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# Liberating Service: In Christian Community and Diaconal Ministries

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I first met Norma Cook Everist in meetings of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education, where her open-faced presence lit the room as she listened intently to colleagues' research. I did not know then that Norma and I would become lasting friends. My first impression was to deepen as I came to know this woman gifted with curiosity, kindness, and commitment. I came to see what a fierce vision for compassion and justice this woman carried in her soul—vision she still enacts every day.

I had the privilege to visit Wartburg once, where I heard stories of Norma's recent travels across the countryside to visit Wartburg graduates and churches where severe flooding had destroyed land and farms, displaced families, and damaged local communities. She had journeyed many miles to accompany the people in their shock and early stages of recovery. She had no expectation of "fixing" anything or giving expert advice. She traveled simply as a friend who was concerned and wanted to be with the stricken people.

Norma's vision for compassion and justice is grounded in grace, the central mark of her theology and way of being in the world. She understands herself and her communities to be grounded in God's grace, and she understands her vocation as embodying and sharing grace in her unique way. Whereas many work for justice through public advocacy and picket lines, Norma's justice work is *grounded in friendship and accompaniment*. Whereas many scholars in practical theology are known for specialized teaching and writing, Norma's books and courses *cast a wide net and integrate across fields and ideas for the sake of guiding ministry and daily life*. Whereas most professors invest extensively in their students when they are in school, Norma's investment is *lifelong*. Whereas most church leaders are laser focused on the primary roles they carry, Norma is *laser focused on the present moment and the people with whom she is gathered*. She understands *education and leadership as a work of community*. She epitomizes service in its most grace-filled forms.

## Liberating service

*The focus of this essay is on the liberating service of people of God, which is amplified, embodied, led, and supported by diaconal ministries. Service is central to Christianity, as it was for Jesus, who came into the world "not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45, NRSV) and whose ministry is extended by his disciples.*

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The service of Jesus was liberating, contributing to new life, healing, and hope. In the Mark passage, he urges his disciples to seek greatness in serving rather than in exerting power over others, and the passage is followed by a healing narrative in which a "blind beggar" shouts to Jesus and Jesus asks him what he wants. When the man says he wants to see again, Jesus replies that the man's faith has healed him (Mark 10:46-52). The dynamic is a liberating one, with the man shouting out and Jesus listening, asking, and responding to him. Power is in the interaction, not in an abstraction about healing. This is liberating service.

Beneath the accent on service is a problem. Service is a challenging term in the history of Christianity and in centuries of relationships across race, gender, and social class. Service has been touted as a Christian value and also used as a way of stratifying the church as some people were granted power (and often wealth) over others, and some were expected to serve, even suffer, for the larger good. In the larger society, service has taken the form of slavery, forced labor, patriarchal social structures, and physical and psychological oppression. In partial response to this looming issue, I seek to re-vision service, at the same time accenting service as a value grounded in baptism and amplified by individuals serving in diaconal ministries.

To be clear, service is the mission of the people of God with or without deacons and diaconal ministers, but the people called to diaconal ministries are called to be what Pope Francis describes

as “custodians of service for the church.”<sup>1</sup> In addressing Roman Catholic deacons in 2021, he said: “Deacons remind the Church that what St. Theresa discovered is true: the Church has a heart enflamed by love. Yes, a humble heart throbbing with service.”<sup>2</sup> Deacons thus call and lead the church in its mission of serving.

The focus of this essay is on the meaning of service for the body of Christ and the intensifying roles of deacons, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers. The people who carry those roles are not only called to give service; they are also called to awaken, support, and lead the service of the whole church. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), a person may be a deaconess and/or a member of the Lutheran Diaconal Association—a member of the diaconal order—and also be a deacon or pastor or lay person in the actual structures of the church. Dr. Everist was the first person from the deaconess order to be ordained as a pastor in the worldwide Lutheran Church. In the United Methodist Church, of which I am a part, we have deaconesses and home missionaries at the same time that we have two orders of ministry, deacon and elder. The Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches have ordained orders of continuing deacons while maintaining a two-step process of ordination toward priesthood, the first step being deacon. Other churches have deacons within congregational structures of leadership. This brief reference to structural diversities is sufficient because my focus here is not on structures, but on the roles of people who are ordained or ordered as deacons, deaconesses, or diaconal ministers, no matter the structures. These individuals have a central role in leading and supporting the service of the community as it connects with the hurts and longings of the world.

Dr. Everist is a deaconess and a beacon in the diaconal movement. She understands her identity with the diaconal community and deaconess order, while serving in the offices of ordained pastor and professor in Wartburg Seminary, which she identifies as “*expressions of my diaconal ministry*” (emphasis hers).<sup>3</sup> I will thus offer a short case study of Dr. Everist to uncover *diakonia* in a life story, followed by a theological analysis of service and diaconal ministries. In integrating the two parts of the study, I will sketch a future vision of *liberating* service anchored in values that counter the dangers of imposed and demeaning servitude. I write this as a deacon myself, recognizing the direct diaconal roles in service, and also the roles of inviting and joining with others to participate in these life-changing, world-changing ministries.

### Case Study: Embodying *Diakonia*

To address the potency of service and diaconal ministries, I turn to Norma Cook Everist’s vocational life, in which she has embodied

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diaconal ministry from a young age to the present. Sources for this case study include an interview with Dr. Everist and a review of her writing, attending to her words. When I asked Norma what had brought the most joy in her ministry, she replied: “creating learning communities where we can be different together,” whether in the seminary, family, congregation, or larger society.<sup>4</sup> Anyone familiar with Dr. Everist’s teaching and writing will recognize this familiar refrain.<sup>5</sup> Twenty years ago, she opened *The Church as a Learning Community* with these words: “Teaching and learning are all about the church as community.”<sup>6</sup> She proceeded to tell a story about riding a bus for a few days in New Orleans, where she witnessed the presence of community, where people *knew* one another. Opening with community, she closed the book with a section titled “Sent to Serve.” The chapters in that section focus on learning in relation to mission, public vocation, and parishes in a pluralistic world.<sup>7</sup> In this one book, she underscores her integrated perspective on ministry—grounded in learning communities in which people engage deeply with one another, and culminating in service in the larger public and pluralistic world. Such is the nature of *diakonia*, service grounded in the community as people relate with God and one another and are sent out to serve wherever need and possibility exist.

Service thus emerges from community—a sense of communion with God and the people of God, and with the larger world. When I asked Norma how she understood her vocation, she said, “Service! Powerful servanthood. And to be a servant leader, including teaching leaders of church, pastors, deacons, to be servant leaders.”<sup>8</sup> This quote—uttered quickly and enthusiastically—reveals something of the deep diaconal commitments to service that led

1. Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Permanent Deacons of the Diocese of Rome, with their Families,” presented in Hall of Benediction, St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City, 19 June 2021), 2.

2. Pope Francis, “Address to the Permanent Deacons of the Diocese of Rome, 2.

3. Norma Cook Everist, Oral History Interview, 1 February 2022.

4. Everist, Interview.

5. Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as a Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), ch. 1.

6. Everist, *The Church as a Learning Community*, 22 (e-book pagination).

7. Everist, *The Church as a Learning Community*, chs. 7-9.

8. Everist, Interview.

her first to become a deaconess and to see her role in empowering the service of others. Deaconesses make a “lifelong vow to service in Christ,” and that continues to be Norma’s identity in ministry.<sup>9</sup> Her service has included pushing boundaries and advocating, “to be open to callings, even to things we would not have imagined.” Such openness has marked her life: “If the door opened a crack, I would walk through the door and open it wider so other people could enter.”<sup>10</sup> This is how Norma opened so many doors for women, sometimes ploughing the ground as “the first woman” in a position of ministry, as when she became the first woman on tenure track in a seminary of the American Lutheran Church. Another way she opened doors was to teach feminist theologies and to encourage the ministries of women through a lifetime of teaching, mentoring, and befriending. Again, this accent echoes in her writing.<sup>11</sup>

The community and service themes are not only overarching values for Dr. Everist, but also ways of living daily life. Her writing embodies these values in her subjects of study, but also in her sources of inspiration and insight, often the very communities in which she dwells and with whom she confers. Further, she has frequently worked collaboratively with others, co-teaching and co-writing books and editing collections with multiple voices. Her writing reflects her passion for community, drawing from, collaborating with, and contributing to communities. A notable example is her edited collection in which Wartburg faculty address the church from their areas of expertise, offering visions for church community and theological and ethical constructions that address public issues and justice.<sup>12</sup> Another is the book she and Craig Nesson co-wrote, growing from their co-teaching, research, and learning from and with students.<sup>13</sup> The title of the book, *Transforming Leadership*, reveals a passion shared by Everist and Nesson, namely to inspire the leadership of pastors, deacons, laity, and the whole body to transform their communities and their public witness, as they are themselves transformed. Justification and justice are intertwined. As in Everist’s other books, transformation is God’s work, which God extends to the church for the sake of both church and world.

Another aspect of Dr. Everist’s work has been her attention to mutuality. Throughout her years of service, she has persisted in working with, learning from, and sharing with others. Her visits with colleagues and churches in the wake of flooding is one vivid example. Another is her recent writing that shares the church with itself. Grounded in her travels from church to church, she draws out narratives and pearls of wisdom from the churches and

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people themselves, recognizing herself as a caring presence and learner rather than a traveling consultant.<sup>14</sup> In most of her books, Dr. Everist extends mutuality to her readers as well, inviting their participation with questions and suggestions for reflection. Martin Marty describes Norma’s spirit well in the Foreword to her *Seventy Images of Grace in the Epistles*: “The key to her discernment is a love of and care for people and their stories. She teaches her pastoral and diaconal ministry students to do the same, how to walk with people in their diverse neighborhoods and to listen to their stories in the languages of their daily lives.”<sup>15</sup>

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9. Everist, Interview.

10. Everist, Interview.

11. Everist, Interview; Norma Cook Everist, ed., *Ordinary Ministry: Extraordinary Challenge: Women and the Roles of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008).

12. Norma Cook Everist, ed., *The Difficult but Indispensable Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1517 Media, 2002).

13. Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

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14. Norma Cook Everist, *Open the Doors and See All the People* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016); see also: Norma Cook Everist and Nelvin Vos, *Where in the World Are You? Connecting Faith and Daily Life* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, The Alban Institute, 1996).

15. Norma Cook Everist, *Seventy Images of Grace in the Epistles: That Make All the Difference in Daily Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 12.

16. Everist, Interview.

17. Everist, ed., *Ordinary Ministry: Extraordinary Challenge*.

All these emphases grow from a common soil of grace—the foundation of Dr. Everist’s theology and life practice, and the hope for church and world. As grace is a persistent bright thread in the biblical witness, so it is in Christian life and Christian communities. God’s grace is the source of life and ministry, fed by biblical tradition and the lives of Christians who have experienced and witnessed to grace over time. Dr. Everist stresses the deep relationship between biblical traditions and human lives in *Seventy Images of Grace in the Epistles*, written “to help people make connections and to empower them for their ministries in their daily life.”<sup>18</sup> God’s grace is the grounding, and daily life is where people experience and enact that grace in liberating service.

### Theology of liberating service and diaconal ministries

The case study of Norma Cook Everist points to many aspects of a theology of Christian service. A central expression of God’s action is found in the sacrament of baptism, in which God confers grace and calls Christians into ministries of service, to grow in grace and give themselves freely to God and God’s creation. This theological understanding is shared across Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity. Baptism in the ELCA sets forth the baptismal covenant and the practices associated with it. Consider the Affirmation of Baptism, in which individuals affirm their baptism publicly. A central question is addressed to the person(s) making the affirmation and then to the whole assembly:

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God’s faithful people; to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper; to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?<sup>19</sup>

In the service of baptism when children are not able to answer for themselves, the question is adapted and addressed to the parents or sponsors.<sup>20</sup> The words of baptism and baptismal affirmation recognize that *baptism calls forth community and participation, proclamation (or witness), service to “all people following the example of Jesus,” and action toward justice and peace.* These accents are significant, the first focused on community and the last three on service, as evoked and conferred in baptism. The role of deacons and deaconesses is to embody, communicate, inspire, and support the whole body in this service as people of God seek to live into their baptism.

In developing the theme of liberating service in the body of

Christ and in the diaconate, I highlight the vocation of sacramental living in the whole body and the particular roles of deacons and other forms of diaconal ministers, turning to the ELCA, Episcopal Church, and United Methodist Church (UMC) as windows. Rather than interpret the church affirmations in detail, I underscore five values that resonate powerfully with ecumenical theologies of ministry and contemporary theologies of human and ecological liberation.

### Sacredness of all life

The first value is the sacredness of all life, and the call to serve with and for the whole. Sacraments awaken people to the sacredness of God’s creation, as accented in ecumenical sacramental theologies.<sup>21</sup> In light of God’s presence in all creation, the universe is infused with God, and every aspect of it is worthy of honor and care. If all life is sacred, then liberating service takes place in countless locations and forms, both with and for the creation.

These insights echo my own discussions of sacramentality, and they are echoed by Roberto Goizueta’s description of human beings as “inherently sacramental, relational creatures.”<sup>22</sup> Lutheran theologians also draw a close connection between sacramental traditions and creation, especially those who have centered on ecological theology and ethics. Larry Rasmussen, for example, makes a case for sacramental ethics in distinction from commodity ethics, noting that sacramentalism can take multiple forms, with “web-of-life sacramentalism” being the least likely to fall into extremes of anthropocentrism and colonization.<sup>23</sup>

If all creation is understood as permeated by God, service is a sacred or sacramental task—the act of honoring and caring for the whole of God’s creation, of which human beings are part. In such a view, hierarchies of value are dismantled; service is not an act of required subservience, or control exerted by powerful people over less powerful ones, or human exploitation of non-human creation. In a sacred frame, *service is a respectful, compassionate engagement with all that God created and with whom God dwells.* Within such a frame, *the role of deacons and others in diaconal roles is to awaken peoples to the sacredness of God’s world and the sacred service to which all are called together.*

### Love-in-community

In a sacred universe, God’s love permeates and flourishes in communities and is best embodied in the community’s service, as expressed in Jewish and Christian traditions honoring God’s covenant with creation and the human family, as part of creation. The Christian theologian Roberto Goizueta attributes these communal bonds to Jesus, “the source of our community: we are

18. Everist, *Seventy Images of Grace*, 15.

19. Evangelical Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2006), 236 and 237. Similar commitments are made in “The Baptismal Covenant” of the Episcopal Church: The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 2016), 304-305.

20. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 228.

21. Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004), ch. 1.

22. Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, chs. 1-2; Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 87 (e-book pagination).

23. Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University), ch. 9.



one insofar as we all accompany Jesus together.” He explains that the communal bonds “constitute us as persons and as a people, thereby giving us the strength to confront life’s vicissitudes.”<sup>24</sup> Service that is grounded in the primacy and immediacy of community is service with, for, to, and by the whole. This is not the showy service of a privileged class of ministers, nor is it the expectation that one group be in servitude to others; it is a service that binds people with God and one another and all who are served.

Such a view corresponds with baptismal theologies and the ecumenical recognition that love is a gift of God moving in and through the community and binding the covenant. The ELCA understands baptism as grounded in God’s covenantal gift to the community and, with it, comes the call to discipleship. In The United Methodist Church, the connection between baptism and ministry is also explicit. The opening paragraph of *The Book of Discipline (BOD)* section on “The Ministry of the Ordained” says: “Ministry in the Christian church is derived from the ministry of Christ, who calls all persons to receive God’s gift of salvation and follow in the way of love and service.”<sup>25</sup> Underscoring the relationship of all ministry to baptism, the *BOD* continues: “All Christian ministry is grounded in the covenant of baptism by which we are initiated into the body of Christ and called into a life of discipleship.”<sup>26</sup>

The ELCA service of ordination for deacons links these baptismal vows with the roles of deacons, as in the address opening the service:

All baptized Christians are called to share in Christ’s ministry of love and service in the world, to the glory of God and for the sake of the human family and the whole creation. You have been called as *minister/s* of word and service to give leadership in the church’s mission to proclaim the gospel through word and deed.<sup>27</sup>

These words are elaborated in the introduction to the service, revealing the deep relationship of church and world and the two-way ministry of the deacon: “Those called to the ministry of word and service speak God’s word to God’s world, and in turn they speak also for the needs of God’s world to the church; they give leadership in the church’s mission to witness to God’s love through both words and actions.”<sup>28</sup> Considering baptism as

a covenantal act, alongside services of ordination for deacons, one can conclude that *the ministry of all Christians is grounded in God’s love-in-community, and deacons are leaders called to serve with, for, and to others in the community, and to inspire and support the likewise service of the whole.*

### Daily witness to grace

Central to the meaning of baptism in the ELCA is also proclamation in word and deed. This is both a fruit of baptism and a calling to give one’s whole life to witness in words and actions. It is a call to live fully in every moment wherever you are and to persist in widening your range of concerns to include all peoples and creatures across our vast world. I am likening proclamation to witness—a way of living and giving in every moment of one’s life as a witness to God’s grace as revealed in scripture, tradition, deep reflection, and Holy presence. The value of daily witness is vivified in the case study of Norma Cook Everist, whose life story makes visible the proclamation of God’s grace in word and deed.

Witness takes the form of ordinary acts of kindness, prayer and meditation, words of love and hope, rejection of hateful actions by oneself and others, resistance to violence and destruction, care-giving, deliberating, and efforts to enhance the well-being of God’s creation. In such a view, witness takes place in small moments of community solidarity and self-giving and is expanded to cosmic proportions, including all forms of words and deeds—preaching, teaching, worshipping, praying, advocating, and giving care—extended to all peoples, trees, seas, lands, and atmosphere, stretching from the immediate into the cosmos. Further, witness includes witness to the wounds of those who have been traumatized, violated, or hurt, and it is animated by the Spirit’s own witness to suffering.<sup>29</sup> It is neither triumphant nor defeated, but it emerges in communion with God and God’s world. *The service of Christians and of deacons is to witness to grace, to hurts and wounds, and to movements of God in the heartaches and heart hopes of ordinary days.*

### Mutuality and accompaniment

The fourth value that is key to liberating service is mutuality and accompaniment, or walking with others as we see in Dr. Everist’s ministry. This value is accented by liberation theologians, such as Roberto Goizueta, emerging from concern for those who are weak and victims of injustice, together with a recognition that symmetrical power is necessary for authentic dialogue and relationships and for solidarity in the face of suffering.<sup>30</sup> On these grounds, Goizueta highlights the importance of accompaniment, focusing on accompanying the poor in ways

543-544. See also, the description of deacons in The United Methodist Church: *The Book of Discipline*, Par. 305, 200.

29. Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010); Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 2018).

30. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus*, 215-225.

24. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus*, 87.

25. The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), Par. 301, 197-198 (e-book pagination).

26. UMC, *Book of Discipline*, 198; see also: Par. 305, 199-200.

27. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Service,” reprint. <https://search.elca.org/Pages/ResourceResults.aspx?k=Ordination+to+the+Ministry+of+Word+and+Service> (accessed, 28 January 2022), 2. The reprint is adapted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2019).

28. ELCA, “Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Service”, 1. Similar accents are found in the ordination service for deacons in the Episcopal Church: “The Examination,” *The Book of Common Prayer*,

that are affective, geographic, internalized, and spiritual. The accent on accompaniment and mutuality are central to liberating service, but often neglected or omitted from theologies of service, including those of baptism and diaconal ministries. Service that emerges from mutual relationships is essential if it is to have meaning and power to support life. Goizueta takes the home and family as a privileged locus for theology, recognizing that love has not only public dimensions in the struggle for justice, but also more personal and intimate dimensions: “The affective love of family becomes the paradigm for *all* human action and, especially, for the love of the poor” (emphasis his).<sup>31</sup> The relationship is one of feeling, grounded in the Spanish word “*sentir*,” to feel, and meaning “to be one” with another “affectively and ethico-politically.” This is how we also relate with God: “To *sentir* God’s presence is to be *affectively* united to God, to *do* God’s will, and thus to *know* God” (emphases his).<sup>32</sup> This focus on mutuality and accompaniment adds significant meaning to the values of sacredness and love-in-community named above.

The accent on mutuality and accompaniment can be found in friendship as well, a theme that Dana Robert uncovers in her studies of Christian mission.<sup>33</sup> The power of friendship across boundaries of difference—ethnic, cultural, gendered, national, and class—has often created pathways toward reconciliation and healing, even in times of great social upheaval. Robert emphasizes that such friendship is modeled in Jesus’ life with his disciples, and it points to God’s kingdom. In this view, as in Goizueta’s focus on accompaniment, friendship is seen as giving oneself to another in mutuality, not to accomplish some trivial purpose, but to identify and relate with one’s full being. To stretch this emphasis still further, we can turn to the widespread Native American emphasis on mutuality with all creation, as expressed by Robin Wall Kimmerer: “All flourishing is mutual. Soil, fungus, tree, squirrel, boy—all are the beneficiaries of reciprocity.”<sup>34</sup> *The service of Christians and deacons is thus to touch and be touched by the lives of others and to journey with others, both human and non-human, in ways of mutuality, accompaniment, and solidarity.*

## Endless pursuit of justice and peace

The focus on mutuality and accompaniment leads naturally to the fifth value, the endless pursuit of justice and peace. Whereas this pursuit is stated clearly in ecumenical baptismal rites, it rarely holds a central place in popular notions of service. In fact, service is often conceived as servitude to those who are more powerful, or “benevolent” care-giving to those deemed lesser than ourselves. In either case, the sense of mutuality and accompaniment are missing and, thus, the pursuit of justice and peace is lost or diminished in imperialistic power structures. Dana Robert recognizes that

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friendship can be a counter narrative to those structures and can contribute to dismantling oppressive systems and relationships, but it is not sufficient in itself.<sup>35</sup> More is needed. She does say, however, that, “Although specific friendships do not solve the enduring human problems of division, violence, sin, greed, and oppression, they nevertheless cultivate life ‘for the healing of the nations’ (Rev 22:2).”<sup>36</sup>

Practices of mutuality, accompaniment, and friendship are themselves acts of building justice and peace, but the “more” that is needed are courageous acts of advocacy, protest, active dismantling of oppressive structures, and bold reshaping of systems and relationships. Such prophetic actions have power to awaken people to injustices and violence, to disrupt the structures that reinforce them, and to build more just structures. Service is larger than interpersonal relations and even community wellbeing; *service calls people to be agents of change for justice and peace in every aspect of interpersonal, communal, socio-economic, and ecological life, and deacons have an important role in leading and supporting this change-building work of the whole.*

In conclusion, liberating service disrupts assumptions of meek and mild Christianity; it disrupts emphases on service as individualized commitments or as actions of privileged peoples giving to those who have little. Liberating service calls the entire community to share in the mutuality and boldness of Jesus’ service with other persons, communities, and social structures. The baptismal covenant is a covenant with God and the human community and the larger ecological community from which the waters of baptism flow. Service, both in the whole body and in the ordained or consecrated diaconal ministries, undergoes radical change when shaped by the values of sacredness, love-in-community, daily witness to grace, mutuality and accompaniment, and the pursuit of justice and peace. Such service is liberating, and it must be so if the liberating witness of Jesus Christ is to shine through.

31. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus*, 235.

32. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus*, 236.

33. Dana L. Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

34. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

35. Robert, *Faithful Friendships*, 147 (e-book pagination).

36. Robert, *Faithful Friendships*, 15 (e-book pagination).