

## Bishop's Message for September 2010

New beginnings! That's what the arrival of September always means. Students and teachers return to school and their studies. We busily enroll our children in those much-needed extra-curricular activities, even as we calculate how on earth we will manage their transport from point A to point B from day to day. The pace quickens as the busy-ness grows. Those who are employed note that their workplaces ratchet it up a few notches; the lazy, crazy days of summer give way to business as usual. The churches, for their part, roll out the regular stuff: Sunday School, Adult Forum, Confirmation, Bible studies. Striving to be relevant, the churches may offer some more adventurous fare: a mission trip, a church growth seminar, a marriage enrichment weekend, perhaps a series on conflict management. The fullness of a congregation's monthly calendar seems to be the measure of a vibrant and healthy parish. Ironically, it sometimes seems that we do our planning as if Christian folks have nothing else to do and nowhere else to be but at the church.

What is the business of the church? What value is being added to our parishioners' lives? A few days ago, I had a visit with a pastor who was outlining the fall programs about to begin in her congregation when she wondered out loud if we were doing our congregants any favors. Another meeting, another night out ... it sometimes seems that parishioners are there to serve the church's needs, rather than the other way around. As we spoke about it, we agreed that there's something wrong with this picture.

The people we serve don't really need more activities and more ways to fill their day-timers. What they really need is help in making sense of their lives. Who, and where, is Jesus for our parishioners from day to day? Are we helping people connect the dots – to see and serve Jesus in the places and amongst the people that fill their days? Are we having serious chats with folks about the ways that faith informs our living, our moving and having our being? How do faith and life intersect? You can learn a lot if you listen in on those coffee fellowship conversations after the service. Generally, people will not be talking about the sermon – or even the choir anthem. They will be talking about their life-issues, the stuff of their real lives that has them anxious, fearful, hopeful, glad. Maybe what is needed in our congregations is less formal programming and more of those quiet, intimate conversations about how things are really going. Maybe the grace of God and the love of Christ would better wash over the faith-community if we – as church - attended to this. That would be a new beginning!

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