

Baptismal Ecclesiology for a Diaconal Church

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Nebraska Synod, October 21-23, 2024

Christendom Model: Church as an Institution Led by Clergy and Volunteers

- **Vertical (Hierarchical): Three “Expressions” of the Church**
- **Dependence on Pastor**
- **Centered in Building**
- **Quantitative Measures of Success. . . and Failure!**
- **The End of Christendom in Our Lifetimes**
- **Grief, Nostalgia, Programmatic Fixes (technical change)**

Conventional Understanding of Ministry: Attraction Model of Christendom

Work done and led by a pastor: “my ministry”

- **Call process profiles: to make a “good match”**
- **Goal: create synergy between pastor and people**
- **Assumes pastor-centered model: “without a pastor the people perish”**
- **Ministry organized with “the congregation as the primary agent” of ministry**
- **This model has been exposed with pastor shortage: congregational drift**
- **TEEM and SAM candidates typically have been raised up to fill needs according to this model**

Equipping Model: Formation of the Baptized for Daily Life

- **Horizontal: Primary Expression is the Christian People (“laity”)**
- **Relational Triune God, Relational Church, Relational Gospel**
- **Pastor Called to Equip the Christian People to Be the Church in Daily Life**
- **Qualitative Measures of Success. . . Need for New Metrics**
- **Validation, Energy, Paradigm Shift (adaptive change)**
- **Affirm and build upon existing assets of STaR communities: relationships and neighborliness (familial, friendships, churches, school, local businesses, civic organizations)**

Back to the Future: Activation Model of the Early Church

Universal Priesthood (Luther) → Diaconate of All Believers (Christian People)

- **Different than a “Lay Led Congregation” that still centers on the congregation as primary agent of ministry**
- **Primary “agents of ministry are the baptized people of God” in all the roles and relationships of their lives (beyond compartmentalization)**
- **If asked, this is what we claim we are doing.**

In reality, the congregation expects its volunteers to do institutional ministry. We ask them to do “something more” for the congregation rather than equipping them for living their everyday lives Christianly.

- **Goal: Equip and activate the ministry of the Christian people in the arenas (stations) of daily life: family, work, school, local community, citizenship, and world**
- **BEING the body of Christ for neighbors in the world.**
- **Forming Pastors and SAMs to lead this paradigm shift.**

WHAT ARE CONGREGATIONS FOR?

To equip the people live out their baptismal promises:

- **Live among God's faithful people...to be formed!**
- **Listen to the word of God and take part in the Lord's Supper...to be formed!**
- **Spread the good news of God in Christ through words and actions...in daily life!**
- **Serve others in the spirit of Jesus...in daily life!**
- **Work for justice and peace on Earth...in daily life!**

If the first two are about equipping, the last three are about the agency of the baptized Christian people in daily life (not by the agency of congregation).

- **Compare early church: worship and catechesis for evangelizing and diakonia**
- **Equipping takes place through the gatherings: worship, teaching, praying.**

WHAT ARE PASTORS FOR?

Word and Sacrament ministry is to equip and activate the people... for daily life!

- **Worship practices as formation for life practices**
- **Gospel of Jesus Christ sets free for the Sending (Romans 12:1):**
“I appeal to you therefore, siblings, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.”
- **Pastoral orientation: “How does my Word and Sacrament ministry equip and activate the Christian people to be neighbors?”**
 - **At dinner table**
 - **At bedtime**
 - **In family life (marriages, parent-child relationships, extended family)**
 - **At work, school, farming, office, factory, restaurant, etc.**
 - **In the local community and through volunteering.**
 - **At school events, soccer games, and musical events.**
 - **At soccer games, musical events, shopping.**

- Pastors will find new vitality in partnership with the people when above all they support what people are already doing in their lives, rather than recruit them for the “extra” activities and programs of the congregation.

WHAT ARE DEACONS FOR?

Word and Service ministry is to model and accompany the movement between church and world

- Model through specialization
- Serving on congregation staff and in other ministries
- Promote ecumenical collaborations
- Accompany the baptized in the movement between church and daily life

BAPTISMAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR A DIACONAL CHURCH

- The (re)Birth of a People’s Church
- Renewal of Ministry of the WORD: teaching the way discipleship in all gatherings and relationships
- Paradigm Shift takes clarity of purpose, intentionality, persistence, and resiliency over time.
- Three focal activities:
 1. Concentrated attention on forming the Christian people to be disciples in Jesus’ Name (catechesis).
 2. Equipping the Christian people to share the faith through evangelical listening and speaking the gospel to others (evangelizing).
 3. Freeing the Christian people by the power of the gospel to participate in God’s work of repairing creation (diakonia).

This way of thinking about a baptismal ecclesiology, vocations, and relationships will be an accessible way of thinking about the church and one’s participation in the Body of Christ for people who live in small town and rural areas, because people who live in STaR contexts tend to think in terms of relationships already. The people of God who live there already see and experience themselves as deeply interconnected with each other via familial relationships, friendships, church membership, school, and civic organizations; many times these arenas intersect and overlap.

The piece that is missing, which baptismal ecclesiology provides, is the language and framework for understanding what is happening via the relationships of people in small town and rural places is living out of baptismal identity. By living into and out of their baptismal callings, STaR contexts are not isolated and abandoned by the rest of the world, but rather, deeply connected in relationship to the rest of the world and vice versa. A baptismal ecclesiology can have significant impact in small town and rural places, for those who may feel abandoned and left behind by the rest of the world, because this paradigm emphasizes and activates the reality promised to us all by God in Jesus Christ: in our baptisms, we are never alone again, and we get to share that love of God for the world in Jesus each and every day.

Core Practices for Implementing Baptismal Ecclesiology for a Diaconal Church

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WORSHIP PRACTICES AS LIFE PRACTICES (CATECHESIS)—Romans 12: 1-2

- **Clarifying our Theology of Worship as Gods Work: Repetition and Interpretation**
- **Invocation**
- **Thanksgiving for Baptism (often and creatively)**
- **Confession and Forgiveness**
- **Songs**
- **Kyrie**
- **Scripture and Sermon (dialogue sermons)**
- **Creed**
- **Prayers**
- **Offering**
- **Passing the Peace**
- **Great Thanksgiving**
- **Meal**
- **Blessing**
- **Sending: All of worship prepares for the sending (Serve..., Share..., Remember...)**
- **Affirmation of Christian Vocation**
- **Introducing testimonies at worship connecting faith and life.**

EVANGELIZING—Romans 10: 13-17

- **Defining Evangelizing**
- **Captivities**
- **Practices: 1) modeling, 2) small groups, 3) mentoring, 4) testimony at worship**
- **Speech: 1) from the heart, 2) explicit, 3) evangelical listening, 4) authentic**
- **Changing Context: Unprecedented Diversity**

DIAKONIA—Romans 12: 9-13

- **Intentionally listen to community leaders through “listening posts.”**
- **Gather demographic information for the local zip code areas.**
- **Discern priorities needed in the community.**
- **Build partnerships with others.**
- **Foster life-giving relationships through celebratory gatherings.**
- **Measure the scale of interventions, favoring the simple.**
- **Design activities for success.**

Craig L. Nessian, “The Diaconate of All Believers: Theology, Formation, Practice.”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/6/741>

Craig L. Nessian, “Perspective: A Paradigm for the Future Church.”

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2024/07/perspective-a-paradigm-for-the-future-church/>

Life of Faith Initiative. www.lifeoffaith.info