

## Working in the Vineyard of the Lord

A National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry  
July 31 to August 3, 2007  
Collegeville, Minnesota



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USCCB Secretariat  
for Family, Laity,  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2007 National Symposium On Lay Ecclesial Ministry

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

*Working in the Vineyard of the Lord*, the 2007 National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry, was a direct response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) statement *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005). The bishops called for expanded study of critical issues facing lay ecclesial ministry and dialogue about effective ways to support and advance ministry in the church. Nearly two hundred Catholic leaders gathered at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, from July 31 to August 3 for extended dialogue on lay ecclesial ministry. The conversation was greatly enhanced by the diversity of participants:

- 18 organizations co-sponsored the symposium including national ministry organizations, Catholic colleges and universities, and committees of the USCCB;
- 50 participants from Hispanic ministry organizations;
- 10 participants from the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators;
- 20 ordained ministers and 18 parish based lay ecclesial ministers.

Table conversation consisted of small groups of eight participants. Tables typically included diocesan leaders, leaders from a national ministry organization, a theologian or university administrator, an ordained minister, and a lay ecclesial minister. Each table had one or two ministerial leaders from underrepresented populations.

Papers commissioned for the symposium and keynote presentations helped focus the dialogue on the four pastoral applications for lay ecclesial ministry identified in *Co-Workers*: 1) pathways to lay ecclesial ministry; 2) formation of lay ecclesial ministers; 3) authorization for lay ecclesial ministry; and 4), workplace issues. Texts of the symposium papers, keynote talks, recommendations, and commitments can be found in English and Spanish on the symposium website: [www.lensymposium.org](http://www.lensymposium.org).

### SYMPOSIUM GOALS

1. To amplify the national will to advance lay ecclesial ministry in the United States;
2. To foster theological and pastoral insight into certifying, forming, authorizing, and sustaining lay ecclesial ministry;
3. To create national recommendations for formation, authorization, pathways, and workplace issues that seek to foster excellence in lay ecclesial ministry;
4. To generate organizational and personal commitments for implementing symposium recommendations.

### SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS

#### *Theological Insights*

- "The emergence of lay ecclesial ministry over the past forty years stands out as one of the top three or four most important ministerial shifts of the past two-thousand years," Edward Hahnenberg, Ph.D.;
- "The principle behind authorization is that there is no such thing as a freelance lay ecclesial minister. A person might assume a ministry; they might be lay, but it's authorization that puts the ecclesial in lay ecclesial ministry," Susan Wood, SCL, Ph.D..

### *Recommendations*

Participants generated recommendations for advancing lay ecclesial ministry in the four areas of pastoral application from *Co-Workers*. Executive summaries are available on the website for each of the four ([www.lemsymposium.org](http://www.lemsymposium.org)).

- Pathway recommendations emphasized ways for Catholic leaders to invite persons into lay ecclesial ministry;
- Formation recommendations focused on 1) formation for a culturally diverse church; 2) funding; 3) allowance for alternative modes of formation; and 4) availability and accessibility;
- Authorization recommendations called for further dialogue and study to clarify the meaning of authorization;
- Workplace recommendations called for dioceses and parishes to establish personnel policies that are just.

### *Organizational Commitments for Advancing Lay Ecclesial Ministry*

The symposium participants generated organizational commitments to advance the recommendations, a significant moment for symposium participants. Overarching areas of organizational commitment included:

- Commitments to discuss, study, promote, or integrate *Co-Workers* within their organizations;
- Commitments to address inclusion and cross cultural ministry competence;
- Commitments to advance lay ecclesial ministry standards, competencies, or certification, including a significant commitment towards national certification;
- Commitments to publicize and engage the work of the symposium;
- Commitments to advance the theology of vocation and authorization.

All organizational commitments can be viewed on the web ([www.lemsymposium.org](http://www.lemsymposium.org)).

## **FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

1. The symposium recommendations and commitments represent a significant effort to advance lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. Bishop Gregory Aymond, in his capstone address, stated: “*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* is being rewritten by this conversation. The Spirit is helping us put flesh on the bones.”
2. Issues of inclusion were discussed throughout the symposium. Sixty participants from Hispanic, African American, and Asian Pacific ministries challenged the participants and the symposium planning committee to be more inclusive. Ana Maria Pineda, R.S.M., Ph.D. stated in her capstone address:

We have been challenged by the diversity within this assembly. This kind of gathering represents another significant moment in the writing of the sacred story of lay ecclesial ministry. It is important that such care has been taken to insure that ethnic representation from the Latino and African-American communities are part of the conversation. It is important because it has broadened the conversation and has made it possible for us to consider other realities that have enriched our understanding of what “lay ecclesial ministry” might mean within these cultural contexts.
3. There is a need to address fears associated with lay ecclesial ministry. Bishop Aymond commented: “As we strive to live out lay ecclesial ministry in the Church we must admit our

- fears and address our ambiguities.” Bishop Zubik stated: “*Co-Workers* invites the baptized and the ordained to stop competing with one another, to stop diminishing one another, to get on with the work of the Church.”
4. Symposium participants strongly endorsed the need for ongoing theological study of vocation and authorization in lay ecclesial ministry. Symposium participants considered this essential for advancing lay ecclesial ministry.
  5. Crosscurrents were clearly evident regarding formation of lay ecclesial ministers. Amid a broad call requiring a master’s degree or equivalent, representatives from Hispanic ministry raised concerns about the lack of access to graduate education and standards that would likely exclude Hispanic Catholics from lay ecclesial ministry. A second concern was that current programs and standards often do not provide the linguistic and cultural competencies required to serve underrepresented communities and finally they raised the need to recognize Hispanic lay ministers without degrees who are providing linguistically and culturally appropriate service in our church.
  6. Two models for certification were explored. The Minnesota model of six dioceses collaborating on a common process for lay ecclesial ministry certification and a national certification model proposed by the “Alliance” of the NFCYM, NCCL, NALM, and NPM. A significant issue for ongoing study is the relationship of the bishop to the formation agents or certifying body.
  7. Parish, diocesan and national leaders should raise expectations for implementing the “best organizational practices” called for in *Co-Workers*. Three priority areas were identified: the development of comprehensive personnel policies, the development of resources and training programs in the area of human resources, and the need for self-assessment of current practices in line with *Co-Workers* and Catholic Social Teaching.

## NEXT STEPS

1. The symposium planning committee will contact all organizations that made commitments at the symposium by March 2008 to determine which commitments have been completed. A report will be sent to the new USCCB committee.
2. The symposium planning committee will be expanded and evolve into a network of organizations committed to advancing lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. The first meeting of this network will be at the emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership National Ministry Summit, April 20-23, 2008, Orlando, Florida. This network will work closely with the USCCB to continue the call of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*.
3. In collaboration with the USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation, the "Alliance," other national ministry organizations, and academic institutions will continue to study the certification of lay ecclesial ministers. Drawing on the ideals proposed in *Co-Workers*, the dialogue will address national standards, local needs, course content, effective delivery systems, and specific ministry skills.
4. Saint John’s School of Theology•Seminary has obtained funding for a second National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry in 2011. Saint John’s also seeks to obtain funding to gather theologians to advance the theology of vocation and authorization for lay ecclesial ministry.

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