

**Solemn Festival of Holy Eucharist at Christ Church, La Crosse
Diocese of Eau Claire's 80th Diocesan Convention**

November 8, 2008

The Rev. Canon Dr. Patrick P. Augustine, Rector

Isaiah 49:5-13, Psalm 67, Ephesians 3:1-12, Matthew 28:16-20

Missio Dei--Come Labor On

We welcome you as our diocesan family to Christ Church. I often say to our people that we are a missional community to serve in Jesus name. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to understand the Gospel just proclaimed by the Deacon. Jesus said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 17-20). There is no doubt it is a clear direction (command) Jesus has given to his church to obey, go forth to proclaim Jesus' message and usher people from La Crosse to Superior into the Kingdom of God. It is a missional charge given to the church.

Mission is not a fancy idea of some theologian in the West. 'Mission is derived from the very nature of God. It [is], thus, put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending and empowering the church into the world."¹ This morning as diocesan family meet here at the occasion of our 80th Diocesan Convention, the words of Jesus once again invite us into this reality that mission is not merely an activity of the church, but it is God's own initiative as "God so loved the world---" (Jn.3:16).

We realize the established church in the West has emphasized the "marks of a true church" to be wherever the Gospel is rightly preached, the sacrament rightly administered, and (sometimes) church discipline exercised. However solid this foundation may have been, there have been gradual shifts. According to Darrel Guder, this perception gave little attention to "the church as a communal entity or presence, and it stresses even less the community's role as the bearer of the missional responsibility in the world." Such churches have come to envision the church as a "place where certain things happen. --One goes to church in much the

¹ Bosch, David. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.Orbis, 1991.p.390.

same way you might go to a store. You attend a church the way you attend a school or theater. You belong to a church as you would to a service club with its programs and activities.²

No, this is not, what Jesus wanted his church to be---“A place where certain things happen.” Jesus has called everyone to extend God’s grace everywhere. This missional call was not easy for Peter, James and John and the rest of the disciples to accept. It is not easy for us, as well. We learn from the parable of the “sowing of the seeds” (Matthew 13:1-10) that in fact there were brambles, rocks and ruts along the way. In the redemptive story of the people of Israel there were always people who were complaining and wanted to go back to the old ways: “Let’s go back to Egypt.” (Numbers 14:3b). There were others who didn’t want to let go of their personal golden calves (Exodus 32). But those who wanted to move with God were the “missional people.” They trusted God and went through the deep waters of the parted Red Sea and finally arrived in the Promised Land.

It is, time for the church to re-discover its biblical and theological roots in order to proclaim the good news with zeal and conviction. The purpose of this re-discovery is to shape the church’s identity and vision that all baptized members in the body of Christ are called to participate in God’s redemptive mission. Such community is called “missional community” which discerns its vocation and proclaims the Gospel. The church engages in communal Bible study though sharing Christian friendship and offering God’s hospitality to strangers. When we live with such missional vision then we become the “Community of the Way.” In our lives we offer a visible, public and practical witness in our neighborhoods and the world. We carry the marks of Jesus’ as a missional people.

Recently, we received an excellent report ‘Charting a Course into the Future.’ On page six Deacon Glasser presents to us the feedback from the Diocesan’s three committees and listening sessions. The first priority, which emerged for the diocese to consider for both the short-term and long term future, is the ‘Primacy of Mission.’ I give thanks to God that the people of this diocese recognize the very purpose of the church is to be a missional community, that is, to be a salt and a light into the world. To put this a little more succinctly, Evangelist Luis Palau has compared Christians to manure. Where they "pile up" in one place they begin to stink, but when they are spread out, they fertilize the land! In Emil Brunner's often quoted phrase: "The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning."

² Guder, Darrel L. *Missional Church*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998. Pp.79-80.

Ours is a culture of disbelief, and we often read that the mainline churches are shrinking in their numbers. It has been our story in this diocese. Numbers in the pews have decreased. The wells for financial resources have been drying up. We may recognize that there is crisis situation, but the Chinese have another meaning for the word crisis and that is opportunity. According to Deacon Glasser's report our diocesan faith community is saying that we want to be evangelists to "gossip the Gospel." We want in a more effective way to be the healing hands of Jesus in our broken world. Archbishop William Temple used to say, "The Church is the only cooperative society in the world which exists for the benefit of its non-members." There is a great urgency and the field is vast. Jesus says, "Go therefore, the harvest is plenty but the laborers are few." Rise up the body of Christ, '*Come labor on*' to finish the task our Master has called us to do. "And Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28: 20), Jesus said. God is not done with us, the Gospel has not lost its appeal to transform lives, and the power (DUNAMIS) of the Holy Spirit has not abandoned us. (the word *Dunamis* translated in English is dynamite)

I would like to close my sermon with the words of the first missionary bishop of the diocese of Wisconsin, Jackson Kemper from 1859-1870. I quote from his sermon which he preached before the Board of Missions in 1841:

"Brethren! May it not be *our* duty to convert the world--May not this high, this inestimable privilege be offered to *us!* And are we prepared? --Are we doing at the present moment *even one tenth* part of what we are capable? Our means and our power are extensive--and under the blessing of Him, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, our aim--our constant, undeviating, untiring aim should be great and lofty. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.

"Have we, as individuals, or a Church, a deep and abiding interest in the success of missions?"

"Not a brother here would I accuse of indifference or cowardice. But I would stir up, with God's permission, the pure mind of each one, by way of remembrance. It is the spirit of missions I earnestly and most affectionately advocate.