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WHAT IS BAPTISMAL MINISTRY?

These two words describe the call to every Christian to link what we believe about God, and God's purposes for human beings declared by the life death and resurrection of the Son Jesus Christ to the living of our everyday life.

Speaking at the Laity Lodge Leadership Forum in Bermuda, Elmer W. Johnson, a business man says, "At the heart of our faith is the assertion that Christ intervened in history that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Each of us as Christ's disciples is charged with the responsibility in our sphere of influence to further that high purpose. As leaders and committed Christians we are obliged to draw on the spiritual power and wisdom that God grants us in order to create and maintain a work environment that facilitates rather than hampers the pursuit of the kind of personal, family and communal values that we hold in common". *1

In taking up responsibility to further Christ's purpose Maxine Dennes, a cashier in a supermarket states, "Observation and perception are the two tools that I use most often to do God's work while doing mine. When I detect by the hassled expression on a customer's face that her day has been less than great or realize she must be in a hurry the way she keeps looking at her watch, I try to help her by working as fast and efficiently as I can. Because I sense she is tired I'm careful to bag her groceries lightly, keeping related items together so it will be easier to for her to put things away".

"Compassion is the most vital tool of my trade. There are many sad stories to be heard while ringing up grocery orders. During such times I try to listen with my heart not only my ears. Often a simple word of understanding or a mere look of genuine concern is just the right medicine to heal a bruised heart. When I succeed in easing some of the pain of another human being it is then I realize just how important my job as a simple cashier is." *2

The editor of a news paper, in giving a sermon is quoted as saying, "Each day we must examine the religion of our work place and nudge it a little closer toward the Gospel, at least in the way we work, if not in the way our colleagues do."

When we define work as "the place we spend most of our time" then it is easy to see how Baptismal ministry involves our home, the volunteer organization, the community group, yes even the church. Baptismal Ministry then is Christian people, the fellowship of the baptized, attempting to be in St. Paul's terms, "Ambassadors for Christ" representing his love, his mission to the world.

WHY BAPTISMAL MINISTRY?

Because committing ourselves to Jesus means taking up his ministry of proclamation and service in our time and place. "As the Father sent me, so send I you." "Go baptize all nations." Each of the gospels after the resurrection contains stories which speak of both a commissioning to service and a promise of the Risen One's presence to carry it out. "Receive Holy Spirit." "Lo I am with you always." This pledge is central in enabling us to live out the response we make as we are baptized.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? / I will, with God's help.

Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? / I will, with God's help.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? / I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself? / I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? / I will, with God's help.

This theme is central to the responses we make in our Baptismal services. Baptismal ministry is the outward and visible sign of our belief that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. The practice of Baptismal ministry is fundamental to being Christian.

WHY THIS EMPHASIS ON BAPTISMAL MINISTRY TODAY?

Because the world in which we live today has changed from the world of "Christendom" when the church was at the centre of community life informing every area of the culture's life. The nation in which we live has changed from a society where most people knew the faith's basics, were favourably disposed toward the faith and assumed its truth.

Because of secularization, whole areas of life such as education and government, economics, art, architecture, literature, music, personal morality, and community life have been withdrawn from the control or even the influence of the church. Over a period of time the numbers of people exposed to Christian faith have grown smaller. Loren Mead of the Alban Institute suggests it is as if the church has somehow slipped off their radar screens. Research appears to indicate that the most important factor in the drop-out track is not something the churches are doing or not doing; it is the character of the culture which surrounds the congregations. As a result, many Canadians no longer understand nor can recall the faith of their predecessors.

In many ways our age resembles the time of the early Church. Like the early Christians, we live in a time where the majority of the population has no knowledge of or a truncated knowledge of the Good News. The population is hostile or indifferent to what Christians have to say, yet is searching and longing for a word of hope and meaning.

We, like them, live in a nation with a veneer of Civil religion. Early Christians had to invite people to adopt the Christian faith and to join the community of Jesus followers as we are being called to do in this decade of evangelism. That invitation could only be made then, as now, through the contacts and associations of every day life.

The time has now come for the Diocese of Kootenay to become intentional about proclaiming the Good News and serving the world for which Our Lord died. We can begin to do just that by:

Starting with the fact that all God's people ordained and non ordained are called in partnership to live out their Christian life through service and mission to the world.

Broadening our definition of ministry and lifting the ministry of the non ordained from a few hours of volunteer service to the Church each week to a conscious full time ministry at work, at home, and in the community.

Freeing the non ordained to engage in their own ministry rather than simply to be around to support the ordained in theirs.

Changing the atmosphere in congregations so that people are truly welcomed, creativity is celebrated, and ministries and gifts for ministry are identified, encouraged and used in the variety of communities each person touches.

Offering the following as a Baptismal Ministry Policy for the Diocese of Kootenay.

BAPTISMAL MINISTRY POLICY FOR THE DIOCESE OF KOOTENAY

1: By their teaching about baptismal ministry, by their seeking and providing programmes to develop it, clergy and leaders in every congregation will begin to be intentional about giving support and encouragement to the baptised in their scattered ministries and witness at work, at home, in the community, as well as in their gathered identity and fellowship as believers in the church.

2: Clergy and leaders in every congregation will seek to become more effective and visible in their efforts to demonstrate knowledge of and attention to the daily contexts of workplace, school, home and community.

3: The fostering of individual witness and mission shall be given equal, if not greater effort than our more common attention to the corporate witness of our congregations and structures by all those in the Diocese with leadership responsibility.

4: Every congregation will begin vigorously to foster programming that will cultivate, enhance,

and give direction to the visioning and fulfilment of each person's God given vocation.

5: That congregations will begin to provide the setting for conversations and groups that will support, guide and hold persons accountable as they discover and pursue their vocation in and to the world.

6: All members of the diocese will place new emphasis on changing the language patterns that suggest a "Minister" is an ordained priestly or Diaconal seminary trained professional and that the words "the Body of Christ" are synonymous with the gathered church.

7: That the efforts made to move toward Baptismal Ministry be measured not by the vitality of congregational programmes but by the number of individuals exhibiting courage, compassion and competence in addressing the hurts and hopes of people and systems within their spheres of influence.

8: That the Diocesan leadership provide help for congregations and regions as they initiate, test, and adapt local programmes that provide starting points, enablement and support of intentional witness and service by the laity.

9: That the lay and clergy leadership of the diocese develop long term strategies for balancing the need of congregations to draw upon the time and resources for lay leadership in sustaining church program while at the same time working to release leadership and resources for the ministry of the laity in their communities and the world realistically assessing the limits of time and energy that are available to persons seeking to fulfil multiple family work and community roles.