

From Independence to Intradependence

A Manifesto for the Renewal of the Independent Sacramental Movement

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The Independent Sacramental Movement has always carried within it a strange mixture of gift and danger.

At its best, it has made room for people who could not easily find a home elsewhere. It has preserved sacramental life in unexpected places. It has allowed clergy and communities to serve outside the usual structures of ecclesiastical permission. It has offered the Eucharist at kitchen tables, in rented rooms, in nursing homes, in prisons, in small chapels, in hospital rooms, and among people who might otherwise have been forgotten. It has given some wounded Christians a way to remain close to the sacraments when they might otherwise have walked away entirely.

These things matter. They should not be dismissed.

But neither should they excuse what has gone wrong.

The movement is too often scattered, poorly formed, overly dependent on personalities, and too quick to confuse succession with maturity and independence with isolation. We have seen jurisdictions appear and disappear. We have seen bishops with no real communities. We have seen clergy formed too quickly, or barely formed at all. We have seen impressive language used to cover fragile realities. We have seen people take refuge in titles when what was needed was conversion.

This is not written to condemn the movement. It is written because the movement still has a vocation and a mission. But that vocation will not survive if we keep blessing every weakness as diversity and every fragmentation as freedom.

The Independent Sacramental Movement must become something more disciplined, more truthful, more connected, and more courageous. It must become an Intradependent Sacramental Movement.

By intradependent, I do not mean centralized. I do not mean controlled. I do not mean absorbed into one jurisdiction, one rite, one theological school, or one administrative structure. The movement does not need another empire, even a small one. Many of us know too well the damage that religious control can do.

But there is a great difference between rejecting control and refusing communion.

There is a great difference between freedom and isolation.

There is a great difference between being independent and being alone.

The World We Are Called to Serve

I began *Faith Without Permission* with a dedication to victims of genocide, persecution, oppression, and every form of injustice — to those whose lives were taken, whose voices were silenced, and whose dignity was denied by the powers of this world was meant to place the whole project under judgment.

If our sacramental life does not make us more courageous in the face of injustice, what exactly are we doing? If our liturgies do not form us to stand with the suffering, then they have become religious theater. If our apostolic succession does not draw us into apostolic witness, then it has become a private possession rather than a public responsibility.

The world is not lacking in cruelty. It is not lacking in loneliness. It is not lacking in systems that crush the weak, exploit the poor, and silence the vulnerable. We live in an age of war, ecological destruction, political idolatry, racial hatred, economic fear, spiritual confusion, and deep mistrust of institutions — including religious institutions.

What will the Independent Sacramental Movement offer such a world?

Another set of small jurisdictions arguing over legitimacy? Another round of bishops debating lineages? Another collection of clergy seeking recognition? Another website with grand claims and little common life?

That is not enough.

If we do not reform ourselves, if we do not strengthen our faith, discipline, formation, and common life, then we will fail the very world we were called to serve. We may become like those Christians who saw the danger rising in their own age, spoke morally about it, but were too divided, too cautious, too compromised, or too disorganized to resist it with real power.

The comparison should make us uncomfortable. It is meant to.

A church that is only moral in language but powerless in witness is not ready for the hour of trial. A sacramental movement that cannot organize itself for truth will not be able to stand when truth becomes costly. If we cannot even build trust among ourselves, how will we stand with the persecuted? If we cannot protect people in our own communities, how will we speak credibly about justice? If we cannot form our clergy, how will we shepherd the wounded?

The point is not that we need to become large. The point is that we need to become serious.

A House Divided

Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one. He also warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

We quote these words easily. We do not always let them judge us.

The Independent Sacramental Movement often speaks the language of catholicity while living the habits of fragmentation. We speak of apostolic succession, but many of us avoid apostolic communion. We claim sacramental continuity, but too often tolerate ecclesial instability. We invoke the ancient Church, but build modern micro-jurisdictions around personalities, grievances, and private ambitions.

This is one of the central contradictions of the movement.

We want to be taken seriously as sacramental Christians, but we often resist the very practices that would make us credible: shared formation, common standards, safeguarding, transparent governance, theological discipline, collegiality, and mutual accountability.

We cannot continue building on sand and then act surprised when the house collapses.

Some communities are built on reaction. Some are built on charisma. Some are built on a bishop's personality. Some are built on escape from a previous church. Some are built on beautiful liturgy but little pastoral structure. Some are built on a lineage chart. Some are built on little more than a website and a hope.

Christ calls us to build on rock.

That rock is not bureaucracy. It is not institutional imitation. It is not Roman centralization, Anglican respectability, Orthodox aesthetics, or Old Catholic nostalgia. The rock is Christ himself — and a life conformed to his Gospel: prayer, truth, discipline, humility, sacramental faithfulness, pastoral care, justice, and communion.

The Old Argument About Greatness

The apostles argued about who was the greatest.

We should be grateful the Gospels remembered this, because the same argument has never left the Church. It simply changes clothing.

In our movement, it sometimes appears in the obsession with titles. It appears in the multiplication of bishops. It appears in the creation of jurisdictions with names larger than their actual communities. It appears in the need to be recognized, addressed, vested,

photographed, and validated. It appears when apostolic succession becomes a private treasure rather than a responsibility to the whole Body of Christ.

Jesus did not respond to the apostles' ambition by giving them grander titles. He placed a child in their midst. He washed feet. He taught that the greatest must become the servant. He warned against religious leaders who love honors and public recognition.

We need to hear that warning again.

The episcopacy is not a costume. It is not a reward for surviving ecclesiastical wounds. It is not a personal spiritual achievement. It is not the final stage of religious self-expression. A bishop is called to gather, teach, guard, reconcile, and serve. A bishop should be a visible sign of communion, not a monument to isolation.

This means we must say something that many people know but few want to say publicly: the overproduction of bishops has harmed the credibility of the Independent Sacramental Movement.

Not every priest needs to become a bishop. Not every disagreement requires a new jurisdiction. Not every small ministry needs its own hierarchy. Not every valid consecration is pastorally wise. Not every claim to succession produces apostolic life.

A bishop without a people, without accountability, without real teaching ministry, without collegial relationships, and without the humility to be questioned is not a sign of strength. He or she may be canonically interesting. He or she may be sacramentally valid. But validity alone is not the fullness of ecclesial health.

The movement needs fewer isolated monarchs and more servants of communion.

The Problem of Formation

We must also speak honestly about ordination.

Too many people have been ordained too quickly, with too little discernment and too little preparation. Sometimes this happens out of kindness. A person feels called, wounded, excluded, or eager to serve, and a bishop wants to affirm them. Sometimes it happens because a jurisdiction wants to grow. Sometimes it happens because we have confused openness with lack of standards.

But ordination is not simply affirmation.

The ordained ministry carries weight. It involves preaching, sacramental leadership, pastoral care, spiritual trust, ethical responsibility, and the care of souls. To ordain someone without adequate formation is not generous. It is dangerous.

A person may be sincere and still not ready. A person may be wounded and still need healing before public ministry. A person may be intelligent and still lack pastoral judgment. A person may love liturgy and still be unprepared to shepherd people. A person may feel called and still need the Church to test that call.

The movement needs real formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. We need processes that include discernment, mentoring, theological study, supervised ministry, preaching practice, liturgical training, pastoral ethics, safe church formation, and continuing education after ordination.

This does not mean every jurisdiction must build a seminary. Most cannot. But that is precisely why we need intradependence.

If we pooled our resources, we could create shared formation programs. We could develop reading lists, online courses, mentoring networks, supervised ministry expectations, and common standards for those preparing for ordination. We could create serious lay formation as well, because the Church is not renewed by clergy alone.

The alternative is to continue improvising — and we have improvised long enough.

Safeguards Are Not Optional

Small churches sometimes imagine that abuse prevention, pastoral boundaries, and safeguarding policies belong only to large institutions. That is a serious mistake.

Small communities can wound people. Independent clergy can misuse trust. Bishops without oversight can cause harm. Lack of structure does not prevent abuse; it often makes abuse harder to address.

If we are going to serve the public, we need safeguards. We need policies about boundaries, complaints, mandatory reporting, financial accountability, pastoral conduct, and ministry with children, elders, and vulnerable adults. We need to stop relying on good intentions as though they were enough.

They are not enough.

The vulnerable deserve more than sincerity. They deserve protection. They deserve clarity. They deserve communities that have thought ahead about what to do when something goes wrong.

A movement that claims to serve the wounded must not become another place where wounds are hidden.

Sharing the Work

There is no reason every small jurisdiction should have to create everything from scratch.

One of the most practical steps toward intradependence is shared work. We can share catechetical materials. We can develop common resources for sacramental preparation. We can create pastoral guides for baptism, Eucharist, reconciliation, marriage, anointing, funerals, and ministry to the sick and homebound. We can collaborate on clergy formation. We can produce common prayer resources, study materials, and retreat outlines.

We could even begin the long work of creating liturgical resources together: copyright-safe rites, ritual books, lectionary materials, daily prayer resources, and pastoral liturgies rooted in the wider Christian tradition but adapted honestly for our communities.

This would not require every jurisdiction to use the same texts. It would simply give us better resources than many of us currently have.

It would also teach us how to work together.

That may be just as important as the materials themselves.

The work of collaboration forms people. It teaches patience. It reveals whether we can listen, compromise, receive correction, and serve something larger than our own preferences. A shared catechism, formation program, or ritual book would not only be a product. It would be a school of communion.

Communion Without Control

Many people in the Independent Sacramental Movement are suspicious of authority, and often with good reason. Some came from churches where authority was used to silence, shame, exclude, or control. Some carry deep wounds from institutions that spoke of obedience while failing in mercy or truth.

So let us be clear: the call to intradependence is not a call to domination.

We do not need one supreme bishop. We do not need a new central office claiming power over everyone. We do not need a bureaucracy pretending to solve spiritual problems by administrative force. We do not need to erase real differences of rite, theology, pastoral style, or ecclesial identity.

But we do need communion.

Communion is not control. Communion is the willingness to recognize that my ministry is not mine alone. My jurisdiction is not the whole Church. My gifts are not sufficient by themselves. My wounds do not excuse isolation. My freedom is not an escape from responsibility.

Intradependence asks whether we can become trustworthy neighbors to one another.

Can bishops speak to one another honestly without immediately defending territory? Can clergy ask for help without fear of humiliation? Can jurisdictions share resources without trying to absorb one another? Can laity expect transparency without being treated as disloyal? Can we disagree without splitting? Can we correct without destroying? Can we collaborate without controlling?

These are not administrative questions. They are spiritual ones.

Apostolic Succession and Apostolic Responsibility

The movement has spent enormous energy discussing apostolic succession. That is understandable. Sacramental continuity matters.

But succession without responsibility becomes hollow.

The apostles were not collectors of lineage. They were witnesses. They preached Christ crucified and risen. They formed communities. They endured suffering. They cared for the poor. They confronted falsehood. They gathered believers for the breaking of the bread and the prayers. They were sent.

If we claim apostolic succession, we must ask whether we are living apostolic responsibility.

Do we teach the faith? Do we form disciples? Do we care for the poor? Do we protect the vulnerable? Do we preach Christ? Do we gather real communities? Do we stand with those who suffer? Do we live in communion? Do we show courage when the Gospel requires it?

Apostolic succession cannot be reduced to a chain of hands. It must become a chain of faithfulness.

Private apostolic succession is not enough. Succession belongs to the Church. It must be lived in the Church, for the Church, and for the world God loves.

The Laity Are Not an Afterthought

The Independent Sacramental Movement will not be renewed if renewal remains a conversation among clergy.

The laity are not spectators. They are not props in the background of clerical identity. They are not simply recipients of sacraments administered by independent clergy. They are baptized members of Christ's Body, gifted by the Spirit, called to holiness, discernment, service, and witness.

If the movement is to become healthier, lay people must be formed, heard, and trusted. They should have access to catechesis, spiritual formation, theological education, and meaningful participation in the life of communities. They should also be able to expect transparency, boundaries, and accountability from clergy.

A clerical movement may survive for a while on titles and liturgy. It will not become the Church in any full sense unless it forms disciples.

What We Must Begin to Do

The call to intradependence must become practical, or it will become another beautiful idea with no consequences.

We need bishops willing to build communion rather than simply protect territory. We need clergy willing to seek formation instead of relying on ordination as proof of readiness. We need jurisdictions willing to collaborate on standards, resources, and safeguards. We need laity willing to ask for more than occasional sacramental access. We need writers, teachers, liturgists, pastors, and theologians willing to give their gifts to the common good.

We should begin with what is possible.

Create spaces for conversation. Share existing resources. Develop common formation expectations. Build a library of catechetical materials. Offer online study days. Create clergy support circles. Draft model safeguarding policies. Host retreats. Plan conferences. Encourage bishops to meet in prayer and honest conversation. Invite laity into the work. Identify ministries that are already healthy and learn from them.

None of this requires control. It requires commitment.

It requires people willing to stop waiting for someone else to fix the movement.

The Choice Before Us

The Independent Sacramental Movement can continue as it is. It can remain scattered, defensive, under-formed, and easily dismissed. It can keep producing clergy and bishops faster than it produces disciples. It can keep mistaking validity for vitality. It can keep speaking of catholicity while practicing isolation.

Or it can repent.

That word may sound severe, but it is the right word. Repentance means turning. It means changing direction. It means admitting that the path we are on will not take us where we claim to want to go.

We do not need to become less free. We need to become more faithful.

We do not need to become centralized. We need to become connected.

We do not need to become uniform. We need to become trustworthy.

We do not need to abandon the gifts of the Independent Sacramental Movement. We need to purify them, discipline them, and place them more fully at the service of Christ.

The world does not need a sacramental movement preoccupied with its own recognition. It needs communities that can bear witness to the mercy, justice, beauty, and truth of Jesus Christ. It needs clergy who are formed, humble, and accountable. It needs bishops who gather rather than scatter. It needs laity who are equipped for discipleship. It needs sacraments celebrated as gifts for the life of the world, not as ornaments of ecclesiastical self-importance.

The hour is late enough that we should stop pretending.

We have work to do.

Let us stop building on sand.

Let us stop confusing isolation with freedom.

Let us stop treating apostolic succession as a private possession.

Let us stop ordaining without forming.

Let us stop speaking of communion while avoiding the labor required to live it.

And let us begin again — not by surrendering our legitimate independence, but by offering it to Christ for the sake of a deeper, freer, humbler communion.

That is the work of becoming an Intradependent Sacramental Movement.