

# Bishops Issue Report Praising Role of Laity

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members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us."

This unity in the ministry should be especially evident in the relationships between laity and clergy as lay men and women respond to the call of the Spirit in their lives. The clergy help to call forth, identify, coordinate, and affirm the diverse gifts bestowed by the Spirit. We applaud this solidarity between laity and clergy as their most effective ministry and witness to the world.

"The laity, by their vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs, and by ordering them according to the plan of God."

Christian service in the world is represented in a pre-eminent way by the laity. It is sometimes called the "ministry of the laity" and balances the concept of ministry found in the ecclesial ministerial services. Because of lay persons, Christian service or ministry broadly understood includes civic and public activity, response to the imperatives of peace and justice, resolutions of social, political and economic conflicts, especially as they influence the poor, oppressed and minorities.

The whole church faces unprecedented situations in the contemporary world and lay people are at the cutting edge of these new challenges. It is they who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development and family planning.

Really new situations, especially in the realm of social justice, call for creative responses. We know that the Spirit moves in all the people of God, prompting the members according to their particular gifts and offices, to discern anew the signs of the times and interpret them boldly in light of the Gospel. Lay women and men are in a unique position to offer this service.

Just as by divine institution bishops, priests and deacons have been given through ordination authority to exercise leadership as servants of God's people, so through baptism and confirmation lay men and women have been given rights and responsibilities to participate in the mission of the Church. In those areas of life in which they are uniquely present and within which they have special competency because of their particular talents, education and experience, they are an extension of the church's redeeming presence in the world. Recognition of lay rights and responsibilities

should not create a divisiveness between clergy and laity but should express the full range of the influence of the people of God. We see this and affirm it.

"As sharers in the role of Christ the priest, the prophet and the king, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the church."

Since the Second Vatican Council new opportunities have developed for lay men and women to serve in the church. We acknowledge gratefully the continuing and increasing contributions of volunteers and part-time workers who serve on parish and diocesan councils, boards of education, and financial, liturgical and ecumenical committees, as well as those who exercise roles such as special minister of the eucharist, catechist and pastoral assistant. We are grateful, too, for the large numbers of lay people who have volunteered and are serving in the missions.

Growing numbers of lay women and men are also preparing themselves professionally to work in the church. In this regard religious sisters and brothers have shown the way with their initiative and creativity.

Ecclesial ministers, i.e., lay persons who have prepared for professional ministry in the church, represent a new development. We welcome this as a gift to the church. There are also persons who serve the church by the witness of their lives and their self-sacrificing service and empowerment of the poor in works such as administration, housing, job development and education. All these lay ministers are undertaking roles which are not yet clearly spelled out and which are already demanding sacrifices and risks of them and their families. As lay persons increasingly engage in ecclesial ministry, we recognize and accept the responsibility of working out practical difficulties such as the availability of positions, the number of qualified applicants, procedures for hiring, just wages and benefits.

Special mention must be made of women, who in the past have not always been allowed to take their proper role in the church's ministry. We see the need for an increased role for women in the ministries of the church to the extent possible. We recognize the tensions and misunderstandings which arise on this question, but we wish to face these as part of a sincere attempt to become true communities of faith.

The combination of all these responses to the challenges of our time proclaims the interrelated oneness of ministry as a gift of the Spirit and we rejoice in this.

"For from the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born. By the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism, these are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church."

Most lay persons have a primary identification with family. This influences their expectations of and contributions to the church as the people of God. The family, as a way of life, is often taken as a model for the church. In most families life is interdependent. Ideally strengths and weaknesses are blended so that a growthful atmosphere is maintained.

And yet we must frankly admit that failure occurs, that in many families the ideal is not reached. For example, divorce and neglect are realities. The parish has a vital contribution to make to all families struggling to be faith communities; for the parish can serve as a model and resource for families.

Because lay women and men experience intimacy, support, acceptance and availability in family life, they seek the same in their Christian communities. This is leading to a review of parish size, organization, priorities and identity. It has already led to intentional communities, basic Christian communities and some revitalized parish communities.

It is likely that this family characteristic of the laity will continue to influence and shape the community life of Christians. If it does, this should enable the clergy to give the kind of overall leadership which their office requires. Such trends are welcome in the church.

The church is to be a sign of God's kingdom in the world. The authenticity of that sign depends on all the people, laity, religious, deacons, priests, and bishops. Unless we truly live as the people of God, we will not be much of a sign to ourselves or the world.

We are convinced that the laity are making an indispensable contribution to the experience of the people of God and that the full import of their contribution is still in a beginning form in the post-Vatican II church. We have spoken in order to listen. It is not our intention rigidly to define or control, to sketch misleading dreams or bestow false praise. We bishops wish simply to take our place and exercise our role among the people of God. We now await the next word.

## Now He's Able to Joke About His Alcoholism

By Martin Thomas, Editor Southern Tier

Corning — A "symptom of sobriety" is the return of a sense of humor, Father Joseph C. Martin told the 300 people who attended his talk in St. Mary's Church Dec. 18.

"Ours is the only terminal illness we joke about," Father Martin told his listeners. He then told several jokes which his audience enjoyed:

Question: "Why did you come home half drunk?"

Answer: "I ran out of money."

The sober alcoholic learns to laugh, he said, just as he learns to love again.

He told of a friend's answer when a waitress asks if he would like a drink. He says: "I'd like 49 drinks but I have to be in Albuquerque in July."

And another who tells waitresses he is allergic to alcohol; it makes him "break out in spots" — in Rochester, in Buffalo.

Sponsored by the Corning Council on Alcoholism, the talk benefited Father Martin's effort to build a treatment center for alcoholics which he has named Ashley. A priest from Baltimore, Father Martin has made appearances nationwide. He speaks not only as a priest and counselor, but also as a recovered alcoholic. He addressed his talk to fellow alcoholics, and

the audience reaction seemed to indicate he had hit the mark.

"Drinking alcoholics lie," Father Martin noted, and "will do anything to protect their supply." He described one instance when he lied about his drinking to a person who knew he was lying. And, he said, he knew the person knew. But, to the alcoholic, the "truth is a threat."

"An alcoholic is a person who is damaged all over," he said, "in body, mind and soul."

While the "disease is not immoral, the subsequent behavior always is," he said. Even for those alcoholics who commit no sin of commission, their drinking makes it impossible for them to fulfill their responsibilities.

That subsequent behavior "makes us hate ourselves," he said, and "we get isolated from God." The isolation from God and from family members leads to total frustration, he said.

On another topic, he called for a truce between Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and the medical profession, noting that at first doctors were upset that AA succeeded where they failed. Now, he said, some AA members practice "reverse snobbery," looking "down on doctors from their lofty position in the gutter."

To AA members, he said, "please don't play doctor." He



FATHER MARTIN

said that AA should get the person sober, and let the medical professions take over from there.

Drinking alcoholics avoid doctors, he said; "we're scared to death of doctors — they're going to tell us to stop drinking." As a result, most alcoholics are in a severely debilitated condition. As he tells people, he said, "if I'm in an accident, don't get me to a (AA) meeting," but to a hospital.

He also warned AA members not to abuse their meetings, using them as a reason to avoid family or other responsibilities.

Father Martin concluded by stating that he had a feeling of support from the audience, which he thought they also would be aware of if they could stand beside him. At such times, he said, the "tongue falls mute," and he must rely on the words of others to carry his meaning. His quote, from a current song, that "I love you more dearly, more dearly than the spoken word can tell," brought a quick standing ovation.

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