

Development Program to Support Common Ministry in the Diocese of Southern Ohio

The purpose of this document is to outline a two year discernment and formation process for common ministry in the Diocese of Southern Ohio. Several congregations in various setting and of sizes around the Diocese will be invited to join in this program to develop a strategy and practice for common ministry. It is hoped that this process will provide a model which can be adapted in future years for additional congregations within the Diocese.

Background and Presuppositions:

The Diocese has been involved in a conversation about Common Ministry among congregations, clergy, bishops, and diocesan leaders. Several key understandings have emerged.

Common ministry is collaborative ministry, shared equally by all in the faith community. It holds the vision that all are united in the body of Christ, each with special gifts and unique ministries and all share in the Church's work of reconciling the world to God. This vision of ministry was established by Jesus in the calling of disciples and modeled by the early church as believers worked to realize God's dream of the reign of God. When Christianity became the predominant religion in many countries, the practice of ministry was altered from the ministry of all the baptized to a greater emphasis and authority on the ordained. Often the active ministry of the baptized was thwarted. In our time the Church is no longer predominant in our culture and is in danger of losing its effectiveness. It is the conviction of many in the Episcopal Church and in our diocese that common ministry, the ministry of all the baptized, must be restored if the Church is to be effective as agents of God's reconciliation and justice in our time. The 1979 book of Common Prayer re-claimed Common Ministry in the baptismal covenant and the Catechism calls all the baptized to minister in the name of Jesus, to work for God's reconciliation, to build up the body of Christ and to work to establish God's kingdom of justice.

Common ministry emerges in Southern Ohio as central to the call of this diocese to "proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, as Messiah and Lord. We fulfill that mission chiefly by being ministers of the reconciliation between us and God, and between us and one another, won by Christ on the cross" (from Bishop Breidenthal's paper on Common Ministry). Common ministry reflects our diocese's commitment to transparency, leadership, and connectivity:

- 1) Transparency, because it recognizes that all effective ministry is open and collaborative, shared by open exchange and the common listening to God's call on all of us individually and corporately;
- 2) Leadership, because common ministry requires mutual accountability and reflects the servant ministry that Jesus taught us to

carry one another's burdens, each having his or her unique gifts for ministry, to build up the body of Christ; and

3) Connectivity, because all are connected together in a common call as one body and share in discerning the call of God on the people.

“Together, these spiritual practices form one practice, one name for which is *common ministry*: a ministry that is open, egalitarian, and collaborative. This name invokes the idea of the *common*, with all the resonance it retains when we speak of *The Book of Common Prayer*. ‘Common’ means everything owned by everyone, and so no secrets (transparency). ‘Common’ also means shared responsibility, and so shared leadership and mutual accountability. Finally, ‘common’ means shared identity, and therefore connection with the common purpose of ministry in the name of Jesus.” Common ministry invites connections to one another, other congregations, other institutions in the community, other faith communities and the Diocese.

Discernment and formation are key components of this model. Common Ministry affirms that all congregations and people have ministries which they are continually discerning and striving to fulfill. Congregations discern God's call on them as a people of God in a given time and place. “What is God calling our congregation to be and do at this time in our life together?” Individuals discern God's call as they ask “What is God calling me to be and do at this time as a member of the body of Christ?”

Ongoing formation is critical to common ministry. Praying, studying scripture, learning about our faith, reflecting theologically on ministry and issues, and developing skills for ministry are vital to Christian leadership.

Much of common ministry utilizes the best practices of healthy ministries and congregations that lead to strong and vibrant witnesses to Christ. Common ministry is not new; it is practiced in abundance throughout our diocese and in many congregations. What this approach seeks to do is to broaden and strengthen the commitment of all the people to a shared, collaborative ministry in the name of Jesus. This proposal is a template for action, but it is based in the strong conviction that it will be adapted and adjusted as circumstances and needs vary in different congregations.

Step One: Invitation (late October 2009)

The Bishop and the Executive staff will issue invitations to 6- 9 congregations to help develop a model for common ministry. These congregations will be chosen to reflect various membership sizes and various locales in the diocese (urban, rural, suburban, east, west). The Bishop will issue a letter to the Rector, vicar, priest-in-charge or Senior Warden, inviting the congregation to discern if they might benefit from participation in this program. Goals and a schedule of the program will be included. The Canons will follow up with the clergy or senior wardens to discuss the program and answer any questions. The clergy or senior warden will discuss the possible participation with the congregation.

Those congregations interested in continuing to discern if they will participate in the program will attend an orientation day on December 12 at Procter. Clergy and lay leadership teams including all parish clergy, both wardens, and as many vestry members as possible will be asked to attend. This day will explore common ministry through Bible study, discussion, and presentations. It will present an outline of the discernment and training process. Assignments will be given for further explorations. Consultants will be assigned to each congregation to support the discernment and formation process.

Step Two: Response (December, 2009- January 2010)

The clergy and lay leadership teams will share information about the process with their Vestry or Mission Council. The Vestry or Council will be asked to prayerfully consider if they choose to participate. Congregations will reply by the end of January 2010. Those congregations which wish to continue will begin a process of discernment and reflection on God's call on the congregation. The congregation will begin a corporate study of Luke-Acts to listen to God and reflect on God's call on the congregation at this time in their congregation's life.

Step Three: Discerning the congregation's Call to Ministry (February- April 2010)

A congregational planning process will be held at the local church to pray and consider God's call on the congregation. This process will be facilitated by the appointed consultant.

A community assessment will explore the resource of the congregation's community. What are the challenges and opportunities presented by the specific location of the church? What institutions or community groups can serve as partners? What faith groups? What are the unique and special challenges and opportunities are present. What are the needs for ministry and for evangelism? This assessment helps inform the discernment of God's unique call on the congregation in its place and time.

The leadership team will take the material from this discernment and develop a mission and vision strategy for the congregation. Various groups or the congregation at large will brainstorm ministries to fulfill God's call. These responses will be collated into a mission strategy for the congregation.

Step Four: Discerning Gifts and Developing a Mission and Formation Team (May-June 2010)

A gifts workshop will be offered at Procter to help individuals discern their call. Persons will be asked to identify what gifts they have and how they feel called to utilize them. They will discuss ways they can use them in the service of God's call upon the congregation.

The congregation will identify the various ministries needed to be faithful to God's calling. Members will share their experiences of call and their gifts as developed in the gifts workshop. **Ministry Teams** will be created in the congregation (such as Pastoral Care, Hospitality, Worship leadership and preaching, Christian formation, Evangelism, Service and Justice, etc.) Persons will be identified to lead various ministries or teams of ministers. Leader of the ministry teams will be chosen. In small congregations these ministries may be assigned to just one person or one person may take on more than one ministry. The leaders of ministry teams will constitute a **Mission and Formation Team** for the congregation.

Step Four: Building a team (August 2010 – June 2011)

The congregational **Mission and Formation Teams** will meet together in three overnight workshops at Procter from August 2010 to June 2011. This will involve team building and training in congregational dynamics. These meetings will include leadership training and offer specific workshops in Pastoral care, liturgy, outreach, evangelism, etc.

Step Six: Assessment

Each congregation will evaluate how common ministry is being implemented in its community. A new group of congregations will begin this process in the fall of 2011.

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