

# Responding to Our Call

## Recommended for Common Lesson Five Year D

We are called through our baptism to be ministers. Planning the ministries to which we are called is the focus of this common lesson. During the past year, the application of our theological reflections in specific steps has been at the core of EFM. The seminar group has been a safe place to try out new ideas and receive support for our day-to-day life and ministry. It is also the place where we have been able to say to each other, “Because of my insights from this theological reflection, I will....”

The readings have provided a deeper knowledge and understanding of God’s people and their lives throughout the ages. Sharing our own story and hearing the stories of fellow group members have provided opportunities for us to gain a broader understanding of what it means to be sent out as ministers of reconciliation in the world.

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. (Catechism, *BCP*, p. 855)

### Exercise One

As you and your group begin to bring closure to this year, look back at your spiritual autobiography in order to remind yourself of your understandings at that time about your Christian journey and your sense of ministry.

What has changed for you? What remains the same? What new insights have emerged for you during the past months?

Recall the passage from Deuteronomy (26:5-8). In what way have you participated in the journeys and experiences of people you met in Scripture and in the history of the Church? What has it meant for you to participate with Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Miriam, Jacob, Rachel, Mary, the Canterbury pilgrims, John Calvin, Teresa of Avila?

Make notes to yourself in the “Reflections” section of your journal. Perhaps you might want to write a letter to your seminar group about the changes that have occurred in your life as you have participated with the events and people in our tradition.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:12-14).

In *The Dream of God*, Verna Dozier suggests that God's people have lost sight of God's dream. Instead of making God's reign—God's love—known to all, we have built institutions and organizations.

Ministry was the high calling of Jesus of Nazareth. It is one way of translating *diakonia*, service. Jesus came to serve the world, to restore it to the oneness with God from which it had fallen. That restoration—“reconciliation” is the word St. Paul used—is always the mission of the people of God. Any talk about ministry that does not talk about reconciliation has already missed the mark. (p. 149)

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, God's love has become enfleshed and dwells among us. Jesus, in pouring himself out for humankind, has shown us the way to love one another. In response to this, the Episcopal catechism reminds us that our mission as God's people is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” This is the ministry of reconciliation.

### Exercise Two

Reflect on the following questions and note your responses in your journal.

- In what ways have you experienced Jesus' command to love one another in your EFM seminar group? What have you learned from these experiences about your ministry?
- In thinking about loving one another as God first loves us, are there times when this kind of love feels like “tough love”? Tough love is the kind of love that says “no” or “not now” instead of “do anything you want.” When have you experienced “tough love”? When have you given “tough love” to someone else? What were your thoughts and feelings? What examples from Scripture remind you of this kind of love? What does this tell you about your ministry as a Christian in your family, in your church, in the marketplace?

### Living Out Ministry

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. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

(BCP, p. 855)

John's gospel reminds us that there is no greater love than to “lay down one's life for one's friend.” Our friendship with Jesus is tied to living out this commandment to love one another.

The ministry of reconciliation to which all members of the church are called is easier to talk about than to do. In our EFM seminar groups, it is usually easier to gain an insight as the result of a theological reflection than to actually say, “On the basis of this insight, I will...,” and then really do it.

The ministry of reconciliation to which we are called is usually right at our feet, or just outside our own door, or the door of our church, or the place where we shop or work. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)? The person who was attacked by robbers and left for dead was on the road where three travelers passed by. He was right at their feet, not in some other country or town.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story begins with Jesus’ reply to a lawyer who asked him, “And who is my neighbor?” The parable ends with Jesus asking, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus’ reply is: “Go and do likewise.”

As we come to this juncture of EFM, we intentionally focus on our own ministries. We ask ourselves, how do we act on our beliefs and our insights? What does it take for us not only to say that we love one another, but also to do it?

### **Exercise Three**

- Take some time to think of all of the places you encounter other people: at home, at work, at church, in the grocery store, at the shopping mall, in the library, anywhere you go in the community in which you live.
- Recall a time in one of these places when you saw someone in need and you responded to that need. What prompted you to respond? What were the thoughts and feelings you had at the time? What image comes to your mind as you recall the occasion?
- Recall another time when you saw someone in need and did not respond. What stopped you from responding? What were your thoughts and feelings? What image comes to mind as you recall the situation?
- As you think about these two occasions and the images that emerged for you, make notes in your journal. As you think about your two stories, begin to enter into a conversation with the parable of the Good Samaritan. What new insights are emerging for you? How will you apply these insights as you live out your Christian life and ministry?
- Reread the questions and answers about the mission and ministry of the Church. How do you understand these statements at this time? What will you do differently? What will you continue doing?

- Identify one or more places where you are living out your ministry as a Christian right now. In what way does your ministry proclaim the gospel and promote justice, peace, and love?

- Identify one or more places where you feel drawn to a ministry. What might you do about that? What would it mean for you? What hinders your response? What encourages it?

**At the  
Seminar  
Session**

Share your reflections on ministry with the other members of your group. Ask for the help you will need to continue with a ministry in which you are already involved or to begin a new ministry.