

Introduction



When I was asked to offer a book of my own reflections on lay ecclesial ministry, I accepted with some trepidation. The growth in numbers of lay ecclesial ministers in the United States has been astounding, with more than 30,000 now working in a wide variety of pastoral settings. Many of these are full-time professional ministers; many others are employed part-time. While their presence as paid members of parish and diocesan staffs reaches every corner of the nation, it has not been without some controversy and deep concern among the Catholic bishops of the United States and among other members of the clergy and the laity. This phenomenon has surfaced new doctrinal, theological, pastoral, and administrative challenges. The meaning, contexts, and distinctions of baptismal and ordained ministries, requirements for formation and accountability, the acceptance of lay ecclesial ministers in the life and mission of the Church, fair employment practices, just compensation, and matters related to due process are but a few of the issues with which we Catholics now must grapple as we seek to incorporate lay people working in professional Church ministries.

I remember vividly the moment when the late Cardinal Avery Dulles stood to address the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in November 2005, a gathering I must say that was not in full agreement with the draft of the document before us—*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (CWVL).

The stated purpose of *Co-Workers* was “to be a common frame of reference for ensuring that the development of lay ecclesial ministry continues in ways that are faithful to the Church’s theological and doctrinal tradition and that responds to contemporary pastoral needs and situations” (*CWVL*, p. 6).

In the midst of my brother bishops’ deep discussion over what exactly “ministry” is and whether or not the term can or should be associated with people who are not ordained, Cardinal Dulles rose to the floor. He spoke very strongly that such use of the word *ministry* was not a new development for the Church but rather has been part of our tradition for centuries. He spoke eloquently, as always, that we shouldn’t fear using this kind of language about the laity, that this seemingly brand-new thing was not new at all.

While I cannot document it, it was my own perception and that of several other bishops to whom I spoke afterward that the intervention by this man—who commanded so much admiration and respect—made all the difference in what still ended up a very close vote to approve *Co-Workers* by the required two-thirds majority. The final vote was one hundred ninety for and forty-nine against, with five abstentions.

I add my own thoughts about lay ecclesial ministry here in this book because I am convinced, based on more than three decades of experience with this ministry by people in our own Diocese of Rochester, that this is a work of the Holy Spirit; that we can embrace the growth as beneficial to our parishes, dioceses, and the universal Church; and that encouraging lay people to serve the Church in this special way is a fulfillment of the promise and spirit of the Second Vatican Council. I have included in this book essays by five lay ecclesial ministers working in my diocese, which I am calling “Voices from the Vineyard.” I believe their experiences and thoughts, and the thoughts and experiences of thousands of others like them

across the country, will help us better understand this development that is still flowering, still in its infancy.

At the L. J. McGinley lecture at Fordham University in 2006, Cardinal Dulles laid out the promise and the challenge inherent in the growth of lay ecclesial ministry in the Church today.

Ours is not a time for rivalry between clergy and laity, or between lay ministers and apostles to the world, as if what was given to the one were taken away from the other. Only through cooperation among all her members can the Church live up to her divine calling. Just as the eye cannot say to the ear, "I have no need of you," so the lay minister and the social reformer, the contemplative religious and the parish priest must say to each other: "I need your witness and assistance to discern and live up to my own vocation in the Body of Christ." Because the lay faithful constitute the overwhelming majority of Catholics, the future of the Church lies predominantly in their hands. The recognition recently given to lay ecclesial ministries should help the laity to rise to the challenges and opportunities that are theirs today.

I agree wholeheartedly with Cardinal Dulles. At the same time, I recognize and wish to discuss here the theological and practical issues in my own diocese and in the wider Church that remain more than forty years after a pastor in one of our diocesan parishes hired a religious woman to be his pastoral assistant, fully involved in the ministry of the Church. I believe this appointment, made well before I arrived in Rochester, was among the first in the nation and soon led to other pastors hiring lay people to assist them. St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester established a master of divinity degree in 1969 and allowed non-seminarians to enroll. This professional degree,

once reserved solely for those preparing for ordination, was now available to help prepare those who embraced a call to lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation. It may well have been the first Roman Catholic seminary in the United States to do so.

The questions and concerns expressed by my brother bishops in our discussion of whether *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* would be approved remain.

- What exactly are lay ecclesial ministers?
- What is their relationship to the ordained?
- Are they a threat to the authority of priests?
- What is and should be their relationship with the local bishop?
- How do we adequately prepare them for their work and commission them for service?
- From where do they draw their authority?

These questions and concerns are genuine, posed by those who are wary of the development of lay ecclesial ministry no less than those who, like me, fully support the ongoing infusion of highly trained lay people into the daily ministry of the Church in support of our mission. Indeed, these are legitimate and necessary questions and issues that must be part of the ongoing discernment of this old, yet new development in the life of the Catholic Church. These are questions that all of us who love the Church must address.

Acknowledging that there is worry, caution, and even resistance among some of the ordained and good and faithful lay people—including in my own diocese—how do we better communicate and explain the role of the lay ecclesial minister and their place in the Church?

- What does it mean to the individual and to the Church that lay ecclesial ministers express almost universally a “call from God”; and how can we discern, honor, sustain,

and nurture that call and remain faithful to our ecclesial tradition?

- How do we balance our efforts to stem and reverse the decline in the number of priestly vocations with the exponential growth of lay ecclesial ministry?
- Need these two developments be at odds with one another?

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, above all, says we need to build carefully. It is neither the complete nor the last word on this development. It does not carry the force of Church law but is intended as a guide to further development, a challenge to trust the activity of the Holy Spirit, and a call to enduring hope. The document concludes in part with these words:

The same God who called Prisca and Aquila to work with Paul in the first century calls thousands of men and women to minister in our Church in the twenty-first century. This is a cause for rejoicing. It also is an occasion for the kind of planning that Pope John Paul II recommended in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*:

The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living tradition; it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem.

—*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 66

I firmly believe that we need to be trusting. We need to be confident that the Lord is guiding us and that we will find our way through whatever issues are currently with us or may arise in the future. I believe *Co-Workers* overall says “amen” to

the development thus far and is an expression of confidence that what is well begun will continue to grow, realistic in acknowledging that we are not all in the same place around the country. I also believe without reservation that we must proceed with due diligence but without fear. My experience has vividly revealed to me the beauty of this development and how deeply it is enriching our daily lives as Catholics.

I believe that we can move forward, confident that we have five important pillars of truth on which to base our hope. These pillars, which I outline below, frame the conversation about lay ecclesial ministry in today's Church that I explore further in the pages of this book.

1. The idea of lay ecclesial ministry as we now define it connects us in an authentic and fruitful manner with the very earliest traditions of the Church.

The New Testament bears witness to the broad involvement of the baptized in the various works of the budding Church. This ancient embrace of ministry by the baptized in service to the Christian community was recalled and re-appropriated for our own time by the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) affirms that the mission of the Church resides with all the faithful, not just with the ordained hierarchy. Further, it affirms that all members of the Church are called to holiness in Christ Jesus. This is explicitly outlined in the decree on the laity. It was, however, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC) that perhaps more than any other document laid the foundation for the renewed theology of ministry by proclaiming that the work of liturgy flows from the full, active, and conscious participation of all the faithful (SC, 14). Pope Paul VI reiterated this renewed theology of ministry in 1975 as the Church was just beginning to assimilate the teachings of Vatican II.

The laity can also feel called, or in fact be called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms that the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them.

—*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 73

2. As we experience it in our parishes now, lay ecclesial ministry is very much in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II and the re-igniting by the Council of the idea that by our baptism all of us—not just the ordained—are called to build up the community of the Church for the transformation of the world.

The Risen Lord calls everyone to labor in his vineyard, that is, in a world that must be transformed in view of the final coming of the Reign of God; and the Holy Spirit empowers all with the various gifts and ministries for the building up of the Body of Christ.

—*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 7

By offering their God-provided gifts to grow the Kingdom, lay people must work in unison with the ordained, not as passive receivers of God's grace but as conduits of it.

3. Nothing in our tradition or teachings of the magisterium suggests that lay ecclesial ministry is intended to be a replacement for or a substitute for the ministry of the ordained. This is absolute.

The primary distinction lies between the ministry of the lay faithful and the ministry of the ordained, which is a special apostolic calling. Both are rooted

in sacramental initiation, but the pastoral ministry of the ordained is empowered in a unique and essential way by the sacrament of Holy Orders. Through it, the ministry of the apostles is extended. As successors to the apostles, bishops “with priests and deacons as helpers” shepherd their dioceses as “teachers of doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers of government” (*LG*, 20). This recognition of the unique role of the ordained is not a distinction based on merit or rank; rather, it is a distinction based on the sacramental character given by the Holy Spirit that configures the recipient to Christ the Head and on the particular relationship of service that Holy Orders brings about between ecclesiastical ministry and the community. The ordained ministry is uniquely constitutive of the Church in a given place. All other ministries function in relation to it.

—*Co-Workers in the Vineyard
of the Lord*, p. 21

4. Lay ecclesial ministry, carried forth as an embodiment of our deepest traditions and carefully integrated into the life of our Church, is a rich help and not a hindrance to our priests.

The presence of and growth in numbers of lay ecclesial ministers should be viewed as a complement to the ministry of the ordained and not as corrosive of their authority or place in the Church.

One of the chief questions asked by both lay ecclesial ministers and the people in the pews is, “If there is a substantial increase in the number of priests in coming years, will we still need lay ecclesial ministers?” My answer is a resounding yes! I share the convictions of Cardinal Roger Mahoney, archbishop of Los Angeles, in this regard.

It must be recognized that lay ministry rooted in the priesthood of the baptized is not a stopgap measure. Even if seminaries were once again filled to overflowing and convents packed with sisters, there would still remain the need for cultivating, developing, and sustaining the full flourishing of ministries that we have witnessed in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. In the wake of the council, we have arrived at a clearer recognition that it is in the nature of the Church to be endowed with many gifts, and that these gifts are the basis for the vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate, and the religious life, as well as for the many ministries rooted in the call of baptism.

—Cardinal Roger Mahoney
*As I Have Done For You: A Pastoral
Letter on Ministry, Part Two*

Additionally, it is helpful to remind ourselves that the first bishops' commission on lay ministry was established in 1962, a time when seminaries and novitiates were, in fact, overflowing. Lay ministry was not then and is not now seen as a stopgap or a "help Father" issue; it is a pastoral development and theological insight in its own right.

Even so, with no significant sign that the gradual decline in the number of priests will abate soon, the presence of lay ecclesial ministers will allow us to sustain our parishes and serve more people than we could without their presence. In my own diocese, I have seen this repeatedly. The presence of our lay ecclesial ministers in nearly every facet of our mission extends what we can do, not only numerically but also in terms of the unique gifts and contributions lay ecclesial ministers bring to the Church.

5. We simply could not do what we do without lay ecclesial ministers. The ideas, energy, and creativity they have and continue to offer simply cannot be replaced.

This is not just a statement about the fact that we need people to provide ministry in the Church, but an honest recognition of what these lay ecclesial ministers have brought to our parishes and diocesan ministries. They add not only their able hands to the work of the Lord, but so much more. Their depth of life experience enriches and inspires our parishioners. Those who are married often bring a special sensitivity to women and men who share that vocation. They can relate closely with other married people and give those who need it relevant help and good counsel. They can offer their experiences or use what they have learned in their own homes to lead and inspire others. They supplement and enrich the holiness of the Church even as their souls are nourished by the very ministry to which they are called.

There is a variety of ways in which lay ministers serve the Church today. On the one hand there are lay ministers who serve in primarily volunteer roles and whose service is limited to a relatively small number of hours each week. These include extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, cantors, choir members, catechists, visitors of the sick, outreach workers, sacramental preparation instructors, youth ministers, and justice outreach program participants.

And there are also those who serve on a more permanent basis and for much more time each week. These people hold paid ecclesial positions; working at least twenty hours each week; many if not most, of them hold full-time positions. These are the ministries whose authority appropriately comes from the bishop rather than the pastor himself. These people undergo ministerial formation and are charged with leading others and collaborating directly with ordained ministers.

They include pastoral administrators or directors of parish life, pastoral associates, catechetical leaders, youth ministry leaders, school principals, and directors of liturgy and pastoral music. By 2005 there were over thirty thousand lay people in this second category alone.

I offer in this book my personal thoughts on lay ecclesial ministry and stories from my thirty years experience as bishop, forty-seven as a priest, and a lifetime of being a Catholic because I believe we can build a better understanding and wise embrace of lay ecclesial ministry. I also believe the challenges are many, but quite surmountable if we but approach the challenges with the same fresh energy and creativity that the late Holy Father John Paul II called for at the close of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “Let us go forward in hope!”

One Bishop's Story



I am certain that the growth of my understanding and appreciation of the expansion of lay ministry in the Church is, in large part, a direct result of my pastoral experience as Bishop of Rochester. When I remember the night of my installation as the eighth bishop of this diocese, I am powerfully reminded that that celebration was a pivotal moment in my life. When I remember the night, I am aware of the powerful formative influence the priests, religious, and lay faithful of Rochester have had in my life and growth.

The Catholic people of Rochester were, and remain now, a people who are strong in their faith—ready and willing to live and celebrate it through service to God and neighbor. I know that this does not make them unique. I know that the people of many other dioceses could be described in the same way. But, I also know that every diocese has its own distinct personality. Each claims the same faith; but no two understand it, live it, and share it in exactly the same way. Had I been assigned back then to Portland or Harrisburg or Wilmington, I would certainly have been shaped and molded in wonderful ways through my experiences with the Catholic faithful in those places. But it would not have been in just the same way

as it happened here. That interplay, that sharing of life and common growth is part of the Church's ancient wisdom that the relationship between a bishop and his diocese is analogous in some ways to the spousal relationship. My concrete and practical exposure to the issues surrounding the emergence of lay ministry in the Diocese of Rochester is a prime example of this.

When I arrived in Rochester in 1979 as their newly appointed bishop, I brought with me my own personality, gifts, and set of personal and ministerial experiences that made me who I was at that time. My only experience of Rochester until then was two years of philosophy at Saint Bernard's Seminary from 1957 to 1959. I enjoyed happy reunions with fellow students when I returned twenty years later but had very little firsthand knowledge of the diocese. Additionally, I was keenly aware at the time that my ministerial experience prior to my appointment as bishop was not typical of what one might expect to find on the curriculum vitae of a candidate for that office.

I had never been a pastor and had been a full-time parish priest for only two years. My other assignments included a year teaching in a high school, canon law studies, an assignment in the chancery and another as priests' personnel director for the Diocese of Albany. Brief as these experiences were, each was rewarding in its own way. Each made me aware that we can bring something of value to any ministry that we approach in a spirit of faith and a desire to serve. But, more importantly, I learned that every ministry entered in that spirit changes the ministers. From those early experiences, there grew in me the disposition to listen for the Lord's voice in whatever ministerial experience into which I was called.

In 1972, I was invited to an assignment that came to be the longest of my priesthood prior to my Episcopal ordination in 1979. That was joining the staff of the North American

College in Rome as spiritual director. I realized when I accepted that assignment that if I was to help the seminarians in their spiritual development, I had to rededicate myself to my own spiritual growth and development as well. As those men were “testing” their call to priesthood, I strove to deepen my personal commitment to my own spirituality and relationship to the Lord. Those years were happy and growth-filled: many thanks to the support of colleagues on the staff; a wonderful spiritual guide, the late Edward Malatesta, S.J.; and the seminarians whose honesty and openness were great gifts.

At the end of my seven years I was in the happy position of enjoying what I did, but at the same time looking forward to a broader kind of ministry at home. I loved the students but looked forward to serving a wide range of people. As God's providence would have it, I was called to minister to and among a wide range of people. It was not to be as presbyter in Albany, however, but as Bishop of Rochester.

So, on the night of my installation as bishop, I was aware that my prayers had been answered, even if in a way I had not anticipated. I knew I was shifting from a ministry with a very particular focus, with a narrow constituency in terms of talent, gender, and mode of engagement in the Church, to the breadth and scope of a progressive, energetic diocese that had already opened itself to many of the reforms called for by Vatican Council II. Quite consciously aware that I had never served as pastor, I was deeply challenged by the call that I now had to be the chief pastor of an entire, and wonderfully vibrant, diocese.

Based on my experience of the lessons and gifts to be found in every ministerial experience, I knew that in order to be able to offer leadership to the community I needed to learn its story and become familiar with its unfolding pastoral life. I needed to immerse myself in its history, in the struggles that

had formed it, in the ethos and culture—both ecclesial and civil—that had come to characterize its life and spirit.

I had to learn about the twelve counties of New York State which composed this particular Church—not only its cities and towns, its long and beautiful Finger Lakes, sparkling waterfalls, broad river valleys, rich farm land, beautiful vineyards, and orchards—but also about its women. I discovered early on that in the very center of this diocese, at Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and a host of other women and men called a Women’s Rights Convention in 1848, which began the worldwide women’s movement. These creative women pushed for a radical rethinking of domestic, educational, political, social, and Church life, all of which had marginalized women. This ferment was translated locally into the founding of a score of female educational institutions, which survive today and continue to influence the local culture to a marked degree.

In addition to a deep desire to learn a great deal about this community, I brought with me a commitment to the Church and a longing to serve it well. I yearned to help this new-to-me diocese continue implementing the values of the Second Vatican Council. It was the people—the priests, the religious, and the lay faithful—who helped me do both. The Catholic people of Rochester were willing to share their stories with me. They were eager to help meet the pastoral challenges of the day and always willing to challenge and question as we moved forward.

I could see almost immediately that this Church liked what they were doing and were satisfied with the direction the diocese was taking. They had appreciated very much the leadership of my predecessors—Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who wanted to implement all of the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council in rapid fashion, and Bishop Joseph

L. Hogan, who had been very much engaged in the formation and education of the laity.

My strong impression was that the people expected a similar kind of commitment and involvement from me. They called on me at every turn to explain what I was thinking and the reasons behind my actions. I remember that I thought I had to tread lightly in these discussions, given the sensitivity of some issues and the high level of expectation they had for me.

I also knew that I had to test all of their and my convictions in light of the teaching of our tradition. All of this sharpened my awareness that, ultimately, I had to determine my own style and priorities of leadership. I could not act out of a desire to please or to avoid problems or conflict.

My arrival in Rochester generated much curiosity and concern. Remember, I had arrived there from Rome! People in all walks of the Church wanted to know, "Would the new bishop support what had evolved locally?" Or, did he have orders to put the lid on things? It became clear early on that there had been significant emphasis placed on the emerging role for women in this diocese. One of the expectations among some was that the ordination of women would soon be approved by the Church. They saw this as a natural outgrowth of the fact that, already, women held significant positions in the diocese and in many of our parishes. I remember being peppered so often with such questions about the issue that I thought it would be helpful to put my thoughts on the ministry of women in writing. The task of doing so would force me to express in some clear and systematic way what I thought about these issues. I also thought that what I wrote would be strengthened if it was written with as much input as possible from the community. Thus, the controversial issue of ordination provided an important moment for our local Church.

The wonderful conversations generated by this writing effort produced “The Fire in the Thornbush: A Pastoral Letter on Women in the Church and Society,” which we published on April 29, 1982, the Feast of St. Catherine of Siena. The process leading to the publication of this document, and the document itself, have proven to be useful in our diocese. This is true in terms of our efforts to appreciate Pope Paul VI’s teaching on the ordination of women and further developments surrounding the ordination question. But, it is also true in terms of our desire to understand and to build on the most helpful patterns of an emerging lay ministry. Even at that early date, and having only recently arrived in Rochester, I could sense that the evolving role of the laity would be a matter of significant attention in the years ahead.

When we think of women and of all the laity in relation to this work of Christ, we realize that there is much that needs to be made more explicit, more open and more inclusive. Vatican Council II affirmed that pastors have the “duty to shepherd the faithful and recognize their ministries and charisms so that all, according to their proper roles, may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart” For from Christ “the whole body, being close joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the functioning in due measure of each single part derives its increase to the building of itself in love” [Eph 4:16] (*LG*, 30).

The Fathers of Vatican Council II said of the laity: “They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world” (*LG*, 31).

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was promulgated in November 1964. As we look

back on that document after eighteen years, we find ourselves remembering the many ways in which the Church has translated into its daily practice the meaning of such phrases as “their proper roles,” “the functioning in due measure,” and “in their own way.” At the same time, we struggle to understand how the reality of the present day constantly calls the whole Church to a renewed understanding of her mission which is our “common undertaking.”

It is part of our work in this local Church to deepen our understanding of how each of us can become more fully “sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ.”

For the present there is much which can and should be done to affirm the rights and responsibilities of lay men and women to participate in the teaching, shepherding, and sanctifying work of the Church.

—*The Fire in the Thornbush*, 57–59

Matthew H. Clark, DD, Bishop of Rochester

Since then, I have tried to enjoy and repeat the lessons of consulting about and finally writing that pastoral letter, particularly by engaging people's love of the Lord and love of their Church. Thus, throughout my ministry in Rochester, I have tried to encourage people to share their ideas, hopes, and dreams, and to bring their thinking to the pastoral issues and decisions that we so frequently face.

There seem to be real convictions here in terms of lay ministry. We all realize that something exciting is happening. There is a stirring in the hearts of people, an appreciation of what it is to serve the Lord through pastoral ministry in the name of the Church. We see more and more the fruits and efforts that this call has in their lives. In particular, lay ministers report that they come closer to the Lord as they go deeper into ministry.

Ministry enriches the minister's life because of personal interaction with others and because of a deepening friendship with the Lord. To hear of this experience is to grow in understanding of the grace and power of lay ministry. It also gives birth to the desire to help continue and strengthen the experience.

There has indeed been much strength and many achievements as lay ministry has expanded and flourished. There have also been difficulties and problems. Issues of financing initial and ongoing formation, questions relating to the reception of such ministry by the whole Church, concerns about the peace and unity among ministers of the Gospel all continue to call us to prayer, research, and respectful conversation. In all of this, I have tried to encourage our lay ministers and the people with whom and among whom they serve. We need to realize that this is not a matter of solving a problem and moving on. Rather, we need to realize that the challenge is to appreciate that this is a matter of faithful relationships among all ministers of the Gospel, and of their relationships with the people they are privileged to serve. We need to find ways to deal with the full range of issues and questions raised, drawing on the teaching of the Church, and relying on the strength and insight that come to us through our communion with other local Churches.

Some have asked about how I came to be so confident in my commitment to learning from and responding to the faithful people of our diocese as a genuine source of wisdom in my episcopal ministry. I think that in large measure it goes back to a conversation I had a few days after I had been named a bishop. Archbishop Jean Jadot, then Apostolic Delegate to the United States, asked me how I felt about the appointment. I said I was happy about it but had begun to experience some doubts about my qualifications for the work. I told him that I was not a scholar and that I had some reservations about my abilities, training, and experience.

His response to me was simple. He told me to be confident in the Lord's call and to trust in my own gifts for ministry. I'll never forget his words. They didn't forestall moments of doubt and difficult times, but they have always provided an anchor when I was experiencing them.

This advice probably should not have been as surprising to me as it seemed at the time. I had always had a sense that ordination, for example, doesn't make one smarter than he was before. The act of ordination does not make one holier than he was before, but leaves one as a pilgrim with everyone else. A priest or a bishop is also a searcher, a seeker, and a person of faith whose guidance will always be the Gospel, the teaching of the Church, and the well-being and growth of his local community. No one holds all the answers or all the truths. All Catholics, including bishops, have the gift of the Holy Spirit—alive in the Word, the Eucharist, and the community—as the foundation and source of our faith life.

We know that our communities will be less than what God wants them to be if we do not share our gifts. In a community of faith as broad, as ancient, and as complicated as our own, we have to be open to the truth wherever we find it. I think someone in my position could make the mistake of assuming that he has within himself such knowledge of the dogmas of the Church and such an expert ability to apply them, that he doesn't need those around him to understand how to move forward.

Surely faith is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus as the One who saves and reconciles us to the Father. Thus, it is a wonderful insight to realize that one is not more brilliant than another, one is not more dedicated than someone else, one is not holier than another may be. When we are appointed to lead the community, it is a very challenging experience. You realize that you, as limited and fragile as you are, have become a primary symbol of unity and faith of that community. You

recognize that this will not be realized simply because the appointment has been made, or because you will it to be so. Rather, the key is in the invitation to others, issued through our common commission as baptized people, to live in, to love, and to serve the Lord as best they can. So how we behave and speak in the midst of the community, how we learn to express in our own voice what is available in the community for the noble purpose to which we are committed, is itself a communal exercise.

Whether we are bishops or not, we can't do this by ourselves. We live fully in the community of the Church. We can only continually invite and encourage, bring people together, urge people to live fully and faithfully the gifts they have for the Gospel we profess.

I have heard of bishops who apparently resist the use of the term "lay ministry." I'm not sure what this means in reality. For example, I was recently told about an archbishop who has urged those in his diocese not to use the term "lay ecclesial ministry." He thinks the term is misleading and problematic in a number of ways. At the same time, though, there are real and concrete signs in that diocese of the emergence of genuine lay ministry: an education program at the local seminary is strengthened by diocesan financial support and healthy enrollment, and many parishes employ lay people in a variety of pastoral ministries. While use of the term may not be encouraged, and the general concept may be under scrutiny, the archbishop is helping the reality flourish in his archdiocese.

Another potential difficulty could be reflected in the comments of another bishop who complained at one point that lay ministry is causing a new caste or class system to be created in our dioceses. I have to say that my own experience has not at all indicated that a new ranking or class system is emerging among the people I know who are engaged in ministry. It is rare in my experience to encounter a lay ecclesial minister

who appears to be in ministry for power or prestige. Still, I understand my colleague's concern in terms of the many ways in which our proneness to sin can make all of us vulnerable to temptations to move in that direction.

Another friend once shared with me his concern that affirming lay ecclesial ministry might indicate a diminishment of commitment to recruiting and developing fine priests for the service of the Church. He seemed to indicate that to support one implies a neglect of the other. My own position is quite different from that. I think the mutual support of both highlights and raises the other to new levels. In my thinking, the fullness of Christ is more fully manifest through the support of both. To those who fear that encouraging lay ministry might constitute a threat to the priesthood, I go back to the example of my own transition from life in Rome to life in Rochester.

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, in the seven years prior to my ordination as bishop, I had little experience not only of women in the Church, but actually of anyone except males between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight years old. While I would say that there were certainly opportunities to enjoy what diversity there was in Rome in those days, I have to admit that I did not find in the seminary setting the kind of richness that I have found in a Church served by women and other lay ministers. I think the same richness and benefit for the whole Church is available as we learn to nurture the vocations of our fine lay ministers.

Early on, I found that I needed to absorb the experience of lay ministry, to reflect on it in order to come to understand and appreciate it. Obviously I came to this new experience as a kind of blank slate in terms of any experience of this dimension of Church life. I wanted to see what the new picture looked like, I wanted to appreciate it and perhaps to promote it, but I had very little personal experience of it at all. I

wondered about what I observed in my new situation, asking, “Is this good? Why is this happening?”

I did not detect anything negative in what I saw happening. In fact, I saw that the people reacted positively to lay ministry. I saw broader numbers of people served because such ministry was available. I saw enriching mutual interaction between ordained and lay ministers. I kept being mindful, over and over, of the passage from Matthew’s gospel, “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:16). I can honestly say that it became an awesome kind of thing to unpack, to appreciate all that people were putting into lay ministry to make it actually happen.

As I said earlier, I could have gone to another diocese and experienced this in a very different way. I keep wondering now what would have happened to me, who I would have become, if I had not arrived in Rochester. I am quite certain that I would have been changed and built up by the people of any diocese to which I might have been assigned, but speculating in the abstract makes it impossible to go much further than that. This community in Rochester challenged me in some very life-giving ways. It didn’t all happen in the first six months, for sure. There was a first intense flash, but what I have really learned has come gradually through this lengthy ministry of more than thirty years in this diocese.

God so often works in and through the relationships we have with one another. In relationships we experience the Gospel alive in the hearts of our companions. This can only bring us closer to the Lord and renew our confidence and our courage. We are not computers. We are human beings who have freedom and the power to choose. We live in a world that is much more complex, more demanding, more difficult than we could ever anticipate. We face scientific and technological advances that can be both promising and frightening. In short, we need to keep searching. We see this most concretely,

perhaps, in the sacraments of initiation. These are really just the beginnings of saying “yes” to the Lord, of learning to appreciate his promises to us and to appreciate what the Church represents to us. Here is where we start to find a treasure and a strength in terms of living the life of faith.

As I have come to understand it, the realities of the pastoral situations we face often call all of us to reexamine our own assumptions. Pastoral ministry itself challenges us to be sure that we have not equated our own life experience with the fullness of truth. This is not an easy thing, because in so many ways we want to trust our own experience. But we always have to be open to the possibility that we need to accept a broader reality than the one we are currently living.

I believe that the Church, in the documents of Vatican Council II, and in the post-conciliar documents, called us to this very thing. Through baptism, we rightly claim the universal call to holiness, to constant growth in the Lord. Through baptism, the Church affirms in each of us a capacity to serve in the name of the Lord. We need to constantly challenge the limits of our own experience—our own view of reality. We need to keep asking, “Is there another way to look at this issue? Do we need to take other steps in order to address the problems before us or to assist us in encountering the fullness of the Lord? What does the Church ask or require of us?” I have to say that I am really challenged in terms of trying to understand people who want nothing to change, when life assures us over and over that everything changes. Life is measured, even, in terms of change and growth.

In reflecting back on people’s response to Vatican II, I can’t help but think that even before the close of the Council and before our awareness of what the changes to Church life would begin to look like, the various dioceses of the United States already had assumed different patterns and personalities. It became clear to me during the years of the Council that we

students arriving for studies at the North American College in Rome had all come from seminaries that had impressed upon their students particular sets of interests and perceptions that reflected the strengths of each institution.

I recall, for example, that many students from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore were very interested in and excited about matters relating to the Church's liturgy. Students from Saint Joseph's Seminary in New York had a notable interest in the study of scripture. The seminaries, like the dioceses that supported them, had a clear influence in tuning their students in to the issues of the time and to the probable work of the Council.

As young students, we had a deep curiosity about what an ecumenical Council would be like, about what it would decide. We became aware that some were fearful that the Council would shake things up too much. People of this temperament were likely to want to continue with business as usual. Others were insistent that things would have to change in order for us to make the Gospel more relevant to a century that had already endured a depression, two world wars, and deep social, political, economic, and religious shifts. The faculty at the university reflected these same perspectives. It doesn't mean that one group was bad and the other good, but only that there truly was not agreement on the main issues, even going into the Council.

I was ordained a priest in the very month that the first session of the Second Vatican Council concluded, and I have to say that my formation was very much influenced by the deliberations and outcomes of it. I returned to Rome after a year to study canon law and was privileged to be there during the third and fourth sessions. The Council punctuated so much of my own program of preparation for ministry.

When I returned to my home diocese to begin my ministry of priesthood, I learned that most of our priests were avid

and enthusiastic about implementing the initiatives of the Council. Some did think these new directions were intrusive and disruptive to the life of the Church they had known and grown to love. For some, I think, there was an attitude of "It will pass. Let's just try to stick it out." I remember at one point there was difficulty in even bringing priests together for retreats, since debate and argument would often prevail and upset the intention of the retreat itself. Parish communities, in large part, took their leads from their pastors. If the pastor was open to the changes and enthusiastic about the new perspectives, parishes seemed to take on that very flavor, and vice versa.

I, myself, recall a sense of excitement about the new possibilities. At the same time, I recall that during that particular era in American history I found focus on the internal life of the Church unusually complicated, even as a priest. This was because we were introducing enormous changes in Church life into the U.S. culture of the 1960s. This seemed only to increase the turmoil that many people felt. The sense of tumult and instability was very real for all of us. After the relatively calm sense of continuity and stability of the 1950s, along came the peace generation, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and challenges to authority on almost every level and in every field. It was hard to isolate ecclesial matters and focus on them, and it was difficult even to set a tone in which we could discuss these things in a productive way. We had many diverse opinions in the Church, surrounded by the swirl of the shifting culture itself.

As I say, some people clamored for stability, wanting to rely on the tradition as we had known it and on the expectations they had come to understand, anticipate, and appreciate. Others were convinced that the Church and its ministers had to be in closer dialogue with the surrounding culture. They wanted to incarnate the Gospel in a particular place and to be

open to truth wherever it could be found—from within the tradition and even beyond it.

This was a real challenge at the time. Some people thrived on that challenge. It stimulated their intellectual curiosity and encouraged their desire for a Church that would become a more participatory community. But others resisted anything that touched cherished ways of life. Even our understanding of the Eucharist became part of the discussion. Much of the theology emanating from the Council stressed the Eucharist as food, with the metaphor of the meal prevailing over earlier understandings that relied on the metaphor of sacrifice. It led me to recall my early catechetical instruction to never chew the host out of deference to its sacredness. The shift toward a new understanding, in just this one example, shook Catholicism to its very core.

Even for me personally, there was a sense in which I was not entirely enthusiastic about change. I would judge myself then to be more conservative about Church matters than I am now. It wasn't because I intentionally accepted or ignored arguments on either side of the questions, but I appreciated very much the habits of the life in which I had grown up. I wanted to continue that and carry it forward. I didn't oppose the Council in any *a priori* way; I think I just needed at that point to be shown—I needed to have the new theologies and perspectives explained to me. I needed to have the why and how explained to me.

Eventually, I came to a profound wonder and appreciation for the goodness of Vatican II. I can still recall the sense of gratitude that came to me as I read the proclamation in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy describing the liturgy as the work of all the faithful. This challenged the view of so many that somehow the liturgy is the work of the presider, in some ways set apart from the people. It became in many ways the foundation for our entire “new” vision of the Church as

comprised of the total membership—clergy and laity together. In this document, the whole Church is called to “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (SC 14). I believe that this summons is, in fact, the very foundation for the reemergence and growth of lay ministry that has occurred in the intervening years. For the first time, we came to appreciate a variety of roles in liturgy, and to understand that it was not only the ordained who exercised ministry and discharged offices in the liturgy. In article 29 we read: “Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought, therefore, to discharge their offices with the sincere piety and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God’s people.”

I was thrilled hearing the Church referred to as the People of God. I recognized the profound shift in the documents talking about the Church not as the hierarchy, but as the People of God. The mission of the Church is not given to the hierarchy but to the whole Church. Clergy and laity share in the one mission of God’s people, and in the triple office of Jesus Christ as priest, prophet, and king. Development of the notion of collegiality only reinforced this appreciation of the Church as the entire People of God. In *Lumen Gentium*, bishops are no longer pictured as isolated monarchs but the emphasis is placed instead on the collective relationships among dioceses. In the years following the Council, collegiality became a benchmark for the shared ministries of all. In fact all these developments flowed from what has come to be understood by many as the most significant contribution of the Council, which is the Church’s self-understanding as the People of God.

That shift in *Lumen Gentium* was a huge, unexpected breakthrough for me and for many. I wondered about what it meant that the Council participants had begun to talk about the Trinity as community and about its relationship to the

communion of saints. Intimately tied to both of these developments was the way baptism had begun to be presented. There was now reference to the call and gifts of baptism, with new application of these to *all* the baptized—with *all* the faithful being called to holiness and empowerment.

I was aware even then that part of the implication of all this was that the laity no longer had to wait for Father to call for some sort of help or the support that he might need. Lay people were called to become active in the Church, and the ordained were now to call on them to coordinate and lead. The hierarchy was being challenged to support *them* in their ministry as the People of God!

Another major shift was the way the Council spoke of the Church being engaged in the world, for God's own purposes. That seemed absolutely wonderful to me. That Christians are called to be succor, encouragement, help, and light to others—that because of our faith we had wonderful things to share with the world—was enormously encouraging to me. So was the view that we need to live in the world, to be in conversation with it, to be part of it. Until that point, there seemed to be a sense that somehow we Catholics were to remain aloof from the world and stand apart from those with whom we differed. Practical examples of this sort of attitude are seen in the notion that Catholics were not, except in rare circumstances, to enter Protestant churches. And, if we did, we should not participate in any way with the prayer of those communities. The strong sense of boundaries surrounding the Church that I had known as a boy was suddenly quite different.

In terms of implementing the Council and looking at the implications of an ecclesiology based on the notion of the Church as the People of God, I return to my earlier example of we seminarians arriving at the North American College in Rome from our home seminaries with different emphases and different interests and areas of growth. That was true of

the dioceses of our country then and is certainly true today. It is not as if every diocese implemented the Council in the same way and at the same pace. Any observer can see that local Churches have responded differently to the promptings of the Spirit, to interpretations of the conciliar decrees and so forth. Some see things very simply: "The laws are there; what is the problem?" There are those who assume that every diocese should be exactly the same.

But we all face different problems at different times and in different ways. What do we do as a parish when our pastor is very old and too weak to preach on Sunday? Is it legitimate or not to call on someone who is trained and skillful at preaching to step forward to do that? Some say, "Yes, that's great. Of course, do it." Others insist that this may not be done. We know that the law is clear. But we know, too, that in the pastoral decisions of bishops, there is a genuine and legitimate leeway. Pastoral judgments have always taken precedence over an absolutely perfect outward compliance with the ecclesiastical laws in place at a given time. Sometimes, as we know, higher laws ought to prevail.

As we know, too, often enough there is no time to write down our reasons for these judgments. Full explanations are simply not possible. I believe we need to respond to the people who need our assistance. It is sometimes difficult to make time-constrained pastoral decisions that meet the legitimate needs of people and at the same time honor fully the relevant norms of the Church. Legal requirements, guidelines, and norms obviously do not all have the same weight and do not always apply in exactly the same way. Clearly, someone could take this to an extreme. But bishops simply are not doing that. I am not doing that. Perfect compliance is hardly the highest value. The sacraments are for the people. We celebrate them to help the Church be holy, not as an end in themselves. The Church is the People of God, in pilgrimage to more perfect

union with our God. We absolutely have to signify this, signify what we honestly and really stand for. We have to keep our hearts where our treasure is.

Recall the story from Mark's gospel of the Lord's friends gathering bits of grain on the Sabbath. In so doing, they did not observe a particular law of Judaism. Even when challenged on their breaking of the law, Christ called his followers to do what they needed to do, insisting the Sabbath exists to serve the spiritual needs of people, not the other way around (Mk 2:23–28). These images live on in scripture and in the story of the Church because they help us to understand what the human condition is. We can't absolutize smaller things without diminishing our capacity to aspire to higher things. This is true for everyone, everywhere.

I have heard the adage "Keep the rule and rule will keep you." In my seminary years, a central switch turned off all the lights in the dormitories at the designated time. We probably learned discipline from that, and we learned that we couldn't act on our own preferences all the time. But circumstances change, and today the formation programs in seminaries are governed by different principles. Co-responsibility and respectful dialogue are much more the rules of operation today. In some ways, it's much easier to simply "follow the rules." There won't be many questions, and all will be clear and simple. But what do we risk in living that way?

My hope is that as we realize more and more what it is to be Church as the People of God, we will move toward a helpful diversity, always respecting the creedal formulae and dogmas, always striving for our deepest values, but recognizing that the living out of such values may find different expression in different times and places. We can be Church and still make decisions that differ—if these help us in achieving the deeper good for which we all strive.

In terms of considering future directions in the development of lay ecclesial ministry, I think we need to keep working on the issues identified in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*. As I mentioned earlier, we need to be equitable and honest in the support we give to the development of lay ecclesial ministers. These people invest considerable time, energy, and money into their formation. They realize, as we do, that candidates for ordained ministry receive much fuller funding for their formation. This reality calls us to serious reflection on whether that situation should be preserved. It seems to me that we need to find concrete, practical ways to support all the people who are so willing to devote themselves to the pastoral ministry of the Church. It is our responsibility to do so.

We also need to keep working on the understanding of lay ecclesial ministry held by our communities at large. So many still equate ministry with that offered by the priest. That, of course, is appropriate as it relates to the sacraments that only a priest can administer. But I have met people who complain because they have not received ministry from a priest, even when a non-ordained minister has, in fact, come to them and cared for them beautifully. We need to help people understand that it is the ministry of Christ for which they thirst, and it is not the ordained alone who exercise that ministry and bring that service to us.

Progress in all these things will not be automatic by any means. I think it will come as all things do: through patient instruction and through careful, continuing reflection by both lay ministers and those to whom they offer ministry. We can respond in ways that promote understanding when there are complaints that Father should have come and not a lay person. Somehow we have to help one another realize Church as the People of God, too. To assume that “only Father” is good enough to exercise the ministry of Christ is surely not to appreciate this image.

As I think back on my youth, I realize that we equated all ministry with priestly ministry. We did not have at the time any real sense that our baptism incorporated us into a priestly people. The notion is deeply embedded in our tradition, but it did not become a vital, discussed reality in our lives until much later. When the Second Vatican Council re-enlivened that rich idea, it was a good example of how we come to appreciate our faith in new and deeper ways as history unfolds. We claim the same faith, but with more understanding and a different way of living and sharing it.

Today, we are blessed with thousands of lay ministers who extend the pastoral care of the Church in beautiful ways. When I was growing up in my hometown of Waterford, New York, our parish, St. Mary of the Assumption, was served faithfully and lovingly by the Augustinian Fathers of the Villanova Province. The priests were good to us, and we loved them.

But save for the lay catechists who taught us after school on Tuesday afternoons, we saw no other lay people in Church roles that we would now identify as ministerial. Those catechists, all women as I remember, were good to us. They treated us with respect and affection. And, although we kids didn't always behave as well as we should have, we had considerable respect and affection for them. We knew that they cared about us and sacrificed much for us. They were lay ministers long before anyone thought to call them that.

In the co-educational twelve hundred–student Catholic high school, which I attended, we were taught by priests, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Saint Joseph, and one lay person who taught music. At that time, we young people were aware that many women and men generously served the Church in volunteer and sometimes paid positions. But we were more likely to talk about their willingness to help Father than about their expressing their baptismal vocation through service to others. There was no developed theology of baptism as a sacrament of

ministry, nor were there many opportunities for the ministerial enrichment and ongoing education of those lay persons. Now, of course, we see this kind of service as flowing from our baptism, as part of our obligation to share our gifts in service to the community, and in the building up of the Body of Christ for the transformation of the world.

What do I see down the road? I am optimistic about the future. In my view, the emergence of lay ecclesial ministry in the Church is not just a sign of innovation or revision but is a sign of true renewal and hope. I truly believe that it is a work of the Holy Spirit. There is much more to be done. We need to reflect continually on the experience of lay ecclesial ministers and on our experience of their ministry. We need to work on the areas outlined in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*: recruitment, initial and on-going support, relationships with bishops and other ministers of the Gospel, relationships with the people they serve, compensation, and accountability.

If we can do this work in faith and with mutual respect—and I have no doubt that we can—we can be an integral part of the continued growth of one of God's greatest gifts to the post-conciliar Church.