

## Letters

To the Editor:

Maggie Wellert and Margaret Leinbach's proposal for the Good Samaritan as a new metaphor for the ordained and lay ministry of the church is a much needed attempt at revising the present understanding of, in particular, the ordained ministry. In their use of servant and shepherd models, they describe well the extremes in the pastoral expectations of congregations, as well as the self-chosen models of many pastors. I see many of us, as pastors, choosing the shepherd or servant model as the dominant model in our work, not just because we are convinced that we are following the model Jesus gave us, but also out of a need to be loved and adored by our congregations. As shepherds, we see ourselves as "set apart" and as the authority on all things spiritual, as well as being "responsible" for the whole church (flock). As servants, we sacrifice ourselves and our families, so that everyone will admire how hard we work and how much we love the Lord.

I share Maggie and Margaret's desire to find a metaphor that is less hierarchical and more mutual and reciprocal. However, I agree with those respondents who noted that it will be difficult to use one metaphor to fully capture the essence of ministry. Yet I suspect that all of us tend to "prefer" one model, even unconsciously, and we follow that model most often. I, for one, think it is high time we let go of the old, hierarchical models for ministry.

In fact, I see Maggie and Margaret's call for a less hierarchical model for ministry as being part of a larger dilemma in the church today. Our ministry models are hierarchical because the entire church is grounded in hierarchy, including our theology. The theological foundations of our church are built on a hierarchical understanding of God, using terms such as king, sovereign, master, lord, servant, slave, sinner, unclean, and so forth. These models came to us more than 3,000 years ago and served the Christian community for many years in societies that were hierarchical.

If we are ever going to change our sense of the ministry to a more mutual, shared ministry of lay and ordained, we cannot simply change the metaphor. We must do the difficult work of theological reflection and reformation which will become the theological foundation for a new vision of how we relate to God in ways that are less hierarchical, and how we relate to one another in ministry in ways that are also less hierarchical.

--- Truman Dunn