Introduction to Radical Sending

Our Journey to Radical Sending

Stephanie Spellers's 2006 book *Radical Welcome* has provided a much-needed guide and goad to congregations to look beyond their "friendly" label to analyze the true quality of their welcome. Inspired by the lessons of that book, many congregations have reframed their understanding of what "being church" means, especially in extending radical hospitality to those who might be understood as "other."

As a "bookend" to *Radical Welcome*'s groundbreaking message, we have chosen to examine how congregations might reclaim their role in sending the people of God into the world. Congregations whose hearts have been opened to offer radical welcome to all God's people are uniquely qualified to send those very people out, proclaiming God's Good News. To preach the message of "radical sending." As the Presbyterian minister proclaimed, dismissing his Sunday flock, "The worship is over, the service begins."

But first, we offer a little background about our own journeys.

Demi's Story

In mid-2000, the large downtown Episcopal congregation where I was serving discerned a call to be the church not only for our members, but also for the neighborhood. The church's location was a busy area of downtown San Antonio, Texas, surrounded by office buildings and hotels, the city convention center, and a major communications infrastructure hub. Some congregations might have chosen to focus on the homeless population that gathered just outside our doors, who were

served by a coalition of churches including our own. A much larger group of people spent a large chunk of their lives just beyond our walls from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. From our vantage point, it seemed that no one in the faith community was paying much attention to these workers. The church leadership chose to focus energy and resources on how people engaged in their daily work might become intentional Christians in their workplace—whether that was an office, a factory, a home, a hospital, or a construction site. That focus gave birth to the Center for Faith in the Workplace, which over time spun off as The Work+Shop, a separate nonprofit ministry.

My role in helping midwife that ministry brought me into contact with people like John Lewis, Paul Minus, and Pete Hammond, core players in the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (CMDL). In the late 1990s and 2000s, the CMDL promoted, as its mission statement affirmed, "that all Christians have been called into ministry and that for most of them their arena of ministry is in and to the world."[1] Its members were drawn from organizations, campus ministries, seminaries and colleges, and individuals from a range of Christian traditions, largely in the USA. Those creative souls—many clergy, some laity—were working on the margins of the church, building bridges between the church as institution and a world that was growing increasingly suspicious of all things churchy. While the mainline churches were becoming increasingly fearful of impending irrelevance, advances in telecommunications and the expanding reach of the Internet were redefining community and bringing the world inside our living rooms.

As a lay professional working in the church, I found all of this foment enormously exciting and hope-inspiring. The voices that were preaching and teaching daily life ministry affirmed my understanding of humanity—that we were created as the image and likeness of God in order to do God's work in every aspect of our lives. I had grown up attending a large Episcopal church in Houston, Texas. I had somehow received the message that my confirmation conveyed an obligation to be active in ministry. My tribe of Episcopalians was "high" enough to fully believe that Christ was truly present in the bread and wine of communion. But we were "low" enough to see little distinction between the priest and the laity. We were all meant to work at making Christ truly present in the work we did and the places where we lived and moved and had our being—to "become what we had received" (though we never would have expressed the thought in those words).

My father—a lawyer in love with the law, who thought the Magna Carta was the greatest document created by the mind of man—understood his vocation to be a calling worthy of a Christian. Because of that, my working with the Ministry in Daily Life folks was, in some senses, like "coming home" to an understanding of "call" that wasn't restricted to those who were seeking ordination.

One of the "edge-walkers" I met during that time was author and publisher Greg Pierce, whose book *The Mass Is Never Ended*[2] helped transform my understanding of liturgy. He points to the Dismissal at the end of the Mass ("Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.") as the essential moment in the liturgy, the culmination of all that has gone before. Those words are to send us "like a cannonball" into the world and our daily lives, having been prayed for, taught, forgiven, healed, and fed, to embrace our daily mission of transforming and reconciling in Christ's name.

At the same time as I was reclaiming my childhood understanding of Christian vocation, I was earning a degree in congregational development from Seabury-Western Seminary. My passion for congregational development had drawn me to enroll in the DMin program. My history of ministry development and community organizer training had led Arlin Rothauge, then-director of the Institute for Congregational Development, to okay my admission despite my not holding an MDiv degree. My class, the third in the Institute's history, included two laity and thirty clergy, and all of us brought at least ten years' experience in congregational ministry. Only four of us were women.

For the congregational development DMin, we gathered for three weeks each summer, three years running, immersing ourselves in twelve-hour days of classes, small group sessions, and meals with our instructors that turned into seminars. Sometime during the second session of the three summer residential intensives, we learned that because of accreditation issues, laypeople who didn't hold an MDiv degree would no longer be admitted to the program. My small group compadres—three rectors—were aghast. My degree process wasn't threatened and the decision had no impact on my continuing in the program. Still, they took the news personally, on my behalf. "We've learned so much from her," they said, affirming not only my theological opinions (which they didn't always share) but also my viewpoint as one of the 99.2 percent—those in the church who are not ordained.[3] They claimed that the program as a whole would suffer without lay

participants, and I took that as a high compliment as well as affirmation that ordination wasn't required in order to "do theology."

My seminary education helped codify for me the bedrock of my theology—my belief in the Incarnation and in God's economy. God's self-emptying act of becoming fully human—the Incarnation—absolutely affirms, for me, the goodness of the world that God created and is still creating. And Jesus's humanity has, for all time, sanctified human activity in service of God's mission. We, as precious children of God, are invited to participate in the life-giving dance of the Trinity, as we acknowledge and incarnate God's life-giving activity in every part of our lives.

God's economy working in the world means that absolutely nothing is lost. No tear, no suffering, no celebration, no effort is meaningless in God's eternity-based household. "We know that in all things God works for good" (Rom. 8:28a NIV). God operates just as thoroughly, just as transformationally, through our workaday lives as in our church-based actions. "Bidden or unbidden, God is present," to quote Erasmus.

All of these threads come together, for me, in what some call the "ministry in daily life movement." Those CMDL pioneers expressed it as connecting Sunday to Monday—embodying our Christianity in our everyday lives, so that those around us see our faith in action. Not so much as heroic, "ministry-to" work that allows us to cast ourselves in the role of Lady Bountiful, but more as day-by-day, "ministry-with" partnerships that call on us to walk alongside, and learn from, those among whom we practice ministry. As a facilitator of Christian formation, I am concerned that often we settle for teaching people tenets of the faith without calling forth the transformation that occurs when we take on the hard work of actually being Jesus-followers—people who practice faithful patterns of life, modeled by Jesus. Those practices are truly life-giving: listening, opening space for, asking curious questions, speaking from our own experience, inviting, forbearing, looking deeply into Scripture. And perhaps even stepping away from practicing our own gifts, in order to let someone else do that ministry.

That's where "radical sending" comes in. Communities that intentionally work at such life-giving practices among themselves prepare their members to be the salt and leaven and light sent forth into the everyday world. Such communities are focused on making disciples—genuine followers of The Way of Jesus—so that they might be sent out as apostles—those who are sent out.

This book emerges out of my ambition for the Church—the body of Christ—to learn to be such a community. I long to see communities where living as just such a body is their reason for being. I hope you'll join me in the work of discovering, forming, and sustaining such expressions of the body of Christ.

Fletcher's Story

Upon graduating from seminary, I was assigned by my bishop to be the vicar of a small congregation in Seneca, Oconee County, South Carolina, near Clemson University—best noted for being the home of the 22nd presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, John E. Hines (1965–74). It was a congregation of caring folks who nurtured, supported, and endured me as both newly ordained and newly married.

During my formative four-and-a-half years there, some seventeen northern industries relocated to that sleepy southern county, which had a transforming urbanizing effect on its rural life. As a congregation we began creatively to live into that new reality captured in *The Episcopalian's* November 1963 cover story, "Seneca's Rurban Revolution." Many of the managers for the relocating companies arrived ahead of their families. I found that the best way to connect with them was in their offices, hence I began workplace visits that developed into conversations connecting their faith with their work. A Seneca banker put it this way, "I try to test my decisions by thinking what Christ would do in my place here. The vicar has tried to teach us to look at our jobs in that way and I think it works." A factory manager reflected, "If you really try to be a Christian in your work, it makes it a lot harder—but I wouldn't have it any other way."

That experience set the tone for my ongoing pastoral, liturgical, and educational ministry in the other congregations I have served as we raised up the vocation and calling of all the baptized in their daily lives. For example, liturgically, we reclaimed the Sixth Sunday of Easter as Rogation Sunday, drawing on its earlier traditions of celebrating the means of production in the farming and fishing communities by celebrating the means of production in the textile and banking and media businesses. On those Sundays, all were invited to place a small token of their ministry in an alms basin that was blessed. We also designed a liturgy and a litany celebrating, blessing, and affirming those for their ministries. Along the way, I have been called to use a house

blessing format to "bless" places like a newspaper office, a paving company's facilities, and an architect's office building.

In John's Prologue, he writes: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us," or as the Greek puts it: "and pitched his tent among us." The Incarnate Lord, Emmanuel, God with us is in each and every aspect of our lives. Thus the sacraments in the Episcopal tradition are not just two major and five minor, but infinite in their possibilities, for all of life is sacramental—outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace—including life on the job, in the home, in the community, and in the church. So Paul calls on the Christian community in Ephesus to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12).

The more my ministry became focused on affirming this ministry of saints, I began to seek out others who shared this vision. That led me to Bill Diehl's first book, *Thank God, It's Monday* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982), which tells of how he gained great affirmation for his leadership roles within the Lutheran church, locally and nationally, but never was his life as a steel industry executive affirmed or recognized. Through Bill, I became an early participant in the formation of the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (CMDL) that Demi has mentioned. Its annual conferences were true watering holes for me as I met, talked with, and gained affirmation and ideas from others committed to the ministry of daily life. They also were reality checks—that much of the church did not "get it," and that a good deal of my excitement for this sense of ministry was not shared to a large extent by the church regardless of denomination, including the Episcopal Church.

At the 2005 meeting of the CMDL, several of us Episcopalians discussed the possibility of meeting a day before the 2006 meeting to explore organizing an Episcopal component of the Coalition. That happened and *Episcopal Partners for Faithfulness in Daily Life* was initiated, led by a small steering committee. Its purposes were/are:

1. To provide a communications link between partners to share programs, ideas, concerns, needs, and more.
2. To be a prophetic voice and a resource for furthering faithfulness in daily life within the Episcopal Church.

Demi and I were on its initial steering committee and have continued to serve as the organization has evolved, now renamed *Episcopalians on Baptismal Mission*. The steering committee continues to

meet every five to six weeks via conference call, despite the end of the CMDL in 2011.

Over the years in congregations I have served, several pastoral, educational, liturgical, and communication efforts were made to affirm and support the ministries of all the baptized. Some of those congregation-tested ideas were included in the Episcopal Church's publication *Ministry in Daily Life; A Guide to Living the Baptismal Covenant* (New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 1996) that I coedited with Linda Grenz. Ten years later I published *Baptism: The Event and the Adventure, from the Font into Daily Life* (Leeds, MA: LeaderResources, 2006) as an e-book.

In 2014, the congregation in Richmond, Virginia, where I have served as a priest-in-residence had as its theme *Radical Welcome* using Stephanie Spellers's book of the same name (New York: Church Publishing, 2006) as a guide to help members focus on "come." As I walked along with the congregation in its work to develop more welcoming practices, I began to sense that there needed to be a complementary book that focused on "go," hence this book on radical sending of the baptized into their daily lives "to do the work God has given us to do" (Book of Common Prayer [hereafter BCP], 366).

Join the Journey

We invite you to come along as we explore the theological foundations for understanding the church as "radically sent," as well as the implications for the church's life in community. Although there may be references to the Episcopal Church's liturgy, they are simply illustrative of the vision that can be found within every Christian denomination. Part I lays the theological framework—tapping Scripture, reason, and tradition—for this vision of the church. The work of emergent /emerging churches and the missional church movement is finding expression in communities of faith which are not only called together but also sent out into the communities where they are rooted.

Part II offers a range of examples where radical sending is practiced—in the traditions of Celtic Christians, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Roman Catholics; in congregations; and in the lives of individuals who understand themselves as "sent." In addition, we'll take a look at some of the limiting assumptions of church institutions that can pose obstacles to faith communities developing a culture of radical sending.

Part III proposes strategies and tactics for moving toward building faith communities that equip their members to be salt and light wherever they find themselves. Chapters deal with recognizing the unspoken curriculum that our churches follow, discovering strategies for offering a new vision, dealing with the inevitable difficulties, and celebrating the vastly expanded horizon for faith.

We encourage you to join us on this journey. At the end of each chapter you will find questions in a section titled "Going Forth." You're invited to use these as starters for your own reflection, for group discussion, or as a framework for a class or retreat built around this book. Perhaps you'll take the opportunity to blog or journal about them. Each group of questions begins with noticing, then moves to analysis, reflection, discussion or discernment, and an opportunity for action.

May this resource serve to fuel your engagement with the challenge of adding the word "sending" to the definition of how to be a life-giving Christian community and inspire your imaginative response. Visit www.RadicalSending.com to access our resources and offer your stories to the growing "radical sending" community.

The Church's Journey to Radical Sending

Radical Sending. *Sending*: it is the propelling forth of the baptized to live into their faith in their daily lives. As Jesus instructed, "As you (Father) have sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world" (John 17:18). *Radical*: it is radical because it calls on a congregation to be intentional about its pastoral, liturgical, and formation life in light of the Dismissal in the Episcopal Eucharistic liturgy: "send us out" and "let us go forth" (BCP, 366). By that we do *not* mean a congregation's outreach or mission efforts. That is for another book. Rather, we are calling for congregations to "equip the saints for ministry" (Eph. 4:12) in their own daily lives of work and leisure and community and school and family. That may call on a congregation to make a paradigm shift in its communal life. Our hope is that we will provide some ways and means both to support those congregations that "get it" in terms of becoming a sending congregation and to provide resources for those that want to "get it."

So how did we get to where we are and why may there be something radical about getting where we want to be? Before we explore these questions, let us take a moment for a short biblical word study. Throughout the New Testament all the baptized are referred to as the *laos*, the people of God. A close New Testament synonym was *kleros*, "used to describe the dignity and appointment of all the people to ministry."[4] There may have been functions within the *laos* (presider, deacon, bishop), but all were within the *laos*, the *kleros*. Later, as functions began to become more institutionalized, the word *kleros* evolved into the way of separating the ordained from the nonordained.[5]

In at least one diocesan prayer cycle people are asked to pray for "the congregation and clergy of . . ." almost as though the clergy are not to be considered part of the congregation. With that in mind, let us now look in on some of the church's history. To do so, we must begin with baptism.

The Early Church

The norm in the early church was adult baptism. In the Acts of the Apostles adults came to be baptized affirming their belief in Jesus as Lord, the result of the teaching and preaching of witnesses to the risen Christ. The post–New Testament journey for adults toward their baptism was known as the *catechumenate*, a word meaning "listening with the ear." The catechumens went through an extensive period (often three years) of reflection, discernment, and instruction focused on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah. That preparation was centered in their (1) renunciation of the existing cultural worldview and its values, (2) exploration of the Christian worldview and the values of the kingdom of God, and (3) taking on that kingdom view by being incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, through baptism. They became a part of the *laos*, the *kleros*, the people of God. The impact of their new life in Christ inevitably necessitated change and, for some, meant finding a new vocation and breaking off certain relationships, even those of their blood family. Not only was a Christian "marked as Christ's own forever," but also because of that baptismal commitment, the newly baptized person was often marked by the existing culture as an outsider, subject to isolation, persecution, and perhaps even death. To "put on Christ" was to risk one's life—literally to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Christ into uncharted waters. It was not an easy journey, this early church paradigm, but each pilgrim emerged with a deep sense of how being a Christian directly affected every aspect of daily life.

Constantinian Christianity

With Constantine (274–337 CE) as emperor of the Roman Empire, the paradigm began to change. The good news was that the persecution of Christians came to an end. The other news was mixed: The realm, by the edict of Milan (313), became "Christian." The focus on

baptism shifted from the extensive catechumenal paradigm of the individual candidate to more instantaneous mass baptisms, often of entire tribes, even nations, by the decree of a local ruler, sometimes under the threat of the sword.

As baptism became an expected social norm with little preparation or nurture, the call to be a "real Christian" began to shift to those who took on special vows for the ordained or the monastic life. The term *kleros* (clergy) came to be used to distinguish those who were separated from the rest of the *laos* (laity) by their greater commitment. As Thomas Ray, retired bishop of Northern Michigan, has pointed out, "For the first four centuries, the catechumenate was the structure through which people came into baptism. Since then, we have flip-flopped that over to holy orders where the same conditions exist: long preparation times (three years of seminary education or its equivalent), new names (the Reverend), new garments (the stole), new vocations. The old catechumenate has been replaced by ordination!"[6] Thus, the focus on the minor sacrament of holy orders supplanted the major sacrament of baptism as the expression of true Christian commitment, demoting baptism and elevating ordination.

The practical effects of this Constantinian paradigm have resulted in some far-reaching practical shifts in the life of the Church, which continue to this day. "Holy orders" came to represent where the real action in the Christian community centered, dominated by the *kleros* (deacons, priests, and bishops), while the role for the *laos* (laity) was understood as being supportive of the "ministry" of the clergy. There are sixteen centuries of church history filled with illustrations of this paradigm of prerogatives and privileges afforded the clergy. For example, The Episcopal Church's triennial General Convention, its most important legislative body, is three-fourths clergy: the House of Bishops (all clergy) and the House of Deputies (half clergy). Most Episcopal diocesan conventions are likewise clergy dominated—all diocesan clergy are typically participants amidst a small specially elected group of the nonordained. Yet clergy represent only 0.8 percent of Episcopalians.[7] A look at other denominations reflected a similar clergy-dominated structure. The Episcopal services of ordination, especially those for bishops, are far more elaborate and require considerably more planning and coordination than anything comparable for baptism.

The medium is the message. And irony of ironies, there is nothing in the entire service of ordination for bishop, priest, or deacon in

the 1979 Book of Common Prayer that even remotely acknowledges that the one seeking ordination has been baptized (although this is stipulated in The Episcopal Church's canons). It is easy to see how far we have disconnected ordination from its baptismal roots. The clergy, to borrow from Paul's analogy of the body of Christ, have become disproportionately enlarged members of the body, be it ear or nose or leg or arm, while the rest of the body—the nonordained—are shriveled: a gross distortion. The Constantinian paradigm is alive and well today.

What then about the nonordained, the laity, under this Constantinian paradigm? As the sacrament of "Holy Orders" has superseded baptism as *the* sacrament defining the "true believers," the role of the nonordained has become increasingly devalued. "Lay ministry" has often evolved into what laypeople can do to help the clergy do their job in perpetuating the life of the congregation as an institution. Terms like "mutual ministry" and "shared leadership" more often than not apply to the local church as the place where all ministry takes place. Rarely do laypersons see what they do in the world as ministry. After all, ministry is what clergy do; they are the real ministers; they provide the ministry while the laity receive. And so, in describing themselves the nonordained have been known to say, "I am *just* a layperson!" Thus, "the whole sense of ministry has been collapsed upon the ordained," Bishop Ray concludes.[8]

Emerging Christianity

Where in our world today do we go to recover and rediscover the ministry of all the baptized? We need a new paradigm.

The experience of the early Christian community can teach us. In that paradigm, it was through their baptism that those early Christians literally changed worlds, changed direction, changed focus. Conversion was a transformation to a new worldview marked by the sign of the cross. As the baptized of today, that is our calling too. As the community of the baptized, we find our identity in being "marked as Christ's own forever" (BCP, 308).

The decades-long decline of the Church in Europe can also teach us. Following the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the Church, with some notable exceptions, has come to be perceived as irrelevant in the daily lives of the people. As the middle-class popula-

tion increased and daily work moved beyond the home and the farm, the Church has found itself on the margins of the culture.

There is a *relevant* lesson in that for us. For example, when we meet someone new, our first question often is, "What is your name?" The conversation then usually moves to, "What do you do?" Congregations have been good at asking the first—we get names on pew cards, we send visiting teams to newcomers, we write letters of welcome. But when do we take that second question seriously? Not often enough. In years of visiting parishioners in their workplaces, I (Fletcher) lead with, "What do you do here?" That is followed by, "What is the connection between what you do here and your faith—the Sunday-Monday connection?" In my experience, for nearly 85 percent of individuals asked, that is the first time the connection question has been raised. Why is it that the Church has generally failed to connect with where the baptized spend most of their God-given time and talent? No wonder the Church is perceived as irrelevant. It is that Sunday-to-Monday disconnect that calls for a new paradigm.

If, in fact, baptism is *the* sacramental act that declares, "you are . . . marked as Christ's own forever" (BCP, 308), then the process of living into that identity becomes *the* primary responsibility of the Christian community. As Theodore Eastman, retired bishop of the Diocese of Maryland, has written, "The sacrament of Baptism is the ordination of the Christian to ministry. . . . It is the process of ignition that propels each Christian into the world in his or her own way and time."[9]

It is time for the Church to do some radical rethinking! What about this: Within the Episcopal Church's baptismal liturgy comes a question for the community: "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" What would a congregation look like if it saw as its job description "supporting of the baptized in their daily life in Christ?"

And what if a congregation understood as its mission statement, "We take the Dismissal seriously," as a way of living into the closing words of the Episcopal Church's Eucharistic liturgy: "send us out" and "let us go forth."

Any congregation that chose to do so would be challenging the Church's prevailing Constantinian paradigm, with its hierarchical relationship between nonordained and ordained. This would necessitate a radical redefinition of that relationship. Such redefinition calls for the *kleros* once again to be seen as part of the *laos*, with its specific calling to

"equip the saints for the work of ministry." That would mean a reordering of the pastor's priorities, taking on the role of outward-focused servant ministry, serving the members of the congregation in their ministries in the world. The pastor would then become the assistant to the people for their ministries. "Ministry," "calling," "vocation" would become terms applicable to all the *laos*, not just the ordained. After all, it is God's ministry to which all the baptized are called, called to share as God's people (*laos*). In such a reality, there are no second-class Christians. Under this post-Constantinian paradigm, the work of the congregation, under the leadership of the servant pastor, is to nurture and equip and empower the baptized for their ministry in their worlds of home, community, leisure, work, and school.

To again quote Bishop Ray, "We are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,' that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. And he calls us friends, brothers and sisters, to share his reconciled, serving, apostolic love, 'for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,' for life, and for life everlasting!"[10]

Therefore, to paraphrase the words of sending that conclude worship, "Let us go forth into *our worlds of daily life*, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Thanks be to God!!"