

Baptism is the sacrament of mission

By Patricia Schoelles, SSJ
Courier columnist

A look at our parish bulletins these days can provide a lesson in theology, and especially the theology of ministry. Our bulletins tell us that there are many people working to minister in our parishes. These people include priests, but there are many other "sorts" of Catholics listed there, too. For the first time in many of our lives, members of the laity serve in ministry roles in parishes and institutions.

Sometimes we assume that the only reason for lay people assuming these new roles in ministry is the "priest shortage." But the number of those who serve us in the priesthood is surely not the only reason — indeed, it isn't even the most IMPORTANT reason — for the rise of lay ministry.

In fact, it is the theology of the church advanced at the Second Vatican Council that provides the basic underpinnings for the shifts we are witnessing in the ministry of the church. Prior to the Council, ministry was the province of the hierarchy. In contrast to the ministers of the hierarchy, members of the laity were called to "Catholic Action." By this was meant that lay people shared in the ministry of the hierarchy through their own apostolates. Lay people, it seemed, ministered in a secondary way.

But in the Council, that theology



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of ministry was turned completely inside out. The Council maintained that the basic sharing in Jesus' mission to sanctify, to challenge and transform, and to serve, is rooted in baptism, and not in ordination or religious vows. All who are baptized and fully initiated into the Catholic faith through confirmation and eucharist, are called to ministry.

This reversal is so complete that the Council documents even establish that the hierarchy of the church exists for the sake of facilitating the ministries of all the rest of us. This is an amazing change in what many of us had known for most of our Catholic lives. But what I find even more amazing is the

fact that so few Catholics are even aware of this change.

Many of us simply assume that if we had more priests, we would not "need" all these "other people" doing all these ministries. But the theology of Vatican II contradicts that view altogether. The theology of Vatican II insists that the sacrament of mission in our church is baptism, not ordination. We are the church, the people of God. It is up to all of us — including those who enter the priesthood and religious orders — to carry on what Jesus began and what the Spirit authorizes in today's world.

Beyond the question of who is doing the ministry today is another question. That is the question of what ministry is directed to do. I, for one, used to assume that those in ministry were supposed to serve the rest of us in the community. I thought this was a sort of "vertical" ministry with a few of the members — usually the celibate ones who wore black and took their paycheck from the church — designated to serve the needs of the others in the community.

But the Council changed that, too. The Council projected a kind of "horizontal" ministry structure with all of us designated to serve the world as a community. It was almost as if the Council defined the church as "clusters of people with a world to serve." Ultimately it is the world, and not the

church of itself that is the object of God's transforming power and so the ministry of the church. We are all called to work for the transformation of the world so that God's Kingdom can come.

Too often in Catholicism we treat our faith as if it were a kind of "cosmic insurance" shielding us from some undesirable fate we might face after death. Or we appreciate it primarily as a kind of "liturgical membership" drawing us to be somewhat passive members of a church community that prays together on Sundays.

Our faith and our baptism into the church is actually a missioning by which we are called to take up the ministry of Jesus Christ and to continue it under the direction of the Holy Spirit in all the circumstances we meet in our own lives.

As we move through the liturgical cycle of Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate great commemorations of our common call to ministry. We are reminded through these days that while Jesus is no longer present in bodily form, His ministry goes on because WE continue it through the Spirit. At the Ascension, the angel is depicted as telling the disciples to stop staring up toward heaven as if someone ELSE will come and get things going. The call of Christian baptism is to get going ourselves and to get ourselves moving to let God's Kingdom come.

Orphanage teaches children value of work

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Father Philip Cleary is a single parent to some 1800 kids. Not only that, he successfully makes them all work around their home!

Father Cleary, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, has been the director of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, a not-for-profit organization with orphanages in Mexico, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, for the past eleven years.

"I try to be a priest to the children," he said. "But I'm also a father (small f) to them."

So how does one single-parent raise 1800 children?

"There are three things we expect of them," the priest explained, "and two things that we provide. We expect from them help with the work, responsibility, and sharing. In return, we guarantee them security and unconditional love and respect."

One way that Nuestros Pequeños



FAITH AND WORK

Hermanos demonstrates unconditional love and respect for its children is by never throwing anyone out, no matter what they have done. Security comes, in part, from the orphanage's policy of no adoptions.

"The reason we do not allow adoption of our children," Father Cleary

explained, "is that we only take entire families of children. Many of the children already have had their families broken up, and we put them back together. By not allowing adoption, we insure that siblings will never be separated again. Besides, if we really are a family, then all must be treated equally. That means that some members of our family cannot be adopted while others are left behind."

Perhaps the most interesting attitude at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos is toward work.

"Everybody has a job," Father Cleary noted. "First of all, it is a necessary evil. We couldn't run the place without each of the children helping with the chores. But more importantly, work allows them the opportunity to give back in time and service for what they have received."

In addition to their daily chores, all orphans are expected to give a "year of service" back to the orphanage after ninth grade. During that year, they work full-time in the kitchen, as field

hands, as dorm assistants and as maintenance workers. Children are asked also to give a second year of service after graduating from high school.

Even though they are allowed to leave the orphanage immediately after graduation, more than 90 percent of the orphans give the year of service before they go out on their own. More than half then volunteer for a third year of service in the hopes of getting accepted into college, for which Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos pays all tuition and living expenses.

There is even a category of adults called "ex-pequeños," orphans who return to work full-time for low pay at the orphanage as child care workers, teachers and even as Father Cleary's assistant director.

"Having to work teaches our children that everyone depends on everyone else," Father Cleary said. "If the toilets aren't clean, people get sick. If nobody picks the corn, none of us eat. The children realize that they are doing their work so that all can survive."

'Fight all error, but do it with good humor, patience, kindness and love. Harshness will damage your own soul and spoil the best cause.'

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