

Editorial

Rebecca Slough

The theme for this *Vision* issue emerged from a conversation with Muriel Bechtel, area church minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, during her 2009 sabbatical at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), where I serve as academic dean. As we discussed her sabbatical project on discerning call, we talked about the interrelationship of baptism, vocation, and ministry in Christian life. We discovered that we share a dissatisfaction with parts of Mennonite church practice that reflect these assumptions: (1) baptism is only about being saved and joining the church, (2) God only calls pastors, and (3) only pastors do ministry.

Our discussion was energetic, evocative, and generative. We kept circling around how the dance of baptism, vocation, and ministry gives shape to a way of life for all Christians. Our dismay about the current diminished, functional understandings of baptism, vocation, and ministry gave us the impetus to propose that we collaborate to edit an issue of *Vision* devoted to the subject.

In July 2011, I led a seminar at the Mennonite Church USA youth convention in Pittsburgh, with this title: “Whose We Are: Baptism, Identity, and Vocation.” Rising above my terror, I explored the claim that in baptism we say yes! to being beloved; to being forgiven; to being inspired and transformed; to being members of Christ’s body; to being part of a faith tradition with a past, a present, and a future hope; to being loyal disciples; and to being ministers in God’s kingdom.

The seminar discussion was reasonably lively, for an after-lunch time slot (blessedly, it was the first full day of convention). It

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became immediately clear that baptism seen as a public yes! to all these ways of being a Christian was a new idea for most of the youth, even those who had been baptized. Certainly, they knew the forgiveness part and the part about becoming a member of Christ's body. But the thought that being inspired by the Holy Spirit is part of baptism was new to some. Perhaps most surprising to these youth was the idea that through baptism we say yes! to ministry for the sake of God's kingdom, for the sake of God's mission in the world. It is my prayer that those who attended left the seminar with an enlarged sense of baptism's meaning: it's about more than getting wet.

In their recent book *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, Alan and Eleanor Kreider argue that baptismal catechesis is

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essential if new believers are to learn the practices of faithfulness necessary to our participation in God's redemptive mission.¹ They point out that we are all baptized into a holy priestly vocation, called into the obedient service of God's redemptive mission. The rite of baptism marks a key moment in each person's rich and complex experience of saying yes! to God, of claiming God's orientation for her or his life and entering into the priestly life of service and blessing.

All the themes I claimed as parts of the yes! we make in baptism dance through this *Vision* issue: belovedness and blessedness; being a blessing to others; listening for God's call(s) to service over the course of a lifetime; discerning the shape of ministry for a particu-

lar time, place, and season; expressions of Christian ministry lived beside or outside the organizational patterns of the church; pastoral ministry as one vital form—among many—of service for the sake of the kingdom. The entire issue bears witness to but does not exhaust the breadth and depth of our baptismal yes!

At the conclusion of my seminar at the convention, three adults came to me, asking for names of Mennonite congregations that have developed a strong and coherent process of catechesis that embodies these (and other) dimensions of our baptismal yes!

I was speechless and promised to take their question on as a research project.

I am grateful to Muriel for being faithful to the questions that arose from her work and for being a wise and generous collaborator in editing this issue. With her, I am convinced that our commitments to be a missional church, to develop a culture of discerning call in our congregations, and to ensure the cultivation of strong leadership for Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations will flounder, if not fail, if we do not attend holistically to baptism, vocation, and ministry as facets of faith for everyone.

Note

¹ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2011), 161.

About the issue editor

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