

1. The Parish: Mission or Maintenance?

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7. Introduction

“Throw open the doors to Christ!” Pope John Paul II inaugurated his pontificate with this invitation to the world; now he inaugurates a new Christian millennium with the same invitation. And, throughout the Church, we are witnessing a remarkable convergence of signs of renewal of the Church in her mission to the world. The apostolic role of the laity has been resoundingly affirmed and promoted at the highest levels of the Church for the first time in our history. The Holy Father has called the whole Church to re-dedicate all her energies to the new evangelization. Lay Catholics who assume personal responsibility for the Church’s evangelical mission are emerging by the millions all over the globe. A dramatic shift in the historic relationship between clergy and laity is well underway, which has important implications for all Catholic leaders who work with lay people.

It is our conviction that, through these historic developments, the Holy Spirit is both illumining and empowering the office of the ordained, and releasing the full vigor of the lay apostolate, for the sake of Christ’s redeeming purposes in the world. But something even more unexpected is happening. As the apostolic gifts and call of the laity have become evident, the apostolic potential of the parish – the one truly universal Catholic institution and the place where ninety-eight percent of Catholics have their only contact with the Church– has also been revealed in a whole new light. No longer can the parish be simply a place where the laity receive the spiritual goods of the Church. If all lay

Catholics are apostles to the world as the Church teaches, then the institutions that nourish them must become places of apostolic formation, support, and consultation. The worldwide network of parishes that has sustained the faith of lay Catholics for centuries can and must become primary centers of lay formation and outreach to the world. We would like to explore with you the theological and practical implications of this new challenge.

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8. 1. Evangelism: The Essential Mission of the Church

“Our whole way of being church must stem from knowing that the purpose of our faith is to be lifelong disciples.”

[Sherry Anne Weddell]

What is the most important service that the Church can offer the world? The Holy Father has asserted that missionary evangelism “is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2).

What is evangelism? The Holy Father has defined evangelism beautifully. It is “to serve men and women by revealing to them the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 2). In the words of Pope Paul VI:

We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church... *Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize*, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14; emphasis added).

...the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18).

People sometimes conceive evangelism only in terms of assisting “inactive” Catholics to become “active” again, of getting them to come back to Mass, of taking up again their identity as Catholics. If we focus only on turning inactive Catholics once again into active ones, we may inadvertently skip over something essential: *discipleship* and *mission*. Do these “returning” Catholics return to our parishes and to the Mass in order to follow Jesus? Are they actively seeking to receive the love of Christ through the sacraments and to bring the love of Christ to others? We must ask these questions because the true goal of evangelization is forming disciples and apostles, not just having more people in the pews on Sunday.

When I use the word “disciple,” Catholics sometimes tell me that I am showing my Protestant roots, that “disciple” is a Protestant term, not a Catholic one. But when the U.S. Bishops issued their recent pastoral letter on evangelization, they entitled it *Go and Make Disciples*, taking the term from Jesus’ commission to his apostles at the end of the

gospel of Matthew. Fr. Robert River, the Director of Diocesan and Parish Services for the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, describes the issue:

...discipleship is what faith is for...it makes people into disciples of Jesus... What is the purpose of our Catholic schools? To create active disciples of Jesus. Our religious education programs? Our sacramental catechesis? To create active disciples of Jesus. Moreover, discipleship involves a personal decision and a commitment—a free response to Jesus’ call... Our whole way of being church must stem from knowing that the purpose of our faith is to be lifelong disciples. This is what makes us an evangelizing church (*Evangelization Update*, vol. 2, no. 1).

If we are to evangelize effectively, we must be clear about what evangelization entails. When we speak of evangelization, we speak of reaching out to those who have either ceased to practice their Christianity or who have had no meaningful contact with Christianity, reaching out and calling them to become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ *and* participants in the apostolic mission of the Church to the world. I would like to offer the following definition for evangelism: **Evangelism is calling people to be disciples of Jesus Christ, both as individuals and as communities, in their personal and collective lives.** Anything less than a proclamation and evangelization centered around life-long discipleship and mission is less than Catholic.

With this definition in mind, we can then ask: How do we do this? How can we call, not only every person, but also whole communities and cultures to discipleship? The Holy Father has made a very strong case that forming and enabling lay Catholics to be the primary evangelists to the world is the most effective and most truly Catholic way to undertake our primary mission. Let us examine his case in more detail.

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9. 2. Lay Catholics: Witnesses to the World

“People today put more trust in witnesses than preachers, in experience than in teaching...”

A good place to begin is the idea that *evangelism is intrinsic to the vocation of lay Christians*, that “All the laity are missionaries by baptism (*Redemptoris Missio*, 71).”

...they are bound by the general obligation and they have the right; whether as individuals or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6, 13).

I was both delighted and staggered recently when I read the following item in a list of the rights and freedoms of all the Christian faithful compiled by canonist Bertram Griffin. Listed in the Code of Canon Law, even before our right to receive the Word of God and the sacraments, canon 211 guarantees to every baptized person: “the right to evangelize the nations (*Code, Community, Ministry; Selected Studies for the Parish Minister*, by Bertram F. Griffin, JCD, ed. by Edward G. Pfnausch, Canon Law Society of America, 1992, pp. 62-63, canon 211).”

Of course, the priestly vocation also rests upon evangelism:

Since no one can be saved who does not first believe (cf. Mk 16:16), priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4).

But as Pope Paul VI noted, our contemporary society will most likely disregard teaching from the hierarchy, unless a compelling personal witness accompanies it.

People today put more trust in witnesses than preachers, in experience than in teaching, in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42).

Doctrinal preaching, one of the primary responsibilities of priests, is unlikely to move the unchurched unless it is *embodied and witnessed* in the lives of the Catholic lay men and women whom they encounter in their daily lives. *A personal witness to Christ is, par excellence, the role of the laity in our Church.*

Lay Catholics are already in daily contact with the unchurched. We have all sorts of natural ties to people who have no living contact with the Church. We have ready entry to many relationships and situations where no priest would be welcome.

Finally, there are a lot more of us! I routinely ask lay participants in our workshops what percentage of the total Catholic population constitutes the ordained priesthood. It is always interesting to hear their answers: Estimates usually range from one to five percent, with an occasional optimist guessing ten. Yet at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, we find over 1,005,000,000 Catholics on our planet. If priests comprised even one percent, there would be over ten million of them! In fact, the 408,628 bishops and priests in our midst (*Vatican Statistical Yearbook*, 1997) actually comprise a tiny *4/100ths of one percent* of the entire Catholic community, meaning that *99.96 percent of all Catholics are non-ordained*. Yet so large does the ministerial priesthood loom in the imagination of most lay Catholics that even their most conservative estimates are twenty times larger than the reality. Could not this cognitive distortion also imply that most lay Catholics underestimate themselves, that the spiritual weight and significance of their own overwhelming presence in the Church goes unrecognized?

Even if we add in all religious, deacons, and seminarians in the world (990,000), the total number of non-lay Catholics comes to 1.4 million, a mere 0.14 percent. Catholic writers and theologians before the Vatican Council often spoke as if this 1.4 percent, this tiny elite, *was* the Church, and looked upon the hundreds of millions of lay Catholics as mere recipients of this tiny “Church’s” saving ministry.

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10. 3. Clergy and Laity: Apostles Together

“Do we believe, with the Church, that the 990 million lay Catholics in the world are more than simply recipients of the Church’s ministry?”

If we as a Church are to fulfill our mission, it is absolutely essential that we as a people know our true identity. Are we a Church made up of 1.4 million recognized apostles and 990 million recipients of their ministry? Or are we rather a community of over a billion commissioned apostles who have been called and gifted by Jesus Christ to participate *together* in his redemption of our world?

Most of us are familiar with the answer the Church has given to this question:

For this the Church was founded...that she might bring all men [and women] to share in Christ’s saving redemption. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the

attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, and the Church carries it on in various ways through all her members (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2)

No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples (*Redemptoris Missio*, 3).

Indeed, by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of his kingdom and to obtain eternal life for all men—that they may know the only true God and him whom he sent, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 17:3). On all Christians, therefore, is laid the pre-eminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3).

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification... . However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening and encouraging them to a more fervent life. "For the charity of Christ impels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16) (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6).

The apostolic mandate of lay men or women, like that of bishops and priests, is received from Christ himself through the sacraments. Therefore, *lay Catholics are apostles in their own right*.

The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*,3).

As lay Catholics who have been baptized and confirmed, *our identity is fundamentally that of apostles*, "sent ones," who have been anointed by Jesus Christ for his mission. We are more than recipients of the clergy's ministry; we are apostles. We are more than volunteers in the parish; we are apostles.

Importantly, however, we are not clerics; our apostleship is not hierarchical in nature. Our leadership, our charisms, our apostleship focuses primarily upon the secular, *not* the Christian community. We are the first and primary evangelizers of the people and structures of this world.

Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of the spiritual life. (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 29)

Precisely with this character in mind, the Synod Fathers wrote:

The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense. The term secular must be understood in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free from the

influence of sin and sanctify themselves in marriage or the celibate life, in a family, in a profession, and in the various activities of society.’

The lay faithful’s position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character.

The images of salt, light and leaven taken from the Gospel, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus’ disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world and the human community, but *also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation (Christifideles Laici, 15; emphasis added).*

The great twentieth century Lutheran theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote movingly about the relationship between Christian faith and action. As Bonhoeffer observed, “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. R.H. Fuller, rev. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1960, p. 54). And so, you and I are faced with a question: What do we, as Catholics, really believe about the character and potential of 99.96 percent of our own people? Do we believe, with the Church, that the 990 million lay Catholics in the world are more than simply recipients of the Church’s ministry? Do we truly recognize them as anointed agents of her redeeming mission, not only disciples, but also *apostles* commissioned by Jesus Christ himself?

If we answer this question affirmatively, then we must ask further, “How we are to live it?” If the character of the lay vocation is truly secular and apostolic, what implications might this hold for our pastoral and catechetical practice as we enter the third Christian millennium?

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11. 4. Formation: a Right and Duty

“If formation for mission is essential to true catechesis, then the overwhelming majority of lay Catholics are not being truly catechized.”

Most of you in the audience today are investing years here in Rome preparing to answer God’s call to a priestly vocation. But I, too, am an apostle in my own right. Where am I to prepare for my mission? Where is my house of formation, my Angelicum, my North American College? The job of your university faculty, of your novice or student master consists in forming you for your vocation, but who are my formators? A bishop will ordain you and grant you faculties to serve in his diocese, but who will acknowledge my call and apostolic work as a laywoman on behalf of the Church?

An enormous gap exists between the Church’s vision of the lay apostolate and the lived experience of most lay men and women. Over and over again in our workshops, life-long Catholics across North America and Oceania have asked, “How come I never heard this before?” They have never heard, much less grasped, the significance of their identity and

their mission in the body of Christ. Most of us in this room may have an intellectual understanding of the Church's teaching in this area; we may even teach and preach it. I can assure you, however, *the vast majority of lay people are not hearing it.*

Yet, when Catholics do realize that the Church teaches they are apostles in their own right, "sent ones" who *literally* stand in the place of Christ in the world, the effect is positively electric. As one woman in a workshop phrased so beautifully, "I used to think that I was not worthy to kiss the sandals of Jesus. Now you're telling me that I'm to put them on and walk like they fit—that I stand in his place with my daughter, at work, with my friends. This is revolutionary!"

I would like to ask those of you who are seminarians to consider for a moment the following question: What difference would it make if you received no support, no formation from the Church for your vocation as a priest? What difference would it make to you, to the Church, to those you will minister to? Few of us in this room would want to imagine a Church where a local vocation director would ordain on the spot any man who approaches him, give him a chalice, a sacramentary, a congratulatory handshake, perhaps a list of suggested readings, and then tell him to get on with it!

Of course, in centuries past, men did sometimes find themselves summarily ordained without benefit of formation. St. Ambrose had not even been baptized when he was chosen by acclamation as bishop of Milan and subsequently had to study Scripture and the Fathers in his spare time. Only about one percent of priests prior to the Council of Trent received serious theological formation (cf. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Ecclesiastical Seminary," by A. Vieban, 1917). The word "seminary" was first used in the 16th century by Cardinal Pole who knew that the formation of clergy would be essential to re-establishing Catholicism in England in the wake of Henry VIII. Universal formation for the clergy was not mandated until 1563 at the Council of Trent. It took nearly one hundred years for implementation to seriously begin in some parts of Europe, and even later in other parts of the world. Wars, revolutions, and state attempts to control clergy formation have made implementation difficult from time to time, but today, we hold universally and without question the expectation that the Church will form seminarians for their mission.

Although the Church survived for sixteen centuries without a universal formation for the clergy, I wager none of us would willingly return to such a system. Today, we may presume, and rightly so, that any priest we meet has received years of intense formation. It is his right. It is his duty. And it is *the duty of the Church* to provide that formation:

Ongoing formation is a *right-duty* of the priest and imparting it is a *right-duty* of the Church... . On his part, the minister has also received, as a demand of the gift connected with Ordination, the right to have the necessary help from the Church in order to carry out his service effectively and in a holy way (*Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 72).

But is formation a right and duty *only* for those called to ordination or religious life? Are lay Catholics somehow without any need to receive "necessary help from the Church" in order to carry out our apostolate effectively and in a manner leading to holiness? When we explore the Church's teaching, we quickly realize that she uses the same language regarding lay formation as she does when speaking of priestly:

Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a *right* and *duty* of all (*Christifideles Laici*, 63).

People are approached in liberty by God who calls everyone to grow, develop and bear fruit. A person cannot put off a response nor cast off personal responsibility in the matter. The solemn words of Jesus refer to this exalted and serious responsibility: “If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6). In this dialogue *between God who offers his gifts, and the person who is called to exercise responsibility, there comes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a total and ongoing formation of the lay faithful*, as the Synod Fathers have rightly emphasized in much of their work (*Christifideles Laici*, 57; emphasis added).

Clearly the Church understands neither lay formation nor priestly formation as luxuries offered only to a privileged few. The Church uses the same words for both: **right** and **duty**.

What about *catechesis*? Where does it fit into the Church’s understanding of lay formation? Catechesis, of course, comprises a “primary education” in the faith, encompassing a process both of evangelization that develops a beginning faith and of preparation to receive the sacraments and participate in the liturgy. Some form of catechesis is presently *available* to most Catholics. Unfortunately, it usually does not include a component held to be essential by the Church.

What is this missing component? The 1997 General Directory for Catechesis makes it clear that *apostolic formation is a normative part of a complete catechesis*:

Formation for the apostolate and for mission is one of the fundamental tasks of catechesis (*General Directory*, 30).

“Catechesis” seeks to equip the disciples of Jesus to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives. It also prepares them to lend their cooperation to the different ecclesial services, according to their proper vocation (*General Directory*, 86).

Adult Catholics need more than a catechesis designed for children. Along with the ordained, we have also been consecrated for a mission. We are called not only to *receive* Christ in the sacraments, but to *bring* Christ to the world. Adults need an integrating catechesis that prepares them to live as apostles, gifted men and women of faith, who are called by God to shape the world they live in through their love and work.

If formation for mission is essential to true catechesis, then *the overwhelming majority of lay Catholics are not being truly catechized*. At present, only a tiny minority of lay Catholics receive preparation for their apostolate. Perhaps one to two percent of lay Catholics, or approximately ten to twenty million people, receive any genuinely apostolic formation. The vast majority of these fortunate lay men and women receive their formation *outside* their local parishes through lay movements, third orders, secular institutes or through certificate and degree programs sponsored by a diocese or university. The ministry of the various lay movements, of course, influences and benefits a much larger number. But if we focus on how many lay Catholics have received *significant apostolic formation*, my research, based upon the self-reporting of many of the movements, indicates that 20 million is a possible but optimistic estimate. The actual number is probably less.

A magnificent achievement in its own right, forming ten to twenty million people means that twenty-five to fifty times as many laity presently receive formation as priests. Yet as wonderful as this accomplishment may be, it is truly dwarfed by the task that remains. For we still have 970 million lay Catholics deprived of a formation which the Church has declared “is not the privilege of a few but a right and duty of all.” In actuality, *we stand in much the same place today with respect to lay formation as the Church stood regarding the universal formation of the clergy* at the end of the Council of Trent. The apostolic formation of the laity has been universally mandated, but as yet only a tiny minority are actually being formed.

What would it mean to take seriously the right and duty of lay Catholics to receive formation? Even if they desired it—and undoubtedly many would not at present—the formation of nearly a billion people lies beyond our ability to contemplate, much less attempt, at this moment. But could we not, perhaps, envision what it would mean to provide formation for a small minority—say ten percent of the Church’s membership over the next twenty-five years? That ten percent would include the millions of devout lay Catholics who have served the Church with great zeal and who have a great spiritual hunger and longing for something more. Today, at the turn of the millennium, this would mean 100 million people. By 2025—when there will be approximately 1.3 billion Catholics—it would mean as many as 130 million well-formed lay apostles in the world compared to the approximately 21.4 million of today. This would mean an increase of 600 percent, which may seem huge, but if we take conciliar and papal teaching seriously, even so large a number would represent only ten percent of our ultimate responsibility in this area.

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12. 5. The Clergy: At the Service of Lay Apostles

***“If we do not understand the role of the ordained
as formators of the laity,
we do not understand the ordained office itself.”***

13. [Michael Sweeney, O.P.]

Any attempt to answer the Church’s call for universal apostolic formation for the laity is doomed to failure without the full participation of the clergy. It is certainly the case that relatively few in our Church fully understand the apostolic role of the laity. It is equally certain that few in our Church have an adequate understanding of the role of the ordained. Further still, if we do not understand the role of the ordained as formators of the laity, *we do not understand the ordained office itself.*

To be sure, every Catholic expects the ministerial priest will dispense the sacraments and provide spiritual counsel. But, as we well know, the sacramental function of the presbyter is only one dimension of his office. And, although this function may hold the greatest absolute dignity, in the realm of practice, it is not first.

We are all aware of the designation of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. Yet few have noted the fact that, at Vatican Council II and in subsequent magisterial teaching, the articulation of Christ’s three-fold office is differently nuanced: Christ is Prophet, Priest and King. In *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, and all subsequent documents, the *prophetic* office is first considered:

The People of God are joined together primarily by the word of the living God. And rightfully they expect this from their priests. Since no one can be saved who does not first believe, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all ... In the Christian community, especially among those who seem to understand and believe little of what they practice, the preaching of the word is needed for the very ministering of the sacraments (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4).

Accordingly, presbyters are called “educators in the faith.” Theirs is the task of assisting lay men and women to reach maturity in the development of their vocations. In this sense, ministerial priests are to be formators of the lay faithful:

Priests should focus their attention on the formation of the laity for the apostolate in their catechetics, their ministry of the word, their direction of souls and in their other pastoral services (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30).

Priests therefore, as educators in the faith, must see to it either by themselves or through others that the faithful are led individually in the Holy Spirit to a development of their own vocation according to the Gospel, to a sincere and practical charity, and to that freedom with which Christ has made us free. Ceremonies however beautiful, or associations however flourishing, will be of little value if they are not directed toward the education of men to Christian maturity. In furthering this, priests should help men to see what is required and what is God’s will in the important and unimportant events of life. Also, Christians should be taught that they live not only for themselves, but according to the demands of the new law of charity; as every man has received grace, he must administer the same to others. In this way, all will discharge in a Christian manner their duties in the community of men (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6).

If we are fully to understand the office of the ordained in the Church, we cannot present the ministerial priesthood exclusively in the light of the sacramental function. Yet this is, in fact, how the vast majority of Catholics understand the presbyterate. The situation is exacerbated in the many dioceses in the Western world in which, due to a scarcity of vocations, presbyters often are called almost exclusively to exercise their sacramental role at the expense of teaching and governing in the community. We must soon confront the fact that, unless we grasp the role of the presbyter as a formator of the laity, we stand in grave peril of compromising the role of the ordained in the Church.

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14. 6. Governance: the Forgotten Office in the Church

“Most parishes are administered, but not governed.”

Not only are presbyters “educators in the faith”, they also participate in Christ’s kingly office:

Exercising the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and according to their share of his authority, priests, in the name of the bishop, gather the family of God together as a brotherhood enlivened by one spirit. Through Christ they lead them in the Holy Spirit to God the Father. For the exercise of this ministry, as for the other priestly duties, spiritual power is conferred upon them for the building up of the Church. (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 24).

Gathering the family of God and leading them to God the Father, ministerial priests must govern in the name of the Bishop.

Having visited many parishes in the United States and Canada I have observed that *most parishes are administered, but not governed*. Most parishes orient their administration towards the maintenance of structures. But *to govern the parish is to call the parish to its mission*: the mission of the Church to the world. In this light, to govern does not mean simply to administer the goods—temporal and spiritual—of the community, or to oversee the programs of the institution. Instead, the governing role of the presbyter is essential to the mission of the community itself, and, simultaneously, an essential manifestation of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

The office of priests, since it is connected with the episcopal order also, in its own degree, shares the authority by which Christ builds up, sanctifies and rules his Body. Wherefore the priesthood, while indeed it presupposes the sacraments of Christian initiation, is conferred by that special sacrament; through it priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and are conformed to Christ the Priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2).

The office of governing the community is both descriptive of the ministerial priesthood in its entirety (acting in the person of Christ the Head), and also descriptive of one of its functions (building up the community).

Intimate, therefore, to the very office of the ordained is *the vocation of the Christian community*, and *the vocations of the individual members of that community*. To govern is to foster both of these vocations: *governance always concerns the fact of vocation*.

...It is the priests' part as educators of the people in the faith to see to it either personally or through others, that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation through the Gospel teaching (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6).

When the presbyter presents Christ in word and sacrament to the community, he is ordered to Christ the Prophet and Priest. When he orders the community toward its own proper vocation and calls each individual within the community to discern and answer his or her own call, he acts in the person of Christ the King. In fact, one cannot understand these three dimensions of the ordained office if isolated one from the other.

Therefore, since the exercise of the *munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi* by the sacred minister constitute the essence of pastoral ministry, the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other. Rather they must be viewed in terms of mutual correspondence and complementarity (Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith: *Instruction On Certain Questions Regarding The Collaboration Of The Non-Ordained Faithful In The Sacred Ministry Of Priest*, 2).

The ordained ministry in the Church is a threefold office which we must understand as dimensions seen in their order, one to the other. But what organizes, what orders, that threefold office is, in fact, *service to the lay members of the community*.

Thus the essential difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood is not found in the priesthood of Christ, which remains forever one and indivisible, nor in the sanctity to which all of the faithful are called: "Indeed the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it, Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received." For the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ, there is a diversity of members and functions but only one Spirit who, for the good of the Church, distributes his various gifts with munificence proportionate to his riches and the needs of service.

This diversity exists at the mode of participation in the priesthood of Christ and is essential in the sense that "while the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood...and directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians." Consequently, the ministerial priesthood "differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, 2).

The ministerial priesthood differs essentially from the common priesthood of the faithful "because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful." This service is for the sake of "the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians"; it is, in other words, for the sake of the formation of the people of God. If the presbyter is not seen in the light of this function—which is one of governance, as well as of teaching and sanctifying—then the essential difference between the ordained ministry and the lay ministry in the Church is lost. What then occurs is now becoming all too familiar: the ordained are principally regarded as dispensers of the sacraments; lay men and women are regarded as either

passive recipients of the ordained ministry, or as lesser participants in the ordained ministry. Furthermore, contentions arise over ordination, inasmuch as ordination is seen to be the only route to ministry in the Church; the secular mission of the Church to the world is almost completely overlooked. In a word, losing sight of the essential difference between the ordained ministry and the lay ministry decisively compromises the mission of Christ to the world—the principal work of the Church.

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15. 7. Collaboration in the Mission of the Church

***“We have not yet called the laity our friends...
We have inherited a whole manner of relationship which the Church requires us to change.”***

The office of the ordained in the Church is ordered to the formation of the lay faithful in order that the mission of the whole Church might be accomplished. This office is also ordered to collaboration in the service of that mission. But what is collaboration? Collaboration is association with one’s peers. One delegates to a subordinate; one collaborates with a peer. The relationship which the Council enjoins is one of familiarity, of co-responsibility in ministry—in short, of collaboration.

Like Christ, he must make Christ “visible in the midst of the flock” entrusted to his care, having a positive and encouraging rapport with the lay faithful. Recognizing in these their dignity as sons of God, he develops his own role in the Church, and in their service he offers all his priestly ministry and pastoral charity. In the awareness of the profound communion which binds him to the lay faithful and to the religious, the priest will make every effort “to awaken and deepen co-responsibility in the one common mission of salvation, with a prompt and heartfelt esteem for all the charisms and tasks which the Spirit gives believers for the building up of the Church” (*Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 30).

I fear that, to date, we presbyters have viewed the laity as passive recipients of the apostolic office; we have not regarded the laity as our co-workers in the apostolate. One evidence of this is the fact that we are, largely, anonymous to the laity. We have not considered it significant that the laity know who we are; we have considered it significant only that we know who they are. When I delegate authority, it is important for me to know that I can trust the one to whom I delegate. When I minister to another, it is important that I have sufficient knowledge of the one to whom I minister. It is not significant, on the other hand, that the one to whom I delegate or the one to whom I minister should know *me*. After all, the Lord himself said, “The servant does not know what the master is about.” Reflecting upon this dichotomy, we see clearly that we have not yet called the laity our “friends”; we have not yet made known to them “all that we have heard from our Father.” Indeed, in many, or even in most cases, we have failed to so much as introduce ourselves to them.

We have inherited a whole manner of relationship which the Church requires us to address and to change. The teaching of the Vatican Council and of the magisterium simply cannot be accommodated by our old modes of relationship; otherwise, we are putting new wine into old skins. Regrettably, the parish structure which we have

inherited almost demands those old modes of relating. (It is interesting—and telling—that the parish church where I reside was built without bathrooms. Given that the laity would fast before coming to Mass and then leave promptly afterwards, there was no need to provide bathrooms! The old modes of relationship were literally cast in concrete—or, in this case, in brick.) Most parishioners still come to the parish to receive the spiritual goods of the Church, and then to depart to their secular pursuits which, in their understanding, have little to do with the practice of their faith. That they possess a divine mandate to evangelize the world, divine gifts with which to do it, and a competence for their mission which is other than that of the ordained, simply does not enter their heads.

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16. 8. The Role of the Parish in the Formation of the Laity

“Until the parish is a community of formation and collaboration, we cannot hold that we have actually implemented Vatican Council II in the Church. “

If we are to form ten percent of the world’s Catholics, our existing informal network of diocesan programs and lay movements is simply inadequate. Just as the cathedral and monastic schools of the middle ages provided often brilliant formation for a tiny minority of priests, but simply couldn’t address the formation needs of all, so our existing formation network is too small to nurture the vocations of 100 million lay people. Yet we have the institutions in our midst to meet this challenge.

We must consider anew the formation potential of the only truly universal Catholic institution: the local parish. The parish is the ideal venue for the formation of the laity and the collaboration between the hierarchy and the laity which the magisterium has insisted upon. The parish exists for the sake of administering the spiritual and temporal goods of the Church. Yet it also exists for the sake of the formation of the laity and for the collaboration of the whole people of God in the mission of the Church to the world. *Until the parish is a community of formation and collaboration, we cannot hold that we have actually implemented Vatican Council II in the Church.*

An American pastor (whose name I cannot recall and who might, anyway, prefer anonymity!) recently commented that far from centers for evangelization, our parishes resemble nursing homes, a sentiment I hear echoed among clergy, religious and laity all over the United States and Canada. How is it that initiatives to form the laity rarely are predicated upon the role of the parish? Why do we in the Church commonly assume the parish, as an institution, is hopelessly moribund?

The fathers at Vatican II certainly made no such assumption, nor does Pope John Paul II, who writes:

The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally. In a certain sense, it is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters (*Christifideles Laici*, 26).

And further, more than being “in the midst of her sons and daughters,” the parish is

...the Church placed in the neighborhoods of humanity, it lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society and intimately bound up with its aspirations and its dramatic events (*Christifideles Laici*, 27).

The parish “lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society.” It is, indeed, the place in which the “dramatic events” and the “aspirations” of society are to be brought for discernment and action:

The parish offers an outstanding example of the apostolate on the community level inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries, and draws them into the universality of the Church. The lay faithful should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world’s problems as well as questions concerning human salvation—all of which need to be examined together and solved through general discussion. As far as possible the lay faithful ought to collaborate in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their own ecclesial family (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10).

In order that the parish may realize its mission, our Holy Father enjoins bishops to bring about the “adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, especially in promoting participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities” (*Christifideles Laici*, 26).

What a magnificent vision of the parish the magisterium has offered us! Imagine the vitality and impact of a parish in which the community brought the great issues of the day for examination and action, in which the laity collaborated fully in every apostolic and missionary activity, in which the aspirations and dramatic events of the local society were celebrated. What a pity that such a parish is so difficult to find!

Indeed, the parish provides the obvious venue for the formation of lay Catholics; it is also the institution which can truly involve itself most directly with the aspirations and dramatic events of human society. Their local parish is the only place where *ninety-eight percent* of Catholics have regular contact with the Church! Any attempt to offer formation to the majority of Catholics must be undertaken in the parish. Apart from the parish, the apostolic formation of the vast majority of lay Catholics will simply not occur.

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17. 9. Obstacles to Lay Formation

“If we do not deliberately develop secondary leadership, we cannot create evangelizing communities.”

The Church insists that apostolic formation of lay Catholics is a right and a duty. We do well to ask, “What are the obstacles to implementing formation? What prevents the use of the parish in this work?” Let us consider a few of the most obvious answers.

Firstly, most lay Catholics remain unaware of their role in the Church’s mission and of their apostolic dignity. Let us delineate a number of underlying reasons:

- *Catholics widely assume that only the ordained have an official role in the Church and in the Church’s mission. The great attention paid to the question of who should be ordained signifies this fact. We must accept that, however ironic, the post-conciliar Church harbors a marked tendency to clericalism.*

- *Most Catholics experience the parish according to a pre-conciliar paradigm:* the parish existing in order to offer the laity the spiritual goods of the Church. That the parish is a “stable community of the faithful,” with its own part in the mission of the Church to the world, does not enter into the experience of most Catholics.
- *The mission of the Church to the world has not yet been sufficiently proposed to most Catholics.* Despite the constant teaching of our popes and bishops, it is rarely preached and little experienced by parishioners in our local communities.
- *Popular culture renders all belief a matter of individual and subjective preference.* Catholics think it wrong to proselytize. They therefore hold the mission of the Church to the world suspect. Such suspicion particularly holds true in the West.
- *The secular role of laity in the Church has been largely ignored;* the most that has been achieved is lay participation in delegated pastoral and liturgical ministries in the parish.

A second obvious obstacle lies in the preoccupation of most pastors and parish staff with the difficulties of maintaining parish structures and initiatives; they consider the mission of the Church to the world only secondarily. Here we have a very real problem. Many pastors are already stretched to the limit—where can they find the time to nurture, form, and support hundreds of their parishioners?

Part of this problem is sheer numbers. No pastor, no matter how hard-working and gifted, can really sustain relationship with and nurture more than about two hundred people at a time, and Catholic parishes routinely have thousands of members. Presbyters—most especially pastors—have a special responsibility to be formators of the lay faithful, but we simply cannot make this happen alone. Almost all of our parishes would be considered “mega-churches” in Protestant circles. As they have well know, communities of such size and complexity necessitate secondary and tertiary levels of pastoral leadership in order to provide every member adequate care. *If we do not deliberately develop this secondary leadership, we cannot create evangelizing communities, nor provide the laity with the formation they need to effectively practice their vocations in the world.*

In a mission-centered parish, the job of the pastor is not to form every individual in the community, but rather to form and collaborate with lay leaders who then assist in the formation of other lay people. If we would have mission-centered parishes, we must truly govern, not merely administrate, them. The pastor must understand himself as prophet, priest and king, as one who teaches, sanctifies, and governs in a community of lay apostles with whom he seeks a genuine collaboration.

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18. 10. Responsibility for Lay Formation

“The first responsibility for lay formation belongs, in fact, to lay men and women themselves.”

In the Church’s understanding, the first responsibility for lay formation belongs, in fact, to lay men and women themselves.

Indeed, everyone should diligently prepare himself for the apostolate, this preparation being the more urgent in adulthood. For the advance of age brings with it a more open mind, enabling each person to detect more readily the talents with which God has enriched his soul and to exercise more effectively those charisms

which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on him for the good of his brethren (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30).

The task of governing must, therefore, include disposing resources to lay men and women for the sake of their own formation, and building up a community which encourages, supports, and acknowledges the discernment of their own vocation in Christ. The formation of lay men and women must, in the first instance, be a self-formation because of the very character of the lay apostolate as *personal*. In contrast, the hierarchical office in the Church is not personal, but common to the all of the ordained; the definition and responsibilities of the ministerial priesthood are the same for all presbyters. The lay apostolate, however, is necessarily personal and unique, founded upon the charisms, talents, relationships and state in life of each lay person.

Being “members” of the Church takes nothing away from the fact that each Christian as an individual is “unique and unrepeatable.” On the contrary, this belonging guarantees and fosters the profound sense of that uniqueness and unrepeatability insofar as these very qualities are the source of variety and richness for the whole Church. Therefore, God calls the individual in Jesus Christ, each one personally by name. In this sense the Lord’s words “You too go into my vineyard,” directed to the Church as a whole, come specially addressed to each member individually.

Because of each member’s unique and unrepeatable character—that is, one’s identity and actions as a person—each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community while, at the same time, singularly receiving and sharing in the common richness of all the Church (*Christifideles Laici*, 28).

Above all, each member of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a “member of the Church” yet entrusted with a unique task which cannot be done by another and which is to be fulfilled for the good of all. From this perspective the Council’s insistence on the absolute necessity of an apostolate exercised by the individual takes on its full meaning: “The apostolate exercised by the individual—which flows abundantly from a truly Christian life (cf. Jn. 4:11)—is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even in its organized expression, and admits no substitute. Regardless of circumstance, all lay persons (including those who have no opportunity or possibility for collaboration in associations) are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it. Such an apostolate is useful at all times and places, but in certain circumstances it is the only one available and feasible” (*Christifideles Laici*, 28).

Responsibility also lies with the community. For, lay formation must acknowledge the unique and unrepeatable character of the lay person. Their particular apostolate always involves a discernment of their personal apostolic vocation. It is therefore incumbent upon the community—almost invariably the parish community—to place at their disposal resources that enable them to discern this vocation.

The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one’s mission (*Christifideles Laici*, 58).

God calls me and sends me forth as a laborer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me forth to work for the coming of his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay

faithful and makes up the focal point of the whole work of formation, whose purpose is the joyous and grateful recognition of this dignity and the faithful and generous living-out of this responsibility. (*Christifideles Laici*, 58).

The pastors of the Church—and, most especially, pastors of parishes—must establish communities in which such a formation may take place. The lay men and women who collaborate with the pastor—indeed everyone who participates in Catholic education including parents, Catholic school teachers, and religious educators—have the obligation to assist in the formation of the laity.

The Christian family, as the ‘domestic Church,’ also makes up a natural and fundamental school for formation in the faith (*Christifideles Laici*, 62).

Those who have the obligation to provide a Christian education also have the duty of providing formation for the apostolate (*Christifideles Laici*, 30);

Priests and religious ought to assist the lay faithful in their formation. In this regard the Synod Fathers have invited priests and candidates for Orders to “be prepared carefully so that they are ready to foster the vocation and mission of the lay faithful” (*Christifideles Laici*, 61).

It is thus that the lay faithful are formed by the Church and in the Church in a mutual communion and collaboration of all her members: clergy, religious and lay faithful (*Christifideles Laici*, 61).

Clearly, cooperation and coordination must come at all levels. Existing formation initiatives in dioceses, lay movements, or by religious orders must collaborate with emerging parish-based efforts. If we are to form even ten percent of all Catholics, all of the resources of the community will have to be mobilized around this initiative.

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19. 11. The Content of Lay Formation

“The single most critical personal and spiritual skill for a lay apostle is discernment”

[Sherry Anne Weddell]

What should formation for the lay apostolate comprise? This question is important because *formation is never generic*. We must always design it around the unique mission of the person who is being formed. *Formation for the laity must not be a “watered-down” seminary program*. Seminarians require formation for a quite different mission, that of ministry *within* the Church. On the other hand, the vast majority of lay Catholics are called to vocations that lie *outside* the parish. Lay people need preparation to engage and evangelize individuals, cultures, and structures which may be non-Christian, or even anti-Christian.

Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of the spiritual life (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 29).

If it would follow the Church’s teaching faithfully, formation of the laity must

- Emphasize the mission of the Church to the world;
- Meditate and insist upon the real objectivity of faith in contemporary society;
- Educate Catholics in their apostolic dignity and invite them to consider the talents, gifts and opportunities for their apostolate already present in their lives;
- Insist upon the secular apostolate of the laity—those on the forefront of the Church’s mission to the world;
- Illumine the proper relationship between the laity and the ordained in such a way as to foster real collaboration in the mission of the Church;
- Take place in parishes which are ordered, not merely to the maintenance of existing structures, but to the mission of the Church to the world.

The Church has outlined the basic elements of such a formation for us in some detail. *The single most critical personal and spiritual skill for a lay apostle is discernment*. Lay Christians need formation in order to adequately discern

- Their God-given talents and spiritual gifts (charisms);
- Their personal call or vocation;
- The leading of the Holy Spirit;
- The meaning and value of temporal things;
- The creative application of Church teaching to specific situations.

The Holy Father says of this discernment:

To be able to discover the actual will of the Lord in our lives always involves the following: a receptive listening to the Word of God and the Church, fervent and constant prayer, recourse to a wise and loving spiritual guide, and a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God, as well as the diverse social and historic situations in which one lives (*Christifideles Laici*, 28).

Note how he insists that formation must involve “a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God.” Priests have, in fact, been given a special gift of the Holy Spirit for this purpose.

Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church’s mission. The ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or “royal” priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, are ordered one to the other—for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17).

Indeed, pastors know how much the lay faithful contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the entire saving mission of the Church towards the world, but they understand that it is their exalted office to be shepherds of the lay faithful and also to recognize the latter’s services and charisms that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.” (*Christifideles Laici*, 32)

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20. 12. The Role of the Charisms in Lay Formation

“Governance of a parish includes identifying and calling forth the gifts that the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon the laity.”

While priests have a special gift in this area, lay people, too, are responsible to discern the charisms they have been given.

For the advance of age brings with it a more open mind, enabling each person to detect more readily the talents with which God has enriched his soul and to exercise more effectively those charisms which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on him for the good of his brethren. (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30)

For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the People of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), “allotting them to everyone according as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11) in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pt. 4:10), to build up the whole body in charity (cf. Eph. 4:16). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who “breathes where he wills” (Jn. 3:8). This should be done by the laity in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors who must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts, not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold forth what is good (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12, 19, 21) (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3).

The charisms of the Holy Spirit can, indeed, be discerned. Moreover, their discernment is vital to the lay apostolate because of its personal character. *The particular vocation of each is shaped by the charisms which he or she possesses.*

The Fathers of the Church made much mention of the importance of the charisms. Cyril of Jerusalem provides, perhaps, the best example, writing in the mid fourth century. In his *Catechetical Lectures*, Cyril instructs his catechumens to expect the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the sake of their ministry in the Church and world.

If you believe, you will not only receive remission of sins, but also do things which surpass human power. And may you be worthy of the gift of prophecy also! For you will receive grace according to the measure of your capacity and not of my words; for I may possibly speak of things too small, and you may receive greater, since faith is a large affair. All your life long your guardian the Comforter will abide with you; He will care for you, as for his own soldier; for your going and coming, and to preserve you against your foes. And He will give you gifts of grace of every kind, if you do not grieve Him by sin; for it is written, do nothing to sadden the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you have been sealed against the day of redemption. What then, beloved, is it to preserve grace? Be ready to receive grace, and when you have received it, do not cast it away (Lecture 18, 37).

Catechumens were told to expect the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to expect to perform works “which surpass human power.” Here we find no hesitation concerning what the laity can accomplish! They are to be *supernaturally empowered* to further the work of Christ in the world. Notice, too, that Cyril understands the presence of the charisms to be an ordinary occurrence in the life of the Church.

And so they are. The Holy Father insists upon the significance of the charisms in the lay apostolate. I have heard thousands of lay Catholics whose testimony corroborates his teaching; they report, as ordinary events, the interventions God works through them on behalf of others. Catholics must again be taught to expect the charisms and to recognize their presence.

Seminarians, for their part, must learn that governance of a parish includes identifying and calling forth the gifts that the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon the laity. For, the spiritual gifts given to a community can provide valuable clues not only to individual vocation, but also to the particular mission of the whole community.

The Second Vatican Council speaks of the ministries and charisms as the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given for the building up of the Body of Christ and for its mission of salvation in the world. Indeed, the Church is directed and guided by the Holy Spirit, who lavishes diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts on all the baptized, calling them to be, each in an individual way, active and co-responsible (*Christifideles Laici*, 21).

Here, John Paul II mentions a characteristic of the lay apostolate which is of vital significance to lay formation: *the apostolic commission—and the gifts which attend it—are bestowed through Baptism and Confirmation.* Lay formation, therefore, entails recognizing and calling forth gifts and opportunities for ministry that are *already present* in the life of the laity. Once again, we see how the principal task of lay formation is one of discernment.

Other In addition, apostolic formation for the laity must include:

- Spiritual formation which nurtures an intimate relationship with God and love of others;

- Intellectual formation in the doctrine and teaching of the Church. For lay Catholics, the Church's social teaching is especially important because it contains principles for discerning real world situations and responding as an apostle;
- Formation in relational skills;
- Formation in personal evangelism skills;
- Formation in group and organizational leadership
(cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 60; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 28-32).

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21. 13. The Experience of Parish-Based Lay Formation

"The way in which the local Church is gifted is a prophetic measure of the society in which it lives."

[Michael Sweeney, O.P.]

As we have noted, each lay vocation is personal, individual and unique. Personal direction and formation, therefore, must be made available to each lay man and woman. This in itself would seem to render impossible the notion that formation is "the right and duty of all." The average Catholic parish in the United States has 2,500 members. To give personal attention to even ten percent of a parish's membership would mean working with two hundred and fifty people. Clearly, pastors and priests cannot do this alone. Lay men and women must assist each other in their personal discernment and formation, and the Church must provide the resources to encourage and foster this assistance.

I hope that you will forgive my brief reflection upon the work of the Catherine of Siena Institute, which I offer as an example of the task at hand. The training which we are developing is not intended to be one more in a long list of parish programs; rather, it is intended to integrate and animate all of the other offerings of the parish. To facilitate a real discernment of the vocations of the laity we must present the teaching of the Church in a way that is practical and directly applicable to the lives of lay Catholics. We seek to take seriously both the contribution of lay Catholics in parish life and, even more explicitly, the secular character of the lay apostolate.

Central to this initiative is the *Called and Gifted* workshop. In the workshop we present the role of the laity in the Church, using the documents of Vatican Council II, the Apostolic Letter *Christifideles Laici*, and other magisterial documents. Given that the role of the laity is secular in character, we decided to offer concrete possibilities for applying the Catholic tradition in secular society. Accordingly, the second part of the workshop assists lay men and women to begin discernment of the charisms they have been given. (Whereas work on the charisms has been undertaken in certain Protestant or Evangelical denominations, this is, to our knowledge, the only program in the Catholic Church to take seriously the role of the charisms in the formation of the laity.)

The discernment of charisms requires two things: first, that Catholics claim their individual vocations both in the Church and in their lives outside the parish; and second, that they therefore resist the tendency to separate the practice of their faith from their secular pursuits. The response of participants in the *Called and Gifted* workshop has been remarkable. Many are astonished that their lives outside the parish have direct

relevance to the mission of the Church to the world. Most leave the workshop having seen new possibilities for the practice of their faith. All leave the workshop more confident in what they have to offer, and more willing to participate in the life of the Church.

Less anticipated, but very promising results have begun to show themselves as well. We find that young men and women clarify a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life. This outcome may seem surprising in a program focused upon lay vocation. But if we pay attention to and take seriously the vocation of each and every Catholic in our communities, we can expect *all* vocations to emerge. How many priestly vocations go unrecognized because our parishes fail to foster an attitude of ongoing discernment? The *Institute's* full discernment program incorporates individual interviews, and through this medium, we are receiving significant feedback from the laity throughout North America, Oceania and beyond. Once they have begun to identify the charisms, they also begin to identify the initiatives through which their charisms already have been exercised. They begin to see the manner in which their faith, and their apostolic commission, are actually integrated with their life in secular society.

We have also found lay people in every parish specially gifted to be formators of others. We have trained hundreds of Catholics to help others discern; we now routinely collaborate with teams of parish leaders who facilitate the discernment of their fellow parishioners. They are the first fruits of the hundreds of thousands of trained parish-based formators that we will need to form if even ten percent of our people will receive the support and preparation they need to answer God's call.

But this is not all. As mentioned above under "The Role of Charisms," parishes appear to have different "personalities" according to the distribution of the charisms. Consequently, we are beginning to see interesting possibilities for the strategic planning of pastoral initiatives in parishes. We have begun to see that the charisms are not at all uniformly distributed in local Christian communities. Within the same diocese, parishes can have very different personalities, making evident they are not merely geographical subdivisions of a diocese but, as the new *Code of Canon Law* insists, "stable communities of the Christian faithful."

This finding should not surprise us. The Church has inherited the prophetic office of Christ. This office involves more than the local Church reading the signs of the times and responding to the society in which it lives and works, as if the measure of the Church's mission were merely or exclusively the society in which it is found. Exercising the prophetic office must also involve "reading" the charisms given by the Holy Spirit to a particular Christian community, which themselves constitute a prophetic sign. *The way in which the local Church is gifted is a prophetic measure of the society in which it lives.* If the parishioners in one parish appear to have been given gifts of encouragement (exhortation) and healing to an extraordinary degree, whereas the parishioners in another parish may have received gifts of hospitality and evangelism, we can consider this difference as a real—even a prophetic—indicator of the needs of the neighborhood in which each is found. It is also a real—and hitherto neglected—indication of the common apostolic initiative which might be undertaken among the parishioners of such a parish. In this light, we can see whole new possibilities in the insistence of the Holy Father that, to become fully aware of one's vocation, it is necessary to pay heed to "the diverse social and historic situations in which one lives." Our very consciousness is shaped by the

talents and charisms which we have been given. That we find something in our situation at home or at work that is compelling, that summons and commands our attention, is indeed a real indication of the work to which God is calling us: the reason we are compelled is in large part due to the presence of the Holy Spirit already at work in the lives of his people.

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22. 14. Expectations

“This is the acceptable time to propose initiatives worthy of a jubilee—indeed, of a new millennium.”

This is the year of the great Jubilee. We are celebrating two thousand years of the presence of Christ in the world through his Church. It is a year in which we expect a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the mission of Christ to the world. *This is no time to be cautious in our appraisal of what we can achieve*; this is the acceptable time to propose initiatives worthy of a jubilee—indeed, of a new millennium.

We are proposing that the Church offer an apostolic formation, initially, to ten percent of our Catholic laity. This can be done if—but only if—we are able to mobilize our parishes to become centers for the formation of lay apostles. What, then, might we expect to see?

We will first see—indeed have already seen—lay men and women begin to understand the relationship which pertains between their faith and their secular activities. We will see that parishes can, indeed, be places in which the issues of the day are brought for discernment and common initiative. We will witness new initiatives on behalf of the Church and world, undertaken in a spirit of genuine collaboration with the hierarchy. We will begin to see other, less expected results. If the discernment of one’s vocation becomes ordinary in our parishes, if every member is urged to discern the personal call of God, then we will also witness an abundance of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to religious life. The lay movements of the Church have demonstrated that, whenever the evangelical ends of the Church are emphasized in conjunction with the discernment of one’s own call, all vocations—lay, clerical, and religious—flourish.

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23. 15. To Priests and Seminarians

“We must strive to create an atmosphere where it is normal for every baptized Catholics to ask, ‘What is God’s call for my life?’”

What can each of us do to bring this about? I would like to speak to those among us who are called to the ministerial priesthood. First, and foremost, we must trust our office. We have been called to the ministerial priesthood to nurture and empower the vocations of many lay apostles, who, in turn, are called to bring Christ’s love to the world. We are, in other words, formators of the lay apostolate, “educators in the faith.” Let us determine to be effective in this work.

To this end, we must study the conciliar and magisterial documents on the formation and apostolate of the laity: *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Christifideles Laici*. We should meditate prayerfully upon the Church’s teaching regarding the role of the ordained in the formation of the laity that is to be found in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. We must familiarize ourselves with the outlines of the Church’s secular mission to be found in *Gaudium et Spes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Evangelium Vitae*, *Redemptoris Missio*, and *Laborem Exercens*. We should explore the needs and issues of the people and region in which we live and minister. We should determine to seize every opportunity to teach and preach these truths to the lay Catholics who are, or will be, entrusted to our care. We should take counsel with other seminarians and presbyters to discuss the Church’s teaching and its implications. As pastors or associate pastors, we can seek to make the parish a true center of formation for the laity. The Church calls us to work with our bishops and other pastors to ensure that a true apostolic formation is available to all.

We can discern the charisms of the Holy Spirit which have been given to each of us. Like the laity whom we will help to form, we must gratefully accept our own charisms and let them color and empower our ministries. We can learn how to help others discern their gifts and vocations. We should be ready to recognize and affirm the charisms of the lay people with whom we will pray and work. It is our privilege to affirm their personal and apostolic vocations; therefore, we must strive to create an atmosphere where it is normal for every baptized Catholic to ask, “What is God’s call for my life?” We can pray for the vocations and apostolates of the lay men and women to whom we minister. Above all, we must seek lay collaborators, and model collaboration with the laity both within the Christian community and in our mission to the world.

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24. 16. To the Laity

“Constantly remind other lay men and women of their apostolic dignity.”

[Sherry Anne Weddell]

We, too, must trust our own apostolic office. We are apostles in our own right, anointed and sent by Jesus Christ to be an instrument of his redeeming love. Those of us lay people present in this room are especially privileged: we are receiving a formation for our mission that is presently unavailable to many millions who hunger for it. Seize this opportunity, as I have. Steep yourself in the Church’s teaching

regarding your own vocation and the Church's evangelizing mission to the world. Seek to grow in your leadership skills and creativity as well as in your knowledge of the Tradition.

Determine to prepare yourself to be a formator: one who makes the riches of the Church's spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral tradition available to your lay brothers and sisters. This does not mean that you must work professionally for the Church. The formation of secular apostles can take place in the home, the school, and on the factory floor as well as within the parish. Constantly remind other lay men and women of their apostolic dignity. If you are married, look upon your spouse and children as fellow apostles and encourage them to work with you to bring Christ's love to others. Work with priests, religious, and other lay people to make apostolic formation as widely available as possible.

Discern the charisms you have been given. They are both significant clues as to your vocation and tools with which to carry out that vocation. Learn how to help your brothers and sisters discern their charisms and God's call in their lives. Always be ready to point out the evidence of God's grace at work in the life of another. Look for priests and religious with whom you can collaborate. Encourage and support them in their vocations.

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25. 17. Conclusion

More than two thousand years ago the Angel Gabriel was sent to a lay woman in a tiny town in the Galilee. He announced the birth of the Messiah, and sought her consent. He gave her an assurance (little enough to go by, we might be tempted to think): that nothing will be impossible for God. On the strength of that simple assurance, she answered, "Yes," and became, in the language of the Fathers of the Church, a "cause of salvation." God continues, through the ages, to seek our consent. He offers us the same assurance so that, knowing that nothing is impossible with God, we too might participate in the salvation of the world. This is a task worthy of a jubilee—indeed, worthy even of a new millennium!