



# Baptismal Mission Forum



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## **BAPTISMAL MISSION FORUM** The Newsletter for Episcopalians on Baptismal Mission

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## **FROM THE EDITOR**

I often hear criticism from individuals that when people want to promote understanding of the baptismal mission of Christ in their daily lives, their language is too vague and general. I agree with this criticism.

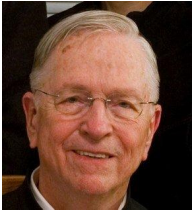
So in the next five issues of this publication, we will get more specific. We’ll use the six mission areas available to each of us for living out our baptismal mission - home, workplace, local community, wider world, leisure activities, and our congregations. In each issue, we will include articles illustrating how Christ uses one mission area to carry out his mission through our daily life activities, thus fulfilling our baptismal promises.

In this issue, we will use the home as a setting for Christ’s carrying out his mission of love and justice through our daily-life activities. Four people have written about this mission area from four different settings. I think you will be moved – as I was – by their insight into Christ taking their ordinary activities and transforming them in ways to carry out his will for our world. In the next issue, we will use the workplace as our area of mission.

If this stimulates in you any questions or comments about this presentation, I would be delighted to hear from you!

## REDEFINING THE WORD, “OUTREACH”

By Peyton G. Craighill



What definition do we use for the word, “outreach”? From my observation in many congregations I’ve been in, “outreach” has the same meaning. It refers to the programs that congregations support, providing welfare to people in need. These programs are treated as the “extra-curricular activity” on the periphery of congregational-directed programs. When budget time comes, they get whatever funds are left over after the central concerns of congregations are met.

I propose changing our definition to a much wider and deeper meaning, in line with what Christ invites us to in service to his mission. To get at this wider definition, we have to focus on a different definition, namely, of what the word “success” means. We usually define the success of congregations by two measures: 1) the size of their congregations on Sunday mornings, and 2) their ability to raise enough funds to cover their budgets.

This definition of success is understandable. The only problem with it is that it ignores the reason why God established the Church in general and local congregations in particular. Christ established the Church for one reason – after his ascension, to carry on his mission of spreading the Good News of God’s Kingdom into “all the world”. Our congregations exist primarily not to attract people in but to send people out to share with Christ in his mission in all areas of their daily lives. It’s true that if we don’t attract people in we won’t have any people to send out. But our sending out is the primary function of our congregations, and our attracting in is their secondary function. Our mission is to attract people in, in order to send them out to share with Christ in his

mission of love and justice in all areas of their daily lives. This sending out is the comprehensive meaning of the word, “outreach”.

The Father sent his Son into our world to bring us Good News; this was the Father’s action of outreach. Jesus left Nazareth to be baptized by John; his baptism was the beginning of Christ’s outreach. After Christ’s death and resurrection, he commissioned his followers to go into “all the world” to continue his mission; this marked the beginning of the apostles’ outreach. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit acted to baptize 3,000 people; this was the beginning of the Church’s outreach. Christ, through his church, established congregations all over the world; that was the beginning of their outreach. According to this definition, outreach is not peripheral to any congregation. It’s why the congregation exists!

If this is true, how does Christ’s outreach express itself through the mission and ministry of congregations? Although Christ’s outreach through his congregations takes many forms, all of them point back to the rite of baptism. As Christ’s commission came from his Heavenly Father to be in outreach through his baptism, so Christ commissions us to share with him in his mission through our baptism. We spell out the meaning and details of our outreach through the covenant that we make with Christ in baptism. The five commitments that we make at the end of the baptismal covenant provide us with detailed guidance in living out that covenant.

How do we live out our baptismal covenant by sharing with Christ in his mission? We accomplish it through everything that we do, Monday

through Sunday, in our familiar daily-life activities. When we realize that through our baptism, Christ commissions us to share with him in his mission of love and justice through everything we do, our lives are transformed! Everything we do takes on new meaning.

We begin to see the possibility of Christian outreach in seven areas of mission – home, work-place, local community, the wider world, leisure, our spiritual formation, and our participation in the life of the church. In each area, we can live out our five baptismal covenant commitments – 1) entering into the apostles’ learning, fellowship, and prayer; 2) resisting evil and repenting of our sins; 3) proclaiming by word and example Christ’s Good News; 4) seeking and serving Christ in all persons; and 5) striving for justice and peace among all people.

What’s the role of our congregations in this transforming way of looking at our Monday-through-Sunday daily life activities? As mountain climbers need a base camp to accomplish their mission, so we also need a base camp to accomplish our mission of outreach in Christ. Our congregation functions as our spiritual “base camp”, given us by Christ. Our community life provides us with the inspiration, knowledge, guidance, and support that makes our outreach in Christ possible. In response to the five commitments of the baptismal covenant outlined above, our ways of sharing with Christ in his mission in our community will be radically changed. The five commitments aren’t just for individuals; they involve our congregation as a whole. It’s our duty and joy to find ways to relate these five commitments to our congregation’s outreach to our community, not only individually, but also corporately.

I will make a preliminary, sketchy, and brief out-

line of how we might do this:

*Entering into the apostles’ learning, fellowship, and prayer –*

Consider what we can learn from the apostles’ approach to relating their congregations to their wider communities. What was threatening their congregations’ fellowship both internally and externally? How did they pray in ways that reached out into the wider community, thus promoting unity within their congregations?

*Resisting evil and promoting repentance –*

In our community, how do we identify evil that keeps us from accepting the Good News of Christ?

When we identify that evil, how do we repent of that evil in ways that will overcome it?

*Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ –*

What does this mean in terms of our congregation and our local community? What is the Good News of Christ for them both? What are the means available to us as a congregation to share with Christ in his mission of bringing Good News to both through word and example?

*Seeking and serving Christ in all persons –*

How can we do a better job of this in our congregation, thus enabling us to do a better job of it within our local community?

*Striving for justice and peace among all people -*

What does justice and peace mean for our congregation? What does it mean for our local community? How best do we share with Christ in his mission of sharing his justice and his peace in both?

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## DOMESTIC ECONOMY

By Doug Cumming



My wife and I live in a looming Queen Anne style, multi-colored shingled house built in the 1890s at the edge of a little Virginia town twice that old. Should we buy it? we wondered when we moved here 11 years ago. It seemed impractical and

needed work. I showed a photograph of the house to one of my Savannah, Ga., cousins and she exclaimed in her most exuberant manner that it was perfect, just like Granny and Granddaddy's big old house where she was raised in Augusta. Our three children, ages 17, 15 and 12, loved all the high-ceilinged rooms, stacked up to a third floor that offered the town's highest view of the Allegheny mountains to the west.

So we bought the house.

The home is the first realm of a Christian's five baptismal vows. It was also the first realm of good order and stewardship in the story of man. You can see this in the history of the English word "economy," which now describes the powers and principalities of our world – the global economy; economic news. The word first appears in the 14th century from the Middle French *yeconomie* or *oeconomie*, meaning management of a household, its expenses, its domestic relations. So the word was applied theologically in the Reformation, meaning the good order of things established by Providence, God's husbandry of all in all ("ecology" is derived from the same root). All this goes way back to the ancient Greek "*oekonomia*," thrifty management of a household or family.

While our children lived in the house, it was anything but thrifty or managed. We had no TV, cable or otherwise, so they brought friends over for late-night movies, crazy art projects like decorating an electric guitar with glue and costume jewelry, or carving Halloween pumpkins as zombies with fake blood drooling out. Our doors were al-

ways open for the comings and goings.

We had raised Daniel, William and Sarah, as best we knew how, "in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers." All were baptized in the Episcopal church; all enjoyed church as children and sang in the choir. But by the time we moved into this big old house in Lexington, Va., in the high tide of their adolescence, they had no interest in the Episcopal parish church my wife and I joined.

Now, they are all three out in the land, living their unsettled but wholly original and interesting lives. They are unchurched. In sociological terms, they belong to the fastest-growing cohort of any religious affiliation in America today: the "nones." People of faith tend to think, optimistically, ah yes, but the "nones" are honest spiritual seekers. There's growing evidence that such spirituality is fleeting, and little more than the questions we ask ourselves in the dark. In any case, nones are the future. They are our nation's future. And it looks like this is the future of most of the old institutional, doctrinal churches of our land. Just what is God up to out there? We wonder.

While our children were home, how did we "resist evil" – the second part of our baptismal commitment – in this domestic sphere? Evil comes in many forms. Our son William wrestled with one form, the boredom of small-town oppressions, and dropped out of high school in reaction, to join the Marines for the war in Iraq. But for really hairy evil, it was hard to beat the osteosarcoma that struck our daughter Sarah, a sudden break then nasty swelling of cancer in the right upper arm, when she was 15. Resisting that evil took all our hearts and minds.

We enlisted the best of medical care, accepted the prayers of countless others, and must have had the assistance of the One who bids the demons depart. Depart they did, without uttering a word (as Jesus commanded them). After metastatic nodules were cut from her lungs and a new cancer, from the

chemo, led to a bone-marrow transplant, Sarah has been disease-free for six years now. She's working in New York. And William is living like Thoreau in a log cabin in North Carolina. And Daniel is a rambler and hard worker with more friends and opportunities than he knows what to do with.

Meanwhile, we were left with just us two and a lot of empty rooms. With our children grown and gone, the sins we might "fall into" (the other part of the second of the baptismal commitments) seemed small and inconsequential: miscommunication, impatience, sulking. We have a non-religious program for repenting of such sins, and returning to domestic bliss. It's called Couples Coaching Couples. This movement, operating under a national non-profit organization, puts us into a circle of about a dozen couples scattered around western Virginia, partners who are committed to being a couple. Or in the jargon of this movement, with roots in est and its breakaway Landmark Education, Being Couple. My wife and I spend an hour each week talking to another CCC couple, usually on the phone. Half of that time, we listen carefully to what they say about how their Couple is Being this week, and how their Couple wants to be next week or in three months. Reflecting their words back, we "coach." The other half hour, we talk, and they coach. It's not therapy or counseling, just a way of talking with "We" as the subject pronoun, not "I."

There is power in CCC, and real love. Participants feel evangelical about it. But as Christians, my wife and I are sometimes disappointed that it lacks (though does not forbid) the greater power of a cosmic concept of marriage as incarnational, a sign of Christ's love for His Church. We are more disappointed, though, that our Episcopal church (locally or nationally) does not have a practice around love and marriage as practical, active and effective as CCC.

With something that active and effective, we feel we would have "good news" to proclaim. But in a pluralistic world of nones and news, I hold back on suggesting that anybody would find anything worthwhile by coming to our church. This third baptismal vow doesn't say that the church is "good news." It specifies the Good News as that cosmic crash of sky and earth, "of God in Christ." As my friend Peyton Craighill stresses patiently, this particular Good News needs a lot of context, specifically, the entire sacred history of the Jewish people and the theology of "sky" and "earth" as signs and symbols. "We won!" may be good news, but it means nothing without context. Who won? What's the game, or war, or consequences? Who lost? But that takes us off to other more difficult realms outside the home.

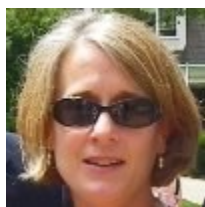
Within the home, we know what "We won!" means. It means Sarah no longer has cancer. That William returned from Iraq safely. Here in the home, the fourth commitment – loving our neighbors as ourselves – is easiest because they are literally neighbors, who know our doors are still open. It is easy for us to let one particular neighbor – a disabled single woman who just lost her son to drugs and then was evicted – stay in one of our empty rooms on the third floor. Home is lovely because here we are naturally close, in blood and memories and gratitude. That is "the dignity of every human being" and striving "for peace and justice" on a very small scale. It's like a flight simulator, our apprenticeship for the challenges out there in the larger family of man.

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## THINKING ABOUT GOD'S MISSION AT WORK IN THE HOME FOR A PARTIAL STAY-AT-HOME MOM

By Laura Carr



Over the past several years of reading articles in our parish newsletter about faith connections in the workplace, a common theme I have noticed is that the authors were always surprised to have been contacted and visited by the Rev.

Fletcher Lowe at their workplaces. I was also very surprised when Fletcher called me because at the time I did not have a "workplace." I was a stay-at-home mom. But leave it to Fletcher to think "outside the office!"

My career path up until that point had been winding, with several stops and starts. After college I worked in retail until the birth of my first son, Quint. I then went back to school for my Masters in Art History (while working part-time). I defended my thesis three weeks after my second son, Peter, was born. I then worked in the museum profession until my daughter Sarah was born. At that point, my husband and I decided that I would stay at home for a while and be "just" a mom. It was during this time that Fletcher contacted me about discussing faith in connection with my workplace.

I really don't remember what Fletcher and I discussed that day, but I remember being anxious about sharing my thoughts about faith at all. I do recall that we sat in my living room and chatted (though our meeting would have been more appropriately held in my van - then and now, my true workplace!), but the rest of our discussion is lost. Imagine my surprised (again), when Fletcher called me a few weeks ago to write about this long ago - and long-lost - visit, especially since I am no longer a strictly stay-at-home mom, but have been back to work (part-time) for three years.

If I could remember our discussion that day, I imagine my thoughts would have been something along these lines: the life of a stay-at-home mom is filled with activity from morning until night; there is little room for reflection, meditation or

formal prayer. I suppose some nights a few thoughts of faith may have crossed my mind as I fell into bed, exhausted from cooking, cleaning, carpool, grocery shopping, homework help, yard work, errands, volunteer work, etc. etc. If I thought then about my faith at all in my "workplace" it was likely in the context of the Martha and Mary story, with myself as a definite Martha! "...But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:38-42)

I still feel this way when overwhelmed with tasks. And as the primary caretaker of my family this happens quite often. However, when looking back on the stay-at-home mom years, it is easier to see from a distance how God's mission was functioning in my daily life and work. I feel that something was allowing me to get through each day relatively unscathed and sane. Perhaps it was the comfort and insight that comes from taking care of others, or the gifts that come with service to others (even one's own family). Even though daily tasks may become routine, there is a beauty in caretaking and trying to do it well. I could see, hear and touch God in the faces, voices and hands of my children and husband, and it gave me great peace of mind to know that hopefully by being at home when my children were young, I was giving them the opportunity to grow and learn in an environment I could make for them. Christ was in my workplace and with me in the simple, yet honest, tasks of making a home and rearing my children.

I am now back in the workplace as a (paid) Museum Technician at the Valentine Richmond History Center (Valentine Museum). I am working on a project to digitize The Richmond Times-Dispatch photograph collection held by the Center. My job

is solitary, with little interaction with others at the museum—mostly just me, my computer and scanner. I have plenty of time for reflection - time I did not have when I was at home. It is interesting to think about and experience faith in the context of work now, even though Fletcher has not been back to visit! Each workday I look at many black and white photographs depicting a wide range of subjects relating to the "heart of the city." Many images are routine shots - created just for the news story, but others are pieces of art that reflect beauty, pathos of Christ in everyday life and people. Preserving these images for future generations and doing a job that may make a difference allows me to see my faith connections in the workplace in an expanded light. I am still serving (and caretaking), and still see myself as a Martha, but now my stewardship may potentially influence more people and help other people with their work. Thinking about an often mundane job in the context of service,

preservation, and faith makes it seem almost important!

My faith manifests itself in the workplace, whether at home or in an office, as service and caretaking. At home, I care for my family by tending to their needs and hopefully allowing them the freedom to grow and become faithful individuals themselves. At work, I am the steward and preserver of one small section of the "heart of the city."

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**Laura Carr** is a wife and mother of three children (Quint, Peter and Sarah) who lives and works in Richmond, Virginia. She is a part-time Museum Technician at the Valentine Richmond History Center (Valentine Museum).



## FOLLOWING CHRIST'S WAY IN OUR HOME SETTING

By Demi Prentiss



I am an empty nester, married to my life partner for 42 years this summer. As I write this, I am a “FEMA widow,” holding down the home front while my husband is deployed. He is serving as part of a FEMA response team sent by the Department of

Homeland Security to Brownsville, TX to help with the flood of undocumented, unaccompanied minors crossing the Rio Grande to enter the United States. By the time he returns home, he will have been deployed 10 weeks out of 11. When he’s deployed, he routinely works 12-hour days, with one day off every two to three weeks.

My husband’s many years’ work in disaster response and relief, combined with his service to homeless families in several different settings, uniquely qualify him to witness to Christ’s presence in a children’s immigration detention center. I think his work is heroic, though I realize it’s largely unnoticed. My admiration for his vocation is my inspiration for my own commitment to being on baptismal mission in my own home.

Our life partnership has been the motivating force behind my living into the first three promises of the baptismal covenant: continuing in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, and practice; resisting evil and amending my life; and proclaiming God’s good news. Time and again, when I have fallen down on the journey, my partner is the one who has helped me get up, inspiring me to continue and renewing my commitment to following The Way, in our home and elsewhere.

The ways I have been led to honor those last two promises have been more surprising. At least in terms of being on God’s mission in my home life, I had expected the focus to be on my partner and my relationship with him. Seeking

and serving Christ in all persons; striving for justice and peace while respecting every person’s dignity – that’s easy with someone you love, right?

The challenge for me has been to recognize that I fall short of realizing those commitments if I allow him to be the “end user” in my promises. Because, for me, his own baptismal covenant expands our relationship to include those he serves.

Particularly in this deployment, my serving Christ and respecting human dignity in my husband has led me beyond encouragement and support for him and his work. I believe Christ calls me to provide support for the people he serves, as well. Requests for prayers and for aid from other believers were the beginning. Next came phone calls and advocacy with church institutions. That led to revising our budget to purchase crayons and coloring books and movies for children I’ll never meet – nor even see. (Photos are not allowed.) And that’s led to increasing my own political activism to effect change in unjust systems and short-sighted, self-serving policies.

Isn’t that just like God? Spilling over our tidy boundaries, to build connections among many different arenas of our lives, helping us grasp the fullness of our baptismal vocation in multiple circumstances. As my friend the Rev. Mary Earle says with a knowing chuckle, “The Holy Spirit is a crass opportunist.” Thanks be to God!

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**Demi Prentiss** serves as ministry developer/administrative officer for the Diocese of Fort Worth. For more than 25 years she has worked to support and equip laity and clergy in fully realizing their baptismal callings.



## A MISSION AT HOME, THROUGH THE TELEPHONE

By Wayne Schwab



*What is God doing in my home right now?*

God is drawing my brothers and me closer together. Jim at 93 and Van at 91 are both coping with serious forms of cancer. Thanks be to God for the telephone and the voices of loved ones across many miles and states.

*What is my goal or mission for life at home?*

My goal is, surely, to keep the lines humming with our voices.

*What am I doing right now to achieve this goal – this mission?*

I call each of them each week. This goal is a mission – perhaps, a grandiose word, but not when all calls are a blessing to each of us. A challenge in it? Yes, to talk in the setting of God's will for our health and celebrating the "up" spirit of

each of them. Their "up" spirit is their lived faith in God's gift of strength in weakness; and I must add, the gift to me at 85 of recovering family history I did not know about and being in touch with God's ongoing work in each of our sons and daughters from real estate investment to theater to home-building to editing. How often I recall my mother saying, "Little brothers should love each other." That wise counsel has been true in the midst of our differences and of our joys.

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Comments and questions about articles in this publication are indeed welcome. Contact information is on the first page.