
A Word of Ecumenical Encouragement

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We “Episcopalians on Baptismal Mission” (EBM) are your Episcopal sister and brother counterparts focused on the ministry of all the baptized in their daily lives. Organizationally, we have been working together for some ten years largely through a small steering committee that meets monthly via a conference call. For most of us “steer-ers,” this work has been a calling for many decades.

One of our guiding metaphors is the base camp for hikers. The base camp is not the destination—it is a way station, a watering hole. The base camp is for the hikers, there to support, guide, equip, encourage, and aid in healing the hikers on their journeys. Translate that to a congregation, which exists to support the members on their daily life journeys.

Sometimes the congregation reverses the priorities, acting as though the hikers/members are there to make the parish run better! EBM’s mission is to shift the Episcopal Church to become more base camp-oriented, and less parochially centered. Over the years, this has not been an easy task. The church has created seminaries that train seminarians to run parishes rather than equip the laity. And parishes like to celebrate and dedicate leaders within the parish—church school teachers, vestry members, altar guild workers—rather than members who are school teachers and administrators, bankers, mechanics, nurses, and such in their daily lives. Those institutional operating priorities work against the development of empowered lay leaders who understand that their most important ministries are their daily vocations.

The Episcopal Church is ordered by a Constitution and Canons. Among the canons is one on Ministry. The first paragraph is about the ministry of all the baptized and calls on dioceses, seminaries, and parishes to equip and support their members in their daily lives. But that subject is never mentioned again! The rest of that canon, of several pages, is all about the ordained!

We of EBM have focused on making that lone paragraph more of a reality. Most recently at our triennial General Convention, we succeeded in passing a resolution—with funding—for a task force to propose ways and means for the church on all levels to implement this paragraph. The task force is being formed and hopefully will include some EBM members and others we have recommended. We shall see!

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