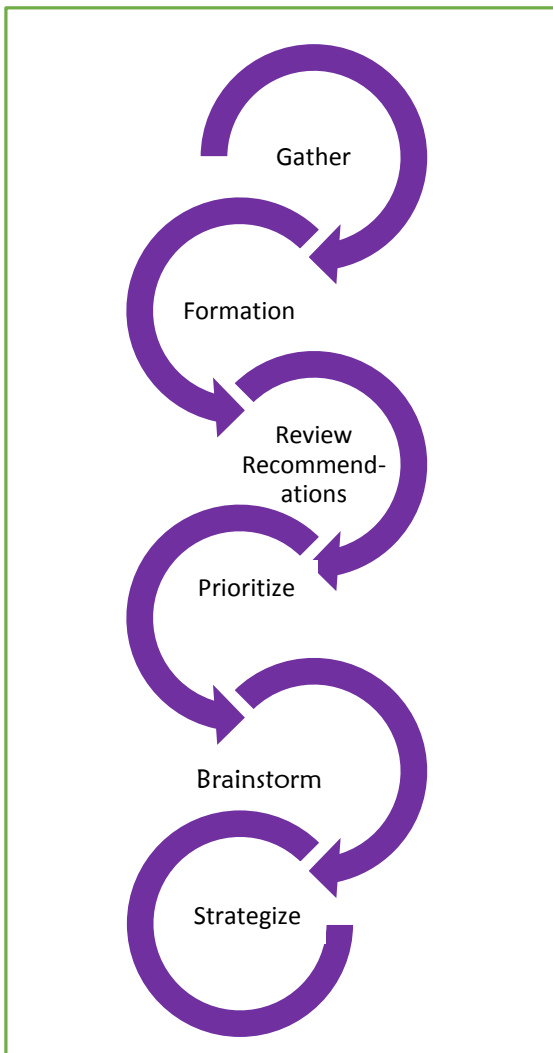


## A 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord



### Facilitating A Conversation toward Prioritizing Recommendations for Advancing Lay Ecclesial Ministers for Ministry at the Parish, Diocesan and National Levels

“Listen and incline the ear of your heart...” Rule of St. Benedict



**Goal:** To generate and prioritize recommendations for advancing lay ecclesial ministry at parish, diocesan and national levels and to document the movement.

**Overview:** Partners from around the country are invited to host a conversation in their region during the year of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary offers a general structure knowing that organizers will adapt it to meet local needs. Resources will be available on-line, including prayer services, suggested agenda and presentations by Mary Gautier, Lynda Robitaille and Rick McCord. There will be a web-based, feedback to capture the brainstorming and prioritization of recommendations from across the country and to disseminate them widely---to the USCCB and National Symposium partners and in publications reaching a broad public.

## Facilitating Productive Discussions

There are three main ingredients for a really good discussion: a well-defined topic, interested participants, and active facilitation. To facilitate is “to make easier” or “help bring about.” (Merriam Webster). Effective facilitation is more than convening. It requires paying attention to the group, managing the flow of conversation and insuring that everyone has the opportunity to contribute their best.

### STEPS IN FACILITATION

- **Preparation.**

Sometimes we think that having a compelling topic will carry the discussion. People, we say, know how to engage in fruitful dialogue. This is a dangerous assumption. Experts on facilitation agree that being clear about the purpose of the event, the physical setting, the agenda, the intended outcome, and the audience make leading a discussion seem effortless and is usually a satisfying experience for participants.

- **Use A Gathering Ritual**

In the church, we spend time at the start of our work re-centering ourselves on Christian mission. However you choose to do that, allow time for people to settle in and come together around those ideas and values that sustain the work of ministry.

- **Lay Out the Plan and Establish Expectations**

Participants will be much better prepared to contribute if they are clear about the topic and what outcomes you are seeking. The plan also includes whatever guidelines you have found help a group stay focused and on task. Here are a few we use at Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary:

***BE PRESENT:*** Try to be fully in the room and focused on the purpose of this gathering.

***PRACTICE HOSPITALITY:*** Help create a safe space for everyone to contribute as they are able and willing.

***LISTEN/SPEAK:*** Listen with the “ear of your heart” in a spirit of learning; share your ideas as your gift to the group’s work.

***BE CURIOUS:*** Rather than simply disagreeing with or acknowledging an idea, be intrigued to know what lies behind it; ask questions, seek clarification.

***TRUST THE SPIRIT:*** Believing that we are about the work of the church in our conversations creates an environment for accomplishing great things. Trusting in the Spirit opens us to new insights

- **Guide the Group.**

However you choose to do it, you need to be active in guiding the discussion. This means bringing the conversation back to topic when it drifts; inviting people to participate who have been silent; and helping to generate the best thinking of participants. This may require asking probing questions or questions that build on someone's idea; it might mean moderating two different points of view arising in the group; and using familiar practices like paraphrasing, checking for meaning, affirming contributions, building links between ideas, and – at times – relieving tension.

Guidance is not dominance but the various ways a facilitator can encourage people as they bring their experience, knowledge, and interest to bear on the topic of the meeting. We are sometimes hesitant to exercise this level of leadership, but leadership of this sort is essential

- **Stay on-task and on-time.**

While there are occasions when wandering far afield can be interesting, most often you have limited time to address an important topic. Moreover, we show respect for people's time by beginning and ending on time and keeping the task before the group. No heavy hand is needed, just attentiveness. And if more time is required, always negotiate an extension with the group.

- **Deal with unproductive behavior.**

Stating expectations at the start helps manage those who, for whatever reason, can derail a discussion by claiming too much airspace, working their phones, carrying on side conversations, etc. Reminding the group of those expectations when it is appropriate helps the group to take responsibility for its behavior. Sometimes gentle humor can redirect a wandering participant. At other times you may need to address the issues directly with individuals during a break. This can feel awkward or uncomfortable, but the facilitator attends to the well-being of a group and sometimes has to do the difficult thing for the good of the group and its work.

- **Provide Closure**

As part of valuing the work of a group, it is also the role of the facilitator to provide a summary of the main points. This is a way of making sure those points are accurate and clear, but it also reflects back to the group the progress it has made in moving the topic of the discussion forward.

## SUGGESTED AGENDA FIVE HOURS

**Gathering/Hospitality/Prayer** (30 minutes)

**Formation Video:** Authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers for Ministry (60 minutes)

**Dialogue**

1. *What does this document help us understand?*
2. *How does it resonate or diverge from your experience?*
3. *What else is going on in the larger system that we need to pay attention to?*
4. *What is happening in the larger system that is not evident in this research?*

**Break** (15 minutes)

**Formation Video:** Canonical Implications for the Ministerial Workplace (60 minutes)

**Dialogue**

1. *To what degree does the code support workplace issues?*
2. *Does the code become a leverage point for moving from a 'nice idea' to mobilizing a way forward and becoming embedded in the life of the church?*
3. *What are the next steps?*

**Review** the recommendations for advancing lay ecclesial ministers for ministry at the parish, diocesan and national level. *Give the group permission to discuss and add recommendations.* (30 minutes)

**Prioritize** the recommendations. Have them choose the three recommendations that they want attention given to at the parish, diocesan and national church. *They can use the three sticky dots all on one recommendation if they want. Remember to do this process for each level.* (15 minutes)

**The next three steps are a rhythm for each recommendation.** (60-90 minutes)

**Brainstorm** the enabling and restraining forces for the top three recommendation at each level—parish, diocese and national by using the force-field analysis method. *By now, you have nine recommendations all together; 3 each for parish, diocesan and national.* The force-field analysis method serves as a visual representation of the positive and negative forces at work when moving toward a goal. *In any effort to reach a goal or to implement change, there are enabling and restraining forces. To reach the goal, the enabling forces must be strengthened and the restraining forces diminished.*

**Prioritize** the top 3 enabling forces and the top 3 restraining forces using the three sticky dots for each.

**Strategize** how to make the enabling forces stronger and how to reduce the restraining forces. Utilize the three sticky dots method to prioritize the strategies. *Which ones do you have influence over on the local level? Who will help you carry it forward?*

**There are usually three types of forces named:**

- 1) forces that can be controlled by the group
- 2) forces that the group can influence but not completely control
- 3) forces over which the group has no control

Naming these upfront helps move the conversation along!