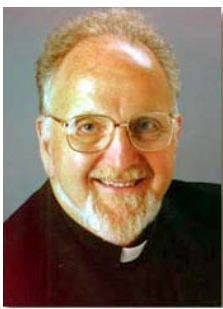


The bishop writes: Consider the power of touch

"He touched me and made me whole." Hymn

One of the things I have learned to do as bishop is to hold hands saying the Lord's Prayer. Two of our churches even do it during the main worship service of the congregation. It was an unfamiliar custom to me, but I have recently looked on that practice with a renewed appreciation.



H. Gerard Knoche

As I visit churches, the part of the service that moves me most is the distribution of communion. I am convinced that is true because I am *touching* the communicants. Ashley Montagu in his classic book *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, says, "A growing body of evidence points to the following conclusion(s): when one person touches another in a non-controversial manner (i.e. gently, briefly, and on a non-sensitive part of the body), positive reactions generally result." Other studies show that tutees do better when they are touched and many illnesses respond well to touching. Touching for just a brief time builds a bond way beyond what we would expect. Hand-shaking at the door has a similar effect. One of our most effective pastors makes his way among the gathering worshipers, welcoming them with a few words and a touch on the shoulder, or back or forearm.

It is the laying on of hands that sets a person aside as a rostered leader in the church. It is anointing with oil that has a powerful effect in prayers for healing. And visitors to folks in a nursing home know how much they want their hand held or a kiss on the cheek.

Let me state unequivocally that I support as necessary and correct our focus on boundaries, appropriate touching, and legal responsibility. Having said that, however, we may have thrown

the baby out with the bath water. Jesus touched folks and made them whole. In our effort at being "sent to share and serve," we need to bond with others and show our care. Maybe touching them - briefly, appropriately, publicly and with attention paid to boundaries - is a more important part of that than we think.

We believe in the incarnation where the word became *flesh* and dwelt among us. Maybe our love needs to be a little more incarnational itself.

Peace and joy,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerard".

H. Gerard Knoche, bishop