

Good Shepherd Institute for Mission
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LIVING IMAGES
By Sr. Maureen Kunz, RGS

It's about a person....

If you're reading this you are somehow connected with Good Shepherd-----you serve in a Good Shepherd sponsored agency, you are a Good Shepherd Mission Partner, you are a Good Shepherd Sister. I am writing to you Good Shepherds as a Good Shepherd Sister.

Currently I live in Blaine, Washington. I'm part of ministries on both sides of the Canada/US border, and I am part-time on the leadership team of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Province of Mid-North America.

I'm served in "sponsored ministries", those owned and operated by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. And I've served in agencies, parishes, programs owned and operated by others. I've seen the Good Shepherd in action within sponsored ministries and way beyond.



So, what do I see? People and relationships.

I hear "Good Shepherd" referred to so often as an agency, or a network of programs around North America and the world. I hear Good Shepherd referred to as a set of values, as interconnected "core values". These core values give identity and purpose to all who are serving girls, women, families, to all who need healing to live fully human lives, including healing of systems that cripple people and their communities.

Sometimes people connected with Good Shepherd are reluctant to talk about *the* Good Shepherd: Jesus. Why? Maybe because some don't want to impose religion on each other. I don't either. But I do want to name some understandings about Jesus as the Good Shepherd for two reasons: so that anyone (Christian or not) can realize **where our core values come from**, and to give a few suggestions to anyone who might want to reflect more deeply on one's own experience of the core values.

In Christian understanding of Jesus and God, we say that God loved the world so much that God sent Jesus to embody God's love (John 3:16). God is Love. Jesus came to embody Love. We call that the Incarnation-----the embodiment, the enfleshment of the God of Love in this person, Jesus. We believe God send him to love people, to search for the lost, to set free those in need of healing, to raise up the dignity of each person.

It was commitment to Jesus that gave John Eudes the heart to start the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. And it was commitment to Jesus that gave Mary Euphrasia the heart to reorganize community so it could reach around the globe, including here in North America. These are our roots. This is the foundation of Good Shepherd Mission.

Jesus called himself the "Son of Man". I used to think that this was a strange title. Then I learned that he was really saying: that he was "the Fully Human One". And he calls **us** to be fully human.



Sometimes we say, "I'm only human" as an excuse for bad behavior. In the context of Jesus saying he's the Fully Human One the term "human" means the opposite. It means one who is living a life of integrity, a life fully aligned with God.

Jesus describes his mission: "I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness". (See John 10:10) Being fully human means to live in freedom, **freedom from** all that keeps us bound to painful past experiences, **freedom for** living in healthy relationships, **freedom for** living out of our gifts, **freedom** for contributing to good in families, communities, the world.

What does it mean today? One way of answering that question is to say that God still wants to embody God's self in each of us serving in Good Shepherd Mission, wherever that mission is found. God still wants to be in the flesh and blood of each of us as we love people, search for the lost, help to set free those who need healing, raise up the dignity of each one, challenge systems that keep people from being free.

If anyone reading this is reluctant to say "God", then say "Love". The Christian tradition says that they are the same thing. Or, rather, the same person, because it's about people.

Jesus embodied Love, and it cost him. He gave his life for people's wholeness. Christians say that God raised Jesus from the dead. Even if you don't hold this as your own faith know that this is the foundation of the understanding that evil is not the end, that goodness and life win out over darkness and death.

Christianity may not be your personal faith tradition. At the same time, this perspective may have a connection with your own tradition (faith or philosophical). What does it mean, in your own words, from your own experience?



Good Shepherd vision includes an understanding that goodness, healing, and life win out over darkness and suffering.

This is the foundation of all Good Shepherd Mission: to embody Love, to set others free for LOVE.

Some suggestions for your own person reflection----and for sharing:

- Remember a time when you experienced the Presence of God, or the Presence of Love, in your own ministry (which means service). You might want to write down the sequence of events before and after your sense of God, or your sense of a Love greater than yourself. Pay attention: what do you want to remember so you notice it sooner the next time?
- Think about this language about Jesus. Is this comfortable for you? Is this part of your faith tradition? If your faith tradition is different----or, if you don't have a faith tradition, maybe you have a philosophical or humanitarian tradition----how does *your* tradition name this sense of embodying God, embodying Love?
- Reflect on the blessing of being a part of this mission.... And the cost....

- I asked Claire, a 4-year-old, what she learned in her Sunday religious education class. She answered, "I learned that God is in my bones!" Have you ever experienced "God in your bones"? If you have, try telling someone what that was like. If you haven't, pay attention.
- Make up your own one line prayer (if you aren't comfortable with the word "prayer" call it a mantra, or an affirmation) that can help you remember your own personal call to embody, en flesh God or Love in the ministry/service that you do. Try it for a week, then evaluate it.
- Whoever we are, we can only be part of Good Shepherd Mission if we experience Love. Try this: spend 2 minutes a day paying attention to your breath. Breathe in Love, and breathe out Love. Watch for transformation to happen in you.

Anytime you raise the dignity of another Love is at work. God is at work. The Good Shepherd is at work. In our bones. It's bigger than ourselves. In spite of ourselves sometimes.

Remember this (Lizzie's Mary Euphrasia quote from March 20/19):

“Become animated with the thoughts, feelings,
and affections
of the Good Shepherd, of whom you should be
the living images.”



Pay attention to what God doing it in you, in us.
What/whose living image do you feel called to be?

Mary Euphrasia says something like is: The beginning of salvation is receiving love; the fullness of salvation is giving love.

For further reflection on the impact loving another has on us try watching this:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ChurchIn21stCentury> or

[A Lesson in Love | Fr. Michael Himes | Agape Latte](#)

“A Lesson in Love”, 3 min. 44 seconds