

Bishop's Address to Convention – Part Three

Reflection on Anglican Mark of Mission # 3 – “To respond to human need by loving service...”

The 234<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of New Jersey

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### **Mark of Mission 3 To respond to human need by loving service**

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

James 2:14-17

The great German Reformer Martin Luther once referred to the Epistle of James as an “an epistle of straw.” He says of James, “In a word, he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and is unequal to the task . . . and would accomplish by insisting on the Law what the apostles accomplish by inciting men to love. Therefore, I cannot put him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from putting him where he pleases and estimating him as he pleases; for there are many good sayings in him.”<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther was a man of strong opinions. He doesn't reject the Epistle of James. He also doesn't reject the importance of works. He does say that James is “unequal to the task” of relating the two – faith and works. Love, according to Martin Luther is the missing element in the equation.

As the baptized, we are saved by God's grace and our faith in Jesus Christ alone. This is the love God has for us. Our response to this love should be love, love that results in works of mercy and compassion. Can we honestly assert that we are saved in Christ Jesus if we show no love, no compassion? Don't live love out? Of course not!

The people of the Diocese of New Jersey know how to love, know how to show mercy, how to engage in acts of compassion. These acts of compassion number in the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, every year. As a diocese we are among the top five in The Episcopal Church for the number of Jubilee sites we have.

The designation Jubilee Ministry was created by the General Convention at New Orleans in 1982. The mandate of Jubilee Ministries, provided by Resolution 1982-A080, is to be a “ministry of joint discipleship in Christ with poor and oppressed people, wherever they are found, to meet basic human needs and to build a just society.”<sup>2</sup> This act of General Convention notes that this kind of ministry is “at the heart of the mission of the church.”

It's important to note that the Jubilee mandate from General Convention calls for ministries of “joint discipleship in Christ *with* poor and oppressed people...” not over or above. It is also important to note that the intention is “to help build a just society.”

Wherever poverty and oppression exist, these are signs of injustice. Our baptismal covenant calls for us to “strive for justice and peace...” The prophet Micah exhorts us to “do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God” (6:8). Our call to compassion and

our call to advocacy are inextricably intertwined. I'll have more to say about that in the next reflection when we consider Mark of Mission 4, "transforming the unjust structures of society."

For now we consider acts of mercy, what the Roman Catholic Church considers the "Corporal works of mercy."

- (1) Feed the hungry.
- (2) Give drink to the thirsty.
- (3) Clothe the naked.
- (4) Shelter the homeless.
- (5) Visit those in prison.
- (6) Comfort the sick.
- (7) Bury the dead.

From Elizabeth and Basking Ridge to Cape May and Vineland, works of mercy are carried out in significant ways by the people of this diocese.

One event that started out as a parish initiative has evolved into a major diocesan event each year: The Annual Battle Against Hunger Bike Ride started out in 2003 as a dream of St. Matthew's, Pennington lay member the late Chuck Inman and his wife, Pam. That first year, five people took a two day bicycle trek from St. Matthew's to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. They raised \$15 K that first year and split it between the Rescue Mission of Trenton and The Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.

In 2014, The Battle Against Hunger Bike Ride joined forces with Jubilee Ministries and expanded to incorporate a diocesan outreach ministry, adding a Walk and Run to raise additional funds. To date The Battle Against Hunger has raised over \$1 million which, in the years since its diocesan sponsorship, has provided substantial support to quite a few of our Jubilee sites including Trinity, Asbury Park who have been outstanding supporters and participants. Canon Phyllis Jones has been instrumental in organizing and supporting this event each year.

On the Feast of Absalom Jones, our Earl B. Scott Chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians honored St. Wilfrid's Church in Camden for their ministry in sponsoring a medical clinic once a month in the church that meets the needs of 100 people in the local community each day. St. Wilfrid's worshiping community has dwindled significantly. There are only 8 – 10 people during their once a month Sunday worship. But the Valentine family and others at St. Wilfrid's are committed to this vital ministry of mercy and care in their community.

Nearby St. Paul's, Camden feeds more than 150 people a week. Their outreach ministries are supported by more than 20 other congregations through Project Interaction in the Camden area.

Trinity Cathedral does incredible outreach ministry in Trenton: a weekly lunch program on Fridays; a food pantry every other Saturday; the Trinity Academy; a Farmers Market that offers fresh produce during the summer in the food desert that is Trenton. Trinity is also a host site for Urban Promise of Trenton. Urban Promise works with inner city youth to develop Academic achievement, Life management, Spiritual growth and Christian leadership. Urban Promise also does great work in Camden and got its start in one of our Episcopal Churches.

Two years ago, we brought our Presiding Bishop to Urban Promise Camden so that he could experience some of the good things happening in Camden. It was incredible to be with him and watch him connect with the young people there. I'm excited to announce that Urban

Promise Camden has invited Bishop Curry to be their keynote speaker at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of Urban Promise Camden. This will take place the evening of October 23, 2018. I'm planning on attending and hope you will too.

Thank God for The Church of the Resurrection, Vineland. They are a Code Blue Warming Center, meaning they are part of a winter emergency shelter program, sponsored through the Cumberland County M25 Initiative. From November 1st through April 15th, when temperatures reach 25°F, if the night is clear, or 32°F, if there is precipitation, the parish halls of the Church of the Resurrection church buildings are part of the emergency-housing rotation for homeless men, women, and children in the community.

There are lots of stories to tell from churches up and down the diocese. Exciting things are happening at St. Mary's, Pleasantville, one of the diocese's historic Black congregations. They have a new priest in Fr. Hyvenson Joseph, who was born in Haiti and came to us from the Diocese of Southeast Florida. Even as they were waiting for a priest, the people of St. Mary's have been engaging their wider community in creative ways. Here to tell you the story is Fr. Hyvenson Joseph and Vestry member Joan Manning-Hill.

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<sup>1</sup> See Luther's Works, vol. 35, Word and Sacrament I (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 362 found at <http://cdn.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/esource-assets/files/943/original/hyperlink-24-05.pdf?1417489965>

<sup>2</sup> See 1982 A-080 - Acts of Convention on The Archives of The Episcopal Church website at [https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=1982-A080](https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=1982-A080)