

The Ministry of the Body of Christ

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&A from The Book of Common Prayer (in "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism")

The Church shares Christ's ministry of bringing the created order into relationship with its Creator. The Church, in its corporate reality as the Body of Christ, animated by the Spirit, extends the Incarnation of Christ throughout history. As the continuation of the Incarnation, the Church incorporates both the divine and human natures of Christ.

"As the father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21)

The whole Church shares in the mission of the apostles as it witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. In the baptismal vows, each Christian promises to "proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ." The Church proclaims the Good News as it reads and interprets the Scriptures, as it administers the Sacraments, and as it models in its common life the reconciliation and restored relationships between creation and its Creator. The Church both invites others to enter into the community of the Body of Christ and seeks to establish relationships of justice and dignity among all people through proclamation of the Gospel.

A shared priesthood

The whole Church shares in the priesthood of Christ. It carries out its mission of restoring the created order to its proper relationship with itself and the Creator as it gathers for its worship of God, as it prays for the world and as it proclaims the good news of God in Christ. As it gathers for worship, members of the Church bring the fruits of their labor in the world as an offering to God. The bread and wine of the Eucharist represent both God's free grace in the fruits of nature – grain and grapes – and the labor and economy of the human community in the effort that transforms those gifts to bread and wine.

The Church offers to God its own common life and the whole economy of the household of God under the signs of bread and wine to be consecrated to God's purposes. In the Church's worship, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, God transforms the Church's offering into the Body of Christ for the world. Gathered as that Body, the Church intercedes on behalf of the world, endeavoring to discern God's purposes and intentions in the specific context of each gathered local community.

A shared servant ministry

The whole Church also shares in the servant-ministry of Christ. As members of the Church return to the world, transformed and empowered by the Spirit, they endeavor to realize in the Church's common life, and in the economies from which they presented their gifts, the relationships that characterize the Incarnate Body of Christ.

As the Body of Christ for the world, the Church serves to make relationships within the various communities in which they live and work more worthy of being offered to God. The Church does this through the ministry of its members as they seek to heal broken relationships and economies in the world, as they uphold the dignity of all the creatures of God and seek to discern the divine energies working through the whole created world. Its members bring these relationships back to the assembly gathered to worship.

Through the ministry of all its members

The whole Church shares the apostolate, the priesthood and the servant ministry of Christ as it offers itself to embody Christ in the world, bringing the divine and created natures into relationship in the Body of Christ.

Through the ministry of all its members, lay and ordained, the whole Church participates in the divine life of the Trinity, and seeks to draw all creation into that life of love.

The Ministry of the Baptized

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of the laity is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

--Q&A from The Book of Common Prayer (in "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism")

Gifts of the Baptized

Baptized persons are called to be actively involved in Christian life. Each baptized person brings unique gifts to ministry, including gifts of time, talent and treasure. Baptized persons are musicians, teachers, learners, leaders, workers and supporters of work, and have the opportunity to move in and out of various roles as they discern where the needs of the community, gathered and scattered, match with the gifts of the individual.

Baptized persons, through their faithfulness, integrity and compassion, carry on the work of reconciliation in the gathered community and in their witness and service to the community at large.

Ministry of the Baptized Within the Community

Baptized persons are called to continue in the Apostle's teachings and in prayer. The liturgy begins with the gathering of the people whose faithful presence in prayer and praise enables the creation of a community that is welcoming, inclusive and reconciling.

The baptized may serve with the clergy in the ministry of word and sacrament, as ushers or hosts, acolytes, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, lay preachers, Eucharistic visitors and worship leaders, as well as through music and preparation of the altar.

Baptized persons have roles within the life and governance of the parish. They financially support the work of the Church through prayerful stewardship. Their presence on vestries, committees and boards assures the orderly management of parish affairs, including business matters, stewardship of property, the work of hospitality to all, and ministry in pursuit of social and economic justice.

Baptized persons have roles as teachers and continuing learners in the formation of mature Christians who seek to develop a Christ-centered pattern of life.

All of this work is sustained through the prayers and gifts of the faithful.

Scattered throughout the community, baptized persons witness in word and deed to the good news of reconciliation through Christ; such witness is their most powerful tool for evangelism. This includes faithfully joining with others in ecumenical and interfaith actions, witnessing to the spirit of reconciliation within the community.

Through secular employment and work with community agencies, they are called to carry out their baptismal vows to “seek Christ in all persons” and to “strive for justice and peace among all people.”

Ministry of the Baptized in the Diocese

Baptized persons serve with clergy as delegates to regional convocations and to the annual diocesan convention, representing the people in the formation of vision and policy. They serve on a variety of boards, councils and commissions for the diocese.

Through the diocesan cycle of prayer, they support the work of parishes, missions and ministries throughout the diocese.

Within the region, the Diocese of Missouri exercises its prophetic voice to call for compassionate justice for God’s people and care for God’s Earth. The work of the diocese is supported through faithful stewardship of the baptized.

Ministry of the Baptized within the Church and the World

Bearing the message of reconciliation to a broken world, baptized persons are found serving through national and international ministries, including representation at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, the National Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion. They join in prayer for people throughout the world and for peace in the world.

Through gifts of time, talent and treasure, baptized persons reach out in love in the name of Christ throughout the world.

The Ministry of the Episcopate (Bishop)

Q. What is the ministry of a bishop?

A. The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

--Q&A from The Book of Common Prayer

(in "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism")

When someone is baptized or we all renew our baptismal covenant, the first action we take is to recite the Apostles' Creed, the ancient summary of apostolic faith and teaching. We follow that with the promise to continue in that apostolic teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers.

From the earliest times, the order of ministry that has continued and guarded that faith has been the episcopate.

Bishops have modeled that ministry in their own proclamation of the Gospel and in administration of the Sacraments throughout their dioceses. In their regular teaching and preaching, and in the baptizing and presiding at the Eucharist, they seek to encourage and support the apostolic ministry of all the baptized to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Bishop as link

From the beginning, the bishops' apostolic ministry has been extended by the priests and deacons of the diocese. A major responsibility of bishops is to ordain sufficient numbers of priests and deacons to work beside the bishops in strengthening the work of the laity in their various congregations.

The discernment of ministries — both lay and ordained — is vital to a healthy and spirit-filled Church. The bishop has the unique opportunity to be the link between those congregations, and to encourage the discovery of spiritual gifts both within individual congregations, as well as mutual ministries among them.

The chief pastor

As the chief priest and pastor of the entire diocese, the bishop also is responsible for overseeing these apostolic ministries, so they remain faithful, united and disciplined.

Bishops regularly do so by being the chief presider in the congregations of their dioceses as they make their circuit of parish visitations. They also do so when their dioceses gather for their annual conventions and on other occasions, as well as at regular meetings with the clergy of the dioceses.

Governance and oversight

Bishops share the ministry of oversight with the laity and the clergy through the various forms of governance in our Church. The fundamental purpose of that governance at every level of the Church—congregational, diocesan, provincial, national and even international—is to assist the mission of the Church to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

The bishops are in a unique position to do so as they represent their dioceses in the councils of the province, the Episcopal Church and of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Each level of our Church has gifts of ministry to enrich the whole Church. One way that is demonstrated is that bishops participate in the ordination of other bishops.

The reconciliation of the world

Finally, bishops have the responsibility both individually and collectively to act in concert with others in our civic communities for the reconciliation of the world in the name of Christ.

The world naturally looks to our bishops to provide such leadership as our communities strive to live in peace with justice, respecting the dignity of every human being.

The Ministry of the Priesthood

Q. What is the ministry of a priest or presbyter?

A. The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and pardon in the name of God.

--Q&A from The Book of Common Prayer

(in "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism")

The whole Church shares in the priesthood of Christ, reconciling the world to God. The Church offers to God the fruits of God's creation and human labor for God's purposes. As the Church gathers for worship, it presents its corporate life under the signs of bread and wine to God, and receives that life back again from God, blessed as the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church itself becomes part of Christ's sacrifice, the Body of Christ offered for the life of the world.

Modeling Christ's priestly ministry

Priests are set aside by the call of the Church and ordination by the Bishop to model for the Church the priestly ministry of Christ. As pastors and teachers, priests gather and equip the people of God to take their share in the ministry of Christ and the Church. Through the sacramental life of the Church, a priest is the instrument of Christ nurturing the life of the congregation.

As pastor to the people, a priest acts as steward of the congregation's common life and fosters the relationships that constitute the Body of Christ. Priests invite congregations to discern the ways they may best engage in God's ministry of reconciliation in their particular settings, then elicit the gifts of all for that ministry.

Our story, as community together, and in the world

In proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed, a priest helps the congregation understand its own story in terms of God's saving acts in history. A priest helps a congregation see God's saving grace active in its common life: in joy, in suffering, in welcoming new members into the Body, in care given to one another, and at the last, in commitment of its members into God's hands (BCP 569). The priest also helps the congregation see God's saving grace in its ministries to the world outside its doors, and in so doing, connects the congregation's mission to the story of God's grace in God's people and in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Holy Communion

Presiding at the Eucharist, a priest speaks on behalf of the whole Church as the Body of Christ, presenting the congregation's common life to God. The priest gives thanks to God for God's saving acts, particularly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and invokes the Holy Spirit over the gifts and the people.

Through the praise and thanks of priest and people, God transforms gifts and people into the Body and Blood of Christ, which strengthen the congregation to offer itself for the life of the world.

Ministry together

In all this, priests work with the diocese, gathered with the bishop, to help guide the whole Church in the reconciling ministry of Christ to the world.

The Ministry of the Diaconate (Deacons)

Q: What is the ministry of a deacon?

A: The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.--Q&A from The Book of Common Prayer (in "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism")

All Christians are called by Christ to lives of service. Deacons are set aside by the Church to take on the task of servant leadership. Individually, their responsibility to service in the world is no different from that of other Christians. However, as deacons, they lead the Church in its mission of service.

A Deacon's call

First, they serve as icons of service, constant reminders of the call to serve the needy, the dispossessed and the marginalized. Second, they are to seek out the needs of the community and bring those to the Church, offering a prophetic voice on behalf of those in need. Third, deacons are called to discern the God-given gifts in their fellow Christians and to call each Christian to live into the mission given them by God.

Distinctive clerical vestments signify a holy trust placed on deacons by the larger community of faith: A diagonal stole signals hands ready to do God's work. In the liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer, we see deacons serving at the table, proclaiming the Gospel, offering up the Prayers of the People and sending the Church out into the world at the end of the service.

Belonging to the whole diocese

Deacons live under the authority of their bishop, and are placed in congregations at the discretion of the bishop. However, deacons do not belong to congregations, and they may be called to operate as agents of their bishops in service to the whole diocese.

All deacons are expected to assume positions of leadership in the diocese. In the Diocese of Missouri, the provisions of some diocesan bodies specifically call for representatives from the diaconate. All deacons in the diocese are accorded voice and vote at the annual diocesan convention.

Between the Church and the world

As icons of servant ministry, deacons serve a distinctive role in relation to the larger world. Deacons are, to use a modern idiom, an interface between the Church and the world. They live in the border between the sacred and the profane. With one hand, they pull the world into the Church; with the other, they pull the Church into the world.

Discernment

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: Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A: The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members. (Q&A from the Book of Common Prayer: An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism)

The Holy Spirit calls the Church and its people into and empowers them for the ministry of the reconciliation of all. Discernment is the process of work, thought, prayer, and listening which makes possible the recognition and understanding of the Spirit's call to an individual or group.

A lifelong process, a role for everyone

Each of us has a duty to be in a lifelong process of discerning the ministries through which we may use our gifts in the service of God's purposes for the restoration of the world.

Each Christian and each Christian community has a role to play in God's ministry of reconciliation. We carry out those roles both in our lives in the world and in our corporate life in the Church. We often need the help of the Spirit and of others to discover how best to live into our share of God's ministry. Like young Samuel, we may find ourselves confused about the nature and source of the call.

Where are you being called?

The process of discernment involves the individual, the community, and the Holy Spirit. The notion of a call may begin with the individual's sense of being drawn into a new ministry, or it may emerge from the community's identification of a person's gifts for a particular ministry. Exploration of a call may lead to a deeper sense of vocation in secular employment, to community service, to specific ministries within the Church, or to consideration of ordination.

Discernment is a prayerful attempt, within the scope of human weakness and limitation, to identify a pathway to meeting God's will for the individual, the community, and the Church.

Which is the ‘better’ call?

It is important to recognize and value the gifts of each person in the course of discernment. All baptized persons are called to ministry in their whole life in the world. A call to ordained ministry is not a “better call.” The ordained have unique ministries to help empower the baptized for their roles in God’s purposes of salvation.

Discernment is a matter of identifying the gifts of a faithful individual that are suited to a particular form of ministry.

When one’s call seems to be toward Holy Orders, the Church has a great responsibility to participate in the discernment process. This includes prayerfully joining in seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, supporting the individual in further exploration of the call, and considering the individual’s gifts in the context of the needs of the Church.

This work of discernment will first be carried out locally, but eventually, a call to ordained ministry involves a wider circle of concerned persons within the diocese continuing the work begun at the local level.

A congregation considering its ministry is engaged in discernment. The work of discernment includes recognizing needs, resources, and gifts, and prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.