

Toward a Theology of Ministry

Introduction

What is ministry? Who are the ministers of the church?

Although deceptively simple at the outset, the answers to these questions quickly become complex and even troublesome. Throughout church history, they have created schism and divided communities. Yet how we answer these questions forms an essential aspect of denominational identity—they shape our understanding and practice of Christian community, discipleship, and mission. Over the last three years, the Standing Commission on Ministry Development, at the request of the 1997 General Convention, has listened to and struggled with a variety of answers to these questions proposed by diverse individuals, parishes, dioceses, and other communities within the Episcopal Church with the ultimate goal of articulating a theologically cohesive vision of ministry to guide the revision of Title III Canons.

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During the second half of the twentieth century, the theological and liturgical recovery of baptism and eucharist has reshaped understandings and practices of ministry. Across the denominational spectrum, Christians placed a renewed emphasis on the ministry of the whole people of God. In the Episcopal Church, the 1979 Prayer Book emphasized the active participation of all baptized persons in worship and the centrality of eucharistic celebration in Christian community. This liturgical change called all Episcopalians to a deeper understanding of their biblical identity as the body of Christ engaged in God's mission in and to the world. With this theology embodied in the church's liturgy—particularly when placed in combination with the 1982 World Council of Churches Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*—Episcopalians began to experience baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiology as

the context for understanding all Christian ministry. This theological perspective, where it is significantly realized in various forms, is transforming the understanding and living of Christian discipleship in the church and in the world.

The new emphasis on baptism and eucharist initiated a shift in theological self-understanding in the Episcopal Church. Historically, “liturgy was what clergy did.”¹ Episcopalians generally understood ministry as the parish-based work of a professional clerical class. When the 1979 Prayer Book stressed lay participation in the church within the larger context of God’s work in the world, previous conceptions of ministry were enriched by an enlarged vision of the kingdom of God.² The resulting challenge of the 1979 Prayer Book, with its conception of ministry as the work of all God’s people, has created considerable ferment in the church over the last two decades. What do we mean by baptismal ministry? What is the nature and purpose of ordination? How do baptismal and ordained ministry relate to each other within the context of the mission of the whole people of God? In the Episcopal Church, these questions have led to innovations in the theory, structures, and practice of ministry among all the baptized.

In addition to the liturgical changes within the church, a host of broader theological and cultural concerns have also influenced the practice of ministry in the Episcopal Church. For example, women’s ordination, the charismatic renewal movement, and a growing awareness of living in a post-Christian, post-modern society have brought forth creative new renderings of Anglican tradition regarding ministry. As a result of varying responses to liturgical change and social transformation, the Episcopal Church does not have a singular, definitive theology of ministry. Rather, a number of theologies of ministry operate in our community. This situation is further influenced by historic Anglicanism itself where catholic and reformed strands have been woven together in our understanding of ministry. Although we sometimes romanticize the past and downplay our diverse traditions, Anglicanism has often been marked by ferment and tension—and sometimes conflict and schism—over the nature of ministry. Despite our commitment to comprehension, we have not always maintained “the bonds of unity” amidst creative ferment.³ Thus Episcopal experience and theological reflection

¹ Charles Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 75.

² *Ibid.*, 93.

³ The most tragic divisions in Anglicanism—those of the sixteenth-century tension with Puritanism and the eighteenth-century conflict with the Methodist movement—were largely arguments over the nature of

reveal the need to engage in a comprehensive, church-wide discussion to discern the nature, purpose and relationship of baptismal and ordained ministries.

In 1997, resolutions of General Convention created the Standing Commission on Ministry Development and assigned it the task of organizing and facilitating a discussion in the Episcopal Church on the theology of ministry. This action was conceived as an important aspect of the mandate of Convention to the SCMD: to generate concrete proposals, in conjunction with the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons, for revisions to or replacement of Title III Canons (“Ministry”) in the next triennium. For the 1998-2000 triennium, a Task Group on the Theology of Baptismal and Ordained Ministry was appointed from the membership of the Commission at large. Its task was to organize a consultative process of theological reflection on baptismal and ordained ministry that would result in a theological statement providing criteria for the canonical revision process.

Out of the Task Group’s preliminary discussions and research, including consultations with the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies, theologians, church leaders, other SCMD task groups, and representatives of the Standing Commission on Constitutions and Canons, a discussion-provoking instrument entitled “Thoughts toward a Theology of Ministry in the Episcopal Church” was crafted. This instrument, with a cover letter, was sent to the program planners for the 1999 Provincial Commission on Ministry meetings, with the formal request for program time. Task Group members and staff from the Office of Ministry Development functioned as discussion leaders at the various Commission on Ministry meetings, with responsibility for documenting discussion and feedback on behalf of the full Task Group. The instrument was offered as a focus for discussion in a variety of other meetings as well.⁴

ministry. In the United States, the Episcopal Church maintained a creative tension between differing visions of ministry in the nineteenth century through a number of “consensus” oriented church parties whose legacy still echoes in the contemporary church: the High Church, Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic and Broad Church parties. See Robert Bruce Mullin, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America* (New Haven: Yale, 1986); Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1995); and Robert Pritchard, *The Nature of Salvation: Theological Consensus in the Episcopal Church, 1801–1873* (Urbana, IL: Illinois, 1997).

⁴ Living the Covenant Consultation, June 1999; National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations Annual Conference, June 1999; Sewanee Deacons’ Conference, July 1999.

After collating the responses from this church-wide discussion process, including criticisms of points in the original instrument and suggestions for further reflection, the Task Group has prepared several revisions leading to this document, “Toward a Theology of Ministry.” Not conceived of as a definitive theological statement, this paper seeks to reflect contemporary understandings of ministry in the church and is designed to invite reflective discussion in our community as we move toward a common theological understanding of ministry. It will be shared with the wider church through a variety of formats including a special pre-convention mailing and the Episcopal Church web site. The document will be formally presented to the General Convention 2000 for discussion, and, it is hoped, will reflect widely held Episcopal theological ideals that will guide the revision of Title III.

I. Method

The Task Group on the Theology of Baptismal and Ordained Ministry deliberated on an appropriate method to use in carrying out its mandate to develop theological criteria to guide canon revision. The practical nature of the task suggested an approach both conceptual and experiential. A purely classical method, moving from abstract concepts to the concrete situation of today’s Episcopal Church, seemed insufficient. An inductive approach “from below” recommended itself as a means of holding up a theological mirror to the actual practices and understandings of ministry in our church today. Inspired, in part, by the Zacchaeus Project and its attempt to provide a snapshot of the contemporary congregation-based experience of discipleship, the Task Group initiated the consultative process described above.⁵ This experiential approach was supplemented by, and interpreted through, scholarly and pastoral expertise offered by theologians, historians, sociologists, and clergy.

Thus, this paper is not intended to advocate or exclude particular views or practices of ministry. The Task Group, whose members brought to the discussion a wide variety of views and experiences, developed a self-conscious desire to stand in the historic line of Anglican comprehensiveness. Recognizing that God’s Spirit has often

⁵ In 1999, the Episcopal Church Foundation sponsored the Zacchaeus Project, an in-depth study of Episcopal congregations in nine dioceses. The project sought to determine how Episcopalians both understand the identity of the church and engage in ministry. For a summary of the Zacchaeus findings, see *The Zacchaeus Project: Discerning Episcopal Identity at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (New York: Episcopal Church Foundation, 1999).

manifested itself in our diversity, we affirm the creative vitality of contemporary ministry in its many guises. We are also aware of the problems and shortcomings in all forms of polity. With these perspectives and commitments in mind, we have attempted to discern the theological contours of a broadly Episcopal approach to ministry—one that both faithfully honors the past and energetically embraces the future. We found a common theological starting point: God’s mission drives ministry, not vice versa.

Emerging from that theological commonality, we also agreed that baptism and eucharist serve God’s mission to bring forth the kingdom in the world. As Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann drew the connection between liturgy and mission:

The Eucharist is the entrance of the Church into the joy of its Lord. And to enter into that joy, so as to be a witness to it in the world, is indeed the very calling of the Church, its essential *leitourgia*, the sacrament by which it “becomes what it is.”⁶

The connection between liturgical life and God’s kingdom is more than theoretical. Episcopalians often experience it in the context of service. As one woman remarked regarding her participation in a local soup kitchen, “I realized today working in the Kitchen that the serving table is like the table in the church, the altar. The two go together. I don’t think the Eucharist makes sense without the soup.”⁷

The mission of the church is, therefore, the divine agenda for which disciples are called and equipped. God’s mission is the appropriate biblical and theological context in which to consider the ministry of all baptized persons. This discussion unfolds from that insight.

II. The Mission of the Church

The theological and liturgical recovery of the importance of baptism and eucharist, described above as a major accomplishment of twentieth century Christianity, has found expression in a mission-centered theology of ministry. This theology emphasizes the body of all baptized people working together in a reconciling and liberating mission in the world God loves (Luke 4:18; John 3:16). The baptized live under

⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1973 edition), pp. 25-26.

⁷ Nora Gallagher, *Things Seen and Unseen: A Year Lived in Faith* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 47.

Christ's authority, accountable to God, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the good news into the broken heart of God's creation. We are an apostolic or "sent" community. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term *ministry*, in common usage, as carrying out a charge on behalf of the body or the individual that assigns the office or responsibility in question; a *minister* acts as an executive agent. We can therefore speak of the church's mission only because God has a mission: to reconcile the world, drawing all creation ever deeper into the divine life of the Triune God.

Jesus constantly spoke of God's mission using kingdom language. In the four gospels, Jesus refers to the kingdom more than 150 times. By comparison, Jesus speaks of the "church" only five times (and only then in the Gospel of Matthew). When he began his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed his ministry inaugurated the long anticipated arrival of God's kingdom (Luke 4:16-22). He instructed the disciples to pray for the kingdom's fullness to be revealed on earth. If Jesus' own teaching so centered on the kingdom, then our understanding of the kingdom has important implications for mission and ministry.

We often speak of ministry "in the church" or "in the world." Yet Jesus teaches us to "seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness." The kingdom is the good news at the heart of the apostolic mission (Matthew 10:5-8). It is sometimes hidden and elusive; sometimes powerful and revealed. God's kingdom serves to measure the world, human history, the church and all its ministries. Neither the world nor the church (as an institution) is co-terminus with the kingdom—except insofar as the church lives into its identity as the body of Christ.

An apostolic community, those sent into the world as witnesses to God's kingdom, requires that disciples or agents ("ministers") of Christ be transformed by and through the Holy Spirit. For the work of transformation, the community is gathered and plunged into the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection in baptism and eucharist. There, the ultimate change intended by God may occur: believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ to continue God's work in the world. A baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiology places the gathered church in the wider context of mission. Transformation and growth in discipleship are not ends in themselves, but through sacramental promise, God's people are changed so they may announce the good news of the kingdom and serve humankind.

Even a generation ago, Episcopalians might not have recognized this as ministry. Ministry was the work of a minister, a Father, who baptized and blessed, married and buried, visited the sick, preached, and led the Sunday service (usually Morning Prayer). Laity were expected to follow the Ten Commandments, submit to spiritual authorities, attend worship on Sunday, christen and raise their children in the faith, and give financially to the church. Holy Communion seemed to many a privatized affair for the “continual strengthening and refreshing” of the individual’s soul. This understanding of ministry was reflected in the Catechism (“Offices of Instruction”) of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, where the “bounden duty” of church membership consisted in following Christ, attending worship and “to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom.”

The kingdom implications of the earlier catechism were brought center stage in the 1979 book. The explicit shift to a baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiology is evident in the new set of questions in the Catechism that replaces definitions of individual duty:

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

This statement of God’s reconciling mission to the world has challenged the Episcopal Church, calling us to discover new ways of understanding ourselves and our congregations as messengers and ministers of God’s kingdom.

This challenge has sometimes led to conflicting expectations regarding the nature and practice of ministry (on the part of both congregants and clergy). Episcopalians often articulate divergent visions of God’s kingdom, mission, ministry, church, and discipleship. While the sharpened focus of our liturgical theology has furnished the church with much creative ferment in the last twenty years, it has also resulted in some confusion. As William Countryman observed:

“Ministry” . . . stands in the midst of a complex constellation of ideas, hopes, tensions, beliefs and norms among Christians today. The ministry of the laity is often contrasted with the ministry of the ordained . . . The whole purpose of ordination in a world that has become more democratic may not be obvious. Churches often have trouble defining exactly what they see as the responsibilities of the ordained. Lay people are equally uncertain about their own role.⁸

In addition to the church’s internal changes, Episcopalians are being challenged by larger cultural shifts. Since the end of World War II, an increasingly racially and religiously diverse United States has attempted to come to terms with vast technological change, radical democratization (with its attendant insistence on human rights and the rights of all nature), and a global economy. We live in the “birth pangs” of a new era. And not unlike the struggles Anglicans faced with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, we find our entire understanding of church and ministry challenged by the stresses of massive social innovation.

We are called to understand ourselves as a people under Christ’s authority for mission. Yet the traditional renderings of that authority are enfeebled in a rapidly changing world.⁹ Thus, the historic ways in which Episcopalians understood spiritual authority (its basis, nature, and structure) are being challenged along with everything else. We find ourselves arguing over the reliability of familiar guideposts: What combination of scripture, tradition, and reason will inform our course? What roles do our traditional leaders—deacons, priests, and bishops—play in our congregations? What, indeed, is the nature of spiritual authority and leadership? How do we discern God in our midst?

A twenty-year period of numerical decline in our church—and other mainline denominations—has exacerbated uncertainty and institutional anxiety.¹⁰ Worry over

⁸ William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999), xii.

⁹ This is true for political and economic structures as well as ecclesiastical ones. Again, the comparison with the Industrial Revolution is apt. In the eighteenth-century, the structures of democracy and capitalism emerged to meet the needs of that changing society. It is these eighteenth-century structures that are being challenged to renewal by the new technological and global revolution. Thus, some of the institutional and structural issues with which the church struggles are part of a larger cultural transformation similar in nature and scope to those experienced in the West three hundred years ago.

¹⁰ Most scholars of American religion now refer to the traditional “mainline” as “the historic mainline” or “old line” denominations. Included in this group are Episcopalians, Congregationalists (UCC), Presbyterians (PCUSA), Methodists (UMC), Lutherans (ELCA), American Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ. The causes for this decline have been one of the most debated points in the recent literature of

survival has sometimes produced beleaguered congregations enmeshed in internal problems with little energy or vision to focus on God's mission. Mobility challenges inherited assumptions about the nature and meaning of the "parish." Social movements—such as the movements for civil and human rights, feminism, the movement for gay and lesbian rights, and a greater public expression of racial, religious, and ethnic diversity in the United States—challenge us to become truly welcoming and loving communities of discipleship where every person's dignity is respected. We struggle to address and correct systemic injustices in the institutions of both society and the Episcopal Church. We strain to understand these changes in relation to Christian faith; we strain equally to understand scripture and tradition in relation to the challenges presented by them. In this dizzying context, God still calls a people to minister as the body of Christ. Chaos is no excuse for quiescence. Indeed, uncertainty only heightens the need for the church to engage more deeply and self-consciously in God's mission.

What, then, is ministry in the Episcopal Church? What does the church look like when the message of God's kingdom is embodied in the world by disciples who have been drawn together in a life-long process of transformation into the likeness of Christ?

In 1999, the Zacchaeus Project pointed to a theological truism in our community: when the trained clergy (bishops, priests, and deacons) and all baptized persons work together in mutually empowering service in mission, then the church experiences significant success in ministry.¹¹ In a wide range of theological settings—Anglo-Catholic to total ministry, progressive to evangelical—the Zacchaeus findings echoed oddly similar themes of mutuality, servanthood, respect, and shared ministry. The old dichotomy between "lay" and "ordained" is fading. It is being replaced with a vision of

American religious history. In the Episcopal Church, the decline stopped in the early 1990s and membership has held steady for a number of years around 2.5 million. It should also be noted that in spite of the numerical decline, the Zacchaeus Project data identified greater vitality in terms of church attendance and giving in the Episcopal Church in the 1990s than anytime since the 1960s.

¹¹ In the language of the Zacchaeus Project, "success" was defined as an experience or experiences when the parish felt that "God was with them" or "God was blessing" their life together. It was not defined necessarily as numerical growth or financial success. Many interviewees protested the language of "success" as being too secular—perhaps an indication of the depth of understanding of such theological matters present in the church today.

spiritually vital, networked congregations working to forward God's kingdom consonant with the needs of local communities.¹²

The rise of this new vision need not threaten the essence of Episcopal identity. For the Zacchaeus Project also discerned that these vital congregations do understand themselves as Episcopal—an identity that emerges through being a liturgical people, a community called in and through baptism and eucharist to serve God's creation. One of the key findings of the Zacchaeus Project was that the locus of Episcopal identity is shifting from being a hierarchically ordered, clerically focussed institution to being a living icon of God's gracious presence in the local sacramental community for the life of the world. In conversations across the church, members of the Standing Commission heard many sentiments and ideals expressed echoing the Zacchaeus Project findings. The shift may be haltingly, partially, or imperfectly realized, but it seems to be the theological direction for which the church is reaching—or to which the Spirit is pulling us. As was clear from the Zacchaeus findings, such a vision can enliven traditional forms of church organization as well as inspire and support newer ones.

The church's main challenge is, therefore, to pursue this new theological reality while honoring and redefining the structures, expressions, and practices of ministry in our midst.

III. Theology of Baptismal Ministry

In answering the question, "Who are the ministers of the Church?", the Catechism of the 1979 Prayer Book replies: "The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." All the baptized together form the *laos*, the people of God, joined in the one ministry of Jesus Christ. As Caroline Westerhoff has written:

¹² If mutuality between clergy and lay persons in ministry was identified by the Zacchaeus Project as key for healthy congregations, then two corresponding problems existed in troubled ones: clericalism or laicism. Clericalism is an often discussed problem. An inappropriate sense of clergy authority has led, sadly, to a host of issues regarding abuse and malpractice. The opposite problem, laicism, is less discussed. In the case of an inappropriate sense of lay authority, laity conceive of the church as their "property" and the clergy their "employees." In such circumstances, lay persons commit abuses as well—undermining clerical ministries, refusing financially to support the church, forcing clergy from positions. In either case, clericalism or laicism, the church becomes a battle ground for power issues and any real sense of the mission of church is lost.

[T]he ministers in the eucharistic community are those who are to carry out its mission of reconciliation and restoration, of reuniting the fractured people of the earth with each other and with God. These ministers are the church's laity, bishops, priests, and deacons, and to each is given a particular charge. . . . [Each] has different functions to perform for the church, the body of Christ, and each is dependent upon the others to make up the whole. To say it another way, each. . . is a symbol for the others of what they are and what they are to be.¹³

She further depicts God's people as seated at "a round table with four chairs drawn up for a meal or serious talk. If any seat is missing or empty, the company is diminished, incomplete." Although not intended to describe four "orders" of ministry, Westerhoff's image of a round table is helpful. Four friends, co-workers in God's mission, seated together, sharing a meal or conversation, eliminates the conceptions of hierarchy often associated with ministry. This is not a banquet hall with persons seated according to their "stations" with the master at the head. This is a family table—a vision rich with the biblical imagery of the Last Supper—where God's people gather to share the love and fellowship of Jesus.

The late Stewart Zabriskie, Bishop of Nevada, recalled his own changing conception of baptismal ministry: "No longer could I accept the icon of the pyramid with the lay people near the base, priests and deacons somewhat higher up, and the bishop perched regally and precariously at the top."

I began to understand ministry in terms of a circle: the *laos*, the whole people of God, the ministering community. For our Native American brothers and sisters, the circle is the symbol of community, people like us baptized into the ministry of Jesus Christ and called together as ministering community.¹⁴

All in this circle or around this table were invited through their common bond: baptism. Baptism is the crux of Christian identity; it establishes the community of disciples. There, "we are incorporated into Christ's body, infused with the character of Christ, and given power to represent Christ and his body, the church."¹⁵ In baptism, believers die and rise to newness of life as agents of Christ for the reconciliation of the world. From

¹³ Caroline A. Westerhoff, *Calling: A Song for the Baptized* (Boston: Cowley, 1994), 15.

¹⁴ Stewart C. Zabriskie, "Baptismal Ministry," *Sewanee Theological Review* 43:2 (Easter 2000), 193.

¹⁵ Westerhoff, 16–17.

this fundamental identity, the baptized are called to various roles within the body to serve both the church and the world.¹⁶

The *laos*—no matter their specific roles within the community—share the corporate responsibility of being Christ in and for the world. Westerhoff refers to this as “am-ness.” All God’s people are “born in the image of the divine” and called to a “lifelong work . . . to practice holy habits that reveal and name the Christ in ourselves and others—to uncover the image (of God).” The *laos* just are. Baptism “sears” this identity upon all who are marked in Christ’s name. And from this fundamental theological identity, the nature of ministry becomes clearer:

Ministry would be part and parcel of our saying, “I am; I am baptized.” In describing ministry, questions relating to character, identity, and disposition to behave would concern us before those regarding the various roles we assume or functions we perform.¹⁷

Baptism and its call to serve God and the world are Christian identity; specific roles express that identity in accordance with God’s calling to each of us to use our unique gifts in service to God’s kingdom.

This understanding—of baptism as divine identity—is drawn from scripture and the example of Jesus. In all four Gospels, Jesus’ own baptism testifies to the presence of the Spirit at the heart of his ministry as an agent of God’s compassionate reign. As a teacher, healer, prophet, and savior, Jesus acts out the love and justice of *Abba*. In the Spirit, Jesus represents God’s interests as his agent without reservation. In the Spirit, he is carried through the suffering of death into resurrection life. In the same Spirit, his followers believe that in seeing Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:9): Father, Son, and Spirit are dynamically one. The ancient Trinitarian baptismal formula in Matthew 28:18ff. is incorporated into Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. When a person is baptized, he or she is drawn into the life of the Trinity, incorporated

¹⁶ “Role” should not be interpreted as “function.” From experience, most people understand that a “role” such as “parent” or “teacher” is not strictly functional. One remains a parent long after one’s children are grown (even though the function has, for all intents and purposes, ceased). “Roles” grow from more fundamental self-understandings, and in turn as they are practiced, reshape personal identities. Thus, “lay,” “bishop,” “priest,” “deacon” are roles forged in the crux of baptismal identity and are distinct (but organically interrelated) vocations that, when exercised faithfully, inform and reshape baptismal identity of the person and the entire community.

¹⁷ Westerhoff, 18-20.

into the fellowship of the original disciples, commissioned to baptize and teach the compassion of God in Jesus' name, in the power of the Spirit. Thus authorized by and accountable to God, the *laos* widens the circle of disciples as a holy priesthood in and to the world through time and space. The whole body shares in Christ's baptism, joined with him in God's mission (Eph. 4:16).

Baptismal ecclesiology is at the same time eucharistic ecclesiology. If baptism is a singular occurrence in the life of believers, the eucharist is the on-going and nurturing well-spring of mission and hence of all ministry. In the eucharist, we offer ourselves to be fed and sustained as agents of God's kingdom. As the weekly gift of Christ's presence, the eucharist transforms, unites, and shapes the *laos* into a holy community. As the table fellowship of the redeemed, the eucharist models and empowers the church's mission of reconciliation. Thus, Anglicans affirm two sacramental expressions as foundational to our life in Christ and to all ministry: baptism and eucharist.

The Catechism in the 1979 Prayer Book defines two aspects of the ministry of the *laos*: 1) to bear witness to Christ and carry forward his work of reconciliation in the world, and 2) to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the church. The baptismal covenant further defines ministry as fellowship, repentance, proclamation, service, and peacemaking. As we struggle to clarify the relation of baptismal ministry of the *laos* and the specific roles of ordered ministry, some have maintained that baptismal ministry is diaconal: the ministry of the *laos* is a ministry of compassionate service in and for the world. This is often contrasted with the ministry of the ordained as a ministry in and for the church. Such distinctions tend to falter, however, when deacons are included in the discussion since they serve the church as well. And this view is equally inadequate because lay persons minister and serve as leaders within the body as well as in the world. The prayer book teaches that baptismal ministry takes place in and for both world and church. Is there a more comprehensive model to help us conceptualize baptismal ministry?

Baptismal ministry is discipleship in which the whole body shares the identity of Christ and his mission as a priesthood of all believers. One possible model for baptismal ministry may be found in the biblically resonant, traditional understanding of Jesus' own ministry, articulated in the roles of priest, prophet, and servant-king. This model may help us see baptismal ministry afresh. As we apply our model to experience, we understand that the priestly, prophetic, and service aspects of discipleship are not neatly

separated when lived in community—even as they also interrelated in Christ’s own ministry. Baptismal ministry is a rich complex of interconnected callings, service, and relationships. And, in many ways, it is as difficult to comprehend as the mystery of the God whose image it reflects.

Jesus the priest offered himself once for all and secured redemption. In the earliest Christian tradition, the identity of priest is extended to the church in all its members, as a holy priesthood (Rev. 1:6, 5:10; 1 Peter 2:5). The *laos* are living stones in a spiritual house, a temple making present God’s compassion in the world. The baptized share in Christ’s priesthood by blessing, interceding, admonishing, forgiving, offering together spiritual sacrifices, taking responsibility for common life by serving on parish committees, acting as lay eucharistic ministers, and singing God’s praises. All these actions and others are priestly as they mediate the transforming presence of the living Christ.

Jesus the prophet turned the world upside down in words and deeds. In line with other biblical prophets and teachers, Jesus proclaimed God’s word and rendered judgment on the world in light of God’s will for humankind. Imbued with his prophetic authority, empowered by the Word, the baptized are sent into the world to witness in word and deed to God’s reign. The baptized also speak God’s word to one another in community: in worship, praying, teaching, preaching, writing, engaging in theological reflection, working for justice, and exploring new forms of congregational life. All of these actions and others are prophetic as they challenge humanity to an ongoing commitment to live in accordance with God’s intent for creation.

Jesus Christ, the servant-king, demonstrated God’s love and reversed the tragedy of the Fall. As King, Christ came as a shepherd to his sheep, to gather and care for the lost (Mt. 18:12; Heb. 13:20). As shepherd, Christ modeled pastoral oversight as humble, self-emptying service for others. Jesus delegated this oversight to the disciples when he sent them into the world: “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:17). Likewise, the *laos* are called into self-giving service to the world—humbly embodying God’s love and justice in creation and respecting the dignity of all persons. The *laos* also exercises oversight in the church: visiting the sick, listening, mentoring, pastoral care, extending hospitality, welcoming the stranger, serving on vestries, exercising stewardship for buildings and grounds, and working as peacemakers amidst conflict. All these actions and others call God’s people to lay down their own lives for the sake of others.

Ultimately, however, baptismal ministry reflects not only Jesus and his ministry. It reflects the greater mystery of God-in-Trinity: God's people forwarding God's kingdom by incarnating Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, ministry is, at its heart, a dynamic relationship of love—lover—beloved engaged in a restless seeking to restore created wholeness and draw everything into harmony with love. And of this, St. Augustine wrote, "That God's ministers *ought* so to live is not a thing we believe on hearsay: it is what we see within ourselves, or rather above ourselves, in very truth."¹⁸

This Christological and Trinitarian understanding of ministry raises one additional point. The deacon's charge at the close of the eucharist is a powerful weekly commission: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." Although the words are addressed to the assembly, they are frequently interpreted as an individual commission. We are sent as individuals and as a body to exercise our callings of priesthood, prophecy, and service—to be Christ in our workplaces, our families, our communities. Conceiving of baptismal ministry as solely an individual venture is misdirected. Individuals sometimes speak of service as "my ministry." Ministry is the corporate activity of kingdom-work. All ministry is God's ministry. The *laos* serve as the ministers, agents, and ambassadors of God's mission.

As we go into the world as Christ's ambassadors, we find ourselves making common cause with other believers, many of whom represent other traditions. On God's mission, we also meet Christ in a neighbor who is not among the baptized, yet works for the interests of the kingdom. Even in our own congregations, we do not go alone. We often form groups to work for justice and peace in the world. God's people labor in soup kitchens and homeless shelters, build houses and schools, dedicate themselves to peacemaking and racial reconciliation, participate in political causes and campaigns, plant churches and do evangelism, support missionaries and teachers, work for human rights and social justice, and join together in concerns for the environment.

The ministry of the *laos* includes all these examples—and more. It encompasses responsibility for the common life of Christian community, Christian responsibility within the family, and living the gospel in the workplace, all arenas of kingdom-work.

¹⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*. Library of Christian Classics edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 54.

Because of its breadth, baptismal ministry cannot be adequately conceived as individuals sent into the world to represent Christ in the daily round. That definition, helpful as it may be, is too limited. Instead, baptismal ministry is the whole work of God's kingdom being carried out by the whole people of God at all times and places. Ministry is not volunteer work, not just a religious United Way. Ministry springs from our identity in Christ, the "am-ness" of baptism, an organic outgrowth from God's covenant with us. We are, in the words of Verna Dozier, "the church gathered and the church scattered." No matter where we are, together or apart, self-consciously or not, the baptized are always the church on mission. Although sometimes unrecognized or rejected, Christian baptismal identity cannot be separated from the dynamic, relational, and sacramental life of the community and God's mission.¹⁹

When baptismal ministry is grasped in its fullness as the people of God enacting Christ's priesthood as his ministers, it becomes clear that theological formation for the entire community is one of the most urgent needs in the church. As a life-long endeavor, and one that links heart and mind, Christian formation undergirds the ongoing transformation of persons into the likeness of Christ. Just as believers are formed for discipleship by baptism, eucharist, community life, and service in the world, the dedicated study of scripture and theology nurtures the baptized to Christian maturity and into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

The scope, energy, and diversity of the *laos* presents the church as an institution with the challenge of order, of discerning and pursuing the call of God in community. But what kind of order empowers, supports, instructs, and coordinates the *laos* to embrace, experience, and engage the fullness of their baptismal identity?

IV. Ordering the Church

The question of church order is, perhaps, the central issue of the American Episcopal experience. Episcopalians are Anglicans in the broadest sense, but we are not members of the Church of England. Our history is not directly that of the English village and its parish church, of archbishops or monarchs. American Episcopalianism was forged in the context of industrial revolution, democratic experimentation, and religious

¹⁹ Verna J. Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return* (Boston: Cowley, 1991), 142.

pluralism. Although Anglicans had been in America since European settlement began, the Revolutionary War nearly destroyed the colonial church. Early Americans who were still committed to Anglicanism needed to recreate their church in a democratic mode—a hierarchical church with presumptions of prelacy was inappropriate in the new nation. They conceived of a democratic episcopate, an admixture of the traditional roles of bishops and clergy with the new ethos of *vox populi*. Thus, American Anglicanism evolved into the Episcopal Church in the United States: a church of “mitre without sceptre.”²⁰

Although solved in theory, some tension between the traditional ordering of the church and American culture remained. Through two centuries of church history, questions of order, authority, structure, and polity arose with some regularity and were resolved based on the theological insight and ministry needs of a given generation. Historically, the Episcopal Church often has proved itself a flexible and culturally responsive institution. Thus, when “authority” has been radically redefined by the culture, and when *vox populi* includes the voices of people previously unheard or unheeded, it is natural that the contemporary church revisits these questions.²¹ Thinking through our polity in relation to culture is a central part of American Episcopal identity.

Throughout our history, however much the church has changed, we have tried to maintain a consensus of dual emphases: that the church should be an ordered community reflecting Anglican understandings of scripture, tradition, and reason; and that God’s mission is best carried out when spirit is embodied in form and when forms are enlivened by spirit in our common life.

Although these emphases are sometimes in tension—as they often seem to be today in relation to contemporary concerns—the dual nature of this consensus is not

²⁰Frederick Mills, *Bishops by Ballot: An Eighteenth Century Ecclesiastical Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 1978).

²¹ The shift at this time in American history is not only “cultural” in the broadest sense. It is also generational. At this juncture, baby-boomers (usually defined as those born between 1946 and 1964) are taking their place as leaders in all American institutions—from politics and business to education and the church. The anxieties, tensions, and world-view differences between those born before WWII and those born after can hardly be understated (with the transitional 1935-1945 cohort displaying characteristics of both sides of the WWII divide). And the words “order,” “authority,” “institution,” and “structure” have been at the heart of generational world-view tensions since the 1960s. In many Zacchaeus sites, as well as some of our conversions, generational issues became clear. Baby-boomers generally define “authority” subjectively and relationally; the pre-WWII generation defines authority objectively and institutionally. These differences have profound implications on understanding ministry—clerical and lay.

new in the history of God's people. Scripture itself points toward both order and dynamism in the community of God's people. Historically, orders emerged as specific responses to practical needs for mission and ministry in early Christianity. It became clear that God not only calls people into the *laos* but also calls some people within the *laos* to serve the body in particular ways: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). Through time, this calling by God to individuals for service to the *laos* became institutionalized into its historic form: the three orders of ordained ministers as bishops, presbyters or priests, and deacons. Thus, the practice of ordaining such individuals emerged to serve the body on behalf of God's mission.

How, then, do we understand the meaning of Holy Orders in the context of the ministry of all baptized persons, the relationship between order and the dynamism of God's people on mission? It has been suggested that the two are "a mutually corrective necessity."

We should all gladly acknowledge the one ministry that is embodied in Jesus Christ and which through baptism becomes the property of all believers as one priestly people. This is not in conflict with [the corollary] that one ministry is essentially and substantially embodied in three co-equal and co-temporal orders that are the outward and visible sign in the sacrament of order...This order is one way in which the Holy Spirit concretely shaped the *koinonia* of the covenant people for its mission.²²

This understanding can be further understood in the theological analogy "found in the union in the one person of Christ of the messianic offices of prophet, priest, and king, as Jesus redefined them, even as he redefined messiahship."²³ Thus, prophecy translates into diaconal service to the church and the world, especially the poor and outcast; priesthood is understood in the terms of Christ's self-offering sacrifice; and kingship is humble oversight for the sake of apostolic mission.

Further enriching the idea of "a mutually corrective necessity," the orders exist relationally within the *laos*. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer maintained, the ordained ministry

²² Robert David Hughes III, "Lutheran-Episcopal Relations and a Trinitarian Theology of Ministry," *Sewanee Theological Review* 43:2 (Easter 2000), 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, 171.

“comes neither before nor after, neither above nor beneath the congregation, but within and together with it. One is not the subject of the other—the subject of both is the Holy Spirit—nor is one the object of the other, for that would mean that the office of ministry was at the mercy of the communal spirit or, alternatively, that the congregation was deprived of its right to judge doctrine.”²⁴ In this relationship, imbued by the Spirit, any seeming contradiction between the ministry of the *laos* and that of ordained persons dissolves.

Therefore, in the spirit of Anglican tradition, we strongly affirm a theological both-and: first, God calls all baptized persons to be agents of the kingdom and missionaries of God’s reconciling love in Christ; and second, God also calls some people within the *laos* to serve Christ’s body, the mission community, in particular ways. Among these are the ordained, who share an indispensable call to faithful leadership in the *laos* on behalf of God’s mission. In ecumenical conversations and in the ordinals, the Episcopal Church has consistently maintained that the essential ideas that describe the relationship of ordained ministry to the ministry of the baptized are pastoral oversight and godly example.²⁵ “The goal of the ordained ministry is to serve th[e] priesthood of all the faithful. Like any human community, the church requires a focus of leadership and unity, which the Holy Spirit provides in the ordained ministry.”²⁶

When we speak of the relation of ordained ministry to baptismal ministry as a relationship of pastoral oversight, it is as defined above, “humble, self-emptying service to others.” In a contemporary society, “oversight” may be misleading because “over” may be wrongly interpreted by some as autocratic hierarchy and may bring to mind “overlord” or “overseer.” Yet, oversight as Christ-like service should characterize the relation of the entire ordained ministry to the ministry of all baptized persons. Every aspect of oversight is, and must be, rooted and grounded in the Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ, “as an educator, community builder, a listener, a learner, one who expected great things from his friends, a person who took the risk of truly delegating tasks.” Upon this basis, “we lay the foundation for an understanding of the

²⁴ From Bonhoeffer’s lectures while he was dean of the Finkewalde seminary in Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (revised ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000): 446.

²⁵ ARCIC I, *The Final Report*, “Ministry and Ordination,” paragraph 9; The Anglican-Lutheran *Niagara Report* (1987), 20; and The Anglican-Reformed, *God’s Reign and Our Unity* (1984), 80.

²⁶ ARCIC I, *The Final Report*, 33.

priest as part of a mutual ministry of all the baptized. . . . The task of the clergy is to nurture corporate ministry, not be the minister.”²⁷

Their further call is as an example: “to model sacramentally—and so to foster and facilitate—the life of the whole priestly community.”²⁸ The ordained are to be seen as “icons, living reminders, and animators” of the congregations with whom they worship and serve.²⁹ The purpose for the ordination of deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops is to provide pastors or shepherds to serve the community as models or “icons” of the fundamental priesthood to which all persons are called. “The ordained person is primarily a sign, a sacrament of the priesthood of all Christians, which is the priesthood of Christ.”³⁰ Through service and sacramental spirituality, pastoral oversight is inverted into a vision of the foot-washing Christ embodying for all disciples the life of service to which they are called.

Growing out of this identity, the pastoral role involves the ordained in a variety of practical responsibilities. Some of these they perform themselves, some are shared, many are delegated. They include, among other things, the final responsibility for coordinating the activities of the church’s fellowship, promoting what is necessary and useful for the church’s life and mission, discerning what is of the Spirit in the diversity of the community’s life, and guarding the church’s unity. The ordained have a designated responsibility for celebrating the sacraments, proclaiming the word, and overseeing pastoral care and outreach. Through these things, God’s people are empowered by Christ for the work of the kingdom.

Because of their call, ordained individuals enter a life-long process of formation in community. They must continue, through prayer, reflection and collegiality, to cultivate the gifts and responsibilities which are confirmed in ordination. At the same time, as they seek to grow in devotion, insight and stature, deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops, remain with all the *laos*, drawn up into a process of transformation into the likeness of Christ. The baptismal community is the setting in

²⁷ Ward B. Ewing, ordination sermon, May 29, 1999.

²⁸ Countryman, *Ibid*.

²⁹ Bishop Jim Kelsey (Northern Michigan) in a letter to the House of Bishops committee on the “Theology of Priesthood.”

³⁰ Countryman, 86.

which the calling of the ordained person takes place, the matrix of personal growth, and a model of spiritual formation for the congregation: community and pastor are one in Christ.

Thus, the Episcopal Church maintains the traditional three-fold order of ordained persons set within and serving God's kingdom through the ministry of the entire *laos*. Because they are part of the ministry of all baptized persons, the ordained participate fully in Christ's mission, characterized as priestly, prophetic, and serving.³¹ The ordained—deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops—uphold and reflect these Christ-like qualities to the whole community to enrich and empower the Body as it engages in God's mission. And, although not often noted in the church's theological tradition, the *laos* model exemplify Christ's one priesthood, the person of Jesus doing God's work bringing about the kingdom of love and reconciliation. In an equally indispensable biblical call, they sacramentally represent the totality of Christ's ministry to the ordained with whom they are joined in mutually supportive mission. Thus, the ordained must look to the *laos* as a sacramental reminder of God's kingdom and their call to faithfully serve Christ's body.

Deacons: Servants of the Church. Responding to the example of the ancient church, to needs in church and society, and to pressure for reform, the Episcopal Church has renewed the order of deacons. Since 1970, the diaconate has gone through several major changes or shifts in meaning and function. These changes began with combining the old "perpetual" male diaconate and the female order of deaconesses into a single order of deacons for men and women. The new diaconate incorporated both the pastoral and sacramental ministry of "perpetual" deacons with the social, caring ministry of deaconesses.

Modern deacons have begun to recover the ancient concept that a deacon is ordained to the *diakonia* (ministry or agency) of the bishop, and hence that deacons are servants of the church who lead in service. Deacons point to the presence of Christ in the needy. They are signs of connection, hands reaching hands. They enlist, organize, lead, and encourage all the baptized in ministries of mercy, justice, and peace. This role involves nurturing, coordinating, and facilitating the ministries of the *laos* and interpreting the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world to the church. Deacons should

³¹ Hughes, *Ibid.*

be proficient at networking and communications, drawing together diverse resources, both material and spiritual, on behalf of mission. Pastoral oversight involves deacons in listening, pastoral care, creative problem solving, visiting the sick and imprisoned, organizing advocacy groups, and teaching—a list as varied as the gifts they bring to ordination and the mission needs of a given parish or diocese.

In renewing the diaconate for practical reasons, the church has also recovered an emphasis on the symbolism or sacramental nature of the order. Recent scholarship has restored the early meaning of *diakonia* as service (or servanthood), agency, and ministry—terms that suggest being a go-between or agent in word, action, and personal attendance. In the evolving and changing history of the diaconate, it is hard to formulate a precise definition. The trend has been to abandon a diaconate that is individualistic and internally motivated and to replace it with a diaconate that is personal, collegial, and communal (as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* proposed in 1982), linking liturgical functions with pastoral and social responsibilities. At the same time, the church is placing more emphasis on the diaconate as a permanent office.

In a sacramental way, therefore, deacons represent Christ in his eternal role as *diakonos* or agent of God in creation and salvation, and they represent the church in its loving duty and baptismal call to strive for mercy, justice, and peace. Thus the liturgical role of deacons emphasizes proclaiming the good news to the poor, urging prayer for the needy, and overseeing practical help to feed the hungry. This suggests a similar role in the church's extended liturgy and life, where deacons serve all people in word, action, and personal attendance.

Since ancient times, deacons have had a close relationship with the bishop. This emphasis on collegiality is expressed in a variety of ways, including the formation of communities of deacons and the appointment of deacons as archdeacons to oversee the diaconate. The bishop normally assigns deacons to congregations, where they serve with the priest and all the baptized to carry out Christian mission in the world. In congregations, deacons have a communal responsibility for the church's ministry to the sick and needy, and they look for ways to bring about ministries to those in need, which is the responsibility of all baptized Christians, individually and corporately.

Presbyters or Priests: Mediators at the Threshold of the Holy. All priesthood—that of Christ, of all the baptized, and of the ordained—exists at the boundary of the “Holy” where divine and earthly realities touch. Priesthood mediates between God and the world; it opens the way for encounters between heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is, as scripture teaches, the great high priest through whom all the baptized have access to the divine, as they participate in his priesthood. Yet among this priestly community are ordained priests—those men and women called to hold up and model Christ’s priesthood, and from whose calling emerges a distinct role and service within the *laos*. Thus, priests are mediators, not as conduits or intermediaries, but as those persons who remind the whole community of the one priesthood of Jesus Christ and the presence of God in their midst.

Presbyters or priests represent Christ and his church by participating in Christ’s ministry sacramentally, prophetically, and pastorally. Historically, priests also represent the bishop in a local congregation. Today, priests share with bishops, deacons, and the *laos* the responsibility of overseeing the Church. In proclaiming the gospel by word and example, priests may be called to assume prophetic stances toward injustice in the church and the world. They bear the ultimate responsibility for the administration of the sacraments and for blessing and declaring pardon in the name of God. These and other duties emerge from the character and nature of priesthood and the community which the priest serves.

Presbyters or priests serve the church by presiding in the Christian assembly; they are the collectors of the faithful and help focus its worship. As presbyters, they lead the baptismal and eucharistic life in congregations, join with other presbyters in a college, and share the bishop’s oversight of the diocese. As priests, they have a symbolic role, expressing the priesthood of Christ for all the baptized. Priests must be strong, loving, and wise leaders in the assembly, teachers where appropriate, the collectors of the congregation’s intercessions and thanksgivings, proclaimers of pardon to repentant, reconcilers and peace-makers among God’s people, and pronouncers of God’s blessing. In all of this, priests are called to be committed men and women of deep and sincere prayer as they pursue Christian holiness and maturity.

Symbolically, priests are threshold persons, who—both personally and as a communal representative—effect the thinning of the boundaries of heaven and earth so that our prayers can rise like incense to God and God’s grace can flow back in pardon

and reconciliation and the nourishment of the eucharist. They stand with the community, reminding God's people that, in fact, the whole *laos* lives on this boundary between God's realm and the world. On this threshold, the people of God minister and serve.

A priest's pastoral oversight is grounded in having first and final responsibility for making the community aware of the sacramental presence of the Word of God in their midst. This shapes every priest and every facet of priesthood. Priests exercise pastoral oversight in congregations where many of the baptized—only some of whom are ordained—exercise leadership and all are called to ministry. It is the priest's duty to animate and “keep in unity the charisms of the *laos* of God.”³² The effectual pastoral oversight of the priest brings together a personal facility for leadership and specific gifts that are exercised, in coordination with the gifts of the whole *laos*, in building up the church for mission, through liturgy, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, service, and other aspects of ministry.

Two qualities have been proposed as foundational examples for all effective leadership. They are perseverance and the acceptance of realistic limitations: holding on and letting go.³³ These two qualities are held in dynamic tension in the lives of successful leaders. Some words used to describe qualities of perseverance are: steadfastness to call; persistence; capacity to grow; stamina; a commitment to an ongoing covenant relationship in a specific time and place; discipline; ability to live with ambiguity; faithfulness. Some words used to describe acceptance of realistic limitation are: an awareness of sin; ability to forgive and be forgiven; ability to live within the sense of the comic and the tragic; eschatological awareness; a theology of the cross; patience; adaptability; a manifestation of joy, humor, personal wellness and a healthy household and family. While these are qualities of leadership for all ministry, they are indispensable for effective pastoral oversight and example of priestly ministry. Both should be basically present in persons chosen for ordained ministry, and both require intensive theological and spiritual formation.

³²*The Sacrament of Order* (1988), 42.

³³ Edwin M. Leidel, Jr., “Claiming a Distinctive Character for the Ordained,” (COM, Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota, 1989), vi-11.

When these qualities are brought to the practical responsibilities of priesthood, whether performed, shared, or delegated—preaching, celebrating the sacraments, teaching, pastoral care—a priest is able to act independently of his or her community while remaining committed to the goal of the gathered community: the on-going process of transformation of all the baptized (including the ordained) into the likeness of Christ. Out of this independence grows true interdependence and mutual ministry. Effective pastoral oversight takes risks and acts decisively on behalf of the church’s life and mission—even knowing that particular actions may result in conflict. The courage for risk-taking is a spiritual matter, as all the baptized know. For the priest, it is a corollary to the representative nature of ordination to the priesthood, manifested most fully in the presidency of the eucharist. To represent God’s kingdom and God’s people simultaneously, through the power of the Spirit invoked by the *laos*, is to stand on the boundary and speak and act under Christ’s authority. It is to be an icon, a living reminder of the positive traditions of the Church and Christ’s own boundary behavior. It was this behavior that characterized Jesus’ road to the cross and his high-priestly sacrifice of himself once offered.

Like deacons, priests or presbyters are joined collegially not only with the *laos*, but also with the bishop and other priests and presbyters, who share in pastoral oversight of the diocese. This shared oversight provides an essential living link between the local church and the broader church and world, connecting and challenging congregations to know and think beyond themselves. The collegial life of priests is expressed in clergy conferences and other gatherings for prayer, discussion, and mutual support. Formation and continuing education are essential components in the lives of priests, promoting growing effectiveness as examples and in pastoral oversight.

Bishops: Gatherers of Community, the Church Catholic. In one of its more ironic findings, the Zacchaeus Project discovered that most Episcopalians failed to grasp the theological concept of *episkope* and often displayed confusion about the nature of the office. Despite this problem, both the Zacchaeus research and the Standing Commission have observed that a new theological interpretation of *episkope* is emerging: bishops are pastors who gather and empower faith community in a diocesan locale.

Traditionally, bishops represent Christ by serving as guardians of the faith, unity, and discipline of the church catholic. A bishop’s vocation to pastoral oversight is exercised chiefly as apostle and pastor of a diocese, with special responsibility to pastor

the ordained. Oversight includes a responsibility to guard the church, in collegiality with other bishops, as well as in ordaining others to continue strengthening the *laos*. The bishop is a regional administrator of the church, its chief apostle and sacramental overseer, the guardian of certain sacerdotal responsibilities, and the overseer of deacons. Bishops serve the church as facilitators of the diocese in its priestly, prophetic, and pastoral mission to the world. As a visible symbol of this role, bishops preside in the eucharist and ordinations, teach the apostolic faith, and are the confirmers and chief baptizers of the diocese. They also join with other bishops in a collegial body representing the catholicity of the church.

This historic understanding, one rich in biblical tradition and catholic continuity, must be firmly placed within the context of God's mission and Christ's body. Today, bishops serve the community of all faithful people and practice their vocation for, with, and among the *laos*. They are not above the body, placed in personal superiority at its head. Rather, they live in relationship with those whom they serve, responsive to and responsible for the needs of their diocese. Although they sometimes function as such, bishops primarily are not chief executive officers, institutional bureaucrats, or judges in ecclesiastical court. They are brothers and sisters in faith—one in baptism and common mission with all the baptized. As Jewish theologian Martin Buber suggestively phrased it, this is an "I-Thou" relationship—one that involves whole persons. Because of this "I-Thou," bishops' lives are linked in prayer, service, holiness, spirituality, and familial love with those whom they serve. Thus, bishops are given the ministry of pastoral oversight for the diocese, "a ministry of presiding for gathering in unity."³⁴ Bishops guard the faith, unify the church, and maintain its discipline humbly and relationally, as one within a family for the sake of the family.

Not only do bishops gather and empower the diocesan community, but they also gather and empower the ecumenical, universal, and mystical community of Christ's body. Linked both to the historic episcopate and to their diocese, bishops join together collegially (world-wide, through the communion of saints, and across denominational boundaries) to care for the universal church and build it up for mission. Bishops remind local congregations that they do not exist in isolation. As Methodist ethicist Stanley Hauerwas has said, "Bishops exist to insure that Christians travelling across time or space worship the same God. That is what 'catholicity,' for which bishops are

³⁴*The Sacrament of Order* (1988), 25.

responsible, really means.”³⁵ Thus, while cherishing, respecting, and serving local communities, bishops also challenge congregations to “see the big picture” of their calling in Christ—a calling to reconcile the world in God’s grace stretching from Genesis to Revelation; through the history of the church; from all nations and to all nations.

In proclaiming the word of God and acting in Christ’s name for the reconciliation of the world, a bishop may assume a prophetic and exemplary stance in church and world. The priestly responsibility of a bishop is expressed in the role of chief priest in the diocesan community, usually functioning as presider and preacher in all eucharists at which he or she is present.

Deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops, working in harmonious concert as part of, with, and for all the people of God, share the common responsibility as models or icons for the ministry of the body as a gathered and a sent community. By calling and empowering servants for the church, God makes provision for the carrying out of its mission: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” At the ordination services, we—the whole *laos*—pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God—echoing the prayer of thanksgiving after baptism and confirmation, in which we thank God for the gift of the ordained person who will be “to us an effective example in word and action, love and patience, and in holiness of life.” All the *laos* are called to such qualities, but those ordained are given the ordered obligation and grace to be “effective examples” in the midst of the people.

Conclusion: The Challenge Before Us

As we move into a new millennium, with its many unforeseen challenges to the mission of the church, we need to consider carefully how we shall order ourselves to meet these challenges in a manner that lives up to the high calling of the gospel. Like the early church, we are seeking practical solutions in ordering our congregations for mission. Approaches such as direct ordination, total ministry, mutual ministry, and lay presidency point to a variety of solutions that call for church-wide conversation and sharing of experiences to discern what builds up the faithful people of God and the kingdom.

Although we have sometimes resisted or been slow to embrace them, Anglican tradition has never been closed to innovations. In the sixteenth century, Richard Hooker emphasized the importance of the continuity of apostolic Christianity and the inheritance of Catholic polity, but he also argued that God allowed Christians freedom to arrange expressions of polity in ways that best proclaimed the Gospel and built up the church. Yet canonical revision can be a responsible process only in light of sound criteria, based in a clearly articulated and comprehensive theology of ministry. The Standing Commission on Ministry Development offers to the Episcopal Church this document, “Toward a Theology of Ministry,” as another step toward widely affirmed theological criteria to guide the revision of Title III.

³⁵ Conversation with Guy Lytle at the School of Theology, University of the South, April 2000.