



ELCIC

*In Mission  
for Others*

National Bishop Susan C. Johnson's Sermon  
At Eastern Synod Ordination  
July 11, 2008

Is 42:1, 6-7

Romans 12:3-18

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Luke 24:36-53

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple

It is a real privilege to be able to be here today and join in this celebration. I want to thank The Very Rev. Terry Dance, the cathedral parish, and the Huron Diocese for their very warm welcome. We gather to celebrate the ordination of Catharine Rowan House, Karen Lynn Kuhnert, Robert Michael Lees, and Sheryl Anne Lynn Stone. We gather to give praise and thanks to God. We gather as family and friends and members of this part of God's family that we call the Eastern Synod to be uplifted in spirit and strengthened for ministry.

I had the privilege of being in South Africa at the end of February for meetings between representatives of The Lutheran World Federation and the International Lutheran Council and I was honoured to be asked to preach at the Cathedral in Soweto on the Sunday. I noticed at several points during the service that people were making a certain hand gesture, raising up an arm and shaking their hand back and forth. I wasn't sure what they were doing and was afraid to join in lest I be making some rude gesture. At the end of the service I asked about it and was told that they don't think it's polite to clap in worship and so they use this gesture instead. Let me take a moment to thank the musicians and the planners of this service for the great job you are doing. Why don't you all join me in trying it out?

There is a huge temptation for the four of you to be thinking. Thank God it's all over. Seminary is done. The candidacy process is done. Mind you, repaying the student loans is just beginning, but other than that, we are ready. We've learned it all, we know it all, and we are ready to do ministry!!!

Well, I hate to be the one to break it to you, and I think you might already know this, but even though you are as prepared as our current system can possibly prepare you, you are not ready for what is lying in store for you. Hopefully the so-called honeymoon period will last a while in the Conquerall Parish, Baden, Windsor, and Philipsburg, but there will come a day in

this next year when you will be totally knocked out of your socks, left sucking wind and wondering “how did I get into this mess??” I remember that happening to me in my first year of ordained ministry in this very city. (And I see most of my rostered colleagues nodding in agreement – if they are not nodding, either they are lying to you or time has mercifully allowed them to forget the moment!) Mind you, I also remember it happening in my first year of teaching. And I must confess, it has happened many times in this first year of my being a bishop.

Well the good news is that you are in good company. Not only have all your rostered colleagues been in the same boat, but quite frankly, the disciples found themselves in the same situation. They had been trained at the feet of the master, interned through the sending of the twelve and then the seventy. They had the opportunity to see with their own eyes how Jesus did ministry, to hear with their own ears his wisdom and teaching and counsel. But when Jesus was crucified, taken away from them, they crumbled and locked themselves away. They were afraid, just as you might be just a little bit afraid right now.

That’s why I love the gospel lesson we have heard tonight. Because Jesus doesn’t leave them in their fear. Jesus comes back and checks up on how they are doing. Jesus mentors them into leadership. He gives them a greeting of peace and then he shows them his hands and feet. And if that isn’t enough, he proves his real presence by asking for food and eating it in front of them. Then he reminds them again of what he has been called to do and what they have been called to do. It’s kind of like the Coles notes version of the last three years of teaching!

One of the commitments your synod has adopted as part of its renewed vision for mission, is that it wants to *be a synod that nurtures leaders who encourage and equip other leaders*. Karen and Mike and Catharine and Sheryl, you have been nurtured in your home congregations, in the seminary community, in your field placements and internships, and even through the candidacy

and examining process. I know that it hasn't always felt like mentoring, but good mentoring means that sometimes we need to challenge and push in order that you will grow. And now you have chosen sponsors for your ordination that will continue to nurture you and mentor you as you begin this next phase of your ministry.

Did you hear that Judi, Rick, Mark, Fred, Patricia, Steve, and Norine? Your job doesn't end tonight. I trust that you will strive to be good examples and wise counselors as these new pastors start out in ordained ministry. And Catharine, Karen, Mike and Sheryl are not the only ones who need mentors. We all need people who can walk with us, encourage us, help us own up to our shortcomings and mistakes, inspire us and give us wise counsel. And we all need to serve as mentors to others as we strive to live out our baptismal callings. In all that we do and say we have the opportunity to reflect Christ and Christ's love to those around us.

But Sheryl and Michael and Catherine and Karen, this says something about the ministry that you are being called to as well. You are being called to nurture and equip other leaders to participate in answering our shared call to ministry. To remember as the lesson from Romans puts it, that we are not all called to the same function of ministry, but that we are all indispensable to the working of the body. You are there to help remind the members of the congregations you serve that we are called to be *In Mission for Others*, to remind them to be a more outward looking church.

When I was confirmed, I know I was given a confirmation verse, but I must tell you I don't remember what it was. Mike, Catherine, Sheryl and Karen, part of the reason I'm glad to be here is that in my former life I had a chance to be a part of the process that has nurtured you and prepared you for this moment. So I want to give you an ordination verse, and it is part of the passage from Romans that we heard tonight and then a few verses beyond. (Romans 12:9-18) I

hope that you will read it frequently and remember it especially on that first day when your socks are knocked off and you are wondering what you are doing. Hear this part of the passage again:

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; (and I love this next part) do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

I think what I love about this passage more than anything is that it reminds me, as it will remind you, that it's not about me. It's not about you. It's about following Christ *In Mission for Others*. And we have all been called to do that. If you can remember that on that first and on all subsequent challenging days, you will be ok.

As you prepare to take on this new responsibility in the life of our church, be assured that you have our prayers and support. And we ask for your prayers and your support as together we do all we can to imitate Christ, to be Christ's witnesses, as a church *In Mission for Others*.

Amen.