

Living Faith Courageously

Message for the Season of Epiphany — January 2009

Jeffrey D. Lee

Bishop of Chicago

We have entered the season in which the Good News comes to us in word and light, illuminating God's hope for creation. It might seem otherwise given the strife in Gaza and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the deepening economic crisis that grips the world. Lives are at stake as the news clips and stories make clear from the Middle East, South Asia, Central Africa, and the streets of Chicago.

These are difficult times for many facing the loss of homes and livelihoods, loss of savings, loss of health insurance, and loss of hope with little sign that the economy will turn around any time soon. Yet, we are called to witness to the Good News that God is with us. I believe we are called to practice hope together, now more than ever to rely on the goodness of God.

Light and word filled our churches over the holidays – light and word are central to the Christmas and Epiphany narratives. Against the shadows of uncertainty, we proclaimed God's entrance into the world, into our lives, and into our hearts. John announces that God's Word brings creation out of chaos: "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." We are bearers of that Word and that Light – incredibly, God asks us to continue the work of the incarnation.

On its website and bulletin, The Church of the Incarnation in Bloomingdale has made clear where it stands in this world with its slogan: "Living faith courageously." Despite limited financial resources, the people of Incarnation are witnessing to God's love through supporting local food pantries and a transitional housing program, and sharing their worship space with St. Luke's Philippine Independent Church and First Asian Church, a congregation of Indian and Pakistani members.

A little south of them the people of Calvary in Lombard are giving hope to families in sub-Saharan Africa by funding 375 malaria nets as part of our One-to-One Malaria Net Challenge launched by our deacon community at Diocesan Convention.

Further north in Lake Villa, the people of Holy Family have welcomed a Hispanic fellowship birthed by the vicar and members of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Waukegan. From 20 members last May they have multiplied to over 200 on Sundays.

More courageous witness can be found where the church is at work in the community, such as All Saints in Ravenswood where over 200 people are fed each Tuesday evening; or St. Clement's in Harvey where for three decades a food pantry has operated; or Holy Trinity in Belvidere where its coat closet clothes families in need; or Holy Nativity, Clarendon Hills which hosts a Family Farm Fest to raise money for Heifer Project International each August, serves as a PADS site for homeless families in the summer. And so many, many more examples of living faith courageously are manifested daily in our diocese.

Through Advent we heard John call us to prepare for the coming of the Christ; and in these weeks following Epiphany we hear Christ's call at the onset of his ministry to join

him in his work of liberation and reconciliation. Happening on two fishermen on shore of Galilee, he calls out to them “Follow me and I will make you a fish for people.” And they do. Who would drop everything—jobs, home, family—to join a street preacher on a campaign to change the world?

But we do when we open the Word and offer our gifts at the table. Here in our 22 counties, and in more remote corners—the Upper Nile of Sudan; the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Tabasco; the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations of South Dakota; and the Gulf Coast—we are living faith courageously.

Thank you, thank you for who you are and what you do in bringing God’s love to a world in sore need of hope. And hope is what we have to offer. Shadows may lurk around us, but the light among us shines bright, and grows. Let it shine.