

Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy *Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota*

What Are We Here For? **A Theological Position Paper on Mission**

A Working Document as of February 2007

Offered by the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy Position Paper Action Team

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Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy

February 2007

To: Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota

Re: Introducing Current "Working Document" of a Theological Position Paper on Mission

It is my pleasure, as the Internal Resource Person for the current work being done by the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS), to introduce to the diocese this current "working document" of a "Theological Position Paper on Mission." In recent months, the over 50+ members of the BCMS have been hard at work in visiting congregations to discern how the Spirit of God is at work in our midst. They have also been engaged in carefully considering how to rethink, reframe and reclaim the identity of the diocese.

Part of this work has involved the development of this paper. The mandate that the BCMS received indicated that the diocese is in need of developing "a shared understanding of its scriptural and theological foundations, as well as a shared understanding of purpose among the congregations in relation to the diocese." Several things are important to note about this current "working document" version of this paper:

1. **"A" Position Paper** - This working document is intended to invite all of us into an on-going conversation. In this sense, it is a conversation starter. It is not intended to be the final word, nor the only word in relation to thinking about the theological identity of the diocese, but rather to contribute to helping to generate an important conversation which the BCMS believes it is crucial for us to have.
2. **Process Employed** - The protocols that the BCMS is working under called for this working document to be generated in three stages: (a) a smaller Drafting Team to do an initial framing of key themes and issues; (b) a larger, representative Presenting Group to interact with, edit, and refine the emerging draft; and (c) the testing of the emerging draft with numerous focus groups of diocesan constituents - at least seven such groups were convened in the fall of 2006 which led to many edits.
3. **Purpose** - The primary purpose of this paper is to help invite, generate, and cultivate a conversation about the theological identity of the diocese in relation to its mission. It is the belief of the BCMS that this conversation needs to be open, dynamic, system-wide, and contributive to our shared work. This conversation, we believe, will deeply inform the eventual proposals of the BCMS, and will also lead to this "working document" being further revised and enhanced.

May the Spirit of God be present in our midst as we engage this important conversation, and may each of you find your voice in contributing to it.

Respectfully,

James Huber

Internal Resource Person, BCMS

Preface

How this Paper Came into Existence

1. Bishop Jelinek convened a planning process in 2005-06 for developing a mission strategy for the metro area congregations of the Diocese of Minnesota. It became clear from that study that a diocesan-wide planning process was required in order to address the systemic issues that were being identified. This led to the formation of the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) which is now working in 2006-07. The process being used by the BCMS is designed to involve as many congregations and members of the diocese as possible in a variety of activities for the purpose of helping to clarify the identity of the diocese and its mission in the future.
2. One of the key activities of this approach is the development of this position paper. Its primary purpose is to assist the diocese to *rethink, reframe* and *reclaim* the identity of the diocese around a shared understanding of scriptural and theological foundations, and to provide for a shared understanding of purpose among the congregations and the diocese. Particular attention is being paid in this paper to understanding the place and role of congregations within the diocese.
3. An initial draft of this position paper was developed by a designated writing team, which then tested and refined that draft with a larger Action Team Presenting Group (as listed on the cover page). This revised draft was presented in many different forums where input and feedback were invited. Further changes have been made in light of this feedback.

How this Paper Is Intended to Be Used

4. This paper is envisioned to have multiple uses within the larger BCMS process. First, the BCMS process involves a series of grass-roots conversations with congregational leaders. This paper will be discussed in the third round of those conversations as a way of providing leaders with a scriptural and theological framework for understanding God's movement in our midst. Second, the paper will help inform the ongoing discernment of the BCMS as it develops a vision and strategies for the mission of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. Third, the paper will be available with a study guide for congregations to use in adult forums and other educational settings. It will also be available via the Web to anyone who seeks to read it.
5. As we have brought drafts of this paper into discussion with numerous groups of lay and ordained leaders around the diocese, we have been struck by how difficult it seems to be for leaders in the diocese to talk directly about God with one another (in other words, to do theology). As theology involves faith seeking

understanding, we offer this paper as a starting point for conversations about God's purpose for us. We do not intend this paper to be the final word, but rather a means of enriching our mutual imagination about our church's participation in God's mission in this new, unsettling and dynamic era.

I. Introduction

6. *If the Episcopal Church in Minnesota were to disappear, what would be lost? What would be the impact on our communities, on those who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ? Would it hinder God's mission in our time and place? Who would miss us? What might God be calling us to do?*
7. The Diocese of Minnesota faces many challenges. We live amidst a highly pluralistic society of many religions and cultures, in which basic acquaintance with the story of Jesus can no longer be assumed. Demographic shifts over the past decades have transformed the population of Minnesota, reducing it in some places while expanding it exponentially elsewhere. Immigration is enriching Minnesota with new faces, languages and customs. Economic disparities are alive and well in our state and world.
8. We have inherited many church structures, norms and behaviors from different eras, while the pace of cultural change seems to accelerate by the year. Membership in our Episcopal congregations is diminishing while the ministry needs of a polarized, violent and broken world are as great as ever.
9. At this time, we in the Diocese of Minnesota are engaged in a project of renewal. Through the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS), a number of pathways to renewal are being explored. Through fact finding and study we are in touch with our history – both our accomplishments and disappointments. Through a process of engaging one another in conversation about God's activity in our congregational life, we hope to see more clearly what God would have us do and be. By entering into theological conversation and reflecting on Holy Scripture, we seek clarity about our "position" and identity, both of which are foundational to understanding our mission.
10. The position paper is a "gift offering" from the BCMS to encourage theological conversation in our diocese. As noted in the paper below, "being Anglican ... means being a theologian – the answers aren't all give in advance" (§37). All the baptized "do" theology as we seek to discern what God would have us do in this time and place. In other words, the goal of theology is to work out what God wants God's people to be and do in their situation. Because God in Christ continues to be present in the church and to be active in our history, we are constantly challenged to align our ways with God's ways. Doing theology is meant to assist with this alignment.

II. Mission Impossible!? Where Do We Begin?

11. "Mission" is an ambiguous word in the minds of many Episcopalians in our Diocese today. In recent years, churches have followed businesses in fashioning "mission statements" designed to focus their energy and effort. For some, the word "mission" conjures the problematic colonial legacy of Western imperialism, both overseas and in our own history, particularly among Native populations. For others, "mission" means obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28), making disciples out of all nations. Others understand mission as the church's activities on behalf of a more just society. Many are simply confused about what mission means in a world where our neighbors adhere to a great variety of religions or no religion at all. They hunger for a definition of "mission" that they can embrace.

Mission Begins with the Trinity

12. For Christians, the heart of mission is the heart of the Triune God, who is an open, interdependent community of three persons, traditionally called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian understanding of God is highly relational: God's identity consists in the loving *communion* (Greek *koinonia*, or fellowship) of three distinct yet inseparably united divine persons: the ineffable Mystery, the expressive Word, and the active Spirit eternally indwell each other in a dynamic exchange of self-giving and sharing love.
13. The threefold relationship of the divine life creates the condition of the possibility of relationship for all creatures, as the inner-Trinitarian life is reflected in the pattern of creation and salvation. The Creator calls the universe into being through the Word and the Spirit (Genesis 1) and continually draws the universe into communion in the Trinitarian life (Colossians 1). Humans are created in the image of God to reflect God's interdependent, creative life of freedom and love and to live in right relationship with all creation (Genesis 1-2). Humanity's deep tendency, however, is to fracture this web of interconnectedness through our willingness to doubt God, seek our own purposes and agendas and reject dependence upon our Creator (Genesis 3). Sin is a personal, social, institutional and spiritual reality from whose power we cannot free ourselves (Romans 7, Ephesians 3).
14. The biblical narrative tells us of God's constant and patient efforts to redeem and restore humanity, beginning with a family (Abraham and Sarah), which grows into a people and nation (Israel). Oppressed by the imperial power of Egypt, God liberates them from slavery and through a long journey in the wilderness forms them into a covenant people. When established as a nation, God sends prophets to recall them to faithfulness in times of prosperity, tribulation and exile. Throughout, Israel's purpose is to show forth to all nations God's vision for *shalom*, or just and peaceful human flourishing.

Trustworthy community begins with a trustworthy God

Within the Diocese of Minnesota, leaders have identified a pervasive culture of mistrust, skepticism and anxiety that impedes our common life and mission. Learning to trust one another begins with our trust in God, who as a loving community of three divine persons, creates, calls, forgives and leads us into a new future. *God's* promises and active presence in our midst are the foundation of the church's common life – not our own strength, skill or best intentions.

15. God makes a defining intervention into Israel's story in the person of Jesus, born to a poor family in an occupied land. In his ministry, Jesus embodies the divine Word as the herald and prime instance of God's reign (or kingdom or rule) over the whole of human life (Mark 1). He heals the sick, challenges the powers that corrupt and oppress, liberates the captives and helps the blind to see (Luke 4). Yet people reject, spurn and ultimately kill him. On the cross Jesus breaks the cycle of

retribution and violence and reaches out in compassion even to the torturers who put him there (Luke 23). Jesus empties himself of power and makes the ultimate sacrifice so that all people might be forgiven and reconciled to God (Philippians 2). God raises Jesus from the dead as the promise that we might be raised with him to new life too.

16. Jesus left a *community* as his legacy – a community at first tentative and afraid, but then empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness boldly to God's reconciling love. This community of the Holy Spirit, which came to be known as the church (Greek *ekklesia*, or assembly), is called to proclaim the good news of God's liberation and justice. Participating in God's mission, the church strives to be an adequate sign of God's reign so all may live in light of the vision of reconciled humanity and restored creation yet to come.
17. We assert that *God is a missionary God*. God the Holy Trinity creates the world for loving, interdependent relationship, or communion, and then seeks to invite all creation back into the communion of the divine life when it has been estranged. The Trinity lives in everlasting communion; Jesus is the human one who lives most fully into that communion; the Spirit-filled community of Jesus lives in the world to draw the world into that communion. "Mission" comes from a Latin term for *sending*. Within the movement of salvation, God the Father sends Jesus the Son; the Father through the Son sends the Holy Spirit; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together send the church into the world. Mission is the journey to the New Creation (Revelation 21).

18. God's mission is one of repentance and reconciliation. It restores right relationships, unifying without erasing difference, promising new and eternal life to all who are willing to accept Jesus' vision and live as his disciples. God's mission gathers all creation into an ultimate fulfillment of justice and love. It is non-coercive; it proceeds through radical identification with people where they are in life, seeking not to colonize and control but rather to transform and set free.

Waiting behind the red doors?

Placing *God's mission* at the heart of the church's understanding of mission challenges us to shift our focus from welcoming the world *to us* to seeking to partner with God *out in the world*. Offering hospitality to those who seek us out is profoundly important. Yet the primary field for mission is the *world*, not the church.

III. What Does the Church Have to Do with Mission?

19. The church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), the continuing presence of Jesus' ministry in the world. The church therefore is created to carry out his ministry of reconciliation, proclaim his forgiveness, offer his healing and promote God's justice for all people. The church's mission is not fundamentally its own, but rather *a participation in God's mission*. Mission is not merely an activity, program or function of the church, but rather its essential nature.
20. The church is created and called to reflect the communion of the Trinity. Diverse persons, groups, cultures and structures share an interdependent, common life that is open, inviting and outward-reaching. The church's unity lies not in homogeneity, or sameness, but rather in the integration of the fullest possible range of human diversity in a community marked by love, justice and right relationships (Acts 2). This community is in its way of life to be a sign, foretaste and witness to God's reign—modeling the new creation begun in Christ (2 Corinthians 5, Revelation 7).
21. The church is a community of the cross. For Christians, the cross signifies both Jesus' death and his resurrection. Thus, the church is to be characterized by self-emptying service, foot-washing (John 13) and the laying aside of personal agendas for the greater good (Romans 15). It bears the brokenness of the cross—imperfect and incomplete, yet growing together into full maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4). As an Easter People, the church is also characterized by joy in celebration and service.
22. Fundamental to the church's life is the gospel story of Jesus' baptism. In his baptismal moment at the Jordan River, the Spirit descends and the Father's voice proclaims the Son. In our baptism, God's Trinitarian life comes alive in the

church. In baptism we become members of Christ's body, receive the forgiveness of sin and are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we affirm "The Baptismal Covenant" (BCP, pp. 304-5), we take on the life of discipleship, pledging to be persons of learning and prayer, repentance and proclamation, justice and peace. Also fundamental to the church's life is our gathering to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Together we rehearse the biblical story and pray for the concerns of God's world. At table, we remember Jesus' last meal with his friends, are fed by his body and blood and experience a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. In the Eucharist we share in a ritual enactment of our ultimate destiny: the union and communion of all sorts and conditions of people from every generation all rejoicing in the presence of the living God (Luke 14).

23. In reciting the Nicene Creed, we affirm that the church is *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic*. As we proclaim that "there is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." (Ephesians 4) we experience the unity of the church. Through the sacraments and the exercise of our ministry and mission we become one in Christ. The church is *holy* because God is holy (Leviticus 11). In baptism we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and "set apart" to be God-like, that is, to have a real involvement in the divine life. The church is *catholic*, or universal, in its inclusion of all cultures, tribes and nations. It is *apostolic*, or sent into the world in ministry in continuity with the earliest followers of Jesus.

IV. What Is the Episcopal Church's Unique Role in Mission?

24. What special gifts has God given to Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church, which they in turn may contribute to the body of Christ? Anglicanism today is very diverse in its global expressions, a dynamic tradition that has evolved throughout its history, including here in Minnesota. The following dimensions may be highlighted as specific Anglican gifts for the work of God's mission in our time and place:

The Centrality of Communion

25. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Anglican tradition as it is lived out in Minnesota is the central place given to *communion*. The three Persons of the Trinity live in perfect communion; they create a universe as a beloved other and seek to draw it into sharing their communion; the church is an agent of God's mission of communion; therefore the church is characterized first and foremost by its living in communion. The church expresses this symbolically in the liturgy of communion, the Holy Eucharist, as its principal act of worship. The eucharistic liturgy creates a sacred space in which people of differing backgrounds, experiences, cultures and identities can join their varied gifts and needs in sharing the new creation in Christ: "when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be

done for building up” (1 Corinthians 14). The Holy Communion provides a liturgical experience of *reconciled diversity*, in which genuine differences between persons are neither ignored nor dissolved, but are gathered up into a larger commonality. Christ is the center of this common life: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5). The faithful people are then sent forth from the liturgical gathering as ambassadors of Christ to bear the promises of the gospel and model and work for reconciled diversity in the brokenness and need of the world.

26. The experience of reconciled diversity gives rise to a vision of the communion of all, from which no person, indeed no creature in all creation, is meant to be excluded. It is from the communion-inspired vision that Episcopalians in Minnesota derive their commitments to advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed, and to the inclusion of all sorts and conditions of persons in open congregations. American religion has tended to be individualistic and fragmented among endless splinter groups and factions. While the Episcopal Church is not without its own sad history of factionalism and fragmentation (indeed, to this day), we hold as an ideal the principle of sharing in a common life together, even when we disagree. In a society in which narrow personal preferences and “going our own way” are ascendant, we can be a sign of living for a greater whole, doing the painstaking work of sharing life together and “seeking the mind of Christ” amidst our differences.

Inclusion and Communion

Minnesota is a state with a deep heritage of democratic and egalitarian ideals. Perhaps it is no surprise that we in the Episcopal Church often talk about *inclusion* as one of our primary commitments. Yet mere inclusion is not the same as *reconciliation* and *communion* – words from our scriptural and theological tradition that describe more accurately what sets the church apart from other societies, clubs or organizations. At the church’s center is God’s active work of reconciling the world in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into the communion of the divine life.

27. Communion of reconciled diversity is both gift and task in the church. Rooted in Christ, communion is something that comes to the church from beyond itself and can only be received joyfully as a gift. Yet it must also be lived out in the practicalities of church life, and such practical living involves continual work in concrete tasks of reconciliation, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The simple inclusion of diverse persons is not in itself communion; inclusivity *becomes* communion when diversities are reconciled in Christ into one body that works together for the common good. Many Episcopalians in Minnesota

are committed to the ideal of inclusivity; yet our life together is infected with racism, classism, sexism and other patterns of exclusion. We often succumb to the divisiveness of special pleading for special interests. While we speak the rhetoric of inclusion, we do not always rise to the hard work of reconciliation; our living into genuine communion is thereby compromised and impaired. The Episcopal Church in Minnesota is a “wounded healer,” which must seek continual repentance and bind up its own brokenness even as it acts to bind up the brokenness of the world. We have the treasure of the gospel in the “clay jars” (2 Corinthians 4) of our weakness. It is only in recognizing our own need for continual reconciliation in Christ that we will be able to join God’s mission to bring reconciling communion to the world.

Comprehensiveness

28. God the Trinity is a diversity of divine Persons in unity of Being. The church is called to reflect and represent the Trinitarian life in its own diversity-in-unity. A signal form of diversity-in-unity for Anglicanism has been the principle of *comprehensiveness*. At its best, Anglicanism has striven to be a microcosm of the richness of the universal Christian church. Anglicanism embraces three primary historic strands of theology and piety: evangelical (“low church”), catholic (“high church”) and liberal (“broad church”). In history, different Anglicans have tended to stress one of these strands, while others have sought to integrate them in their own piety and practice. Today, there are Anglicans who emphasize the Reformed/Protestant stream of Christianity, including a large number deeply influenced by the Evangelical revivals that occurred from the 18th through the 20th centuries. Others resonate more deeply with the return to catholic worship and piety that emerged in the 19th century in the Oxford Movement. Still others find themselves most at home in the open engagement with modern culture represented by the Latitudinarian movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. These are all legitimate historic expressions of Anglicanism.

29. Unlike many Christian denominations, which identify with only one of these strands, Anglicanism has sought to unite them into one church—drawing from Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox sources and traditions. The *promise* of this approach is the potential for an unparalleled richness of Christian life and witness to the world. The *problem* of this approach is a tendency to succumb to infighting, which leaves the mission possibilities of Anglican comprehensiveness not yet fully realized.

Distributed Authority

30. If the Trinity lives in non-hierarchical, mutual relationship, and if the church is called to reflect the Trinity in its own life, then the church should strive for non-hierarchical, mutual relationships in its structures and polities. In Anglicanism this has classically been expressed in a drive toward *distributed authority*.

31. The American Episcopal Church especially has pioneered a polity in which lay people, bishops, priests and deacons share collaboratively in leading the church. Our governance reflects the ideals of federalism and representative democracy. While some traditions tend toward the extremes of strict hierarchy or disconnected congregationalism, we value local autonomy *and* interdependent bonds of unity.
32. Similarly, we recognize distributed authority in our theological resources. In the 16th century, the theologian Richard Hooker famously described Anglicanism's three sources of authority on matters of Christian life and belief as a "three-legged stool" comprising *scripture*, *tradition* and *reason*. In Hooker's formulation, we read the Word of God in scripture, by means of our reason, informed by tradition. In the 16th century the word "reason" meant more than it means now; while we today use the word to indicate analytical intellect, historically the word meant something more like "the capacity to reflect reality." For Anglicans, theology happens when the Word is reflected in the individual soul within the community of interpretation.
33. Theological authority, then, comes from reading the Bible through the lens of tradition with the full engagement of our critical and intellectual faculties; from reflecting upon tradition in light of the Bible and contemporary knowledge; and from interpreting innovations in human thought through eyes shaped by Scripture and the tradition. In a world in which many Christians tend to emphasize Scripture alone, tradition or reason, Anglicans seek to hold all three in tension. At its best, this can lead to great depth and relevance in our engagement with the world and its questions.
34. In another example of distributed theological authority, Anglicanism seeks to balance two core doctrines that in other traditions are sometimes prioritized at each other's expense, namely, the doctrines of *Incarnation* and *Redemption*. We affirm the sacramental character of the universe, created and blessed by God as good (Genesis 2). The creation reflects the wisdom of God's Word (Colossians 2), was embraced profoundly when God became fully human in Jesus in the Incarnation, and is laboring toward its completion in eschatological fulfillment (Romans 8).
35. At the same time, we cherish the great Protestant insight about God's definitive act of redemption on the cross. This atonement ("at-one-ment") frees us from condemnation to slavery to sin, guilt and death (Romans 8). Through it, we receive grace and adoption as God's children (Galatians 4). The cross renders null our attempts to earn our own salvation, which is a great temptation in our

culture today. Both of these doctrines are theologically authoritative for Anglican belief and practice.

Rich Liturgical and Artistic Expressions of the Christian Story

36. God's mission in the world is for communion and abundance of life; one sign of abundance is the coming-together of diverse feelings in the experience of *beauty*. Anglicans therefore value aesthetics – worshiping God “in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29). There are many Anglican expressions of worship, from charismatic revivals to solemn high masses, but we tend to share an attentiveness to form and beauty without which many people would not understand or participate in God's mystery and truth as deeply.

Intellectual Curiosity, Freedom and Engagement

37. Believing in a whole and integrated life, we also believe that God calls us to pray with the spirit and to pray with the mind (1 Corinthians 14). Being Anglican therefore means *being a theologian* – the answers aren't all given in advance. Every member of the church must wrestle with questions of Christian belief and behavior. The church doesn't foreclose debate by requiring assent to strict confessional statements. Rather, we ground our unity in Scripture, the creeds, the historic episcopate and our practice of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.¹ Members of the Episcopal Church are afforded the opportunity to think for themselves, which makes room for some rich and varied conversations about how to live a Christian life in the 21st century. When so many secular people in our society perceive Christians as narrow-minded and unthinking, the Episcopal Church is a powerful alternative witness.

38. These are some of the gifts God has made manifest in the Anglican and Episcopal way of being Christian. But we must also be mindful of the paradox of the Gospel: many are first who will be last, our strengths can become our stumbling blocks, and it is often in our weaknesses that we become most aware of grace. We Episcopalians can become too smug, or too complacent, or too attached to our gifts, and when that happens they cease to be instruments for mission. When we think of our gifts as something to share with the world for the sake of God's mission, they can be vibrant and vital signs of communion life.

V. Organizing for Mission and Leadership Today

39. The Episcopal Church in Minnesota has a rich mission history with many facets, including expansive church planting in its first fifty years, costly advocacy for Native Americans and other oppressed groups, service to the poor and needy, evangelistic preaching, translation of the liturgy into other languages (including Ojibwe, Norwegian and, more recently, Hmong) and the building of a network of strong social service and educational institutions (such as Episcopal

Community Services, the House of Prayer, Breck School and Shattuck-St. Mary's School). We are the diocese of Bishop Whipple and Enmegahbowh (the first Native American Episcopal priest), of James Lloyd Breck and countless other faithful and courageous Episcopalians over the generations.

40. We are also the inheritors of many denominational, diocesan and local church structures, assumptions and practices that bear critical reflection in today's changing world. Like other Christian churches, the Episcopal Church's organization and ministry are shaped by particular cultural influences from specific times and places. At best, when the times and context change, the church has adapted its organization and ministry to remain vital and engaged. This occurred when Anglicanism was transplanted from England to the American colonies in the 17th century, again following the American Revolution (when the Episcopal Church was formally born) and in the 20th century during the rise of American corporate bureaucracy.

Mission and Our Sense of Place

41. The Episcopal Church carried over from England the *parish* concept – the division of geographical territory into parishes, each with a local church building staffed by a priest. In England, inhabitants of a particular parish were expected to attend their parish church. Large blocks of parishes were organized into *dioceses*, with a bishop in charge of this domain.
42. Generally, Anglicanism assumed that everyone who lived within a particular parish was, nominally at least, a Christian. Clergy focused on preaching, teaching and pastoral care for settled flocks. For much of European history, mission and evangelism were understood as something primarily done across geographical frontiers, particularly overseas. Mission societies were organized for this purpose, sending specialist *missionaries* out to do the work. Most ordinary lay people were understood to be *recipients* of the church's ministry, normally performed by the clergy.
43. In America, the parish system never really functioned very well since religious adherence became a voluntary preference. Nonetheless, the Christian church for much of American history saw itself at the hub of society – located on the proverbial town square, its steeple a symbol of its centrality and influence over American life.
44. The world has changed. We have entered a period of *discontinuous change* in our context today, when longstanding cultural norms and assumptions are breaking down and we don't know clearly what lies ahead.² Amidst a globalized economy, the emergence of postmodern culture, the dissolution of loyalty to institutions (particularly denominations) and a tendency toward radical

individualism, the church's place in our society is uncertain. The Constantinian ideal of the church standing at the center of culture is gone, replaced by a deeply pluralistic, post-Christian social reality.³

45. While this sea change may feel threatening, it also represents a moment of great opportunity. The times in which we live are analogous to the biblical wilderness (Exodus and Numbers) or the Exile (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). One of the great temptations of the biblical wilderness is to make idols out of what we once knew or what surrounds us in the culture. In such a time of change, our tendency is to cling tightly to what we know best – whether it be the comfort and familiarity of our church communities as they are, or the skills and behaviors that worked in the past.
46. Instead, our primary task today is to return to the core sources of our identity – our *Christian* identity. This means learning to listen to the biblical narrative and the Holy Spirit together with a fresh depth and openness, and practicing the classic spiritual disciplines of our faith (such as prayer, worship, witness, service, silence, Sabbath and solitude). When the church in any particular place is in decline, it is often because of one of two reasons: the church has lost its clarity and commitment to the *constants* (or core beliefs and mission practices) of the faith, or the *context* has changed and the church hasn't.⁴ We must take seriously both of these challenges. Now is the time to return to our roots and rediscover our identity and purpose as People of the Way of Jesus (Mark 1).

Mission Is Local

47. The incarnational principle testifies to God's identification and engagement with human life in all its local particularity. The church's mission is always rooted in place – specific cultural and geographical locales. It is through existing and new relational webs that the church's members witness to God's redeeming work by word and example on a daily basis. This includes family, neighborhood, workplace and community ties.

Gospel-Based Discipleship

In order to live as disciples in mission, we must all learn to dwell imaginatively in the story of Jesus. The Native American community has developed a practice for engaging the Word and one another called Gospel-Based Discipleship. It involves sharing reflectively in three questions about a gospel text: *What words or phrases did you hear? What is Jesus (the Gospel) saying to you? What is Jesus (the Gospel) calling you to do?* Gospel-Based Discipleship is a practice from which Episcopalians across Minnesota and the Anglican Communion have benefited.

48. Relegating mission and ministry primarily to the clergy as a separate, "holier" caste betrays our baptismal identity. Rather, *the church's primary missionaries are its lay members in their daily life and work.* This is the pattern by which the early

church grew exponentially amidst a culturally and religiously diverse Roman world. Mission took place not through elaborate strategies, programs or techniques, but rather through the witness of ordinary Christians, who took Jesus' encouragement to be salt, leaven and light to heart (Matthew 5).⁵

49. Anglicanism is deeply shaped by Benedictine spirituality, which values community, stability and the rhythm of an ordered life of prayer, study and work, all in a particular place. In contrast, contemporary American society is highly mobile. People move frequently for reasons of education, work (sometimes with little choice at the whim of the corporate system), pleasure or retirement. The deep relational ties that once characterized American life and that could span generations have frayed amidst a hyper-individualism.
50. Effective Christian witness for the church today may in some cases mean making a sacrificial commitment to community and place in order to strengthen the relational ties so important for mission and evangelism. We cannot deepen our practice of Christian community, listen carefully to the stories, questions and needs of those around us or "give a reason for the hope that is within us" (1 Peter 3) and expect to be heard without being bound together in relationships.
51. At the same time, we must recognize the new forms that relationships are taking within emerging generations. The defining cultural metaphor for younger generations today is the Internet – a geographically-dispersed, decentralized network. For the Episcopal Church to be engaged with these generations, room must be created in our imagination for forms of church that depart from the parish model.
52. This might mean congregations organized around particular affiliations or interests or ones that gather in unconventional settings. For instance, in the Church of England today, there are *network churches* coexisting alongside traditional *neighborhood churches*. These include cell churches, pub and café churches, new monastic orders, and school-linked congregations, all of which are effectively connecting with younger people and others unfamiliar with the church.⁶ Grass-roots forms such as the Gospel-Based Discipleship and Base Ecclesial Community models have proven effective in developing Christian maturity and witness. This is a time to allow ourselves greater flexibility for discerning the multiplicity of ways in which God may be calling us to be church together.
53. For too long, our understanding of church has been dominated by the *family* metaphor. Many of our congregations conceive of themselves as an extended family with its quirky traditions (at times bewildering to outsiders), comfortable in the security of knowing one another. We gladly welcome newcomers to visit –

but on our terms. Clergy are trained in psychology-based “family-systems theory” as a primary lens for their pastoral leadership of congregations. While the Bible does speak of the church as the “household of God,” our understanding of the church as a family has often become an overly constricting one that has closed us off to the world.

Mission is Regional

54. While the church’s ministry is indigenous and local through the daily lives of its members and the witnessing practices of congregations, there have always been mobile, or cross-local, mission workers and ministries. In the early church, this included leaders like Barnabas, Paul and Timothy who planted churches, raised up new leaders and moved on (Acts), or Phoebe, who was an important emissary between churches (Romans 16). Europe was initially evangelized by traveling bands of monks, such as those led by St. Patrick and St. Columba.
55. The episcopate evolved as a way of overseeing and encouraging ministry across multiple house churches and congregations in a region. However, once Europe and North America were considered to be settled “Christian” territories, the apostolic (from a Greek word for *sending*) nature of bishops tended to shift. Instead of empowering and multiplying congregations and leaders, bishops often focused on governance and control. In 20th century America, the Episcopal Church adopted forms of hierarchical bureaucracy from secular corporate culture, with their command-and-control leadership styles. Bishops and diocesan staff came to spend much of their energy on regulating the ministry taking place within their dioceses (through credentialing clergy, licensing lay ministers and developing corporate policies, procedures and committees).
56. Today’s changed context calls for reframing the episcopate to emphasize *mission* rather than *maintenance*. Instead of a geographical domain controlled by a corporate CEO (bishop) and diocesan bureaucracy, the diocese may be reconceived as a *communion* of congregations and other ministries networked and equipped for mission. Reflecting the shape of the Trinity, the congregations, institutions and members of the diocese share an interdependent, common life of service and witness.

Mission is Global

57. Just as mission is local and regional, so too is it global. Today, that concept takes on a new twist. Whereas missionaries were once sent from America or Europe to Africa, Asia or Latin America to share the gospel, today the logic is being reversed. The areas of greatest growth and vitality in the global church are in the South (Africa, Asia and Latin America), while the North (the United States, Canada and Europe) struggles with the legacy of modern secularism.⁷ Mission in a post-colonial era is now *from everywhere to everywhere*.

From every tribe and nation...

Congregations such as Holy Apostles (St. Paul), St. Andrew's (Minneapolis) and El Santo Niño (St. Paul) reflect some of the vibrant richness of the immigrants in our midst. The church is called to be a community of diversity reconciled in Christ. These congregations challenge us to consider together how we can live more fully into the promise of Pentecost, speaking the gospel in many languages and cultures.

58. We must take seriously the possibility that one of the greatest forces for renewal in once-mainline Christianity in North America and Europe will be immigrants from the global South. Relationships with sisters and brothers in Christ whose cultural experience of the gospel differs from our own offers the promise of mutual enrichment, correction and encouragement in the faith. Minnesota has become a major immigration hub. Will the Episcopal Church in Minnesota regard these immigrants as gifts from God, greeting them with openness, compassion and hospitality (Exodus 23)? Will we be responsive to their needs and also receive the fresh expressions of the good news they bring?

59. On a less promising note, global capitalism as a form of neocolonialism brings increasing disparity of wealth from which we in America (as in other developed nations) primarily benefit. God's vision for *shalom* calls us to work actively for global peace, justice and reconciliation around the world, not imposing our will, but accompanying, seeking to listen to, collaborate with and support local people. The global character of mission calls us to recognize the impact on the poor and needy of the systems in which we are complicit. The U.N. Millennium Development Goals point fruitfully toward our responsibility, call and opportunity to serve in this regard.

Reframing Leadership for Mission

60. As described in the New Testament, leadership in the early church was primarily gift- and team-based. The primary purpose of those gifted to be "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" was to equip *all* of God's people for ministry (Ephesians 4). Leaders were identified and raised up from within indigenous local communities, often to serve those same communities. When Christianity became the established religion of the empire, leadership shifted to more restricted forms of clerical office. Gradually, ministry came to be seen as the purview of clergy tending to the needs of their parishioners, and the more collaborative models of ministry and expansive horizon of mission we find in the New Testament were eroded (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).

61. In recent years in the Episcopal Church, our predominant models of clergy leadership have been that of family care-giver/chaplain and administrator of a non-profit voluntary organization. We have generally not developed leaders who are focused on unleashing the missional energies of the laity. Most clergy feel they should encourage the ministry of all, but are typically not trained to lead in mission, think like missionaries or develop collaborative teams.

Total Ministry

Total Ministry is a collaborative, team- and gift-based approach to congregational leadership that in many ways better reflects the Trinity and biblical models of leadership than the solo-priest chaplain model left over from the Christendom era. Through Total Ministry, the Spirit has breathed new life into many congregations in Greater Minnesota. Churches across the diocese could learn valuable lessons from the principles of Total Ministry and our experience with it.

62. In order to live into a more missional understanding of the church, we need new generations of *missional leaders*. Missional leaders (lay and ordained) do not simply reproduce the latest business strategy or marketing technique in order to try to grow the church. Rather, they focus on cultivating communities in which the challenges and demands of people's lives are placed in fruitful conversation with the biblical narrative; in which all members of the church discern and activate their God-given spiritual gifts and talents for ministry in daily life; and in which lay leaders are developed and multiplied for ministry.⁸

63. Similarly, bishops have been understood as *pastors to the pastors* or administrative executives. In a missional era, the episcopate might discover a new purpose in facilitating relationships, partnerships and resource-sharing for mission among congregations and other bodies as bridge-builders. Those partnerships and mission initiatives may more likely emerge from and remain at the grass roots than be conceived and controlled at the diocesan level.⁹ Diocesan leadership will play a critical role in listening to, linking and equipping local leaders for mission. It also must tend to the theological identity that unites us. Unity can no longer be enforced by regulation; it must be cultivated through interpretive leadership, leadership that makes sense out of the realities of the contemporary world in light of the biblical and theological story we share. Bishops have an unparalleled position from which to exercise this type of leadership.

64. The idea that "mission" congregations are somehow the lesser cousins of proper "parishes" is inadequate to our context. *All* congregations should be understood to be mission outposts.¹⁰ The assumption that a congregation needs a full-time professional priest in order to be viable must be reevaluated. Our rich experience

in Greater Minnesota with Total Ministry teams (which in many ways better reflect biblical models of leadership) bears wider discussion. Many emerging leaders across America today are deliberately choosing team-based, bi-vocational leadership models for *missionary*, rather than financial, reasons.¹¹

65. Tending to leadership is critical for the renewal of the Episcopal Church's mission in Minnesota. It would be fruitful for the diocese to begin a serious dialogue around what it means to lead in mission and how the leaders we need can be identified, formed and deployed. There is too much at stake for us not to engage these questions deeply. Our world is deeply divided, broken and hungry for good news.

Notes

¹The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888. See *Book of Common Prayer* pp. 876-77.

²See Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

³See, for instance, Darrell Guder and Lois Barrett, eds., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴See Steven B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

⁵See Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962). Allen was an Anglican priest and missionary in China.

⁶See Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

⁷See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸See Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*.

⁹"Planning for predetermined outcomes is legitimate but no longer primary. A mission-informed response, rather than a structural initiative, is now seen as authentic. Much that now happens is ad hoc and not officially planned." *Mission-Shaped Church*, p. 24.

¹⁰See Claude Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

¹¹See Eddie Gibbs, *LeadershipNext* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005).

Glossary

atonement – the root meaning is the *condition* of being reconciled after some wrong has disrupted a relationship; it also has a secondary meaning of a concrete *act*, a payment or ritual, that can remove guilt and restore relationship. The Christian theological tradition has never insisted on a single account of atonement in its secondary sense, i.e., whether Jesus' work for us is a sacrifice, a ransom, a satisfaction, or a vicarious punishment. But the Christian tradition is universally insistent that what Jesus does for us is open for us the condition of being "at one" with God.

Benedictine spirituality – a way of life and prayer rooted in the monastic rule of St. Benedict of Nursia. Benedictine monasteries were centers of learning, service, worship – and even good farming practices! – throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. Benedictine monasteries played a particularly important role in the development of Christianity in the British Isles, leaving a lasting legacy in the character of Anglicanism.

Constantinian ideal – the Roman Emperor Constantine (d. 337) used the Christian church as an instrument of unity to hold together his fractious empire. From that time to ours, it has been almost taken for granted that the church will act as one among many social institutions contributing to the quality of civic life.

episcopate – the role and work of the bishop. The word is sometimes used to include not only the bishop her- or himself, but other staff people who assist the bishop in fulfilling the role and work.

eschatological – having to do with the end. The Christian doctrine of the end includes teaching about the end of *time*; more importantly, it teaches about the "end" in the sense of the *purpose* or *goal* of the universe, what creation is *for*. The Christian promise is that the purpose of creation is fulfillment in everlasting communion in God.

eternal life – a phrase chiefly used in the Gospel of John (see, for instance, John 6:54), it has two dimensions of meaning: both life everlasting in God after our life in the body in this world, and a life-giving openness to God in our earthly existence as well. In the context of mission, it is important to recognize that "eternal life" is not just "saving souls for heaven," but is also bringing people into more abundant life here and now.

ineffable Mystery – that which cannot be named because it is beyond all names and the source of all names. A way of referring to the First Person of the Trinity.

inner-Trinitarian life – God's own experience of being God, distinguished from God's self-presentation to human experience in revelation.

koinonia – the original Greek word has several dimensions of meaning, for which we often need different English words. The word can mean "fellowship," with its connotations of social interconnection. It can mean "communion," with its connotations of mystical and spiritual sharing. It can mean "partnership," with its connotations of actively working

together. “Communion in the life of the Trinity” and “participation in the mission of God” are not two separate things, but are two aspects of a single *koinonia* reality.

polity – the formal system of structures for the governance of the church, including, e.g., the General Convention composed of two houses, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies.

repentance – traditional translation of the Greek *metanoia*. It implies sorrow for sins, in a negative sense, as well as the positive sense of a transformation of heart.

right relationships – a translation of the Hebrew *zedek*, righteousness, emphasizing not merely adherence to a moral code, but being just in all our interpersonal and social connections.

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