



### Sending out the 70, New Ipswich Congregational Church

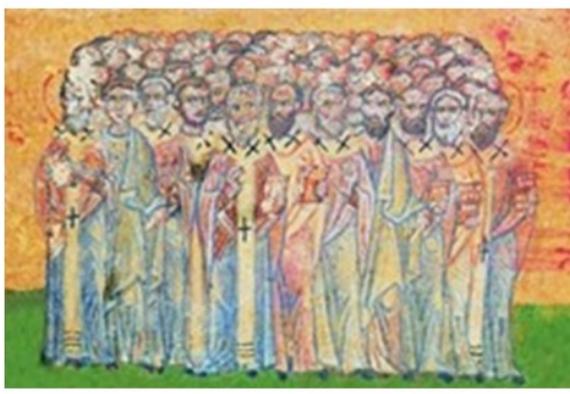
Greetings!

Please read [Luke 10:1-23](#)

The sending of the 70/72 disciples in the Gospel of Luke is one of my favorite texts. It is a building block of the developing ecclesiology<sup>1</sup> of the church and the generations of representative Christian leadership. Favorite nuggets like “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” (Luke 10:2) Or “if you are not received, shake the dust off your feet.” (Luke 10:10-11) Or upon their return Jesus said, “I could see Satan fall.” (Luke 10:18) To me this story represents the best day in Jesus’ ministry. It is the culmination of his work and teaching, and he is there to see the fruit and complement the disciples on the work they have done (Luke 10:17-20).

There is a small controversy in the text that should be noted. Early tradition kept track of these disciples with biographical information that developed reporting on their work and ministry, even though they are never mentioned again in either the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles. Some are mentioned in the Catholic Encyclopedia and in another source known as [The Book of the Bee](#)<sup>2</sup>. These individuals are held as examples in the early church. They become for the early church and for us, representative ministers of the Gospel. And while these reports are extrabiblical, they give clues to the commissioning and ordination of persons for set apart ministries - which became the tradition of the church. This passage from Luke 10 has some similarities to two other commission text narratives, Matthew 10 and the preceding Chapter 9 in Luke. Perhaps a quick read of them would be helpful? They are set in Galilee with strict instructions to not wander into Gentile territory. There is no such prohibition in the Luke 10 passage.

The question remains, was it 70 or 72? Both numbers are given in different lists. Seventy appears to be



Ancient Icon, *Sending Out the 70*, artist unknown.

the popular number as there are three other sources in the scriptures that identify 70 elders - Exodus 24 and Numbers 11. In Jeremiah 29, the number 70 is used to speak of the number of years in Babylonian Exile. The conclusion is that Luke's reporting of 70 would fit within the biblical tradition. That has, for the most part, been the tradition of the church. It's too bad that the work of

these 70 is not reported upon further in scripture. However, since that time the church has been sending out representative leadership in the name of Jesus for the work of ministry.

In this tradition, on Wednesday, May 19, we in the West Ohio Annual Conference, in the Sanctuary of Church of the Messiah in Westerville, Ohio did just that. With Bishop Palmer's leadership, called and set apart representatives for the work of ministry were sent out on our behalf. For the **Deacon** - Word, Service, Compassion and Justice<sup>3</sup> are the major responsibilities and vows taken by each individual, and for the **Elder** it is Word, Sacrament, Order and Service.<sup>4</sup> For those commissioned, they acknowledged their call to ministry and took vows to continue the process towards ordination.

Let's look deeper in the text for the instructions of Jesus and how it sets up for the life of ecclesiology and representative ministry:

- Go – Luke 10:3
- Be Innocent – Luke 10:3
- Live by Faith – Lk 10:4
- Take Nothing – Lk 10:4
- Extend Peace – Lk 10:5-6
- Receive the gifts of others – Lk 10:7-8
- Heal the sick – 10:9
- Proclaim the Kingdom – 10:9

The work of representative ministry and ordination services that we share have their antecedents in the calling, sending and commissioning work of Jesus. My favorite part of the Annual Conference experience is in this work. I love that we send people out into the world.

I have been serving in our Annual Conference in various capacities on the Board of Ordained Ministry since 2005. In that work, we hear people's calls and confirm them either for the ministry of the baptized or for representative ministry. We train through the education process of college, seminary and course of study. We send out to over 1,000 preaching place as primary and secondary places of justice, service and word, and to extension ministries within and outside the bounds of the Annual Conference of word, sacrament, order and service through the deployment arm of the church led by the Bishop and Cabinet.

I can't sit through a commissioning and ordination service without deep emotion.

First of all, I am reminded of my own sense of call to ministry and what that has meant over the years. When things get tough, I fall back on my call to ministry story. It began at age 9 and then I experienced it in a deeper way my senior year of high school. This call has been confirmed for me in deeply spiritual experiences, both inside the church and outside, through the process of ordination in the United Methodist Church and in relating to people outside that process. I am just one in a long line of persons credentialed and deployed for the work of ministry in the tradition of Jesus.

This tradition is 20 centuries long and has had its ups and downs. At first the church was very multi-cultural and inclusive. It began with a decision about whether they would be a Jewish sect or include the Gentile world. The ruling was made and it changed the face of Christianity. But it came through breaking some rules, about both kosher eating and circumcision.<sup>5</sup>

Later when the church became a tool of the empire, Constantine protected Christians from the general persecutions they had suffered for years.<sup>6</sup> Following the empire years the church became nationalized, less multicultural and supported the state. Nearer to our lifetime, the greatest abuse came at the hands of the Lutheran Church in Nazi Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Early on in the history of the church both men and women were leaders. However, near the 5th century women were marginalized from leadership and the ranks of the clergy became male dominated.<sup>8</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a shift again towards women in ordained representative leadership. The church has made a giant step towards inclusion, but there is more to be done for brown, yellow, black and red persons. Systemic racism and marginalization of persons of color, many as conquered or enslaved people, is also part of our church history. Scripture was used as a weapon to hold down, marginalize and discredit persons called by God for represented ministry. In many sectors the church bore this out making "11 o'clock on Sunday mornings the most segregated hour"<sup>9</sup> in the United States.

This is largely true in our own Annual Conference as we have very few truly multicultural worshipping communities. Recently, the cabinet learned that worship attendance for our Annual Conference shrank by 55% from 2000-2018! Each year for many years at our annual gathering we are told that hundreds of our churches do not report 1 Baptism or receive 1 person by Profession of Faith. For more than 40 years in our denomination we have debated the inclusion of LGBTQIA persons in the ranks of the clergy. For a long time the systemic marginalization of persons of color, women and LGBTQIA persons in leadership has been scapegoated in systemic racism and sexism resulting in spiritual and numerical decline in our denomination. What we have at work is that most of our leadership are not developing relationships and discipling people in Jesus Christ. But we do have churches that are growing with congregations and pastors on task. While no one is brave enough to publish any statement of overt racism and sexism, I have ample anecdotal evidence in my work. It is because, and yet, the vast majority of our churches are led by white men.

Unfortunately, I continue to receive requests for clergy leadership from our churches who say they will only accept someone who is white and male. There is a perception

of fear that supports ethnic and gender biases. Fearful of white flight should a person of color become the pastor, the church – our church - has failed to be prophetic or even representative of the general population that surrounds our churches. Some places are not diverse, but many places are and still make these wishes known.

Soon, but not soon enough, General Conference will decide about the inclusion of LGBTQIA persons in the ranks of the clergy and a split is in the offing. Already the name of at least one new denomination has been created and others have been suggested around the edges. We have replaced our ecclesiology with politics. And yet in our system, politics is the way the church moves forward. Any casual read of the history of our denomination or the Church universal will note that change does not come with strict adherence to the rules. Calls of disobedience reign supreme in the United Methodist Church. Take our founder, John Wesley, for example. When he got kicked out of preaching places, he continued his call by taking to field preaching. What some brand as disobedience is for others engagement in justice work. And our ordination vows call us to do this. We take and live those vows in the style of Jesus.

In his own time, our Lord Jesus couldn't escape the conflict between ecclesiology and politics. Nobody gets crucified for strict adherence to the status quo. And as he said himself, "You cannot serve two masters." (Matthew 6:24) Jesus didn't live the status quo. Jesus only served One. When there is inclusion of LGBTQIA persons in the denomination, there is no illusion on my part that discrimination will go away. That hasn't happened for women or persons of color. There is still much work that needs to be done! We are missing God gifted people in our clergy ranks because of marginalization and outright discrimination.

What can we say of all this? The church is at its best when it pursues an inclusive ecclesiology like we did in the first century. The church is at its worst when we replace ecclesiology with the body politic of discrimination like we did in the first century. We are riddled with brokenness! However, we have hope and we have examples of how to live into that hope. The full circle for me comes in this lovely story in Luke from the ministry of Jesus, a basic in ecclesiology for all time:

Go  
Be Innocent  
Live by Faith  
Take Nothing  
Extend Peace  
Receive the gifts of others  
Heal the sick  
Proclaim the Kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiology>

<sup>2</sup> [The Book of the Bee, Chapter XLIX, The Names of the Apostles in Order. 1886.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Par. 328, [The Book of Discipline](#), The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Par. 332, [The Book of Discipline](#), The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10.14 and Acts 15.19-21

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/Constantine>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-5/protestant-churches-and-nazi-state>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/researcher-artifacts-show-early-church-women-served-clergy>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/eleven-oclock-on-sundays-is-still-the-most-segregated-hour-in-america/>

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Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

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