

Laity on Brink of New Church Ministries

By Elythe Westenhaver
(RNS Correspondent)

New doors are opening in all directions as the role of lay people in the Roman Catholic and the mainline Protestant churches undergoes a radical reshaping.

Call it lay ministry, shared ministry, unordained ministry, total ministry or — the very newest phrase — ecclesial ministry. The people in the pews, traditionally known as the faithful, the flock, the sheep — all terms connoting passivity, are emerging from what has been called the "pray, pay, and obey" syndrome.

"Since the fourth century, the (ordained) priesthood has swallowed up all other ministries," observes a Chicago priest, Father Dennis Geaney, OSA. "Other Christians served within the church not by their baptismal commitment or the discernment of the local church but by the nod of the pastor."

But now, writes Father Geaney in a new book, "Full Church Empty. Restory,"

"The offices or leadership roles that the centuries have defined will need to be refashioned to make room for the young men and women, married and single, who are on fire with the love of Christ and believe that this love can be best communicated through the ministry of the church — a church that will restructure its ministries to make room for them."

In speaking of these new opportunities for lay people — in the educational, spiritual, social service and administrative spheres — Father Geaney is addressing the Catholic Church, but Protestant churches with an ordained clergy also face the same challenges.

Sixty men and women including lay people, bishops, priests, deacons and sisters, met in Washington in early February to discuss the same theme at the invitation of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Bishops Committee on the Laity.

Their conclusion was that priests and laity will jointly and explicitly share



Special Report

responsibility for pastoral ministry in tomorrow's Church.

The phrase, ecclesial ministry, as descriptive for those functions that fall "in-between" the specific obligations of the ordained clergy and the duties common to all the baptized, was suggested by two speakers independent of one another at the Washington conference.

Significantly, one was an archbishop, Rember G. Weiland of Milwaukee, and the other a young laywoman, Terri Monroe, who is dean of students at the Catholic

Theological Union in Chicago.

For Catholics, this redefining of ministry is revolving around two poles. The first is the ongoing transfer to trained lay people of all those functions not specific to the priesthood. American Catholics, Father Geaney thinks, are on "the brink of a wide-spread disruption of parish structures" because of the coming shortage of clergy caused by the resignation of many priests and the radical drop in seminarians studying for ordination (from 48,750 in 1964 to 13,960 in 1979).

He cites studies by Father John R. Gilbert for the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis, which show that during the coming decade every suburban pastor, now working alone, will have to take on a second parish.

Father Gilbert warns priests against assuming too many roles. He recommends that a pastor in the 1980s not budget any time for administration and finance or for participation in parish and

civic meetings. His key roles should be those of liturgist and pastoral theologian, with time for adequate preparation for these works and for personal spiritual growth, he states.

Lay people are also affected, necessarily, by the redefining, initiated by Vatican Council II, of the ordained priesthood itself.

This second pole includes not only the controversies provoked by demands for married priests and ordination of women, but also the practical problems resulting from the restoration of the permanent married diaconate and by the new roles being undertaken, especially in pastoral ministry, by sisters, who, while canonically lay people, are also "professionals" bound to the Church by their vows.

The number of married deacons in the American Catholic Church jumped by almost a third last year — from 3,087 to 4,028. In some parishes, deacons as well as lay ministers, have been plagued by lack of acceptance by pastors and also by the faithful. The greatest problem, however, for these married ministers is often financial — how to obtain and justify adequate salaries in a church long accustomed to the services of the celibate priests and sisters at minimal cost.

Also a problem is defining the roles played by the variety of people in pastoral ministry, a problem which hits a raw nerve in the Vatican as demonstrated when officials at the recent Synod of Dutch bishops voiced criticism of the "pastoral associates" who are full-time staff in many of Holland's parishes which no longer have a priest. The synod's final document warns

the Dutch Church to "avoid the creation of a parallel clergy presented as an alternative to the priesthood."

Dolores Leckey, secretary to the U.S. Bishops Committee on the Laity and co-organizer of the Washington conference, thinks the difference between the American and Dutch lay workers is more one of attitude than of function.

"The lay people here see themselves as working alongside the clergy. They don't want the distinction between the ordained and the non-ordained erased," she explained.

Given the opposition of Pope John Paul II to ordination of women, opposition tacitly reinforced by the papal visit to Istanbul which revealed his strong desire for reunion with the Orthodox churches which adamantly oppose such ordinations, some American Catholics have proposed that women be ordained to the diaconate, as they were in the early centuries.

However, Mrs. Leckey says that few of the lay people seeking careers in ministry want to be ordained. "They see their vocation as different, more flexible," she said. "It could take several different forms in one person's lifetime and it will exist alongside a stable permanent, though somewhat smaller, group of ordained ministers."

According to Mrs. Leckey, there are now several thousand lay people — most of them young but some seeking new careers in mid-life — studying in seminaries, divinity schools and diocesan programs for full-time pastoral work.



Fr. Louis J. Hohman

The Open Window

Kindness Is Fundamental

Dear Father Hohman,

Some thoughts on trying to satisfy everyone, especially women, by public inclusion in the Mass prayers:

If you change the present wording from "men" to "men and women," children will feel excluded. That would make it "men, women and children."

BUT teenagers are not men and women, and they don't like to be called "children," therefore we would have to say "men, women, teenagers and little children."

HOWEVER that is very cumbersome. "Male and female" would do, but some female-women would be sure to demand "female and male."

SO the Church is wise! Why not stick to "men," which means all human beings, of all ages and without preference of sex.

Women were well named. They have been women ever since Eve handed Adam that apple!

(Signed) Ann Nonymous

Dear Ann Nonymous,

I would guess that you are not an Ann at all because of what you say in your letter.

It is precisely the kind of thinking shown in your letter that I deplore beyond telling, because it is totally insensitive to a great number of people's feelings. Not everyone accepts this as simply and as offhandedly as you do. For them it is a

painful thing and one that touches something very essential in themselves. For you to ridicule it and to make it sound as if it is of no consequence at all and to be so utterly snide in your remarks is to bear no consideration for these people. For one thing, the wisdom of the Church has nothing to do with sticking to "men," since it is a weakness of the English language and has nothing at all to do with what is intended. The Church intends to refer to human beings, but the weakness of the language makes it impossible to do so.

I probably shouldn't even comment on your last remark since it is so blatantly and hurtfully sexist, but if I were to play the game I would remind you that Adam didn't have to take the apple.

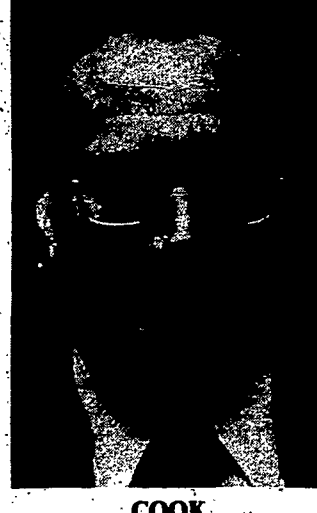
I don't want to make this the occasion for preaching a sermon, but I am painfully aware of our need not to hurt each other, and what is more, our need to be very sensitive to the feelings of each other. Otherwise, we deny out of hand the Christianity which we profess in words. It is obviously all right to disagree with someone in such a matter as the use of language. But to ridicule and to put down other human beings is to deny our Christian heritage and its fundamental call for charity. This is true also relative to our differences in Catholic practice. I do not think that it is really necessary that we agree at all on whether it is better to be conservative or liberal. I do think it is absolutely essential that we agree to be kind to one another and to respect each other's position. When we fail to do that we fail in an essential.

8 Candidates Pledge Studies For Priesthood

Eight seminarians took part in the Rite of Candidacy for ordination as deacons and priests on Thursday, Feb. 7, in ceremonies held at St. Bernard's Seminary.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark was the principal celebrant of the liturgy and presided over the candidacy ceremony.

Business in Diocese



COOK

Robert H. Cook has been appointed registrar and director of academic services at Nazareth College. As director of academic services, Cook will coordinate the work of Nazareth's Academic Advisement Center with that of the Registrar's Office, said Sister Marion Hoxter, dean of the college.

Cook has been registrar and assistant to the director at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester since 1973.

Olga A. Wirlo has been named associate registrar. Mrs. Wirlo has been serving as assistant registrar and acting registrar at Nazareth

Those pledging to pursue theological studies leading to ordained ministry were: David J. Faraone, St. Theodore's Parish, Rochester; Richard T. Farrell, St. Augustine's Parish, Rochester; Gary H. Hayes, St. Mary Magdalen's Parish, Millville, N.J.; Scott Kubinski, St. Casimir's Parish, Elmira; Gary Metz, Newman Oratory, Brockport; Raymond H. Fleming, St. Matthew's Parish, Kalispell, Mont.; John Appiah-Poku and Gabriel Forkuoh-Mensah, Kumasi, Ghana, West Africa.

The seminary also revealed last week that three seminarians from the Diocese of Syracuse will be ordained deacons by Bishop Frank J. Harrison of Syracuse on Saturday, March 1, at 10 a.m. in the school's chapel.

Those to be ordained are Richard B. Dunn of Rome, Michael P. Minnehan of Binghamton, and Steven P. Wirkes of Mattydale.

Cenacle Sets 'Holy Week' Weekend

The Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal will host a weekend retreat for women and men entitled "Entering Holy Week and Celebration of the Paschal Mystery," March 28-30, under the leadership of Father Benedict Ehmann.

The weekend is open to adult Christians and will include lectures, liturgies and leisure time.

Registration will begin at 7:30 p.m. on Friday at the Center at 693 East Ave. Further information is available by calling the Cenacle Ministry Office (716) 271-8755.

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SAINT MONICA'S SCHOOL ... A STORY OF LOVE

SAINT MONICA'S SCHOOL TEN YEARS AGO. We were just about out of money. Many believed that Saint Monica's would have to close its doors forever. All we had left was hope.

SAINT MONICA'S SCHOOL FIVE YEARS AGO. More dark days. Seven more Catholic schools in Rochester's central city closed. Hundreds and hundreds of children would never see the inside of a Catholic school again. Would Saint Monica's be the next to close?

SAINT MONICA'S SCHOOL 1975-1979. We were desperately short of funds. What happened? Parents and friends contributed over 10,000 hours of fund raising efforts. Alumni rallied to the support of their alma mater. We needed massive repairs on the school's roof, but we had no way to pay for them. So, friends and supporters made \$12,000 worth of repairs — at no charge. We still couldn't balance our budget. So, parents (even the poorest of the poor) agreed to make even more financial sacrifices for their school. And, people throughout Upstate New York, people we've never met, have helped us through their financial support and their prayers. All of our hopes were met by a beautiful outpouring of love.

SAINT MONICA'S SCHOOL FEBRUARY 26, 1979. Parish and school leaders decided that Saint Monica's School would remain open. Not just for a year or two, but indefinitely. Truly, the outpouring of love we had seen was the work of the Holy Spirit. It could not be ignored.

TODAY. We are trying to serve more poor, but deserving, students. Students whose families find themselves in real poverty through no fault of their own. Will you join us in our efforts?

Your contribution to our CATHOLIC EDUCATION FUND, large or small, will help make it possible for Saint Monica's to bring Catholic education — and God's love! — to more deserving children next year.

Sr. Mary Ellen Cragon
 Saint Monica's School, 841 Geneva St., Rochester, N.Y. 14611
 Dear Sister:
 I'd like to help. Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____ to Saint Monica's CATHOLIC EDUCATION FUND.
 (Your Name) _____
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Clip and mail to the address above. All gifts are tax deductible.

COURIER-JOURNAL

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