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DAUGHTERS OF THE KING - May 4, 2002

“The **mission** of this Order shall be the extension of Christ’s Kingdom through Prayer, Service, and Evangelism.”

“**Vision Statement:** As Daughters of the King we are women of courage who have made a commitment to serve God our King...our vision is to encourage and enable all to be reflections of God’s love, reaching out through prayer, service and evangelism to spread His Kingdom.”

As you can see, I have been reading through the “National Handbook and By-Laws of the Order of the Daughters of the King,” and I have been struck by the repeated emphasis on “God’s Kingdom,” or “Christ’s Kingdom.” It is obvious that such an emphasis is appropriate. Daughters of the King would logically be concerned about the Kingdom and its extension, and that concern is reflected throughout the Handbook: in the mission statement, in the vision statement, in the prayer of the Order, in the Rule of Prayer, in the Rule of Service, and elsewhere.

I note, however, that nowhere does the Handbook tell us what the term “Kingdom of God” means. I guess the authors assume that everyone knows what it is. Sometimes the Handbook makes reference to the Catechism in the Prayer Book so I looked there to see if there might be a definition of “Kingdom of God,” or “Kingdom of Christ,” but I found no such reference there either.

It’s a biblical term, of course. Jesus talked about the Kingdom a great deal. Many of his parables are about it. St. Mark, the earliest Gospel, tells us that this was the very first theme of Jesus’ very first preaching when he started his ministry. Here is what Mark’s said: “Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and believe in the good news.’” But what does “Kingdom of God” mean, exactly?

I will start by stating what may be obvious: God’s kingdom is the realm over which God rules. I think I hear someone saying, “But doesn’t God rule over everything and everyone?” Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that God has power and dominion over all things, and will rule over all in the end. But not all people are willing subjects of God’s rule. So Jesus’ use of the term is more focused. He means the realm in which God rules over hearts, willing hearts, those who are loyal subjects, those who are subservient and obedient to God’s will. Jesus came to teach us about that realm and invite us to enter it. It is a spiritual kingdom, not a political one.

The difference between God’s Kingdom and the kingdoms of this world can be made clear by doing a little exercise. Sit down with today’s newspaper, or with “People” magazine or some other popular magazine - or just sit in front of the TV screen for a few hours -- and make a list of the kinds of people that our society seems to regard as fortunate, happy, lucky. (I would say “blessed,” but people who are not religious don’t often use the word “blessed”.) Make your own list. Mine would start out something like this:

"Happy is the person who has one Mercedes and one Lexus in the two-car garage. Happy is the person who has a recession-proof job. Happy is the person who has a solid, secure pension plan. Happy is the person who has a medical insurance plan that pays for everything."

"Happy are those who strike while the iron is hot, for they will be rewarded. Lucky are those who get there first with the most, for they will make a killing. Happy are those who can see opportunities coming before anyone else, for they will be rewarded with a fat bank account. Happy are those who manage their investments wisely, for they will spend their golden years in carefree comfort.

It might continue, Happy are those who look 20 years younger than their age, for they will be the object of amazement and envy. Happy are those who get to the top, for everyone has to look up to them. Happy are you when everyone has nice things to say about you, for you will have no enemies and no conflict in your life.

Well, if you don't like my list, sit down and make your own. Remember, now, we are talking about the kinds of people that our popular culture, as represented by its most visible expressions, would call "Happy" or "Lucky" or to be admired. Not necessarily the kind that you would admire, or that people in this church would admire, but the wider culture.

After you've made your list, write down beside it, in a parallel column, the list of Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, the list of people Jesus called "blessed." (Read from Matthew 5) Jesus' list sounds a bit strange, doesn't it, to ears attuned to the "beatitudes" of T-V commercials. "Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are those who mourn...blessed are the meek" - hard to think of anything further from the ideals of our culture than meek! "Blessed are the pure in heart? Madonna sells; "pure in heart" doesn't sell. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness....the persecuted?" Reading Jesus' Beatitudes hits us with a very powerful message: Things are not as they seem. The way of the world is not the way of God's Kingdom.

Note that these are not imperative sentences, not commands; they are declarative sentences in the indicative mode. Someone has suggested that they might be translated, "Congratulations to the poor in spirit...", etc. This is not a set of rules. Jesus is telling us how God has arranged things. People who are like this are truly blessed in God's eyes. But it certainly does sound strange to us, doesn't it?

The point is: the message of Jesus, and the way of life that Jesus represents, turns the commonly accepted values of the world upside down. There is a "great reversal" here.

That's because Jesus is talking about another realm, another culture, a different government. It is the realm in which God is King; God rules, and all things are brought into conformity with God's will. Values are transformed. Up is down and down is up. In fact, that could be the slogan for this realm: "Down with up; up with down!"

In the Bible, this realm that Jesus is talking about is usually called the Kingdom of God. But the word "Kingdom" is a little too archaic and a little too static to convey effectively what Jesus means. I would rather say: "the rule of God," or "the realm where God rules" - not arbitrarily or oppressively, but through the willing and joyful and wholehearted collaboration of his subjects, whom he chooses to call his friends. It doesn't have to be a forceful rule, you see, because everything that God wants is for the good of every single member of the whole creation, and since every member of this realm knows that, each one is willing, even anxious, to have God's will done. Because God's will is absolutely the best thing that could happen for every person and every living creature and every part of the whole environment in which God has placed us.

So this realm is a realm of perfect harmony, perfect fulfillment of every potential, and the complete integration and wholistic functioning of all persons in the one great family that constitutes God's people.

So this is what you got into when you joined the Daughters of the King - the extension of Christ's Kingdom. It's actually what you got into when you were baptized, because as the Handbook says, Daughters are "a group of Christian women striving to fulfill the promises of our Baptismal Covenant through the adoption of a Rule of Life." (P.5) Whether you realize it or not, that is really a very subversive activity. You are living in and participating fully in one society but you are really foreign agents, working for another kingdom. You often have this subversive prayer on your lips: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In other words, you want that foreign Kingdom that you are an agent of to take over this kingdom in which you live. You are working for the extension of that other Kingdom.

And how do the Daughters go about "extending Christ's Kingdom?" The Handbook says it is through Prayer, Service and Evangelism, a triad.

Christian faith is definitely Trinitarian. According to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, we believe in one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Anglicanism is very trinitarian also. In addition to believing in the triune God of the Creeds, Anglicans affirm that authority, for the Anglican churches, resides in Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, in that order. It was clearly understood by the Anglican reformers that Scripture had pre-eminence. Tradition meant the tradition of the early centuries of the Church, including the first ecumenical councils. Reason was used to interpret Scripture and Tradition. This is sometimes called the three-legged stool of the Anglican concept of authority.

The Daughters of the King are also trinitarian. In addition to all of the above, Daughters affirm that the mission of the Order is to extend Christ's Kingdom through Prayer, Service, and Evangelism. This triad occurs again and again in the Handbook - prayer, service, evangelism.

I have noticed that in all these trinitarian formulas, it is the third item which is likely to be

problematical, or most likely to cause some kind of difficulty. Take “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” for example. Most people are pretty clear about the first two persons of the Trinity, but the doctrine of the Holy Spirit often tends to be a little hazy, the least clear of the three in people’s minds.

In Anglicanism’s concept of three-fold authority, Scripture and Tradition are strongly affirmed, and Reason is affirmed also, but that third one seems to raise questions and cause debate. Because of that fact, recently some people have suggested adding a fourth leg to the three-legged stool - Experience. Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience are authoritative, they want to say. Furthermore, they seem to want to reverse the priority and make Experience the highest authority. That suggestion is strongly resisted by many Episcopalians, of whom I count myself one. I believe that would be a very dangerous development. Almost anything could be justified by someone’s experience. Such a move would pretty much destroy the authority of Scripture and Tradition in the Church, because people would say (and are saying), “If my experience doesn’t agree with Scripture or Tradition as interpreted by Reason, then my experience has priority.” That would be the end of the Church as we know it.

Now in the case of the triad put forward by the Daughters of the King, the third item does not raise that kind of question, but it does seem a little problematic. What I mean is this. “Prayer, Service, and Evangelism.” are repeatedly spoken of as of equal importance. However, in the Rule of Life for members, there is a Rule of Prayer that spells out the centrality of Prayer in the life of the Daughters. There is a Rule of Service which explains clearly that dimension of the Rule of Life. But there is no Rule of Evangelism. Why is that? Various possibilities suggest themselves.

Could it be because Evangelism has, in the past, been such a problematic concept for the Episcopal Church? There is no disputing the fact that Episcopalians in the past didn’t care much for the idea and generally avoided the word “evangelism.” Bishop Paul Marshall of Bethlehem once quipped, “The Episcopal Church in general has pretended that when Jesus said ‘Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations,’ he mumbled, ‘except the Episcopalians don’t have to do this.’”

In the 19th century, we associated evangelism with what was then called “enthusiasm,” which meant religious people engaging in various kinds of joyful and exuberant behavior which we Episcopalians regarded as not decent or in proper order.

Then, in the middle of the 20th century, along came the Charismatic movement and other forms of renewal, which brought enthusiasm, of all things, right into the heart of the Episcopal Church. A few decades ago, we decided to reverse our long-standing prejudice against the e-word and established an Office of Evangelism right in the national headquarters of the church, and the people in that office took up the task of trying to change the minds and hearts of Episcopalians about evangelism. More recently, our shrinking membership has kindled growing concern, and our last General Convention embraced something called 20/20. No relation to the television show of the same name. What is it? Here is the official description. “20/20 is a movement in the

Episcopal Church toward embracing fully the stated mission of the church: ‘to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ’ (BCP, p.855) and toward accepting the Great Commission: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ (Mt. 28:19). The goal that General Convention adopted in July 2000 that would hold the Church accountable to the movement is that by 2020 the Episcopal Church will have restored and discipled twice as many people as we claim today.” Thus the Episcopal Church has fully embraced the need for evangelism.

That doesn’t mean that we never did evangelism at all before. There were always some people who were winning others to Christ. But we didn’t like the word, partly because we didn’t like the way some other people went about doing it. Even the 20/20 documents still seem to avoid the e-word and prefer to talk about “discipling”. That’s O.K. Whatever you call it, evangelism is at the heart of Christianity, and no church can long endure which doesn’t believe in it and practice it. So those early Daughters of the King were certainly on solid ground when they made “prayer, service, and evangelism” their mission and goal.

Although there is no separate “Rule of Evangelism” in the Handbook, that does not mean that it overlooks the subject. Quite the contrary. First of all, if you think about all those references to “the extension (or spread) of Christ’s Kingdom,” those are really references to evangelism, aren’t they? What is evangelism if it’s not extending Christ’s kingdom or rule over human hearts and lives?

Then why is there no “Rule of Evangelism” to go along with the “Rule of Prayer” and “Rule of Service?” I think that it is probable that the founders of the Order thought that the Rule of Prayer and Rule of Service were, at the same time, rules of evangelism. That is, they saw evangelism as being carried out through prayer and service. This seems clear to me in the following statements. Under the “Rule of Prayer,” the second item says, “to pray daily...for the spread of Christ’s Kingdom, especially among women and girls.” Under the “Rule of Service,” the first item is: “To be Christ’s faithful servant in the extension of His Kingdom.”

This is spelled out even more clearly in the section on “Duties and Responsibilities of Membership.” We read the following: “...a Daughter undertakes a personal program of evangelism through prayer and service, working to bring others to Christ through His church...”

Then, it appears to me as if someone, at some point, thought evangelism was being neglected, so a whole section was added (on page 7) on evangelism. Let me read just the first paragraph to you.

“As defined by the Episcopal Church, ‘Evangelism is the presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in such ways that other persons may be led to believe in Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of the Church.’ Each Daughter promises to make a conscientious effort to live out the definition in her life, doing all she can through her words and deeds to bring others, especially women and girls, into a relationship with Jesus and into the fellowship of the Church”. That, along with what follows, is a very strong statement. So

why wasn't it made a "Rule of Evangelism," to parallel the other two rules?

I think I can imagine a debate going on in national leadership circles about whether or not to make a separate rule of evangelism. I can imagine that someone said, "Well, a Rule of Evangelism would pretty much be a repetition of things that are said in the Rule of Prayer and Rule of Service, so we don't really need one? I can understand that reasoning and go along with the argument, up to a point. But what I am concerned about is intentionality. If evangelism is an equal partner, along with prayer and service, as constituting the mission of the Order, wouldn't that fact be more visible if there were a separate Rule of Evangelism parallel to the other two rules? I wonder if it is really present in the minds of the members that evangelism is equal with prayer and service as a part of the mission of the Order? If someone who is not a member asked you to explain what the order is and what it does, I am pretty sure that you would tell them about Prayer and Service. Would you think to mention Evangelism also? In the Prayer List of your chapter, I am sure that you have many people who are sick or infirm that you pray for. Do you also pray for unbelievers to be brought to faith in Christ, or for those who have lost their faith or wandered away to be restored? Do you pray for those who hate the church and oppose the cause of Christ? Do you pray for those in your community who corrupt young people and undermine Christian values, that they will turn from their wickedness and be converted? You probably would not use names, but wouldn't prayers of that sort be a part of extending Christ's Kingdom?

If someone had walked up to you yesterday and asked, "What is the primary purpose of the Daughters of the King?", how would you have answered? Along with what we have seen in the Handbook, I discovered that in the "Twelve Question Study Program" of the Order, evangelism is given serious attention. One of the Twelve Questions (Question Number Five) is devoted entirely to evangelism. It starts out with this startling statement: "What is the primary purpose of our Order? The answer to this question is one word, evangelism." Note: primary purpose. Would you have guessed that to be the primary purpose of the Order? That whole lesson on Question Five is an excellent teaching on the nature and method of evangelism.

Now let me ask you a question, and you give an honest answer in your heart. Does this talk about evangelism make you a little bit uneasy? If it does, never mind. That probably just proves that you are a good Episcopalian. Because the word itself conjures up images that make us feel uncomfortable - images of television evangelists, for example.

In the retirement community where my wife and I live, a group of people from a neighborhood church came around recently knocking on doors. Mary and I were away, so we missed them, but we heard about it from our neighbors. When someone answered the door, these folks asked, "If you should die tonight, are you ready? Are you sure that you would go to heaven?" Well, let me assure you that I'm not suggesting that the Daughters of the King go out and start knocking on doors. It's activities like that which have made Episcopalians uneasy with the e-word.

So what do we mean by it? How do we do it? Back to the definition: "Evangelism is the

presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in such ways that other persons may be led to believe in him as Savior and follow Him as Lord in the fellowship of the Church.”

For me, the key words there are: “presentation...in such ways... “ I ask myself, What kinds of presentation of Jesus Christ would lead me to believe in Him and follow Him if I were not a Christian. Certainly not a knock on the door and a rude question from someone I didn’t know at all. That’s reducing evangelism to peddling Jesus like selling magazine subscriptions.

What would lead you to believe in Jesus if you were not already a disciple? I’ll answer for myself; you answer for yourself. You can agree or disagree with my answer.

First, in order of importance, would be — witnessing a Christian life in action. There is absolutely nothing like seeing faith in action. Seeing the love of Christ acted out in the life of one of his followers. There is a wonderful verse in the book of Acts that I like. It’s about the reaction of some unbelievers to the early disciples. It says: “And they took note that they had been with Jesus.” Something in their behavior and attitude reflected their Master. “Follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of people.” The “follow me” part comes first. The beauty of a Christian life that allows Christ to shine through is the number one tool of evangelism.

This is a matter of being and doing. It’s both what you do and the spirit in which you do it. It can be reflected in what you support and what you oppose in the life of a community. And when you find it necessary to oppose some course of action, then your attitude and spirit toward those with whom you disagree is of primary importance.

The importance of our Christian service is central to evangelism. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves.” Loving service in the name and spirit of Jesus wins more disciples than anything else, especially in our jaded and skeptical world. “A cup of cold water given in my name,” said Jesus, “will not go unrewarded.”

So it comes back to being a good disciple, to following Jesus closely, letting our love for him transform and influence all we say and do.

Thus it obviously comes back to your Rule of Prayer and Rule of Service. A life that reflects Jesus must be nourished and sustained by prayer, and by faithful appropriation of what used to be called “the means of grace.”

Now most of us Episcopalians would probably have no difficulty with the picture of evangelism that I’ve just given. It has to do with living primarily, not talking, actions over words, and we are comfortable with that.

But human beings are creatures of word as well as deed. And the word “evangelism” comes from the Greek word which means “good news.” So there is a message involved, a story to be told. Good news to be shared. We like to assume that in our culture, everyone has heard the

message of the Gospel. I hate to be the one to inform you that ours is an increasingly pagan culture in which ever increasing numbers of people have never really heard the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. They may have heard something about it, but they have never really heard it as good news.

We are living in a post-Christian culture and we need to get used to that fact. As opposed to a pre-Christian culture in which people are totally ignorant of the Gospel message, we live in a post-Christian society in which most people have been exposed to some of the vocabulary of Christian faith, but they know it only in a distorted, mangled, perverted, or watered-down form. They know the errors and atrocities of some parts of the Church in past history and in current news. And they are exposed to the speaking and writing of many people who have rejected forms of Christianity in their past which they found repulsive or repressive. We have many skeptical journalists. We have many novelists and other influential people who are still rebelling against the church of their childhood.

The result is — large numbers of people who have never heard the Good News as really good news! They've only heard bad news. They've never seen the beauty of God's love and goodness, or if they have seen it, they have somehow not connected it with the church. They have never experienced the power and profundity of what happened on Calvary's cross, and what that means for them personally. They are thus in many ways more difficult to reach than the native of some distant tribe who has never even heard the name of Jesus. They have heard the name — heard it uttered in a curse.

Thus evangelism is more difficult and in some ways more urgent in our time and place. And that is why living the faith is such a critical component of "extending Christ's Kingdom."

At the same time, on the positive side of possibilities for evangelism, there is a tremendous hunger out there, a spiritual vacuum in people's lives which is going to be filled with something — if not Christianity then one of its competitors. A document of the 20/20 movement speaks about this hunger.

Despite unprecedented wealth and materialism, those around us today are showing symptoms of a persistent and far deeper yearning. Having discovered that life is more than enjoying physical comfort and material contentment, huge numbers of women and men, young and old, are on a spiritual quest....Searching is one of the motifs of our age. Whatever their origins, in the midst of this complex interplay of forces, many whose lives are soaked in the fluidity of our culture are asking the ultimate questions about identity and where they belong. Those who are on this journey are not just strangers and those who are far off; the unchurched or formerly churched include our friends, neighbors, and families — even our own children. It is inevitable that their thoughts will eventually center on the divine — even if they do not know or use theological words or spiritual terms to describe their longing. A recent survey...identifies two out of five American adults in the 25-54-year-old range as serious seekers after spiritual truth....What Jesus told his disciples