

## Paul and Mike and Gail

By Dolores Leckey  
NC News Service

Consider the story of two laymen who live in different parishes. Paul works for a data processing firm. Married and the father of three children, he teaches seventh grade religion; he ushers at Sunday Mass; he often conducts Saturday morning devotional services.

Paul's life centers around the church.

Mike is a public school administrator. His work occasionally requires him to attend community meetings one or two evenings weekly. As a result, Mike guards his time and energy for his family and a pet civic responsibility.

His parish participation includes Mass each week with his family. Occasionally they linger for the social hour.

Paul defines his lay role in the church in terms of his church ministry.

Mike says he is coming to see his professional commitment, his family life and his volunteer work in local political campaigns as his ministry. Parish liturgies and adult education offerings are helping Mike to see that his life "on the outside" holds something the church values.

Twenty years ago the Second Vatican Council called the church to a new kind of pilgrimage. I remember the excitement of news stories at that time explaining what the council had to say about the laity's role in the world: that "the laity by their vocation seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs."

Increasingly since that time, lay women and men have moved into new roles within the church, partly because of institutional need — fewer clergy and Religious.

An equally important reason is the laity's new self-concept. Like Paul, they realize that their competencies and gifts can be put to good use within the church.

A real challenge, though, is to develop ways of supporting the laity's role as the church in the world — ways of supporting Mike and others like him.

This is what the U.S. bishops had in mind when they wrote in a 1980 statement on the laity: "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, (the laity) are an extension of the church's redeeming presence in the world."

Lay ministry in the parish and the lay witness in the world aren't exclusive of each other, however.

Consider one more story — that of Gail. A single parent of two

teen-agers, Gail is employed full time as a librarian and serves as a parish lector.

A few years ago her parish held a seminar series on "Gifts and Ministry." Over several weeks, lay people identified talents, prayed together and studied the evolving role of the laity in today's church.

In a very real way, Gail reports, the seminar helped her recognize that she has a genuine mission, first in the family where she maintains a consciously Christian home

- through prayer;
- through the practice of hospitality;
- and through the willingness to work through conflict toward forgiveness and reconciliation.

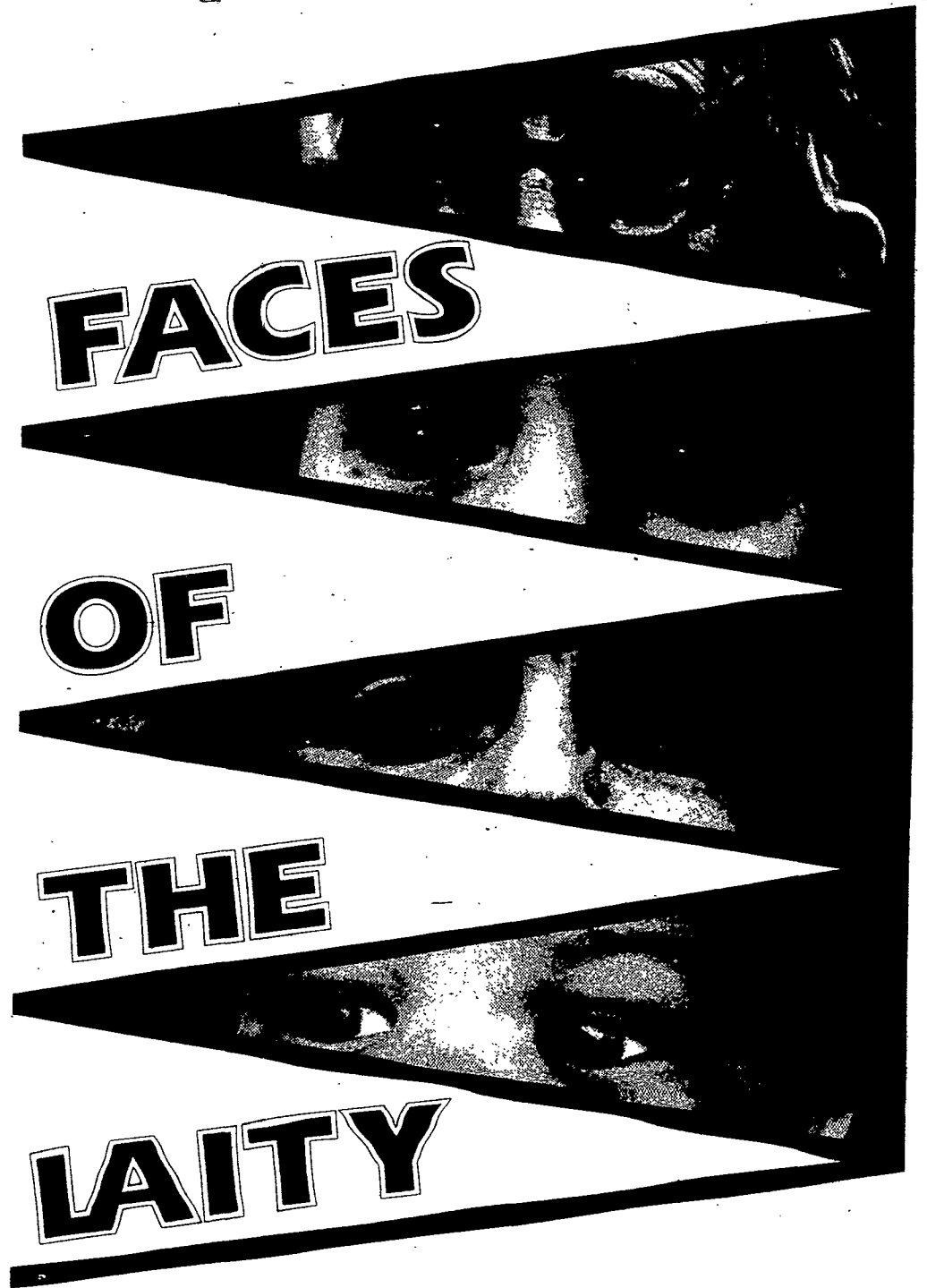
She now sees too that her Christian role reaches into her career and her relationships with clients and co-workers.

And she is gifted organizationally. So she chose to share that gift by supporting her children's drama club.

Finally, she decided she would serve her parish as a reader at Mass — bringing to this her feeling for Scripture and her belief in the power of God's Word.

Gail's parish helped her to recognize the strength of her ministry in the world and to discover a new ministry within the parish as well.

(Mrs. Leckey is director of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Laity.)



## Matthew's guide to community living

By Father John Castlot  
NC News Service

A girl who had 12 years of Catholic education left the church shortly after her high school graduation. She had not given up on religion, she said. In fact, she had joined a little storefront Bible church.

When asked why, she answered quite simply: "There I am somebody, a person."

People, perhaps especially the young, have a deep yearning for community — for interpersonal sharing. They want others with whom they can share their thoughts, pray and gain moral support for Christian living.

Today more and more Catholics are becoming aware of how much the vitality of the church counts on them. And many lay people are participating in small groups where they can experience what it

means to be a member of the body of Christ.

In fact, a number of renewal programs being used in parishes are encouraging the formation of small groups in which people share insights into the meaning and potential of their Christianity, and in which they pray together.

"Community Booklet," chapters 16-18 of his Gospel, containing instructions for Christian living.

They were addressed to all Christians. And for the first few centuries this is how Christians lived — as small groups in which they shared everything, but especially themselves.

**"A yearning for community is rooted deep in human nature. And it is thoroughly Christian."**

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Jesus acknowledged it when he said: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Matthew 18:20).

These words appear in what I like to think of as Matthew's

As a consequence, their lives were marked by joy, a reflection of their love and life together. For them the idea of a Christian as someone who could "go it alone" would have seemed a contradiction in terms.

The unity they enjoyed was not that of the local drama society or

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