

Working in the Vineyard of the Lord:
A National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry
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Raising Expectations in the Ministerial Workplace

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The late, great Monsignor Phil Murnion, described the development of lay parish ministry as “a virtual revolution in pastoral ministry” in the United States.¹ Some of you gathered here today have been part of that “revolution” for decades; others of us are the beneficiaries of those early trailblazers in lay ecclesial ministry.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to address you today as part of this national symposium that will, I believe, further advance the development of lay ecclesial ministry in our parishes and dioceses. It will achieve this potential if we succeed in identifying, committing ourselves to, and actually *implementing*, the recommendations being generated through this discernment process.

Best Organizational Practices

*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*² identifies four major components in the pastoral development of lay ecclesial ministry. We have reflected upon pathways to ministry, formation for ministry, and authorization for ministry. My presentation today will focus on the fourth area identified by the bishops: the ministerial workplace, and specifically, will respond to the bishops' call to establish best organizational practices in the development of “a comprehensive personnel system” for all lay Church personnel (p.42). It is noteworthy that *Co-Workers* states categorically that best organizational practices *are* “consistent with Gospel values” (ibid). So let us be clear that this is not a case of imposing a secular or business model of personnel management on the Church. Rather, it is learning how the principles and methods of human resource management and organization development can be adapted and put into practice in an ecclesial context and how they can serve to make our mission more effective.

Fruitful Collaboration

In recent years, formal Church pronouncements on lay ministry³ have been complemented and indeed advanced, by grassroots developments where lay ecclesial ministers and their national associations have come together in a model of collaborative ministry. For example, developing *The National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*⁴ and more recently, the *Emerging Models of Pastoral Ministry* project.⁵ Individual dioceses and groups of dioceses have also come together to chart the future development of lay ecclesial ministry.⁶

The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, whom I represent here today, is an organization that brings together senior level executives from the business, finance, philanthropy, and education sectors. We work with Church leaders from the parish, diocesan and national levels and with bishops in dioceses across the country. Our mission is to promote excellence and best practices in the management, finances and human resources development of the Catholic Church by greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity. Our members are committed Catholics who have the expertise and desire to serve the Church in the development and implementation of best practices in the temporal affairs of the Church we all love.

In the area of lay ecclesial ministry I pay tribute to our Leadership Roundtable members from NACPA, NALM, CARA, the National Pastoral Life Centre, the Lifecycle Institute, and many others who have contributed so much to the understanding of and development of lay ecclesial ministry. Working with the National Federation of Priests Councils, NCEA, and Catholic colleges and universities, we believe we are modeling as well as promoting the “close mutual collaboration” called for in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*. (p4)

The Challenge: Raising Expectations

Today we can celebrate significant progress made by parishes and dioceses towards developing comprehensive personnel systems for lay ecclesial ministers. The *challenge* I share with you this afternoon is that we must continue to raise our expectations concerning “best organizational practices” if we are to continue to recruit, form, retain and reward the most qualified and gifted ministers for our Church.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard provides a tremendous resource for us as we endeavor to raise standards and expectations in the ministerial workplace. The principles it lays out align with key elements of best organizational practices. We know that strong leadership and a collaborative approach to ministry are needed if lay ecclesial ministry is to continue to develop and mature. We are fortunate to be participating in this open dialogue – bishops, priests, religious, and lay ecclesial ministers – on how we can best be of service to the Church. We know we need a plan if we are to successfully implement this ministry. We can begin with an audit of our ministerial workplaces to assess our current personnel policies and procedures. And finally, as *Co-Workers* emphasizes, we need an evaluation process where we evaluate progress, revisit decisions and assumptions, and refine our approach. I have great hope that our deliberations during this symposium will contribute to this positive approach to workplace issues.

Best Place to Work

Imagine if you opened your daily newspaper and saw the headline, “Catholic Church voted ‘Best Place to Work’ in national survey!” Those who create such lists define great places to work as where employees “trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with.”⁷ *Co-Workers in the Vineyard* speaks of “close mutual collaboration” (p.4) and “enabling all the disciples to realize their calling to holiness and service...” (p.14). When we combine this spirituality of

communion with our long tradition of servant leadership, justice, respect for the dignity of the individual, and a vocational response to our baptismal calling, we can easily see the firm foundation we have to build on as we address the development of personnel in the ministerial workplace.

I would like to draw a parallel between what *Co-Workers* calls the ‘integrating of lay ecclesial ministers’ (p.4) and the concept of “employee engagement.” Both have to do with “loving the work that I do and the place that I work.” Studies indicate that organizations and businesses with high employee engagement outperform those where there is lower employee engagement.⁸ Hewitt Associates, a human resources consulting service, has identified six inter-related drivers for this engagement. People, Work and Value, Opportunities, Compensation, Process and Procedures, and Quality of Life.⁹ The proposals I offer this afternoon are designed to strengthen these drivers of engagement. There are also seven key factors identified in fostering employee engagement that I believe are applicable to our situation of lay ecclesial ministry:

1. The purposeful selection of talent
2. Meaningful work
3. Clear work impact
4. Inspired leadership
5. Continuous learning and development
6. A sense of community
7. Results-based recognition and rewards¹⁰

We should pay attention to these key factors when we review ministerial workplace issues.

Elements of a Comprehensive Personnel System

So how can we raise expectations concerning the ministerial workplace? How do we integrate an ecclesiology of communion with best practices in personnel management? As a recent editorial in *Commonweal* magazine observed: “If there is to be any hope for an ecclesiology of communion, it is important that bishops, clergy, theologians, and the laity build personal relationships. The first step in building a relationship is to begin talking with one another, and the only hope for sustaining one is to continue talking.”¹¹

So it is in that spirit, that I offer specific proposals in each of the six areas identified by the bishops in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*. It is my hope that individual lay ecclesial ministers, diocesan leaders, and national organizations might all be “initiators of the conversation” with bishops, priests and the lay faithful as a whole, as we seek to further the development of lay ecclesial ministry.

Much of the data I rely on for describing the current reality and longer term trends in lay ecclesial ministry comes from Dr. David DeLambo’s study, *Lay Parish Ministers:*

A Study of Emerging Leadership,¹² which I suggest should be recommended reading for all bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay ecclesial ministers.

And so to the first of our six elements...

1. Recruitment and Selection

In *Co-Workers*, our bishops express gratitude to those who serve as lay ecclesial ministers for service that is “unique and necessary for the life and growth of the Church.” (p.9) How can we raise expectations in the area of the recruitment and selection of lay ecclesial ministers? I have six suggestions. Let us raise the expectation that:

- dioceses will build up the capacity and funding to provide central recruiting and formation services for parishes seeking lay ecclesial ministers
- That compulsory, comprehensive training will be provided for all those who interview and appoint lay ecclesial ministers. Sr. Katarina Schuth’s recent research indicates that almost a third of priests see themselves as either “not too effective” or “not at all effective” in the area of hiring and supervising professional staff.¹³ We can help them respond to that self-identified need.
- That all parishes and dioceses will establish clear and high expectations of the qualifications, formation and capability of potential lay ecclesial ministers.
- That the diversity of the Church and society will be reflected in those recruited to lay ecclesial ministry. Just take a look around the room at our age, our ethnicity and our gender. While we have made progress in this area, we still have some work to do!¹⁴
- That *all* fulltime and part time lay ecclesial ministers will have a written job description. Ten percent of full time lay ecclesial ministers and 23% of part time do not currently have job descriptions.¹⁵ We can and should improve on this number and also make sure that position descriptions are not a vague list of “the things that need to be done that have somehow fallen into my lap” but rather a focused description of the essential functions of the position.
- That all lay ecclesial ministers will have clear performance objectives and metrics. Having a formal record of mutual expectations and responsibilities is vital for a healthy and productive ministerial workplace and the mutual accountability Dean Bill Cahoy spoke of in his opening remarks.

2. Orientation and Support

The second area of a comprehensive personnel system identified in *Co-Workers* is the initial orientation and ongoing support for new lay ecclesial ministers. How do we raise expectations that once we recruit lay ecclesial ministers, we then retain and support them in their ministry? Let us raise the expectation that:

- A well-organized and comprehensive orientation will be provided for all new lay ecclesial ministers in all parishes and dioceses. This orientation should be detailed in the personnel manual for all Church employees and should include a review of the personnel policies and procedures of the organization.

- That mentoring and executive coaching will be made available to lay ecclesial ministers to develop communication skills, leadership skills, and to promote personal and organizational development
- That ongoing formation in the area of personnel development and management will be provided by dioceses, national organizations, Catholic colleges and universities, and others.
- That all Church employees will be offered career development advice and opportunities for advancement.

3. Evaluation and Feedback

The *Co-Workers* document recognizes that self-reflection and formal performance appraisal provide valuable opportunities for the growth of individual lay ecclesial ministers. Unfortunately, formal evaluation has not been part of the culture of the Church and many in the Church do not appreciate the benefits never having had a positive experience of the process themselves. The Villanova Center for the Study of Church Management ¹⁶ recently spent two full days exploring this subject, and even then we barely scratched the surface. But the call in *Co-Workers* to integrate best organizational practice means that the issue of performance management must be on our agendas and deserves serious attention. So let us raise the expectation that:

- All parishes and dioceses will have a clear mission statement that forms a shared statement of purpose for all those in the ministerial workplace; that we have a shared understanding of what we are doing and why.
- That all parishes and dioceses will develop a formal performance management system for those who minister in the Church
- That all lay ecclesial ministers will receive a formal, annual performance appraisal. While those receiving performance evaluations has grown (from 37.2% to 44.2%¹⁷) that still leaves more than half of lay ecclesial ministers without the benefit of such a potentially fruitful and even transformative experience.
- Let us expect that training will be provided for all lay ecclesial ministers and all supervisors to develop the skills to make performance management processes a mutually beneficial experience for both the individual and the organization.

4. Compensation

If performance management can be described as a sensitive matter worthy of further attention, you can imagine the challenge of addressing the complex issue of compensation for lay ecclesial ministry. When *Co-Workers* speaks of a desire to “achieve consistency where possible and to encourage diversity where appropriate” (p.4) compensation is perhaps one of the most challenging areas in which to achieve this balance. We know that canon law speaks of the right of lay persons to: “decent remuneration appropriate to their condition so that they are able to provide decently for their own needs and those of their family. They also have a right for their social provision, social security, and health benefits to be duly provided.”¹⁸ Our bishops’ conference speaks of the “need for renewal” within the Church to ensure she is “exemplary” in her treatment of employees and meeting her obligations to provide a “sufficient livelihood for employees.”¹⁹ We also have to address the concern that, as

Dr. David DeLambo puts it: “Those in ministry right now are those who can afford to be in ministry.”²⁰ So as part of raising expectations in the ministerial workplace, let us raise the expectation that:

- All parishes and dioceses will undertake a comprehensive compensation survey and follow best practices already in place in some dioceses that provide a compensation program “to administer the salaries of those working with them in an equitable and consistent manner.”²¹
- That funding support will be offered for initial and ongoing formation of lay ecclesial ministers. The issue of student debt is one that we must address if we are to be able to offer compensation that meets the needs of lay ecclesial ministers.²² One report on Graduate Theological Students in Church ministry paints a disturbing picture: “... their level of debt is affecting their career choices, holding them back from purchasing homes, preventing them from saving for their children’s education, limiting their retirement savings, causing them to delay health care needs, and creating stress in their personal and professional lives.”²³ This is not a good situation for ministry to flourish in!
- That as part of a comprehensive compensation program, parishes and dioceses will take both internal and external equity into account when establishing individual salaries and salary ranges for all lay ecclesial ministers.
- That dioceses will develop creative solutions to ensure health and other social benefits are provided to all lay ecclesial ministers. 19% of full time lay parish ministers do not currently receive medical insurance. 45.8% do not receive annual retreat time.²⁴ I believe we have a responsibility to raise expectations concerning the physical and spiritual wellbeing of lay ecclesial ministers.
- That the portability of benefits, talked about by the bishops in *Co-Workers*, will become a reality for all who dedicate their lives to lay ecclesial ministry.

5. Transitions and Terminations

When transitions go well in the ministerial workplace, both individuals and the community of faith can grow from the experience. When transitions and terminations are not well handled, painful turmoil can result. I echo the call in *Co-Workers* that dioceses can be helpful not just in “clarifying expectations” (p44) but also in providing guidance and protections for all those involved. Let us raise the expectation that:

- Written termination policies will be part of diocesan and parish personnel policies and that wherever possible, all terminations will be referred to a human resources specialist.
- That exit interviews will be offered to all lay ecclesial ministers and that supervisors will reflect upon and learn from the findings.
- That outplacement assistance will be available for all lay ecclesial ministers who are leaving a Church position. This can have immense benefits not only for the individual who is leaving but also for the morale of those staff members who remain.
- That severance payments will be offered and a continuation of benefits for a transition period.

6. Grievance Procedures

The sixth and final element of a comprehensive personnel system, as identified by the bishops, is the need for conflict management and dispute resolution. Fortunately many tensions and conflicts in the ministerial workplace can be readily resolved with common sense and good pastoral judgment. However, a formal grievance procedure protects all parties and addresses situations where a lay ecclesial minister feels unfairly treated. Let us raise the expectation that:

- All dioceses and parishes will have formal policies and procedures that are clear and are fairly implemented
- That access to qualified mediation services will be offered to lay ecclesial ministers and their supervisors as part of any grievance procedure
- That all Church employees will have access to canonical processes that are available and appropriate for particular grievance situations
- And once more, that ongoing formation will be provided for all lay ecclesial ministers and supervisors in this aspect of personnel management

Resources and Outcomes

The ministerial workplace section of *Co-Workers* concludes with a call for dioceses, state Catholic conferences, regional associations, and national associations and organizations, to work together to support parishes in the area of human resource administration. To be successful with such collaboration we need to add ministerial workplace issues to our planning agendas and conference agendas. We must convene the key people with the expertise to assist us and not fall into the trap of reinventing the wheel. We should maximize the capacities of individual parishes and groups of parishes and dioceses to respond to the needs in this area. We must pool our resources and collaborate in the development of formation resources and in sharing examples of best practices in the personnel area.

One concrete result of such collaboration is the *Church in America* DVD²⁵ that you used in preparation for this section of the symposium. The Leadership Roundtable is also working with many of the organizations represented here today, together with an advisory group of bishops, to develop a *Standards for Excellence Code* for parishes, dioceses and Catholic nonprofits that covers the workplace issues we have been addressing today. This code is a self assessment tool for parishes and dioceses to measure themselves against the best practices benchmarks referred to in *Co-Workers*.

Finally, I urge each diocese and organization represented here today to develop communication plans for ongoing dialogue with the Bishops Conference, individual bishops, priests and the lay faithful about ministerial workplace issues.

I am grateful to those bishops here today and to all the bishops who work with the Leadership Roundtable and all our organizations to bring best practices into the temporal affairs of the Church. Their leadership in this area is crucial. In February of this year, Bishop Dennis Schnurr, treasurer of the Bishops' Conference, called for a "change in mindset" where parishes are no longer "mom-and-pop businesses with "Trust Me" as their motto."²⁶ Although his primary focus was financial accountability,

I believe the same challenge applies to parishes and dioceses in the area of personnel management. Yes, we are a faith community, and yes we are a family, but yes, we do still require a human resources professional and comprehensive personnel policies and procedures if we are to be as effective as we desire to be in our ministry.

Concluding Proposals

Co-Workers in the Vineyard concludes with a call for “pastoral initiatives” and “fresh energy and creativity” relating to the future development of lay ecclesial ministry. I conclude with five final suggestions to further this important conversation beyond this symposium:

1. Let us expect excellence in the ministerial workplace. Let us set standards to achieve that excellence. Let us embrace the challenge to implement these standards in the areas of organizational best practice identified in *Co-Workers*.
2. As parishes, dioceses and national organizations, let us make a commitment to implement the recommendations that emanate from this symposium.
3. Let us dedicate equal time in our formation programs, conferences, and lay ecclesial ministers meetings, to consideration of ministerial workplace issues. We should not leave this aspect as an afterthought following on the other significant areas of pathways, formation and authorization for ministry.
4. When we enter into dialogue on these matters, may it be a serious conversation that leads to concrete proposals, with timelines and benchmarks for achievement. What are we going to do and who is going to do it? When are we going to do it? How will we know if we succeeded?
5. Let us each make a personal commitment to raise expectations in our own ministerial workplace and to enter into serious dialogue with our co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

I offer my thanks to you for the opportunity to share with you this afternoon and for your attention. We have been called to a wonderful ministry in our Church and receive many blessings in our faith communities. It is has been a privilege for me to be here with you these days to reflect upon the future of lay ecclesial ministry in our Church.

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Notes

¹ Philip Murnion. *New Parish Ministers*. NPLC, New York. 1992.

² *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. USCCB, Washington, DC. 2005.

³ See *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (1980) and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (1995). USCCB, Washington, DC. *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-*

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- Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests. USCCB, Washington, DC. 1998. Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Question. USCCB, Washington, DC. 1999.
- ⁴ National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers. NALM, Washington, DC. 2006. Developed by NFYCM, NALM, NCCL, NPM and approved by USCCBCCA.
- ⁵ Emerging Models of Pastoral Ministry, www.emergingmodels.org.
- ⁶ See Archbishop Elden Francis Curtiss. Lay Leadership and Lay Ecclesial Ministry in the Archdiocese of Omaha. February 20, 2007. <http://www.usccb.org/laity/laymin/Curtiss.pdf>. See also Minnesota Catholic Education Association. <http://www.mncatholiced.org/certification.htm>.
- ⁷ Great Place to Work Institute. www.greatplacetowork.com/great/index.php.
- ⁸ Raymond Baumruk and Ted Marusz. Employee Engagement: Insights into why it matters and what you can do about it. Hewitt Associates, 2004. p. 4.
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 14-15.
- ¹¹ Editorial, Commonweal Magazine, July 13, 2007 / Volume CXXXIV, Number 13 commenting on outgoing President Daniel Finn's recent remarks to the Theological Society of America (CTSA).
- ¹² David DeLambo. Lay Parish Ministers: A Study of Emerging Leadership. NPLC, New York. 2005.
- ¹³ Katarina Schuth. Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. 2006. p. 87.
- ¹⁴ DeLambo, p. 45-48. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* also promotes the reasonable accommodations that should be made for lay ecclesial ministers with disabilities in order for them to carry out their ministry. p. 43.
- ¹⁵ DeLambo, p. 101.
- ¹⁶ Villanova University, Center for the Study of Church Management. <http://www.villanova.edu/business/excellence/churchmgmt/>.
- ¹⁷ DeLambo, p. 103-5.
- ¹⁸ Code of Canon Law. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983. Canon 231 §2.
- ¹⁹ Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. USCCB, Washington, DC. 1986. #347-353.
- ²⁰ DeLambo, p. 127.
- ²¹ Parish Compensation Program. Diocese of San Jose, CA. July 2007. p. 1.
- ²² Antony Ruger et al. The Gathering Storm. Auburn Theological Seminary, New York, 2005. In reports in 1995 and again in 2005, researchers identified the significant problem of student debt for those training for ministry. Calling it "the gathering storm" the researchers note: "There is alarming news about the indebtedness of theological students. In the last decade, the percentage of students who have debt has increased, and the average amount of debt has increased dramatically. Some graduates have found the repayment difficult. The situation creates stress and may affect their persistence in ministry...." p. 1. See also, Financial Assistance for Lay Persons Preparing for Lay Ecclesial Ministry. USCCB Subcommittee on Lay Ministry. March, 2002. <http://www.usccb.org/laity/laymin/finasst.shtml>. See also, DeLambo, p. 123-129.
- ²³ Ruger, p. 2.
- ²⁴ DeLambo, p. 128-129.
- ²⁵ *The Church in America: A Resource for Parish and Diocesan Planning*. NLRCM, Washington, DC. 2006, <http://www.nlrcm.org/DVD/default.html>.
- ²⁶ National Catholic Reporter, February 2, 2007.