

COLUMNISTS

Church has right, duty to oversee visitation

Ministry (literally, a "service") is central to the life and mission of the church, as it was to Jesus himself. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). But it is exercised outside as well as inside the church.

First, there is the service rendered by every human being to meet the need of another. A parent who comforts a sick child at night provides a ministry to that child. It is the sort of ministry that is required of every human being in a position to help another, simply because they share a common humanity.

Second, there is the service performed by those who are specially qualified by reason of education and training, and whose competence is verified by society through certification or licensing. This would be the case with a nurse who comes to the assistance of a patient.

Third, there is the service rendered by every Christian to meet another's need. The Christian parent who comes to the bedside of a sick child is providing a Christian ministry. It is rooted not simply in the parent/child relationship or in their common humanity, but in baptism. By baptism every Christian is called to follow the example of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served.



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

Fourth, there is the service performed by those Christians who are specially qualified by reason of education, training and spiritual formation, and whose mandate to provide the service is conferred by the church, whether a parish or a diocese. The nurse working in a Catholic hospital participates in that hospital's corporate Christian ministry to the sick. It is a ministry rooted not only in the baptismal call to service, but in some form of designation by the church.

In a few special cases (namely, the ministries of bishops, priests and deacons), the designation takes the form of ordination.

Because of the otherwise healthy egalitarian impulses encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, some members of the church immediately after the council

went so far as to deny any distinction at all between the baptismally-rooted ministries that every Christian can exercise, and designated ministries approved, conferred and supervised by the church.

On the surface at least, such an outlook seems to make perfectly good theological sense. Because we are one in Christ, we must also be equal in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Indeed, the council itself declared that everything it had taught about the church as the People of God was "addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 30).

However, some ministries are exercised in the church's name. The church has not only the right but also the duty to insure that these ministries are rendered competently and in a manner that faithfully reflects Christ in the church, his sign and instrument in the world.

To illustrate: A national trend is developing to tighten the rules governing visiting in health-care facilities. These institutions have come to recognize their legal and moral obligation to protect the privacy of patients, which includes pro-

tection from intrusive and disturbing visits from individuals, including even clergy, whom the patient has no wish to see.

In Connecticut, for example, many hospitals now require a patient's written authorization for visits by clergy and parish visitation teams. Those authorized must wear special badges and maintain complete confidentiality not only about the patient's condition but even about their admission to the hospital (see Gerald Renner's "Hospitals Tighten Rules on Pastoral Visits," in *The Hartford Courant*, 8/14/99, pp. F1 and 4).

Needless to say, there are to be no spontaneous "walk-ins" by well-meaning but inept and imprudent people.

It isn't that Christians must now avoid rendering personal ministries to others. But if their ministerial activity also places the church's reputation on the line, they should be authorized or "designated" by their parish or diocese to exercise these ministries. Moreover, the person to whom the ministry is directed should freely choose to receive it.

This is the new reality to which all ministers must adapt. It is also good theology.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

God's love cannot be earned

Sunday of Year (Sept. 19): (R3) Matthew 20:1-16. (R1) Isaiah 55:6-9. (R2) Philippians 1:20-24, 27.

A black man had his home painted. Within days someone spray-painted graffiti all over it. He was angry and rightly so. At first he thought it was racially motivated. He looked for the culprit and found out it was an 11-year-old boy. It was nothing more than a childish prank. He could have called the police or the parents or sued for damages.

He could have made a big issue out of it. Instead, he decided to get to know the boy better. The black man and the white boy soon became friends. The man decided to teach the boy about computers. When a news reporter went to the man's house, the reporter asked the boy about the graffiti. The boy said he was sorry and didn't know why he did it. "Now Mr. Stephens and I are friends," he told the reporter. "He has taught me computers."

Surprise ending, isn't it? You might have expected the boy scrubbing the graffiti off the house or his parents grounding him, but not working in the man's den on his computer.

O. Henry was noted for his surprise endings. And so was Jesus. His parable of the laborers in the vineyard has a sur-



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

prise ending. Grapes ripened in Palestine in late September. The grapes had to be harvested before the October rains. Every available person in the community would be employed to help.

One morning the owner of a vineyard went to the marketplace for workers. He promised to pay them well. After a couple of hours the landowner realized he needed more workers. So he returned to the marketplace and offered employment to those standing idle. "I will pay you whatever is right," he told them. So they went to work. Later he realized he needed still more workers, so at noon and at 3 o'clock he hired more. Yet he felt he wasn't going to make it. So at 5 o'clock, with only one hour left to work, he went once again to the marketplace.

The trouble started at quitting time. The workers who had worked for only one hour were paid one silver coin. The workers who had worked all day began to think they would receive more — after all, they had worked all day. When they received one silver coin too, they felt cheated. How dare the owner pay those who had worked only an hour the same amount as those who had worked all day.

Of course, the parable isn't about harvesting grapes at all. It's about grace. Loudly and clearly it says that grace cannot be earned. "Friend," the landowner replied to one of the disgruntled workers, "I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" Then he asked an interesting question, "Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?"

God's grace is a gift. We cannot earn his love and acceptance. It is poured out freely to all. Whether we have been in God's family a long or short time, the benefits of faith are the same.

A misconception we may have is that a person's worth can be measured by the size of his or her accomplishments. There are people who, because of limitations of many kinds cannot ever hope

to accomplish nearly as much as you or me. But that doesn't diminish their essential worth. Both they and we are already worth more than we can ever imagine. We are all children of God.

We don't have to prove our worth to our neighbors, to our family, to anybody in this world. The Son of God has given his life for us. We are of infinite worth just as we are.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, September 20

Ezra 1:1-6; Luke 8:16-18

Tuesday, September 21

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13;

Matthew 9:9-13

Wednesday, September 22

Ezra 9:5-9; Luke 9:1-6

Thursday, September 23

Haggai 1:1-8; Luke 9:7-9

Friday, September 24

Haggai 1:15-2:9; Luke 9:18-22

Saturday, September 25

Zechariah 2:5-9, 14-15;

Luke 9:43-45

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND OUR

Grand Opening!

WellStream

The Jean and Madeleine August Center for Women's Health

Saturday, September 18th
1:00 - 3:00 pm
Park Ridge Hospital
1555 Long Pond Road in Greece

WellStream is a comprehensive center for women's health offering contemporary obstetrical care and a full array of medical services along with complementary medicine for women of all ages.

- Tours of the new St. Mary's Family Birth Place and Women's Health Center at WellStream
- Women's Health Information Fair
- Give-aways and Refreshments
- Children's Activities and Entertainment



Unity