

Summary Vision and Foundational Principles
Concerning the Ministry of the Saints
Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes, Anglican Church in North America¹

The Great Narrative of Redemption

The biblical narrative of redemption is the foundational framework for understanding specific biblical texts and doctrines as they are intended – various aspects of God’s Good News. Therefore, we will begin with the beautiful story of redemption and its movement through four “chapters,” Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.

Creation: The human race was created by God in his image, after his likeness, to rule the earth (as his stewards and “gardeners”) and to fill the earth with life and beauty (Genesis 1:26-29; 2:15-25). As male and female, we bear the image of the Triune God. Our nature as image-bearers explains many dimensions of our humanity that are otherwise inexplicable:

- The near-universal proclivity to worship and prayer throughout world history
- The desire to relate personally to God, to know and understand him
- Our self-consciousness
- Our calling to and desire for love and relationship
- Our sense of justice and moral and ethical responsibility for the world and for others
- The innate sense of the value and goodness of both men and women, and the longings to understand and fulfill gendered identity
- Our longings for transcendence, meaning, purpose, and paradise
- Our sense of responsibility and freedom to make spiritual, intellectual, ethical, moral, and relational choices
- Our capacity for “culture making”
 - The testimony of the trades and professions, of art, literature, education, and science, of life together in communities, of our efforts to govern and protect society, of our desire to make life satisfying and enjoyable, i.e., food, recreation, entertainment, etc.
 - Our appreciation of beauty
 - Our desire to explore, understand, and enhance creation
 - Our ability to identify and solve problems and order our world

Attempts to explain away these dimensions of humanity as merely accidental, chemical, and social-evolutionary developments are dubious to say the least. Lacking a coherent narrative about the world, non-Christian worldviews have no rational, consistent basis for these miracles of human life. In a materialistic universe, spiritual questions and longings hinder and complicate evolutionary “progress.” They have no beneficial purpose. There is no logical “why” in a merely materialistic world. There is no story to tell.

¹ Used with permission to edit from the Bishop and staff of the Diocese of Christ our Hope.

Fall: The Christian narrative also rightly testifies to the universal sense that things are not as they should be. Every one of us knows that we are deeply broken creatures. The biblical explanation for this is the Fall of mankind, described historically in Genesis 3. In the Fall, humanity chose to doubt, disbelieve, and disobey God. We turned from our primary love for, and trust in, our Creator. As a result, we were cut off from the source of life itself and from our created identity. We sought autonomy from God and thereby chose separation from God. In making these choices, we died spiritually (Genesis 2:16-17). Physical death therefore became eternal death, apart from God.

The results have been universal and devastating. The image of God was not obliterated, but it was profoundly shattered and indelibly marred. We became vulnerable to evil and prone toward every form of idolatry. We became committed to self-fulfillment, self-pleasure, self-protection, self-actualization, and self-assertion. We also became outwardly aimed at destroying others through pride, envy, covetousness, hatred, anger, lust, and theft. Every point of reflecting God's image that we might have noted above has become subject to deceit, disorder, and destructiveness.

Redemption: In the continuing narrative, God, in mercy and love, refused to abandon us to our sin. In the very moment of pronouncing the impact of the Fall on men, women, and the world itself, he also announced his promise of redemption. A person would come, the "seed of the woman," to crush the head of the serpent (evil embodied). Evil would be defeated, sin forgiven, humanity reconciled to God, and creation redeemed.

The biblical narrative gradually unfolds the outworking of this promise of redemption. Through the call of Abraham and the long story of the nation of Israel, history builds toward fulfilling the promise in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of God's Holy Spirit, is the prophesied "seed of the woman." But he is also miraculously and wonderfully "Emmanuel, God with us." God the Son himself, the second Person of the Trinity, became man. He lived a perfect, sinless life on this earth. Through word and deed, he called people to follow him. But he did not come simply to teach us how to live, but to accomplish God's promised redemption. On the Cross, Jesus died in our place, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." By his resurrection, the sacrifice is proclaimed "full and sufficient for the sins of the whole world." The debt is paid; the devastating barrier that erupted at the Fall is removed.

Now, through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God. We become "children of God" (John 1:12-13). We are given "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:3). We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have died with Christ to sin, and we also share the resurrection life he has already received (Romans 6:1-10). That enables us to live every day as people "dead to sin and alive to God" (Roman 6:4-11).

God's plan of redemption continues. He relentlessly and lovingly calls all humanity to follow Jesus, now revealed decisively as Redeemer and Lord by his Resurrection from the dead. What wonderful Good News is ours in Jesus Christ!

Consummation: The final chapter of the great story of redemption is the consummation, when

earth and heaven will be reunited in a new creation. Redeemed humanity will be fully transformed and fit for an eternity of love and life with God and one another in the perfect cosmos that God intended (1 John 3:1-3). The wonders and beauties of an unmarred creation that reflects the Creator, and a perfect humanity who corresponds to him, will be stamped with the added, breathtaking story of redemption through the mercy and love displayed forever in the wounds of Christ (Revelation 5:6; cf. John 20:20, 25-27).

A New Creation People Today

A critical point of reflecting on this grand narrative is to remember that, since that first Easter, we have received an invitation from the Lord of the universe to a resurrection-shaped life now. Though we live in between the Fall and the consummation of all things in Christ, we are already “citizens of heaven.” Even though “we are not yet what we will be” (1 John 3:1-3), we are to “press toward the goal of our calling in Christ” (Philippians 3:14). We are here to live fully into our identity as redeemed human beings, filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit (John 10: 10; Galatians 5:22-23). We are on the path to final and completed redemption, where we will become all we are created and redeemed to be (Romans 8: 18-25; cf. Proverbs 4:18). To follow Christ is to enter into the resurrection life even in “this old world.” Further, through the Holy Spirit, we are born into the body of Christ, the Household of God. Our life together in the Church is meant to truly be a foretaste of “heaven on earth.”

Personally, that means that, as we follow him in trust and obedience, the devastating effects of the Fall begin to be undone, and we are increasingly transformed into the image of Christ. But the effects of this transformation extend beyond the Church and individual Christians into creation and culture in each generation. However incomplete it may be at any given moment, the Holy Spirit is working through the Church to redeem broken creation, broken culture, broken relationships, and broken individual lives.

Therefore, the Church, and individual Christians, are now in this world to carry out the purposes of God in the strength that he alone provides by actively joining in his work of reconciling all things to himself. In his wisdom, he has created a path of faithful works for each of us, a path which we must choose to walk. Among the many good things that we can do, we are here to know, love, and worship him. We are here to care for and serve one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God. We are here to represent and proclaim Christ and his Gospel through thoughts, word, and deed. In spite of being “strangers and aliens on earth,” we are called to do good in our communities, in our families, among our friends and acquaintances, and for creation itself. We are called to bring blessing in every way we can, to the glory of God and the wellbeing of others. (See all of Ephesians 2, especially verses 10 and 19-22 in context, and Ephesians 4:11-5:21. See also Titus 2:11-14, 3:18, and Jeremiah 29: 1-13.)

This call to a life of faithful service is not limited to what we can accomplish in human strength and ingenuity. At Pentecost, the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Jesus poured out the incalculably generous gift of his own Spirit on his followers. The Holy Spirit in turn brought lavish gifts (abilities and effectiveness) for good works. Young and old, male and female, servant and master, all categories of humanity were offered equal and full access to the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts he brings: see Acts 2:1-21. The typical categories of “haves and have-nots”

were obliterated. St Paul affirms this transformation of humanity in the well-known statement of Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ.” This does not mean that Jews cease being Jews racially, or slaves are instantly set free from their masters. Young people are still younger than old people. Men are still males and women are still females. The legitimate distinctions appropriate to all of these human interrelationships and identities still exist. In fact, they all find their distinct beauty, dignity, and worth in Christ. But when it comes to salvation, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable us to do good in our world, all Christians have full access to all the gifts and graces of God. We are equal members in the Household of God.

Because of the lavish gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on all Christians, and the specific gifts for ministry that he freely distributes, the primary ministry force for the work of God in our world is the Church – **all** the saints. All Christians are gifted for ministry and mission in the world, and ministry in the Church, by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-13).

Implications for All the Saints in Terms of Ministry and Ordination

What are the direct implications in terms of the specific questions of ministry and ordination?

- As saints, all of us are called to the work of ministry. God’s vision is a Church that is brought to maturity in Christ *by that which every joint, muscle, and ligament supplies*.
- His commitment to “every member ministry” is such that he calls and gifts certain people to serve primarily by equipping others for their service. (See Ephesians 4:11-16.) Even if a denomination associates this equipping work with ordained leadership, that simply underscores that ordained clergy are therefore set apart and trained to serve by equipping, empowering, and releasing all the saints to fulfill their God-given ministries.
- The New Testament assumes that, “All are gifted,” then exhorts us as a whole, “Now use those gifts in the way, and for the purposes, God intends.” Inherent in that exhortation is the admonition to the Church, and its equipping leaders, to ensure that each person in the body is free to exercise the gifts he / she has been given. This vision of ministry and ministers in the Church is far broader than simply those who are ordained.
 - The excursus on the freedom for women to prophesy and pray publicly in 1 Corinthians 11 is just one example where essential ministries within the local Church have no stated association with ordination.
 - Rarely are the described ministries of the Church in the New Testament connected specifically to what we know today as “ordained ministers.” For just a few examples, consider Romans 16. Prisca and Aquila were well-known disciple-makers and hosts of a house church. Junia (a woman) may well have had an apostolic ministry (not holding the office of apostle but as a missionary or significant expander of the Church into new territory). Mary is “a hard-worker for you.” Urbanus and Stachys had visible and recognized ministries, as did two women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Dozens of people appear in this text as essential contributors to the spread and growth of the Church in and near Rome. Only one, Phoebe, possibly bore a title that we now call “ordination.” She may well have been a deacon. (Romans 16:1).

There are many more New Testament examples of “lay ministers.” The point is that God calls all his saints to ministry and gives each Christian the spiritual gifts and talents to fulfill that call. (NOTE: Many Anglicans see confirmation as the practice of “lay ordination,” the laying on of hands and prayer for the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit for service. Historical antecedents and current experience indicate that this view, well-attested by the Church, has merit.)

In the Diocese of Christ our Hope, we value godly ordained leaders. We pray for God to raise up church planters, deacons, and priests. We are eager to train and equip generations of new ordained leaders for the Church. **Nevertheless, we believe that God has empowered ALL his saints to do great things for the sake of the Kingdom – young, old, rich, poor, male, female, Jew, Greek, or Scythian. It is our desire and prayer that the work of ministry be broadened so that each parish is filled with saints who minister according to the Holy Spirit’s calling and gifts. We pray for gifted preachers, teachers, evangelists, pastors, and strategic leaders, in far greater numbers than could or should be ordained. And we call on the leadership of every local church, to equip, empower, and release ALL the saints for the work of ministry.**

What Does This Mean for Ordination in our Diocese?

We assert strongly that all Christians are called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to active and essential ministry for the Kingdom of Christ. We believe that an overemphasis on ordination suppresses the great work that all the saints are gifted and called to do. Nevertheless, we also believe that God instructs the Church through Holy Scripture to order its life and ministry through the offices of bishop, deacon, and priest.

- After the Resurrection, the apostolic office was established by Jesus himself. The original apostles were foundational to establishing the doctrine and practices of the Church. (John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-9; Ephesians 2: 19-21)
- In the earliest days of the Church’s existence, the apostles recognized and set apart those called to leadership through the laying on of hands. (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 4:14)
- There are recognized offices noted in several New Testament epistles. (See Philippians 1:1; Hebrews 13: 7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-5.)
- Ordination to ministry offices is supported by example and instruction in the New Testament. (1 Timothy 3:1-15; 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5)

In these examples, several constants are evident:

- Developing and discovering new leaders for the Church is a ministry for existing local leaders as well as for the whole Church. Some new leaders are singled out for ordained offices within the Church. These include the offices of deacon, priest, and bishop.
- Other gifted leaders are singled out and commissioned for particular service without being ordained. The focus is not on the office so much as the ministry.
- New leaders are raised up from within the Church as their character, gifting, and desire are recognized and affirmed by both the Church and its current leaders.
- Gifts and graces for ministry are conferred on new leaders by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and anointing by apostolic and ecclesial leaders – and that can apply to ordained leaders and “lay” leaders.

- The Church is called to follow and honor the godly example and direction of its leaders.
- All leadership is called to serve the Church by equipping and releasing all the saints for the work of ministry.
- Therefore, there is value and place for ordained leadership, for non-ordained leadership, and for the universal ministry of all the saints. May it be so among us in the Diocese of Christ our Hope!

More will be said about the responsibilities and nature of ordained Christian leadership in the next paper. At this point, it is sufficient to say that within the calling of all Christians to ministry, the Church also rightly ordains people to serve and order its life and ministry.