

The Movement of the Spirit: Challenges and Reasons for Hope  
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Working in the Vineyard of the Lord. A National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry  
August 3, 2007

First of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be with you for these past couple of days. In the name of the Bishops' Committee on the Laity, I want to thank Saint John's University and the planning committee for all you have done to bring about this conversation. I also want to thank you for a very insightful and beneficial conversation over the past three years – okay - three days. It might have seemed like three years at times, because we all worked very hard.

Thank you too for your ministry and your leadership. You enrich the Church in the United States and the ministry and the mission of the Church. I thank you for your dedication to Christ and his Church. I thought Sister Anna-Maria Pineda was going first, and I was going to say I agree with her. But since I'm going first, I have to give some reflections!

The first question I was asked to address: Where have you seen the movement of the Spirit at the symposium? I suggest that I have seen, along with you, three signs, three specific signs of the presence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

First, in these days of prayer and conversation, all of us have felt great energy, faith, and hope and we have witnessed among us and from one another a tremendous commitment to Christ and to the mission of the Catholic Church. Your commitment is a sign of the commitment of many other lay ecclesial ministers who join our ranks. Good lay ecclesial ministry is alive and the Spirit is moving in us. The conversation these days has been serious, faith filled, very honest, prophetic, affirming, but also challenging. I believe that is also a sign of the presence of the Spirit.

Secondly, the document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* is being rewritten by this conversation. The Spirit is helping us put flesh on the bones. That document represents the bones of lay ecclesial ministry. This conversation helps to rewrite it. The document was written after much work, consultation, deliberation and many, many revisions. As we live it, as we discuss it here, we rewrite it. I call our attention to page sixty-seven of the document that says, and I quote, “Within the next five years, it will be helpful to revisit the material here and redefine it in the light of our experience.” This revisiting must be guided, and is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is leading us together, in creating a new understanding of lay ministry in the Catholic Church in the United States. As we work together and have conversation together, we are holding lay ministry as an essential part of our church. Lay ecclesial ministry is rooted in scripture and in tradition, and is theologically sound. The ministry will become more ecclesial and professional for us and for the next generation. We need the Spirit to continue to guide us.

The second question I was asked to address: What are our challenges in sustaining excellence in lay ecclesial ministry? And I suggest there are four challenges that I place before us.

First, as we strive to live out lay ecclesial ministry in the Church, we must admit our fears and address our ambiguities. The first response to change is always no. Lay ecclesial ministry calls us to think in new ways and to meet the needs of the pastoral church today. I believe that the Spirit is leading us to let go and to think in a prophetic way, and certainly that will cause fear. Dr. Ed Hahnenberg said the other day that we must think outside the box and remain within the box. May I say the same thing in a slightly different way: We together in our conversation and in

our work certainly must remain faithful to Christ and to His mission in the Church, but we can think differently and creatively. To do so, we must pray. We must have conversation. We must try new models, and then we must assess these models. Fear does create tension, but our fear surrounding ministry, and many other issues in the church, cannot paralyze us. And just as importantly, it should not polarize us.

Number two, formation programs. I believe it is a challenge for us that our formation programs in lay ecclesial ministry must be carefully designed and must be of high quality. This will take work. Our lay ecclesial ministry programs must be affordable, and we must work with Catholic colleges and universities, and seminaries to ensure the high quality. Mediocrity is not acceptable. We are raising the bar and must continue to do so. The programs in formation must be sensitive to cultural diversity. They must include diversity in education models. They must address the pastoral needs of the local church. National standards must be flexible enough to serve the local church. These are tough, but important challenges.

Number three. I suggest that what we have said over the past three days, and we have said this moved by the Spirit, that there are two very important issues that need theological research and dialogue. First, as many others have said, is the theology of vocation in ministry. This needs and deserves theological research, dialogue and pastoral reflection. The second issue that deserves our ongoing theological research and dialogue is authorizing people in ministry. What does authorization mean? Who does the authorizing? It is a complex but important issue, and as we go forward with lay ecclesial ministry, we must continue to do conversation, prayer and reflection around those issues.

Fourth and lastly. We must live out justice in the church workplace. We must discuss and continue to set guidelines for salaries, benefits, ongoing educational retreats. We must find ways to use best organizational practices to uphold respect for the work of lay ecclesial ministers.

In conclusion, in order to accomplish the four challenges that I believe the Spirit is calling us to, and to accept the affirmation of the Spirit, it will take continued openness on our part to the movement of the Spirit working within and among all of us. It will take prayer, work, planning, and yes, it will take money. It will take collaboration with all of the partners here and some who are not. I suggest that we, the Church, must be willing to be lead by the Spirit and commit ourselves again to the mission of Christ and the Church. Thank you.