

Introductory remarks by the Bishop

"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn" (Isaiah 58:8)

Ever since these words from Isaiah 58 were read at my Consecration in April 2003, they have represented my vision for the Diocese of Iowa. Christ's light which John says "enlightens everyone who comes into the world", thus takes many forms, but Isaiah reminds us that God seeks a people whose spirituality is reflected in concrete ways of manifesting compassion and love. We demonstrate our devotion to God by the way we treat God's people, and even our liturgical rituals are subject to that. As a directional guide for the ministry of the Diocesan staff, we have adopted a statement that we are "In mission with Christ through each and all." We extend this to our work in the Diocese and invite the Diocese to adopt this statement for ourselves.

Based on this premise, we now endeavor to fashion a plan of ministry action that can guide all of us in the Diocese. The foundation of the plan comes from the four strategic areas, which became evident from the extensive surveys undertaken in 2006:

- 1) Shared Ministry
- 2) Strengthening Congregations
- 3) Next Generations of Faith
- 4) Anglican/Episcopal Identity

These four ministry priorities are fleshed out in this document. They demonstrate a people who seek to work together as the Body of Christ, who want a balance between the natural centralized ministry arrangement which is united by the Episcopacy, and the demands of local witness and ministry which can only be met by a more decentralized sharing of resources. We are **One Church** in many locations.

Secondly, they state the obvious that such resources need to pay attention to the strength of the local congregation. Healthy congregations have always been a goal of the Diocesan staff in its ministry: whether through assisting with transitions, handling conflict, developing communication, connecting congregations, enhancing education and ministry development. We are **One Church in many locations**.

Thirdly, they are very clear that the Church exists for those who are not yet its members, as well as for those who are not its members at all! The next generations of Christ's followers are always around us, often waiting for the invitation to "Follow Me!" which Christ has commissioned His followers to offer. We often think of them as the young, but they are also the elderly, and those who are often middle-aged or people who have given up thinking God or the Church had anything of interest to present to them. The phrase "Next Generations of Faith" opens up to us the possibility that God has an intergenerational task of faith sharing and forming for us to engage.

Fourthly and finally, these are days when we have to restate the peculiarity of our Anglican and Episcopal tradition. We need to define this tradition, and we need to demonstrate how it is a meaningful expression of our love for God in Jesus Christ and of God's people and creation.

Our baptismal covenant stands at the heart of all of this, as does our catholic appreciation of meeting God in the mystery of sacraments. It is not about taking back the Christian identity from TV evangelists or evangelicals, but is about being ourselves who include evangelicals, charismatics, and various degrees of catholic often in the same congregation. Back to Isaiah 58 - the incarnational nature of our sense of mission is often our leading edge in participating in God's reshaping of the world, and God's restoring of humanity in Jesus Christ.

I pray that this plan offers a guide for our common ministry, and can be engaged at every level. It will create priorities for our common budget from 2008 onwards, and I hope it will be a plumb line for every Diocesan Commission and local congregation as you set forth your goals for the coming years. I trust it is a plan in which you see your words and your desires as Christian people, for it was created from your common voice.

Yours in mission with Christ through each and all,

Alan Scarfe, Bishop of Iowa