

My friend Mike died last week. I was never Mike's minister, in fact Mike was more of a minister to me, depending on how you understand the word minister. Mike was a minister if you understand a minister to be someone who: takes an interest in your faith in God; discusses the love of Jesus with you; debates the issues of the church and the world with you fairly; encourages you to go deeper into trusting God's mercy, forgiveness and protection; someone who prays for you, and with you; helps your kids say Grace and give thanks; helps your spouse to affirm and strengthen your marriage vows; someone who invites you to church and welcomes you to eat and drink and enjoy good company - both when you have things to celebrate and when you have problems to deal with.

Mike helped his congregation to grow. He gave generously of his God-given time, and his God-given talents - including his earnings. He showed up for meetings. He cared whether the church acted fairly and ethically or took advantage for itself.

All that, by most people's definitions, would affirm that Mike was a minister and I am thankful he ministered to me. He ministered to me particularly because I came to town as a newcomer without friends and without family here. He had eyes for newcomers and made them feel welcome, took an interest in their lives and found joy in their successes and grieved their losses.

Mike wasn't perfect, but he was pretty amazing. He was an ordinary person who believed that God used him extraordinarily to make a difference in the world - a difference in God's Kingdom. Mike was never a member of the clergy, but he was a minister.

We are leaving January behind now. It's a time to reconcile the past in order to get ready for the future. I have been actively closing the books on last year's business, paying 2012 bills, library fines, accounting for taxes, completing personal calls that didn't happen at Christmas, putting a new twelve month calendar on the wall for my busy family of five to guide our hopes and dreams, to plan time to grieve pending sadnesses, to make time to be with God and with one another.

How about you?

Is this, for you, a time for reconciling, for planning for the future, like me? Is this, for you, a time for ministering, as it was for Mike?

I think we give thanks today and always that God doesn't seek-out only the extraordinary people for God's Mission of love and grace. I think we give thanks that God had the wisdom to imagine using us ordinary people and making us extraordinary by forgiveness. I think that we can thank God that every day God wipes away the weight of what we owe our saviour, the fines we've accrued by our imperfect behaviour, settles the outstanding relationship debts we can't always bear to face and gives us a new beginning, cuz like Mike, we're not perfect, but in God's mercy we can be pretty amazing. By God's love we can make a difference in this Church place, in our homes and community, in the world, in God's Kingdom.

God dignifies us with the call to be ministers by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.