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## Communities ministering to Creation

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A ministering community as compared to a community with a minister is a model of a church congregation that seems desirable and appropriate for a church moving forward. We are indeed being encouraged to become ministering communities. One way of both imagining a ministering community and becoming one in a more specific way may be to liken such a community to a healthy garden.

A ministering community recognizes diversity and interdependence amongst its people as a condition for healthy growth. Like-wise, an organic ecosystem relies on complexity and a strong 'web' of life for optimum health. The foundation of any garden is the soil and the soil is best able to sustain the life of plants when it is built up by organic matter. Healthy soil is teeming with life – worms, bacteria, ants, fungi – which feed each other and convert leaf litter and compost into humus.

#### Differences

Like healthy soil a ministering community allows for difference, shares its gifts and is fully alive; working cooperatively, giving life to each other and feeding the wider world. To use the words of Nyambura J. Njoroge, as quoted in Robin Greenwood's paper, *A Theology of Collaborative Ministry*, "It is not just the material things we share but God's love and will for wholeness and wellbeing for all God's creation. Together we participate in feeding one another. This way the mission of God will be lived out by all the people of God in their everyday life."

Humus has large stable molecules with ion-exchange sites. Negative ions entice and catch positively charged ions like potassium, iron, calcium and others. The humus stores these ions so they aren't leached away. The humus also glues particles together so that water and air are able to penetrate while less soil is lost through erosion. Similarly communities built on a healthy, inclusive and incarnated faith are attractive to others and reveal the enticing nature of God through Christ. In fact the root of the word humus also gives us the word for humility and means of the earth or ground. Humankind, or Adammah are of the earth, as the story of Genesis reveals to us, and the incarnate Christ dwelling in community is, like the humus, the 'glue' that holds all together.

Humus is also the answer to most soil problems helping dry soil to retain moisture, wet soil to drain, clay soil to break up, warm soil to cool down and so on. Just so the living Christ within an authentic community will heal that which needs healing.

A ministering community is about the whole people of God living out of the deep principles of the kingdom, faithful to its authentic nature and becoming cooperative and co-creative in the desire to further that kingdom. This calls for a whole of life response to the world in which we live and the particular challenges confronting us.

### **Mindlessly unaware**

The soil upon which we live and depend, this earth, is increasingly losing her health and vitality. The diversity of life on this incredible gift of God's creation is diminishing daily and will continue to do so. We seem mindlessly unaware of the loss that is now occurring. As ministering communities we need to recognize our role in giving life back to the earth. This earth clearly has enormous capacity for healing but cannot endure ongoing neglect and exploitation. What role do we as Christian faith communities have to play in contributing to the healing and health of the earth?

Perhaps we might 'build organic matter' through making our own community gardens, contributing to tree planting schemes, reducing our own consumption, recycling and re-using, caring for injured wildlife, advocating for the environment. Within the diversity of our own church communities we may find the variety of skills and desires to contribute to enabling the earth in different ways. We may find as we do so that we encounter the wider community in new ways. And as we work to heal the particular part of creation in which we live we ourselves may also be healed in some way.

A ministering community is a collaborative team moving in the same direction yet incorporating the variety of gifts, expertise and expressions of faith found within its people. All are valued and encouraged in their unique qualities including the 'littlest' amongst us. Just as the bacteria, invisible to the eye, are essential in the garden so is every member of the ministering community. A healthy garden or forest is an incredibly dynamic, productive and beautiful expression of God's living, pulsing creation. From the deepest subsoil to the highest canopy it is a fertile, breathing organism in a constant cycle of life: a wondrous working together of multiplicity and verdant life forms. In its rawest state it is free and uncontained yet when managed well can remain true to its essential nature.

### **Learning from Nature**

We could well learn from nature when considering our own communities.

Are we an overly domesticated garden with too much lawn and not enough indigenous plant life? If so perhaps we need some freedom from control and new ways of incorporating local life. Are we an overworked garden with too little organic matter? Perhaps we need some fallow time to rest and regenerate.

Most importantly however we could consider how we might integrate concern and care for the natural environment into our ministry. We could explore how to become not only ministering communities but also communities ministering to creation. We must integrate

such consciousness into our ministry because we indeed are not separate from the greater garden of this earth. We are in and of the garden; fashioned out of the same raw materials by the Creator who endowed humanity with particular gifts and responsibilities to care deeply for that which is of Him (Her).

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