

## **MISSION AT WORK: A THEOLOGY OF LOCAL MISSION APPROACHES IN THE DIOCESE OF VERMONT**

Q: What is the mission of the Church?

A: The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

(Book of Common Prayer, page 855)

**Mission is God's process at work.** A strong theological current for the Local Mission Approach initiative in the Diocese of Vermont is an understanding of mission as *God's mission (missio dei), put into practice* by the Church. Put another way, as many Christian leaders have observed, "The Church does not have a Mission. God's Mission has a Church."

And just as the Five Marks of Mission (1), widely embraced throughout the Anglican Communion, point to the reality of God's reconciling presence through the ministry of Jesus Christ, so too we have identified four features of local mission as a basis for consideration of this "mission at work" and as points of entry for discernment for the Episcopal Churches in Vermont and our effort to articulate and implement Local Mission Approaches.

**"Seeing"** in the parable of the Great Judgement (Mt. 25:31–46) plays an essential part. "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we *see* thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we *see* thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we *see* thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' (v.37) Local Mission Approach begins with *seeing* and recognizing the face of Christ in those around us.

**"Sending"** is half of the equation, the purpose for why we gather as the *ekklesia*, the assembly - the Church. Fed and reconciled, 're-membered' as the body of Christ, we are then radically dismissed to proclaim by word and deed the good news of Jesus. This is our witness. We *see* that gathering and sending builds relationship with God and one another. Jesus gathered seventy and sent them out two by two (Lk. 10:1–9) Sent out in pairs, mission becomes a collective communal enterprise, not an individual undertaking. Together in our local mission we discover how God's peace and healing demonstrates "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." (v.9)

**"Transforming"** mission does not end with those we have encountered. *God's process at work will change us!* The practice of faith (praxis) yields renewal. St. Paul exhorts, "do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Ro. 12:2) When we truly engage in local mission, we must be ready to be transformed

**"Returning"** is the other half of the equation. Although mission is most often characterized 'being sent', the return is just as important in understanding Local Mission Approach. The transformation experienced and felt needs to be shared back with the sending community. In returning we are given the opportunity to give thanks to God, space to share that learning and witness (tell your story) with others. The seventy disciples return with joy (Lk. 10:17) and Jesus responds, "Blessed are the eyes which *see* what you *see*! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to *see* what you *see*, and did not *see* it, and to *hear* what you *hear*, and did not *hear* it." (Lk. 10:23 – 24).

**For the Mission of the Church** (*Book of Common Prayer, page 257*).

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that's people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit on all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.  
*Amen.*

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*The Mission of the Church Is the Mission of Christ*

- *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- *To teach, baptize and nurture new believers*
- *To respond to human need by loving service*
- *To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation*
- *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth*