tough things happen to you; and you ask the Lord, "What do I do now?"...and boom!, He provides this teaching position without much effort on my part. I have 120 students per semester; and I am in my 16th year now. Something interesting that has developed through the years is that I have an email base of 25-50 students, who ask for advice and for spiritual direction in their lives after they have left high school.

*What makes you come fully alive?*

I feel fully alive when I am teaching a subject like theology or epistemology; and then something I say makes a student see something that he or she has never seen before. Something becomes clear. When you help the student settle something in terms of truth or a moral issue; and they are so excited that they want to talk about it--that makes me come alive! When I watch students or anyone get turned on to the faith. When faith "clicks" and it makes sense, maybe for the first time, those moments make me really excited.

*What are some of the struggles?*

I believe the teachers that are reading this will somewhat relate to this. It used to be, that when someone in ancient times knew something better than others, you asked the one who knew something if they could teach you what they knew. Small groups of disciples gathered around the master or the teacher (doctor) and they were really into what the teacher was into, trying to learn. This gave the teacher the liberality to teach with excitement and animation. The students would help with the process, because both the students and the teacher were going somewhere, they were on this "learning journey" together. Then somewhere along the way we got into public education which means that everybody under the sun is supposed to learn. (I think that is a good thing.) But the difficulty is, that many students today simply do not want to be in that now mandated class or subject, which makes it hard to go to the length or depth you want to go in order to create that learning excitement. And because the numbers of students are huge, you have to hire administrators who can fit students in the buildings and get it all paid for. Now, administrators are the masters, and the teachers are their servants. I'm confident that when the first administrators came along they were hired to help the teachers do their job. Well that's not the reality anymore, and I struggle with that. A lot of teachers burn out or leave early because of all of the stuff in the schools that is constantly changing and is not about teaching well.

*In looking back on the journey you have done within the Church, what have you learned about Her nature?*

I don't think the ancient fathers were wrong when they spoke about the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. But if they weren't wrong, and the Church is One, we haven't had that "oneness" for a long time. In a sense this seems to mean that the Church hasn't therefore existed since the 11th century; and I don't believe that this is true either. So the Church must be more than just a single entity under one polity. That doesn't mean that unity is not important, I do believe it is of the utmost importance. We need to do the work of unity and dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect as best we can on all levels. But you know, when we pray "may Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven", a lot of things are hard to fully realize here on earth, that's why we need to keep asking, keep praying. So, what is the Church? Ultimately I believe we have to realize that the Church is the body of Christ. It's a living, organic thing; and the Holy Spirit conceives the body of Christ in and through people. This is similar to what the Holy Spirit did in Mary. When people with sincerity say: "I believe God exists; and I am going to receive Him into my life and do something about that belief"; at that point God goes to work in them. God acts on our invitation to Him regardless of how much we understand. Whatever theology, or whatever expression of the Church (within limits), as long as they stay on that path or that dialogue with God, they are on their way and being the Church. It might be baby steps, but they are on their way. Some churches are more of a "baby stepping kind" and some churches might be more of a "get you up and running" kind. As the ancients said: "We know where the Church is, but we don't know where it isn't." I think we should be more concerned about helping each other express the Church rather than saying "you are in it or you are not in it". Let's help each other rather than hurt each other. Even if a person is totally skewed (according to Christian doctrine and belief) in terms of understanding theology or true doctrine. Let us take Mahatma Gandhi as an example. Anyone who is trying to love and seek truth and justice. If they are compassionate, searching, and open, I believe people like that are on a journey towards God in ways we cannot fully understand. They are being pulled by the Holy Spirit towards the body of Christ, the Church. Rather than fuss about where the Church is, I would prefer to proclaim Jesus Christ as the way to the Father and encourage people to get a hold of Jesus in the Bible, in the sacraments, by practicing love, in any way they can. Go as deep as you can. Don't judge people in some final sense. Make the journey towards God, towards the fullness of the Church in love--in any way you can; but also make sure that love does not turn into something else.

*The EOC holds on to the belief that "we are part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" regardless of whether the RCC or the Canonical Orthodox Church recognizes us as a part of the body or not. How "big" do you believe the Church is?*

You as a people are on a journey. I think it is obvious that you are a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. But you have to be careful so that you don't start saying that this is "far enough". On the other hand, if somebody come along and says "this is the next stage", that should not automatically mean that this is in fact the next stage. I believe that people within the EOC have been wounded and even destroyed by other people who tried to put new wine into old wineskins. I think it is a mistake to try to force EOC into some ethnic expressions that are not a natural part of her identity. I think it can be dangerous to join something that already exists; but I also think it is dangerous to say "this is as far as we go". I don't have the final answers, we are just on a journey. Let's listen and be attentive; and if the relationships work, let us work towards marriage. Let us reduce the number of denominations, not increase them. If you find friends that want to make you better than what you are, but not destroy you in the process, then nurture those friendships. I didn't figure this out in time, and I believe that is a big part of why I find myself within the RCC today. Are you part of the One Church? Yes. Is that process finished? No. It's always forward. Unity is unity with and in Christ. If Christ is the Light of Light, then the Church should be the light of the Light of the Light. We will only find our unity through our identity and our identity is hidden in Christ. Where there is light, there is unity. In the modern West, we made the mistake of believing that the truth and unity are determined by social contracts, by statements of faith, and by declarations of independence. "Let's find the right wording and then sign your name on it; and then we think we have found what the truth is". That is an insipid view of Truth. Jesus Christ says that He is the Truth and the Way and the Life. The dialogues between Churches are important; but I believe that we must find unity in the communion we have in Christ. We must focus on the face of Christ rather than trying to argue our way into an agreement. I need to focus on being a better worshiper, lover, prayer person, and truth teller; and if I become that, these other matters will eventually fade away. Unity in the Church depends on Unity in Christ, and that depends on our Christlikeness, and our willingness to follow Him, to be with Him. The Kingdom of God is not of the world, it is within you.

*How are you able to work towards unity in your current vocation?*

I'm a small fish in a big ocean. This question might have been more relevant when I was a bishop, when I was a big fish in a little pond. Nevertheless, in the classroom, I tell my students what is beautiful about being a Protestant. The Protestant's love of community is awesome, their love for Scripture is inspiring, They know how to do evangelism. I love these things about Protestantism. I tell my Catholic students that there are a lot of Protestant Christians out there doing a lot of things for the Kingdom of God. I could tell them about the faults of the Protestant movement as a whole, but why should I make that the primary emphasis? I rather talk about the things that are

good. When I talk about the Orthodox Church I talk about the beauty of the theology, of the icons, of the sacramental worship, and the hymns, and the smells and the bells. Those traditions developed over thousands of years in the Middle East are just deep and gorgeous. I love all of that. It's beautiful! There might be some dysfunctional stewardship of these gifts by many Orthodox leaders and people, but the gifts are there. Personally, I just couldn't figure out how to fit my American culture into the Byzantine culture for both myself and my people when I was a priest without losing some very precious and necessary things. Was I even supposed to? In Catholicism, Christianity is given a specific face that can talk to the rest of the world--in the pope. Catholics do all these incredible humanitarian works in schools, orphanages, and hospitals, It's all truly inspiring! They do many wonderful things; and then, on the other hand, some of the choices they have made in say the celibate clergy, for one, seems to have reduced the impact for good they could have. I can talk about both good and bad things from my perspective, but who am I? I choose to talk good as much as I am able. I say to my students, that if you could get the Orthodox, the Catholics, and the Protestants to come to the same place, and get them to bring the gifts that they took with them when they left each other, we would be the most profound, living, organic and powerful social and spiritual entity in the world. The Church would be so potent! That's what I believe, and I tell my students that. I bring the riches I've learned from each Christian context in which I have lived and participated to the classroom. That says a lot about the unity of the Church to my students.

*Do you think that the EOC still has a role to play (even though it might be a small one) within the Church? What would that look like?*

I hope that the EOC continues to play a role in doing this unifying work as well. The fact that I am invited to teach here in Saskatoon again indicates to me that you are still walking this path. However, I am not involved enough to know if this is still part of your nature. I don't know, but I hope so.

*What is your favourite memory from the EOC days?*

There are so many things I could say. But I do recall this time when worship came to its climax in accordance with our EOC dream. In the late seventies and early 80s, we were pretty serious about solid preaching and true community. We also had a great zeal for evangelism. But at the same time, we were developing and living our new understanding of the Eastern liturgy. We used chanting and vestments like the Orthodox, but along with that, there were great processions with people even dancing. It was basically a marriage of the East and the West in our minds, and it was a period of pure joy when we worshipped. In one Easter service, in the middle of the great

procession, two guys--without permission and with big grins on their faces--knowing that this was what they were supposed to do in the Spirit, carried the resurrection icon down the aisle along with everything else. When the whole congregation saw them, they started to weep; and I had the hair on the back of my neck standing up. Then two young boys got a hold of the steeple bell rope and started to ring it--also without permission; but it was all so perfectly timed. We wept, and sang, and worshiped; and I thought that I was as close as I will ever be to seeing the Kingdom of God on earth. Worship, at that particular moment was a beautiful blend of all of Christendom. I have never known beauty like that since. Even as I talk and think about this now, I get a bit weepy. It was so beautiful!

*For a number of people that remained within the EOC after you left, some questions remained unanswered. (Why did he leave? What happened? etc) What would you like to say to the people that believed in the vision you carried for so long but then seemed to have abandoned?*

I think maybe the questions themselves assume some things, which may not be all that accurate. Over an extended period of time, many of the EOC leaders and myself had conversations about all that transpired. However, we may not have communicated very well with "everyone" who might have had questions. One of the things that various churches within the EOC discussed in the early days with varying amounts of importance was the making of covenants. While a great deal of emphasis was placed upon this practice by many, I would want to say, that covenants made between people are not necessarily always of divine origin. The covenants that God has made with us have been mostly "in Christ" and related to the sacraments, since the Old Testament came to an end. We as people sometimes try to possess each other; and in so doing, we may overstep some boundaries. I believe that many of our EOC covenants were turned into attempts to coerce people outside of the working of the Spirit. What I'm saying is that there is a bigger covenant, the covenant in Christ. This covenant we make as His body, to be One in Him. And everyone that exists in Him has to give their gifts as best you can for as long as you can in whatever context. I was always an apostolic teacher, not a pastor or liturgical leader, that was not me. When I was operating in my gifts it was fine but when I got into areas that were not within my gift, things turned bad. I ran into a wall. When the Church who paid my salary fell into crises I realized that I can not lead these people anymore, it is not going to work. And for their sake, I think I had to "die." I finally realized that if I tried to keep myself "alive," that everything was going to turn out worse for everybody. I said to myself, "I don't believe at this point in my life that I can be a canonical priest and do the "cultural thing," And thus, if I can't be canonical with the canonicals, I should step down from being bishop and priest. Neither can I be a protestant with the protestants. That would be like going backward to

something which now seems immature." I also didn't think I couldn't be EOC anymore, because it felt to me like that would be simply going backward to something very confusing and out of place. I hit the point where I realized that I didn't have any place to go. I got genuinely confused. I had to die and trust that God would resurrect me someday, somewhere.. (Maybe you think this sounds to spiritualized but that is how I felt). I came to the point where I realized I'd given everything I could possibly give, and I was in way over my head, and I couldn't fix this thing, I had to let it go. I thought: "My confusion does not help anybody so I need to retire." Maybe something will come along that will fill the gap for everyone if I leave. Let them try to be canonical and see if that works. Some can try to continue as the EOC, let them try that. I don't know. It was not my problem to solve anymore." The way I was immediately cared for, and the way that I ended up in a place totally fitted for my gifts was just like wow! I think the Lord rescued me and said that this is not what you are supposed to do anymore.

*Do you still carry some of that initial vision of the EOC albeit in another part of the body of Christ?*

I teach high school and never dream about that at night. I was a Protestant and never dream about those days. I'm now in the Catholic Church and never really dream about it at night. But I constantly dream about the EOC, I almost wish it would stop. Those steady dreams at night put me back there in those EOC days talking to people about our vision. So you tell me. If I wake up and wonder why am I dreaming about this? Do I still carry some of the initial vision? I'm dreaming like I'm still back there and having conversations about this and that. Maybe it is because it is the one part of my life that I never got to finish. I don't know. Maybe I still want to write the next chapter of all of that, and I work at it at night in my dreams. The EOC is the place in my life that I got to experience the closest to what I envision what an American Orthodoxy might look like, or how God's people might make on earth what it is in heaven. Of course, in the end, such things become a target for the Devil's attacks; and we certainly had that in all of its subtle and not-so-subtle forms.

*How do you think that the EOC could extend her testimony another 100 years?*

Yeah, what's the solution? Take what you have, continue your journey; and then at some point, figure out how to give what you have away to the fullness of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Do it authentically, however, don't give yourself away to the Pharisees. But don't give yourself away to gnostics either, or people who are sectarian. It's a difficult journey. Live as authentically as you can as a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; but then, "buddy up" to anybody who will help you do it even better. Churches in Africa "buddied up" to you for seemingly this

reason. Who is to say that you won't run into some movement some place down the road where you will act in the way the Africans did and you "buddy up" to them? Befriend the movement that genuinely lets you be you, but is also offering you things and gifts you haven't had before. I think you will know it when it comes along. Maybe the issue is not so much how are we supposed to do it, but more to prepare our hearts, souls, and minds to have strength for the day; so that when God reveals Himself, we are actually prepared to move with Him. Instead of having the mentality of "we have to maintain this in the same way", we open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and His guidance. I think the fact that I have changed many times in my life, has deepened me and matured me; and that does not only happen to persons, it happens to whole movements. The Kingdom of God always tries to flesh itself out. Don't try to manufacture it, it is already here. Rather enter it more and more. Respond to the Kingdom, it is a journey that will always go deeper and deeper. I don't think we create the Kingdom of God, we respond to it. It is always offered. For example, you don't go looking for a guy to do a certain job, you look for a guy who is already doing the job in his gifting. A Church might say: "We are going to make you a priest because you are already operating in the gifts of the priest. We are recognizing that those gifts are going to be used here." Or: "We choose you to teach because you are already a teacher, we recognize the gifting that God has appointed to you." Why did the EOC get created? Why did this whole thing happen in the first place? Well, it was the touch of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit fell. The EOC manifests something that is already happening. God put a name on that. So let us continue in the same mode of recognizing that whatever comes along and is touched by the Holy Spirit, we are supposed to say "yes" to it, to name it. Not because we planned or organized it (manufacturing) but because it fell on us. Pentecost falls on people, you don't plan it. Live in a state of expectation. The expectation is not only done in the mind but through all the virtues. Be a lover, be justice and truth, be kind be generous, be all those things all the time; but also be discerning and careful. You have to discern because there might be a wolf lurking around. That happens too. But act in love even when you encounter the wolf. Fight the wolf, not because you hate the wolf, but because you love the flock. This kind of fight is only possible by saints. It is too complex. Only saints can do this; and they are called saint because they depend fully on God. So work on being saints. Pray, fast, love each other, read the scriptures. Then God might say: "Wow, those people might be able to handle some very mysterious and very deep things." David says: I want to build a temple for you. God says: No, I'm going to build it out of your body. We say: We are going to build the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. God says: No, your not, I already have it. And I'll give it to you when you are saintly enough. That's what it's about.

*Would you like to add anything?*

No, that's enough.



