

VOCĀTIŌ

IMAGING A VISIBLE CHURCH

C. ANDREW DOYLE

Foreword by Peter Block

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Foreword: A Neighborly Narrative

By Peter Block

This book is a prophetic invitation to reimagine the functioning of the Church. It calls us, first, to follow a more authentic and communal way of being a Church together and, second, to activate the Church into healing the woundedness of our culture by restoring our neighborliness in community. My intention is to speak to why this book is important to us all and how we might respond to its invitation, whether from Church or not Church, faith or not faith.

There are two ideas that create a context for this book: The first is to be specific about how our ingestion of the beliefs and values of the free market consumer economy has both rearranged the landscape of our soul and created institutional cultures that prevent us from living out our deeper purpose. The second is to talk about how these beliefs produce a sense of isolation and incompetence that lead us to lose faith in the power of neighbors and community. The impact and cost of this doubt is that we have surrendered our collective capacity to take into our own hands our well-being, our livelihood, health, safety, and the care for our children and those whose lives are most vulnerable.

The invitation of Bishop Doyle addresses both of these issues: the transformation of the contemporary Church and the mission-driven possibility of reestablishing a neighborly economy based on the abundance inherent in our faith. This contests the scarcity mentality that now dominates our narrative, our ideologies, and our way of being with each other.

The Imperial Economy

We live in culture that is increasingly determined not by the laws of nations, or the covenants of God, but by the laws of business and its affection for management solutions to human problems. It tries to treat the human condition through ideological beliefs that are most visible in a free market consumer economy. The liturgy of that ideology is the incessant and well-financed glorification of efficiency, speed, commodification, and scale.

These beliefs originated in and grew through the long development of industrialization, and at this point they have spread into every corner of the culture, the community, and our institutional life. This ideology governs how we live, even to the question of who cooks our dinner. It has side effects that impact our souls, namely the way we choose to isolate ourselves and compete with each other. This influence is so ingrained that we rarely see it as a problem, and when we do, we look to the Imperial Economy to solve it for us. We have been sold the idea that flat screens cure our loneliness, crowd funding makes us more cooperative, and shipping our children to Africa for two educational weeks contributes to world peace.

The Tenets of the Imperial Economy

Efficiency means that the more we can produce at the lowest cost, the more value we can deliver, the more sales and profit we can expect. This is called comparative advantage. The cost most amenable to reduction is labor cost. Wage cost. Benefit cost. Cost cutting calls for outsourcing our labor cost to contractors that can seemingly operate more efficiently by not paying market rate for people, not paying for health benefits, or such luxuries as holidays and family leave.

Better yet, our attraction to efficiency leads us to automate every transaction we can get our hands on. It was machines in the beginning. Now we see the magical emergence of BOTS and artificial intelligence. Siri and Alexa are household names; they live rent free in our homes and are our watchful companions.

The business culture has also developed a love of *speed*. Speed is God; time is the devil. We have come to believe that we are running out of time. There is too little time. Time is a consumable that must be well used. We eat fast food. We have no time to cook, or even to pick up a prepared meal. The world must be delivered to our doorstep.

For efficiency and speed to reign, we are required to *commodify* what we exchange and who and what we care about. People are interchangeable and in many cases obstacles to performance. In the tech world, people are considered “friction,” something that slows down a transaction. In a commodified world, consistency, control, and predictability are values in and of themselves. The primary task of management, whether in government, a business, or a church, is to take surprise out of the future.

The Imperial Economy has an insatiable need for *scale*. Size matters. Any innovation in the free market consumer world must face the question, “Can you take it to scale?” This is the essential measure of things. If you cannot take it to scale, why would we invest in what you have created? Globalization is just one expression of this: the domestic market is too small, we must seek the low-hanging fruit in countries where labor cost is low and the absence of regulations makes for a more favorable climate for private enterprise. We see the love of scale all around us. Universities have to offer online courses; people purchase followers on Twitter to bolster their brand. Even in the compassion industries, if you want funding, you have to prove you can replicate in many places what you do here. It is called leveraging our investment dollars, even when the dollars are an expression of love.

Parallel to these beliefs is the love of individualism and competition. Its simplest expression is when children enter first grade and are placed in individual competition with their peers. In that moment, which we accept without question, we convert children from learners to performers, and in that act, as educator Ward Mailliard points out, we steal a piece of their humanity.

These covenants of commerce have worked well for businesses and brands. They produced upward mobility, created a strong middle class and

fed the belief that the future will be a highway of continuous progress. These beliefs have been so compelling that they have captured our consciousness, our way of being together, and our collective value systems. Now this imperial model of private enterprise dictates how all of our institutions function and how we function within them.

Some Examples

A key function of *government* once was to care for the common good and to be a caretaker for democratic values. Now it is asked to run like a business: efficiency, speed, commodification, and scale. If government cannot deliver on these business criteria, the function is outsourced. We have privatized the prisons, the highways, the parking meters, public safety, and the military.

The Imperial Economy has also invaded *education*. Instead of developing the whole child as a citizen and thinking of education as a keystone of democracy, we now believe that education's primary purpose is to develop good employees to feed the productivity of the marketplace. School now is a place to prepare our children to get a job. There is a standardized core curriculum, standardized testing, a computer in the hands of every child, and a race to the top. We give priority to a curriculum of science, engineering, and technology with the claim that they are needed to maintain market and competitive dominance in the world. Where did the arts and humanities go?

We see the same effects in health care, not-for-profit management, and, to the point of this book, the faith community and the Church. We find a small example in how religious and educational institutions view their endowments. Most trustees of endowments believe their job is to protect that money and grow it, rather than to aggressively invest it in the good cause for which it was given. There are towers of capital in our cities that could drastically reduce suffering or provide education for all if the endowment money were spent. But if I think my job is to hold and grow the money, I distribute my 5 percent and protect the rest. Under the

pressure of empire, all of our institutions struggle to fulfill their original purpose and create environments fit for human habitation. Thus, this book offers a much needed call for reimagining the Church.

Effects on Community

When you look through the lens of the Imperial Economy, you see how market and management values are defining our lives. By embracing the imperial value system, our neighbors and neighborhoods have become incapacitated. We have come to believe that we can outsource the raising of our children to the schools. We expect the police to keep us safe, and pharmaceutical companies to keep us healthy. This leaves us dependent on institutions to look after what we traditionally were competent to care for ourselves.

What is not widely recognized is that where there is strong social capital—a term for neighbors who trust each other and work together to make the place better—there is strong evidence that children learn more and function as citizens more effectively. Where you have solid neighborhood connections, money is spent locally and the livelihood of all is enhanced. These places are safer because the eyes of the neighborhood are on the street. Also, all the indicators of health improve when people are less isolated and connected with others in a place. When we are active in one local association, our life span increases by half a year.

Eliminating Poverty, Drug Abuse, and Violence

The imperial economic ideology has been the dominant way of thinking not only in our institutions, but also in working on our larger societal problems. It has dominated our attempts to deal with poverty, drugs, and violence. We have fought a war on poverty, a war on drugs, and wars to end all wars. By now it should be clear that market values are useless in these pursuits. We cannot use more diagnosis or look to efficiency, scale, and speed to end poverty, reduce drug abuse, or end violence.

If we have the courage to seriously consider eliminating poverty, drug abuse, and violence, it will take a major shift in thinking and focus. One framing for this shift is to think of it as a switch from the imperial narrative to a neighborly narrative—what Bishop Doyle calls a shalom community. On these difficult fronts, the Church, with its commitment to compassion and care for the least of us, already has the language and history and text to move toward the shift. We need a different way of thinking about these issues than better management, more programs, better measurement, clearer goals, and more experts. The Church and this book offer this different way of thinking.

If we are to deepen our understanding of the work—the vocation—of the people of God in the future Church, we must come to terms with the fact that we are called to be a community that is completely different from the world around us. (p. 10)

The neighborly narrative would have us stop believing that poverty, drugs, and violence are problems to be solved and call us to see them as symptoms of something deeper—symptoms of the isolation and scarcity mentality that are the inevitable, and not accidental, effects of an imperial ideology. Empire cannot sustain itself unless we are convinced to compete against each other. We sustain empire when we believe we are autonomous and on our own—the essence of individualism. We nourish empire when we keep looking for leaders and institutions, church and priests included, who can keep us safe.

The neighborly narrative would have us end the belief that it is in our nature and interests to always want more. Empire promises us a predictable and measurable future. It has convinced us that whatever we have is not enough. Not enough time. Not enough wealth. Not enough stuff. We have to stop believing that we must be able to purchase all that matters: health, children's well-being, safety, pharmaceuticals, and warehouses for old age. What cements our slavery to the empire culture is our own fear. We fear of the wilderness. We are afraid of the stranger. Facing our fear is a difficult task when marketing fear is the primary function of most every news program and much of social media. The main journalistic mission is

to lead with crime and violence. The news professional and social media thrive on wrongdoing and finding out who is at fault. Every media commercial exploits our belief in scarcity and promises us more security, more power, and more ways to be loved. The bombardment from every direction is intense.

The most difficult part of shifting from the imperial to the neighborly narrative is learning how to question our thinking about charity and social action. We have done a good job of serving the poor, but that is not ending poverty. We will invest any amount of talent and wealth through philanthropy and legislation to increase health services, add classrooms, add police, and put more helping professionals on the frontlines. The paradox, of course, is that the medical profession does fight disease. Schools do help children learn. Police fight crime, treatment centers and case workers help keep people off the street, clothed and fed. Prisons also keep troubled people off the streets. The challenge is that these services have built-in limitations. One limitation is that most of these institutional solutions are run in the imperial way with attention on control, scale, cost, and speed, which is dehumanizing and commodifying to staff and client alike.

The larger limitation, which is a main point of this book, is that the major determinants of health, learning, safety, and well-being reside not in the hands of professionals or organizations or the credentialed elite, but in the relational realm—the network of relationships and the social capital that reside in the hands of our community, and the people in our neighborhoods. The option to empire is community. This is what is missing in finding a place for our hearts and compassion to make a real difference in the economic stability and general well-being of the people on the margins. Wars on poverty, drugs, and violence have produced more of what they were designed to eliminate simply because wars, laws, and fences are the only tools available to the empire mentality.

What will reduce poverty is the will of a neighborhood, combined with its relatedness to the larger community, and a decision to trust each other, which means that neighbors, often led by the faith community, will, first, create an alternative narrative about and relationship with the people we care about. This alternative narrative acknowledges that we

have enough. Second, we will then follow that with investment money and access to the support that people who are socially and economically connected—who know about finances, marketing, technology, real estate, and law—take for granted.

We know that the associational life of a neighborhood produces health. We know that what produces a child who learns and is useful and grows into a positive human being is a place where ten people outside the family know the name of that child, and a place where that child has stability in their housing and economic life. We have known for a while that a safe place is created when neighbors have their eyes on the street—a front-yard-and-front-porch-way of being together. We now know that if people who are geographically close trust one another and are willing to work together, they can make the place better. Key in this is the capacity of a neighborhood to welcome strangers. These are the elements of a beloved community. And who better to create these conditions than the faith community—in this book, the Church.

We no longer divide the human community into friends and others. Instead there are only friends along the way. When we obey God's call to go, there are no strangers or aliens. (p. 7)

This calls for the end of charity, for it divides us from those we claim to care about. Divided from our neighbors, coarsely labeled as the poor, divides us from God

Departing the Empire and Egypt

If the beginning of the transformation of how we bring our faith into the world is to emancipate the internal functioning of the Church from its imperial habits, the next big step is to reimagine what the missional work of the Church might be. How do we invest and work in the neighborhood that is also free from the habits of empire?

As this book calls to us, it begins with acknowledging that the context for this communal neighborly attention is not about traditional political action, social action, or charity. There is tension in almost every faith

community about the ideological questions of the day: right to life, same sex marriage, gender equality, gun control, welfare to work, left and right, liberal and conservative, war and peace, climate crisis or denial. These contests in ideology are taking place within the context of the imperial, scarcity, patriarchal narrative. These divisions are territorial claims for dominance in what laws we pass, what voting rights we grant, how we tax each other, and how we determine which boats rise with the tide and which ones sink to the ocean floor.

Of course, these social issues matter, and each of us has a heartfelt point of view about what is best for our family, our local interests, and the larger common good. The harsh reality is that these longstanding points of contention have not ended poverty, improved our health, cared for our children, stabilized the housing of too many of our neighbors. They, in fact, have increased our isolation, our like-mindedness, our addiction to stimulants, and our fear of the stranger.

The same must be said for philanthropy and charity. In addition to the love underlying charity, there is a scarcity and imperial force that declares that other people are needy, perhaps broken, and need us to fix them. To state it perhaps too strongly, if a church takes pride in feeding the poor on a regular basis, as an act of compassion, are people any more in control of their economic lives after dinner than they were before dinner? The call is not to stop the feeding, or clothing, or housing, because the needs are real. The problem is in how we perceive the neighbors we are feeding, clothing, and housing. When we name them poor, we declare them not only broke, but broken. This is seeing the world with the eyes of Pharaoh.

God calls God's people to create a new community of shalom. We must take care not to simply make God's mission into a social ethic or universal morality. God's call is not merely a means for achieving better wages and working conditions for the enslaved. It cannot be narrowly defined as a socio-political intervention or strategy. Shalom community is not limited to "strategies to ensure just distribution of resources, or theories of justice presupposed by such policies."¹ God does not give Moses a theory of justice. God wants to foster very real, transformed, and renewed relationships among the people of Israel and the people of Egypt.

Neighborly Economics and the Beloved Community

The neighborly narrative takes our attention away from the imperial arguing and away from our charitable patterns and puts our attention strictly on the determinants of the well-being of neighbors, which moves the Church into the elimination of poverty, not just serving the poor. That move begins with a change in labeling. There is no such thing as a poor person, or a homeless person, or a troubled youth, or an ex-offender. These labels are too small a version of a human being. They drive solutions that keep us all stuck as strangers. When we see that neighbors are not poor, but are economically isolated, we name an idea we can do something with. We can reduce their isolation by learning who they are and what they are good at, and then invest in their enterprise with a neighborly support system to insure their success. Same with people experiencing homelessness, whom we used to call homeless. We can find out what they are good at, and find ways for them to offer their gifts. Many can cook, pray, sing, listen, live outside, and waste little.

The neighborly narrative calls for joining the movement toward a cooperative economy, based on the common good rather than private, competitive interests. We can take a financial interest in the path of local real estate development so that gentrification is more evenly balanced with investment in locally owned businesses, common land and buildings, and micro start-ups. In this work, we can include the quality of the local environment. We can invest resources in the food hub surrounding the church, caring about where food is grown and how it is distributed and priced. We can commit to finding usefulness for our teenagers, connect our elderly with our children, bring our neighbors with disabilities into the rooms where we meet, or into our storefronts. We can become committed to the connectedness and health of our neighbors. We can enlarge our role as conveners to bring neighbors together to reclaim the commons.

All of these now are attended to by the professionals in health care, public safety, economics, supermarkets and agriculture, education, and government. They do what they can, but they are incapable of effecting true transformation. The real exodus from empire will come from citizens

exiting the market ideology and its dependence on professional services and the programs of the charitable industrial complex.

The good news is that none of the transformative alternatives have to be invented. There are social innovations all around us that give us valuable models: the Parish Collective, the Abundant Community Initiative in Edmonton, The Hive in Cincinnati, the neighborhood economics movement called SOCAP, The Jubilee Project Cincinnati, The Jubilee Fund of Cincinnati's Christ Church Cathedral, Oasis, BALLE, Yes! Magazine, Common Change, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, the Family Independence Initiative. There are many more examples, these are just the ones I am close to. All of these efforts are building connected families and neighborhoods, and most are funneling financial investment and support into residents' hands in economically isolated neighborhoods. They are proof of concept for the ideas in this beautifully constructed book and confirmation that the movement is underway.

The Church has been headed toward these ideas for a while, and many of these efforts have been created out of the missional commitment of churches and church leaders. This book makes this direction clear and compelling. It calls us to put this vocation front and center as the work of the faith community. It brings the Church full force, in the words of our friend Walter Brueggemann, into our double agency with God.

God invites and God sends all of God's people. This is not a professional or clerical invitation. God's call to ordinary people undergirds all other work done in God's name. . . . The words to Isaiah echo for us, "Whom will I send? Who will go on my behalf? Who will be my messenger?" It is not a call to professionals or specialists. God calls all brothers and sisters into new relationships, and a new kingdom of shalom. Who will answer the invitation to go? (p. 12)

Enjoy the book.

Introduction: Selling Jesus

Hence the vocation of the Church of Christ in the world, in political conflict and social strife, is inherently eschatological. The Church is the embassy of the eschaton in the world. The Church is the image of what the world is in its essential being. The Church is the trustee of the society which the world, not subjected to the power of death, is to be on that last day when the world is fulfilled in all things in God.

—William Stringfellow¹

I believe that God has a mission. God's mission has a church—a community—and we are that community of beloved apostles. As such, how do we stop fumbling over institutional trappings and get to the business of our mission? What are the theological and spiritual imperatives that mark the work before us? And what are the economies that force us to rely on outdated models of being and doing church? I have explored these questions in previous books, sharing the conversations I have been having as a priest and then bishop of the Episcopal Church with my diocese and beyond. I have come to believe that some aspects of our formation for the future lie in how the Church functioned in the past. I believe firmly that there is a great tide that washes through the Church both from the past and the future. If we look carefully at our past, we can see the seeds of our own becoming.

I believe that the Holy Spirit draws us forward. Discernment and conversation, cost what they will and lead where they may, are essential for

leadership and strategy. All of creation flows out of the community of the Divine Trinity and is a reciprocation, a return to God, of this divine gift. We are part of that eternal return. Yet, as an institution filled with people, we also wander adrift, blown by winds that lead us elsewhere (Eph. 4:14). In every age, therefore, we examine the faith we have received in order to make necessary course corrections to ensure that we are traveling with the tide of God's Spirit and not futilely rowing against it.

There is no doubt that we have seen seismic shifts over the past fifty years of Church mission. The givens for discipleship, our assumptions about community norms, and the very economies we depend upon continue to change. Many old forms have become millstones around our necks, and many parts of the Christian Church are gasping for air. At the same time, creativity and hope spring forth as leaders point their people toward a gospel vision outside their church doors. Every day, people attempt new ways of undertaking God's mission. They need our prayers and resources—time, energy, and money. My books and my ministry have attempted to offer some cover for the entrepreneurs, the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs, and the ones who see things differently. The tenacious creative people among us are not only where energy for the future can be found; they are also able to show us where the steep learning curves are.

My conversations with people committed to a mission-driven future led me to write *CHURCH, A Generous Community*, and *Small Batch*. As the conversation evolved, I found something was still getting in the way. I wrote *Jesus Heist* after realizing that so many of us within the institution use an institutional lens to read the scriptures. In *Jesus Heist* I offered a new hermeneutic for reading the scripture: a missional perspective. The next challenge is locating the primary work of the Church. After years of working within the institutional Church, many of us know how it does business. But what is the work really for? This book focuses on the vocation of the inherited Church, but not its myriad accouterments. This book asks: What are the Church's vocations? What is the work of the baptized? A Church refocused on mission will never happen without a mass enlivening—a great awakening—of the people of God. William Stringfellow wrote in *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*:

I am called in the Word of God—as is *everyone* else—to the vocation of being human, nothing more and nothing less. . . . To be a Christian means to be called to be an exemplary human being. And, to be a Christian *categorically* does not mean being religious. Indeed, all religious versions of the gospel are profanities. . . . In the face of death, live humanly. In the middle of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst Babel, speak the truth. Confront the noise and verbiage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the Word of God. Know the Word, teach the Word, nurture the Word, preach the Word, define the Word, incarnate the Word, do the Word, live the Word. And more than that, in the Word of God, expose death and all death's works and wiles, rebuke lies, cast out demons, exorcise, cleanse the possessed, raise those who are dead in mind and conscience.²

Somewhere along the great arc of history, the Church abdicated its primary vocation of being God in Christ Jesus's body in the world, and started selling Jesus and eternal life as a consumer product instead. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). But today, when people experience the Church, do they feel that the kingdom has come near? I fear that many more would say "no" than would say "yes."

Along the way, the Church became a worldly principality. It is often remarked that this churchly kingdom looks much different than the community imagined by Jesus. It is worth inspecting this universe of Church and its centripetal forces carefully. The Church has a very natural way of taking the focus off of Jesus and the scripture and placing it on its own institutional needs. As the influences of the world have pressed in, especially the disciplines of business and organizational culture, all nondenominational and denominational church leaders have begun to make matters other than the gospel the lens by which they lead. Far too often, I succumb to this temptation in my own ministry. I know how challenging it can be to make mission primary, and I find that when it comes to vocation, this is doubly true. We can trace the history of vocation to see how this institutional bait-and-switch happened and where this churchly kingdom is presently headed.

This book will challenge us to acknowledge that the vocations of the Church are not meant to protect God behind an impermeable screen of holiness. Such protective behaviors serve our own interest and that of the institutional kingdom—at the expense of Jesus. In order to grasp the future of vocational life, we must learn to see Christ working in the world and through others.

As we ponder the future of the Church's vocation and the vocations of its members, we ought to be curious about the emerging mission work of the baptized. This is essential. We now face a mission age. We must start Christian communities that are not priestly or institutionally oriented. We must help people discern their calling in the world and on behalf of God. And we must also increase ordinations (because of retirements) while asking, "What kind of ordinands will we raise up?" We must make more ways of training available to both the baptized and clergy, but how? We must get curious about what processes for discerning clergy leadership work, but are all clergy formed the same way? Furthermore, the discernment of lay vocations cannot be an afterthought, simply for those turned down by leadership for the ordained ministry. Lay vocations should be our *first* thought. Some may discover a call to be ordained, but most will find an enlivened sense of themselves and their community as part of the baptized.

We have been focused liturgically on the recovery of the central role of baptism within our churches and liturgy. The twentieth century was an age of defining the rules of the assembly. During the high watermark of parochial ministry, we spent a vast amount of theological and corporate energy defining baptism in the midst of the Eucharist. Then, we quibbled about *what* language best incorporated the baptized into the communal celebration, which resulted in numerous trial liturgies and a new prayer book in 1979. Our older generation of leaders now long for another revision before their time passes, but face a church weary of change. We have also spent a good amount of resources sorting out who is allowed to celebrate in the community. Who can be a deacon, a priest, or bishop? Can the celebrant be a woman? Can they be a priest but not a bishop? Can they be gay? Transgender? Single? Or Divorced? These have been the questions about the assembly that occupied our liturgical efforts in the past century.

Other questions remain unanswered. For instance, the baptized might ask, “Am I participating as the priest prays, or is the priest praying my prayer? Are the clergy praying with us or for us?” The questions point to the hierarchy of orders. Is the priest one of us as we pray the Eucharistic prayer together? Is the priest our chosen celebrant among equals with the baptized? Or is the priest praying the prayer for the congregation? The latter suggests a hierarchy where the priestly vocation is to pray on behalf of the baptized. The Rt. Rev. Neil Alexander, bishop and dean of the School of Theology at Sewanee, has a helpful way of thinking about the complex work of the Church in these conversations. He says, “Every time we move our theological thinking in one area, we move everything else in relationship to it. It is all like a mobile.”³ When you pull on the vocation of the baptized, it moves the ordinal, and moves our ecclesiology. Historically, the assembled congregation (one priest, one church building, Sunday morning services, one plot of land, and an internally focused ministry) has dominated every part of our theology, ecclesiology, and liturgy for a century. Moreover, the primary actors in that space and dialogue have been the clergy, and priests most of all.

Our parochial orientation has affected our every move, and has been a stumbling block to engaging mission. Due to the high place liturgy has played in this discourse, we have completely left the questions of mission, and the formation of the baptized for that mission, off the table. In fact, it has been argued that liturgy *is* mission. However, a church that focuses most of its time, energy, and resources on Sunday morning liturgy is not missional. The professionalizing of the priesthood and Episcopacy has diminished lay orders, robbing laypeople of their external mission work, and leaving them to spiritually tend to the most basic of ministries that revolve around Sunday morning activities. Many generations of the baptized have been spiritually transformed by their stewardship for the sake of a temple-oriented tradition and ministry at the Lord’s altar.⁴ But the work of the Church is not limited to an altar-centered faith alone. The baptized during this age have been particularly resilient and their faith has led them to start, build, and discover new forms of ministry outside the confines of the institutional Church. They have adapted to the changing

shape of culture and formed nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations to undertake their vocations of service. Many have left the building and have not returned. The Church has not followed them into these mission adventures to support, learn, and share.

Given the short shrift the baptized have received over the last few decades, we must, in fact, begin with laypeople instead of tacking them onto the end of a discussion of vocations. The uncomfortable truth for the institutional Church is that missional vitality combined with the shared Episcopal DNA of the baptized will be the key to a healthy future. In my diocese, there is a very old family business. The great-grandsons of the organization's founder manage it today. Their immigrant story, along with their partnership with the church, is an essential piece of the corporation's DNA. They have had to work to create a method of transferring the corporate family DNA, entrusting the future of their business methods and activities to new generations of employees. The same kinds of formation will have to be adapted to our use as we become a mission-minded community of the baptized at work in the world, supported by the clergy orders and one another.

We will need to discern and develop baptismal vocations that help people go out from the Church to serve the world and start new communities in God's name. We must seek to understand how we got to a place where the empowerment of the baptized always pointed to discernment for priesthood. We must confess that we have given lip service to the baptized while overemphasizing a false hierarchy focused on perpetuating clerical ministry. Our focus on discernment, seminaries, ordination, and internal parochial life and liturgy has sidelined discussions around the formation of God's people. As Bishop Alexander cautions us, any discussion about vocations will affect everything. We must be courageous as we proceed, because our task is monumental—we must imagine the future of baptismal vocation for mission. We must plumb the depths of the Church's vocation, its reason for being, and its means of participating in God's mission. Like an Alexander Calder mobile, when we tug on mission and the baptized as part of that work, all the other parts of the Church will move. The chief occupation of any discussion about the future of vocations must have two key components of the mobile in play at all times: the vocation of

the Church itself and the formation of the baptized for that mission. Only by holding these two things closely together can we pull apart our myopic and internally focused hermeneutic.

Not long ago I was getting coffee at my favorite coffee shop. The young man making my coffee and I have had several conversations about faith and religion. On this day he asked me, “So what do you think about the Catholic Church?”

I asked him to clarify, as I had a lot of opinions and it was a big topic. He simply offered that he did not think it looked much like what Jesus imagined. I told him he was right and that neither did we as Episcopalians. I said that, as a bishop, I thought we should be responsive to his question. In every missional age, I said, reformation is invited and even called for. The Church as the living body of Christ is out in the world at work. This is happening through the prophets, teachers, and people who minister from underneath the shadow of the Church. If the Church is to be like Christ, it must go out and join people where the work is being done. Only then will it truly be the body of Christ. He agreed and I think he was curious about what that might look like. We will have to have more conversations to be sure. He seems faithful, concerned, and curious about the future shape of ministry, and by that I mean the ministry of people in Jesus’s name.

The Church has often sought to protect itself from its instinctive curiosity and from the uncertain nature of sharing the burden of ministry with those who are not members. It was true at the time of Moses’s ministry. We find in Numbers 11:27 that Eldad and Medad were prophesying on God’s behalf, which was seen as a challenge to Moses’s authority, and so a young man came to tattle. Jacob asked Moses to make them stop. Moses said, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!” (v. 29).

The same of course happened with Jesus. In Mark 9:38, we are told that the disciples were sent out to do Jesus’s work. They came back to tell Jesus about their success. But they said they saw people “casting out demons” in Jesus’s name, and they were scandalized because those people were not part of the group Jesus sent out. They told Jesus they tried to stop the rogue exorcists because they were not part of the in-crowd. Jesus’s

response was much like Moses's. He said, "Do not stop them." They were part of his ministry if they chose to do it in his name.

The people who love God the most often get confused and think they need to protect God. But as Jesus teaches, sometimes it is actually these followers who must be renewed by what they see and experience in outsiders. Sometimes salt loses its flavor (Mark 9:50). Our work is to reject the desire to protect God and our ministry from others, and to reimagine the vocation of those who call themselves followers of God in Christ Jesus.

After reading my book *The Jesus Heist*, the Rev. Rebecca Stevens, chaplain at Vanderbilt University's St. Augustine's Chapel in Nashville and founder of Thistle Farms, said, "So what happens if we take your words seriously? Will there be no bishops?" Maybe. But I doubt it. I think the institutional Church is here to stay. What I hear us saying in our conversations is: We are out here doing God's work. It is not enough to change the structures of Church and orient them around mission. The very people who do that work will have to change and be transformed to undertake mission differently. Space must be given to people to do mission in a safe way. Lay missionaries must be able to engage the culture knowing that bishops, priests, and deacons are supporting them.

We have invested in the setting apart of leaders and ordaining people in a system and culture that is loyal to an old model of church. Stevens is right. We must change not only where we go and what we do; we must also change who we are and how we choose and train our leaders. Perhaps the way deacons, priests, and bishops work will need to be different in the future. Maybe, in fact, just as we have sought to understand the mission of the Church differently, we should ask ourselves about the ministers of the Church. If we dare to call ourselves "Christ's Body" and undertake the work of going where Christ went, and doing what Christ did, and hanging out with the people Christ hung out with, then maybe we should pray God give us wisdom to become the people doing this work. Maybe we should ask God to open up the living word of scripture and invite us to see the work of God's people in a new light, outside the ministry of church structure and institution. The question before us as an institutional Church is *not* "How will we save the Church?" Instead, the questions are:

How will we work with people to find their call to serve the world? What are the different roles needed in this new missional age? And what parts of our organization need to be reshaped to help us accomplish this work together? We are even now writing the story of this generation's response to the gospel. What is before us are mission-shaped vocations.