

“Living the Great Commission Today”

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The Church in the 21st Century is much more like the Early Church (of the first few centuries) than probably any other period in our over 2,000 year history. An increasing number of people are growing up in nominally churched or un-churched households. We can no longer assume that people have faith when they arrive – or that they will arrive on their own. As the gathered Body of Christ, we must deliver the faith to them by going out into the world and showing forth the love of Christ in what we say and do and inviting – yes, evangelizing – people to 'Come and See.' To succeed this must be a radically open invitation to all. Part of fulfilling the great commission is our reflecting the diversity of God's people: inclusive of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, economic status and every other aspect of the human condition. And the radical invitation must be followed by radical hospitality when people arrive at church – one where we show forth the grace and love of God in a congregation focused on building up, empowering, and nurturing ministers for mission in the world.

The hymn “Lord, You Give The Great Commission” (*The Hymnal 1982* # 528 and *Wonder Love and Praise* # 780) beautifully speaks to the theology of the Church's mission: healing the sick, baptizing and teaching, Eucharistic worship, and offering God's reconciling grace and forgiveness. This hymn eloquently expresses how it was into a broken world that Christ came and it is into that same world that he sends us. Without the Church fulfilling the great commission, the gospel goes unheard; abundant life – which God intends for all – is unfulfilled; communities are not strengthened; and we hoard as private treasure what God so freely gives. In the refrain, we are reminded from where our authority and gifts come: the Spirit's gifts that empower us for the work of ministry. This rousing hymn reminds Christians of why we are called together as the body of Christ. We are all called together, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be a people sent.

To fulfill the great commission we need to deeply live from our Baptismal promises. This begins by the priority that we place on the importance of Baptism in our congregational life by actively inviting to and preparing people for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (or preparing families in raising an infant or child being presented for baptism). From the font of Baptism we move, week by week, to the Eucharistic Table to receive the gift of our regular remembrance, reception, and renewal.

Rooted in the Sacraments, the great commission invites, challenges, and offers opportunities for us to actively engage in growing in our faith and presenting a maturing faith to the world. Ours is not a faith that professes to have all the answers; rather, our faith is one that loves and embraces the questions – a faith seeking understanding. In creating opportunities, we need our engagement in life-long Christian Formation for all ages and in a variety of formats.

And, finally, from the Sacramental life and exploration of the questions of faith, our fulfilling of the great commission must move us out in God's Mission in the world. A focus on offering outreach ministries of healing, justice, and peace help in meeting local, national and global needs that reflect God's compassion, love, and healing for the world.

The tasks before us are great, but our Baptisms call us to nothing less. Christ has given us the Great Commission and through this place has called us all together on the journey of faith to receive and live it boldly in our world today.