

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND FAITH: PART VI ENGAGING THE WORLD

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

I. How the catechism describes the mission of the Church

II. Identifying with the Church's mission

Perspective 1: Mission as the work of the heart	Luke 10:25-37
Perspective 2: Mission as the work of the hands	I Corinthians 12:4-31
Perspective 3: Mission as the work of change	Luke 14:17-23
Perspective 4: Mission as the work of the Trinity	Matthew 28:16-20

II. Engagement

Any of the following questions may be offered for discussion

1. At the beginning of each of the four perspectives on mission a related passage of Scripture or liturgy was offered. Choose one of these selections and read it. What does this passage say to you about your place as the Church and the world?
2. Can you recall a time when you were aware that something (whether you were able to identify its source as God at the time or not) was working to help you to love the "unlovable"? What was that like for you?
3. What is your greatest gladness? What do you think is the world's deepest hunger?
4. Mission as the work of change often begins with the insight that we enjoy privileges that are not necessarily extended to others? Does that make you uncomfortable? What might you do with that insight?
5. Identify an "outreach mission" that is ongoing in your parish. Who is doing it? Who is receiving it? How does this mission reflect some of the mission perspectives offered in this class?

III. Reflection

1. Re-read the promises contained in the baptismal covenant (BCP 304-305). Do you understand them any differently now that you have studied the Church's mission?
2. How important is it that you are asked to respond, "I will, with God's help?"

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND FAITH: PART VI ENGAGING THE WORLD

Introduction:

This chapter is unique in that the topic lends itself to an interactive discussion with participants as opposed to a lecture format followed by engaging questions. Therefore, you should note that this chapter is designed to engage the participant as it relates to their own personal spiritual journey.

I. Gathering

Hymn

- O holy city, *The Hymnal 1982* #583
- Where cross the crowded, *The Hymnal 1982* # 609

Collect of the Day *(One of the following collects for mission may be used)*

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach to those who are far off and those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit on all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

or

O God of all nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in your image, but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that, by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and worship you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

“If angels could talk, they would tell us Bible stories all the time. Then they would tell you why God made you, if you could stay awake for it.”

from What Children Know About Angels

Have you ever noticed that children seem to know a lot more than adults about listening to what God is saying to the church? Sometimes adults forget that we are living actors in the Christ-centered drama of reconciliation. We forget to remind ourselves why God has made us. We invent ways to sleep through the good news of salvation. Or as one poster put it:

*Most people don't know that there are angels
whose only job is to make sure you don't get
too comfortable & fall asleep & miss your life.*

Without a clear sense of its mission the Church will also miss the fullness of its life. Some people run away from the idea of mission because it makes them uncomfortable. Some are afraid that if they believed they had the power to change things, it would be an overwhelming burden to bear. But, until we live into the promises of the Gospel in our everyday lives, we miss what it is to be truly alive to the Spirit of God.

Theologian and author Howard Thurman observed that awareness of the Spirit of God is the unifying principle of all life. It is the most crucial experience that any human being can encounter. He compared this awareness to a door that leads immediately into the lives of all other beings. And once that door is open we must go through. He wrote:

God is making room in my heart for compassion: the awareness that where my life begins is where your life begins: the awareness that the sensitiveness to your needs cannot be separated from the sensitiveness to my needs; the awareness that the joys of my heart are never mine alone— nor are my sorrows.... God is at work enlarging the boundaries of my heart.... I struggle against the work of God.... I want to be let alone. I want my boundaries to remain fixed, that I may be at rest. But, even now as I turn to Him in the quietness, His work in me is ever the same.

This short essay is offered as a door opening into awareness of compassion. It is an invitation that welcomes you to explore how God is also working to enlarge the boundaries of your heart for mission.

II. Illumination

I. A good place to ground our understanding of the mission of the Church is to review the words of the catechism (BCP. p. 855)

- The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and with each other in Christ.
- The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.
- The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

II. The work of restoring all people to unity begins when members of the Church identify with the mission of the Church and begin to act as missionaries wherever they are. In this chapter, four perspectives on mission are offered as points of engagement. These perspectives all act together as God's love is shown forth in the world. They are:

1. mission as the work of the heart
2. mission as the work of the hands
3. mission as the work of change
4. mission as the work of the Trinity

Perspective 1: Mission as the work of the heart (Luke 10:25-37) Good Samaritan

The ethical code of the Old Testament tempers judgment with compassion. God is portrayed as a jealous deity who demands to be loved. At the same time, God's people are expected to show hospitality to those who cannot fend for themselves. This includes not only the poor (especially widows and orphans), but also those who are wayfarers and strangers in the land. God's people are often reminded that they themselves were once wanderers and strangers. Now, they have been brought together as Yahweh's people. Their covenant with God calls them to see with God's eyes and to have compassion on those who are vulnerable and powerless. Spiritual awareness is always connected to inclusion and outreach. It begins the work of the heart.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus takes this awareness one step farther. As the story begins, a lawyer asks Jesus for clarification about what he can do to inherit eternal life. (Perhaps he suspected that he had gotten too comfortable and had fallen asleep!) Jesus' answer refers him back to core of Jewish code, one that required love for both God and one's neighbor. But the man, still convinced that he may not have heard Jesus correctly, pushes the point by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" It is then that Jesus tells the story about the Samaritan. This parable brings us face to face with all that it takes to live a compassionate life. It is not a story about good people versus bad people or wicked people versus saved people. Instead, it is a story about the kind of awareness needed for a person to enlarge the boundaries of his or her heart. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans would have been well known to Jesus' audience. Notice, even at the end of the story the lawyer still cannot bring himself to say the word "Samaritan" when Jesus asks him. Instead, he continues to distance himself, referring to the man as "the one who showed him pity." We also choose to distance ourselves from people that we don't know or don't like.

The way that Jesus fleshes out the parable challenges us to see that the pain we claim as ours is always connected to pain that is our neighbors'. We are intended to identify both with the wounded Jew and the compassionate Samaritan. When we do this, we see that the work of the heart discourages us from thinking about "my mission" or "your mission". Instead, we can begin to focus on God's mission. Coming to this way of thinking is not always easy. We may continue to struggle against the work of God in us. Nevertheless, the call to mission always invites us to enlarge the boundaries of our hearts as well as the boundaries of our concern.

1. What does this passage say to you about your place as the church and the world?
2. Can you recall a time when you were aware that something (whether you called it God at the time or not) was working to help you to love the "unlovable"? What was that like for you?

Perspective 2: Mission as the work of the hands (1 Corinthians 12:4-31)

Mission is doing God's work in a broken world. St. Teresa of Avila wrote that we are Christ's earthly hands, offering blessing to the world. Like the hands of the resurrected Christ, our hands may also be wounded by what life has brought us. But those hands are ours and that will have to be enough. Jesus has called us to join with others as His living disciples, to go where He has gone and to love as He loves.

St. Paul described this organic dimension of spiritual awareness by referring to the church as a body. Today, our knowledge of molecular biology may make this analogy seem simplistic. We might feel more comfortable referring to the Church as an "open system" that relies for its life the input of grace and the output of works. Or, we might use the word "synergy" to describe the experience of teams of Christians working together. St. Paul uses the word "body" to offer two important insights about the work of mission. First, the mission of the church is a single mission. No matter how many mission trips we sign up for or how many outreach projects we support we never act on our own. The work of mission is nourished by one Spirit. Each of us responds to the call of the same God.

Second, each of us has different gifts for mission. We are, as St. Paul describes it, different organs playing different roles within a single body. As we discover our place in the body, we begin to become as fully alive as we can be—in other words, we start to become our vocation. Frederick Buechner has given us a simple definition of vocation: "*It is the place where your great gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*" Some people seem to know immediately where that place is. Others remain clueless until something seems to "knock them upside the head," releasing in them previously undiscovered joy. For some reason, our true vocation often comes to us as a complete surprise. C.S. Lewis captured this idea in the title of his biography, Surprised by Joy.

Once, going through a particularly tough time in life, a wise friend said, "Remember, God never makes in order to mock." She meant that God is not some kind of prankster who dangles impossible vocations in front of us. The work of mission uses all skills and talents that we are willing to offer. In fellowship with Christ we will

never encounter a sign that says “no vacancy” or “need not apply.” Instead, we receive full acceptance and welcome.

This brings us to the most important insight about mission as the work of the hands. When we lump our mission programs under a single category called “outreach,” we place the focus on **our** hands reaching **out**. We understand mission as something we **do** for someone else (and we may even hear ourselves bragging that “we got as much or more out of it as they did”). Do we ever think that the central issue in mission is to allow people to discover their vocations and become fully alive in Christ? If we do not think this way, we may be guilty of becoming too comfortable and falling asleep and missing our lives. The following are two stories that provided awakenings. Strangely enough, both of them are related to Christmas:

There was a musical Christmas program at a day care center for older adults. As the performer sang the familiar hymns, ones that evoke such powerful memories, one woman with advanced dementia did not seem to be listening. Asked if she was okay, she smiled brightly and said, “Oh honey, I can’t do the words anymore, but at least I can tap my foot.” Sure enough, her foot had been tapping to the music.

A certain church collects money at Christmas to purchase presents for a needy family. Over the course of several years, as the children had grown older, this outreach project had gotten to be more and more of a chore. Finally, one year, a “last minute” decision was made to give cash to the family (against the outreach committee’s better judgment). The next time they saw the mother, she was beaming. She said, “The best thing I got this year was being able to pick out what I wanted to buy for my kids, not what the committee wanted to give me. Thank you! Thank you. Merry Christmas.”

God’s mission will not permit us to treat people as outsiders. As we use our hearts and hands for mission, we cannot ignore the foot that taps or the mother who craves the dignity of buying her own Christmas gifts. When we understand that this radical inclusiveness is truly God’s mission, we begin to guard against using “outreach” as a way of keeping people out. We change it to a way of bringing people in. It is our vocation to use the work of our hands to heal and to bless. We cannot not do this without clasping the hand that reaches back to touch our own.

1. What is your greatest gladness?
2. What do you think is the world’s deepest hunger?

Perspective 3: Mission as the Work of Change (Luke 14:7-23)

One of the images for God’s kingdom that Jesus preferred is the image of the banquet. Because we live in a world of fast food and potluck suppers, the power of this image may be lost on us at first. The communal sharing of food in an agrarian economy was a privilege that only certain people enjoyed. Women were not invited and were kept apart. Widows (who had the least social status) collected their own food from what was left over in the fields after the crops were picked.

At dinner there was clearly a pecking order that determined one’s place at table. To be invited to the table meant that you had access not only to food, but also to networks of power and influence. You were privy to insider information. Those who ate together were those who shared similar social status, a bit like corporate America.

Jesus gave a different rule. When someone who was eating at table with Jesus bragged that those who eat the feast in the kingdom of God will truly be blessed, Jesus gave a startling answer. He recounted the story of a great dinner party where the invited guests had refused to attend. So, the host instructed his servant to round up the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, and travelers from the roads and country lanes. These people seem at first to be a strange choice because they appear to have the least to offer to conversations of power. Nevertheless, Jesus says that these are the very ones whose place at God’s table will be assured.

If we are to become fully alive as Jesus' disciples in this world, we must take His image of the banquet to heart. This is not to imply that we should give up our efforts at relief work on behalf of those who are ill, impoverished, or oppressed. Rather, it says that relief work is only the tip of the iceberg. Our sense of mission must evolve so that we use our influence to mold our current social order into one that seeks change through a real commitment to truth and justice. In short, we must make it our business to build a just society by becoming instruments of reconciliation in a world that is broken by suffering and violence.

The root of the word "religion" means to bind together. Too often, we allow ourselves to be bound into groups with people who are just like us—Episcopalians, twenty-somethings, suburbanites, Alabama fans etc. But when we limit the power of religion to that of linking us only with "the like-minded," we cut ourselves off from other people. This cutting does violence to those we exclude—Muslims, senior adults, city-dwellers, Auburn fans etc. We put up signs that say "no vacancy" or "need not apply." We maintain our comfort level by forming our own networks and being sure to safeguard our own privileged position within them. We use our power to bring about good for the people that we serve, but we fall short of using our power at the service of social change.

Titus Pressler recounts the following story about mission. After nearly forty years as missionaries in Liberia, Judy and John Gay realized that, while the relief work they were doing was indispensable, they themselves were dispensable. They had created a comfortable niche where they carried out the work of God successfully, but they had done little to change the conditions of poverty and injustice that gave their work meaning. The Gay's story could be repeated again and again by missionaries from Nigeria, Honduras, South Dakota, Palestine, Haiti, and all the other places where the Church struggles to invite the poor, the lame, the blind, and the dispossessed to the table. Even when the church recognizes the difference between paternalism and partnership, it labors to discern how to move forward, acknowledging that power differentials exist not only within a single society, but also globally.

We who make it our priority to engage in the work of justice and reconciliation often feel that our abilities to effect permanent global change are very limited. This does not mean that the church should give up trying. It means instead that we must move forward in the assurance that Christ's love has indeed made all things new. Just as Jesus overcame death and the grave, we too can overcome our impatience, discouragement, and short-sightedness to find renewed commitment to the task that He began. As Christians we believe that Jesus' suffering and death were not the end; instead, they signaled the first stage of our redemption. And Jesus died not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.

1. The work of change begins with the insight that we enjoy privileges that are not necessarily extended to other. Does that make you uncomfortable?
2. What might you do with that insight?

Perspective 4: Mission as the work of the Trinity (Matthew 28:16-20) The Great Commission

Across the ages, the church has come to understand that mission originates not the work of just one person (Jesus), but in the Trinity. Martin Smith writes that when we are drawn into prayer for mission, this very act of prayer "...draws us into the love which flows between the persons of the Trinity." Thus, the deep roots of our sense of mission are nourished by lively communion with a God who is Three in One.

Educator and author Jean Vanier describes communion as mutual trust and mutual belonging. He writes:

"... it is the to-and-fro movement of love between two people where each one gives and each one receives. Communion is not a fixed state, it is an ever-growing and deepening reality....Community is mutual vulnerability and mutual openness one to the other. It is liberation for both, indeed, where both

are allowed to be themselves, where both are called to grow in greater freedom and openness to others and to the universe.”

This type of communion with the Trinity is foundational to mission. We may believe that we are answering the call to mission when we act on the words of Jesus’ Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Gradually, we come to see that this kind of obedience is only one dimension of mission. We begin to realize that we are engaged in *co-mission* where, in communion with God, we experience the to-and-fro movement of love. Over time, we know that our partnership is with the all three persons of the Trinity. Just as the Trinity is a community-in-the-making, so we come to rely on the Trinity as we ourselves become community-makers.

How often are we drawn to pray for people who are the victims of war, disease, or natural disaster? It may seem to us that the desire to intercede for these unfortunate people originates with ourselves. But, this is not true. Prayer that intercedes for others has its origin in a God who continually tugs on our hearts. The desire to find and be found by God originates with God, not with us. So, when we find ourselves praying for the mission of the Church, we are merely re-directing our focus to the problems that God already knows. By enlarging our hearts in ways that draw us ever closer, God makes us co-missioners in the kingdom.

We have a model for this intimate relationship to God in the person of Jesus. Through His life and work we can see what it means to be totally God-centered. Jesus is a person whose whole life is shaped by the working of God’s Spirit. We believe that He was conceived by God’s Spirit, baptized in God’s Spirit, and brought to full life through God’s Spirit. Jesus is the antithesis of the one who “falls asleep and misses his life.” Moreover, the ministry of Jesus gives preferential treatment to those who are victimized, dispirited, disinherited, and oppressed. It is to these people that He brings new life. Jesus becomes the model through which we, His disciples, become fully alive, not just to our own lives, but to the life of the world.

The life of Jesus links us to the Spirit of God. From this Spirit we receive a desire to move toward goodness and wholeness. We receive a guide who helps us grow in ways that allow us to give and receive love. And we are strengthened and sustained for the hard work of reconciliation. Therefore, the church’s true mission never originates in our desire to change the world, however good our motives may be. Mission is not a program initiated of the Church to increase its influence in underdeveloped parts of the globe. Mission is not the service projects that we plan. Instead, mission is about realizing that the Great Commission asks us to sign on as *co-missioners* in a plan for saving the world. This plan is relatively simple. God sends the Son, the Son sends the church equipped with the power of the Spirit.

Anglican educator Grant LeMarquand describes it this way:

“Mission ... is about God: about God’s love and forgiveness proclaimed, about God’s sending Jesus as the promise of the spirit’s presence as the task is continued by the church....Mission has its origins, and it’s continuing, and it’s fulfillment in the life of the Trinity.”

Often salvation is proclaimed as a “come to Jesus” moment.

1. Does the Anglican view of mission-in-the-Trinity presented here change your perspective on salvation?
2. If so, how?

Conclusion:

“If angels could talk, they would tell us Bible stories all the time. Then they would tell you why God made you, if you could stay awake for it.”

from What Children Know About Angels

When, through baptism, we become part of a Spirit-led community that responds openly and joyfully to Jesus' Great Commission, we are truly alive. The door of our spiritual awareness swings wide open. We begin living in ways that heed the call of the angels to listen to why God made us.

This new life in the Spirit immerses us in pain and joy. We have the pain of knowing that we must "go." We will need to leave our old securities behind in order to become a *co-missioner* in God's new creation. We will need to open ourselves to work and love in a world where poverty, intolerance, and injustice often do violence to God's plan for redemption. We may find that our effectiveness as agents of change is hindered by "do-goodism", misunderstanding, and by open hostility. This is what it is like to walk where Jesus walked. All of the prophets and saints have known this. We are in good company.

Even so, we know that we are filled with grace, even when we are poor in love. We respond in joyful obedience to a God who is always enlarging the boundaries of our hearts, helping us to live in ways that demonstrate God's love of all creation. We are sustained by knowing that we have not slept through, but, rather we have danced through the Bible stories that the angels tell. We have come to a place where the world's deep hunger has become the wellspring for our surprising joy. Thanks be to God.

1. Identify an "outreach mission" that is ongoing in your parish. Who is doing it?
2. Who is receiving it?
3. How does this mission reflect some of the mission perspectives offered in this class?

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND FAITH: PART VI ENGAGING THE WORLD

III. Engagement

1. Re-read the promises contained in the baptismal covenant (BCP 304-305). Do you understand them any differently now that you have studied the Church's mission? How important is it that you are asked to respond, "I will, with God's help?"

2. Has this class challenged you to live more fully into your baptismal covenant? What did you think about this covenant before? What do you think about it now?

THE ANGLICAN SPIRIT

EPILOGUE

During this study you have been introduced to some of the essentials of the Episcopal Church and Anglican tradition. You have found the Episcopal Church to be a community of worship and the service in the name of the Trinitarian God whom we know most fully in Jesus Christ. As a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion we share in what has been called “the Anglican spirit.” It is a way of being Christian in the world.

The Anglican spirit is rooted in the Holy Scriptures, in the belief and ancient liturgies of the Catholic tradition, as reformed during the Reformation period, and in the mission of God in the world. We are a church that shares both in the great Catholic tradition of the Church and in the insights and energies of Protestantism, as well as in the spirit of the Enlightenment that values reason as a means for God’s speaking to us. Our life is centered in worship and service, and in the on-going discernment of God’s truth through Scripture, tradition, and reason.

Anglicans are inclined to be joyful Christians, celebrating the original blessing of creation and the divine gift of salvation through Christ. We affirm that human beings are made in the image of God, an image that endures in spite of the corruption of sin. We are also deeply aware that we are broken and imperfect people, living in a fallen world that needs healing and redeeming. In the Incarnation of Christ and his saving work in the crucifixion and resurrection and giving of the Spirit, we believe that God has come to be with us in our brokenness and struggle and is healing us through the grace and mercy of Christ.

In our devotion to the Incarnate Christ, we are passionate about the reality that all things have been made holy by the coming of God into the world in Jesus. We are a sacramental people who find our way to God through the blessing of earthly things, such as bread and wine, water, beautiful vestments, and holy ceremony.

In our devotion to the cross, we believe that God has reconciled all things in Christ and brought into being the beginning of a new creation. We are a forgiven people who rejoice in God’s mercy and compassion. We believe that, as an ancient prayer says, in Christ “things which had been cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are being brought to their perfection through whom all things were made, your son Jesus Christ....”

In our devotion to the Spirit, we rejoice in “the love of God that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given us.” Life in the Spirit celebrates the reconciliation and unity of all things in God. It affirms that through Baptism and Confirmation each of us has been given the gifts of the Spirit for ministry, and that the Church is a community of the Spirit empowered to do Christ’s work in the world.

In our devotion to worship according to The Book of Common Prayer, we affirm that it is through worship and prayer that we grow in our knowledge and love of God and both find and express our faith. The Book of Common Prayer gives us a uniform repository of our common belief and common worship, which binds us together as one in the midst of many diversities and differences. We are not a confessional church. Our accent is on reverent worship and mystery and wonder. One of our favorite ancient sayings is *lex orandi, lex credendi*, the law of prayer is the law of believing. The Prayer Book is where we find our oneness of belief and prayer, in the communion of the Spirit and of the saints in every time and place. There has been a succession of English Prayer Books, 1549, 1552, 1662, 1789, 1893, 1928, and 1979, each continuing the Anglican tradition of worship in the context of the changes in the English language and our understanding.

In our devotion to the Church we understand that we are the family of God, a community of faith, worship, and service where all the people of the earth can find a home in the love of God. We value what the New Testament calls *koinonia*, the communion of the Holy Spirit where all things are reconciled and made one. We are the

Church of the “Via Media,” where we value the golden mean, the middle way, between extremes. Deeply centered in Christ, we are resolute in holding together things which differ, for the sake of the Church’s wholeness. The Via Media requires patience and restraint, a sense of humility and balance, and, above all, the conviction that only God has all the truth. It leads us to be a tolerant community, where diverse people can worship side by side and be one in mission.

“Comprehensiveness” is a good word for the Anglican spirit. Our way of being Christian, as one put it, is not about “compromise for the sake of peace but comprehension for the sake of truth.” Comprehensiveness means containing in one tradition all of the truth of God that we are able to contain, with some of the inevitable tensions that this involves. We tend to be “both/and” people rather than “either/or” people, trying to live in the spirit of I Corinthians 13. This attitude of heart has given the Episcopal Church and Anglican tradition an openness of mind and gentleness of spirit, which embraces diverse viewpoints within the broad whole of the catholic faith. This has enabled us to be a church in which the evangelical, catholic, and liberal traditions are held together in one body, at our best, with grace, patience, and generosity of spirit.

By encountering the mystery of God that surrounds us, we continually learn that before the Creator we are dependent creatures, before the judge we are sinners, and before the redeemer we are forgiven and reconciled. In our continual encounter with God’s Word and Sacrament we are drawn to a life of repentance, that is to a reorientation of ourselves to God and his purposes for life. This is possible because we know the grace-filled mystery of God the Trinity and the love of God in Christ from which nothing can separate us.

We hope that this curriculum has enabled you to catch a glimpse of the faith of the Episcopal Church and of the Anglican spirit. We hope that you will help us continue to build God’s holy Church and make a difference in the world for Christ’s sake. May we all continue to study to understand the essentials of our faith and practice them in our common worship and service to the glory of God.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always.