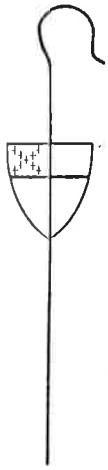


A PROPOSAL FOR A THEOLOGICAL  
AND PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF  
THE EPISCOPATE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



# OFFICE OF PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

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At a meeting of the Committee on Pastoral Development of the House of Bishops in February 1979 a review was made of fifteen possible programs or projects that might claim the time and energy of the Committee in the future. The committee members went thru a prioritizing exercise in order to determine how best to distribute their time, energy, and resources. The priority that came out as number one had a score that was significantly higher than the second choice. This top priority reads "Plan a theological colloquium on leadership and the episcopate in conjunction with the interim meeting of the House of Bishops, October 3-11, 1980.

The material that follows suggest a rationale for such a colloquium. It includes a proposal and also provides a means for getting feedback from committee members and from others regarding this proposal.

Your thoughtful reading and response to this material will aid greatly in planning for the future.

One of the things that is becoming very clear at this time in the life of the Episcopal Church and in other churches is an extensive and significant concern about ministry. When the word 'ministry' is used today it is not simply a way of referring to that class of Christians who have become ordained and earn their livings as professional custodians, managers, and care givers within the institutional church. The word has now taken on a very new conotation. In years gone by we were quite comfortable speaking about a young man attending college and seminary as one who planned "to enter the ministry". Today the message comes thru in a variety of ways and with increasing frequency that one does not "enter" the ministry; all Christians in fact, are the ministry of the Church.

This expanded view of ministry is welcomed by a large percentage of the laity. The theory and the theology of ministry is being worked on seriously, and in some areas imaginative and truly exciting work is being done with regard to the practical implementation of the emerging theology of ministry.

While in some areas there is great enthusiasm for a new and broader view of ministry, in other areas there is a certain mystification and some apprehension about the changes that such a revision could bring into the Episcopal Church.

Expanded thinking about ministry focuses largely on the laity, but necessarily it also raises substantive questions about the ordained ministry of the Church. Since the episcopate is such a key factor in the traditional view of ministry within the Episcopal Church it is logical that attention be given to a careful examination of the Episopate in the twentieth century.

This examination has already begun. In 1977 the Committee on Pastoral Development published the first phase of an empirical research study entitled

"Bishops Look at Their own Ministry." This study has been expanded and the second phase will be published in early 1980 under the title: "Bishops and Diocesan Councils View the Episcopate: A Study in Church Leadership".

These studies have brought together factual information about how bishops view their own ministry and how the episcopal ministry is viewed by a cross section of members of Diocesan Councils whose involvement in church affairs allow them to have a closer association with the bishops than most other church members. The data describes how things really are. It is experiential and not theoretical.

What is needed now is a theoretical and theological assessment of the ministry of the episcopate. If an overall revision or renewal of ministry is occurring, then it is essential that these questions be asked:

1. *What does this mean for bishops?*
2. *How do new developments in ministry impact the purposes and functions of the episcopate?*
3. *What theological reality underlies the Office of Bishop?*
4. *Is this theology changing?*
5. *Are there new insights and theories of leadership that are compatible with our theology of episcopate?*
6. *Can new knowledge about effective organization and management enrich the role and function of the Bishop?*
7. *If God is leading us toward a more comprehensive and more dynamic understanding of Christian ministry in general how does the episcopal ministry in particular adapt to these new circumstances while not abandoning the apostolic truth which is the bedrock of our tradition?*
8. *How, in fact, does the old integrate with the new, and how is this all contained in wineskins that will not burst?*
9. *How do we conceptualize the modern episcopate so that in responding to a world so radically different from the apostolic world the essential theology, the divinely ordained purpose and the God given value of episcopal function is not dissipated in the volume of activity required for survival in our conflicted world?*

The exploration of these and other questions cannot be done by some group of experts on behalf of the bishops in today's church. The task is distinctly an 'in house' task, but it does require stimulation from the outside. There is need for an interdisciplinary approach. Bishops, theologians, theorists regarding leadership and organizational development, and practitioners in related fields could profitably work together on such an exploration. The one common bond that must be present among the different but associated experts is a deep and loving concern for the church, a knowledge of an experience in the Episcopal Church, and a serious commitment to the mission of the Church in the world.

Within the membership of our church we have the persons with the knowledge and experience needed to launch such an exploration. While bishops are faithfully performing their tasks and fulfilling their vocations other Christians and church members are also at work in Gods world - attempting to discern His will and fulfilling important tasks as stewards of His creation. Some are priests, scholars, and researchers; others are lay persons who are students of human behaviour, managers of large corporate structures and leaders in fields closely related to the ministry and mission of the Church.

Whether priest, or lay person these individuals are practitioners whose tasks are demanding and important and in the performance of which it is critically important to be guided by theory, theology, and conceptualization. While performing in quite different areas they share a common need for a conscious theological and value-oriented base upon which, in a highly intentional manner, they can structure their activities and corporate life.

If, in fact, we are entering upon a period in which ministry is seen as a mutual responsibility and as the function of the entire membership

of the church, then it is appropriate for bishops not to closet themselves in some kind of professional isolation in order to think out a new theology or restate for new times a traditional theology of the episcopate.

Two things seem to be clear:

- #1. It is timely and important to explore and state for our times a theology of the episcopate. The question is not: "What do Bishops do?". But rather: "In God's plan for the world today, what are Bishops for?"
- #2. This exploration cannot be done by bishops alone. The contributions of others in our church and society are needed in order that we might lay hold on the fullest measure of truth.

The key issue is leadership.

The bishop is seen as a spiritual guide and religious leader; as a leader in terms of management and organization of church structures, as a leader in prophetic thought, as a leader in implementing faith commitments in such a way that God's will may be done in the world and as the leader of mission!

In reviewing the overall leadership function of the bishop it may be seen generally to fall into two major categories; custodial and missionary.

History reveals that in the expansion of the church throughout the USA and in chosen overseas mission fields the early bishops happily exploited their missionary function, and the church grew. In time, however, the demand for being custodians of what had become established took over.

Today bishops are caught in a bind: they are called the chief missionary of the diocese, but then they are employed in such a way that their time and energy is devoted chiefly to the maintenance of what is. Any missionary function being carried out is delegated to others.

This is but one of the dilemmas that has resulted from losing touch with a vibrant and dynamic theology of episcopal ministry.

Recently a harsh judgment on the episcopate appeared in print in the house organ of the National Episcopal Clergy Associations (Leaven: Vol. IX #2 1 Oct. 1979) No matter how biased this statement may appear to be it causes us to ask: What is there about the modern episcopate that allowed it to be said:

*"ON THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS: One observer told me, "It's instructive to remember that every single one of these turkeys was elected by a large group of clergy and laity -- who have perhaps gotten what they deserved." There is definitely something wrong with the office of bishop in the Episcopal Church. I ran into a few people, clergy and lay, who either 1) liked the bishop or 2) thought he did a pretty good job, but many feel that "the bottleneck is at the top of the bottle." This is a sad thing, but it really is true. There are few bishops who seem to remember where they came from. Instead of a collegial relationship with their clergy, they come to think of priests and deacons as their adversaries. Many parishes, with their bishop's blessings, have annual goal-setting sessions, so that the leadership and rank-and-file can get together on the directions they would like to see the parish go. Included in this is often some direction, some agreed upon goals for the clergy of the parish.*

*How many dioceses have you seen where this type of thing is done on a regular basis? I can't recall ever seeing it, other than before an episcopal election, and I need to be convinced that it wouldn't be of some benefit in many dioceses. I suspect that not only would the dioceses be happier places, but that the bishops would feel less lonely at the top after such a procedure."*

Within this statement there are some practical issues but also some theological issues that point to the need for the very exploration we are proposing.