

**Boston College Conference on
“To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry”
Jan. 2-3, 2020**

The goal of the conference was to build on the theological convictions and identify common ground from which to imagine pastoral recommendations based on the document, [To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry](#), issued by the Boston College Seminar on a Contemporary Theology of Priesthood and Ministry aimed to stimulate a fresh conversation toward a renewed formation for and practice of lay and ordained ministries.

The participants at the conference included episcopal leaders, seminary rectors and board members, a USCCB consultant, lay ecclesial ministers, theologians, and 10 members of the original Boston College seminar.

Below is the official communiqué issued by the conference, followed by a list of the conference participants.

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

All consideration of priesthood and ministry must flow from the Second Vatican Council’s affirmation of the church’s living tradition as it has been received and developed by Pope Francis. He has called the church to missionary discipleship that goes to “the peripheries” and is responsive to the gifts and challenges of contemporary cultures.

The priesthood has its source in the life-giving mission of the triune God; more specifically, it has its context in the life of the church. Through the action of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit the church comes into being as a community of faith called to witness to the world the hope that has its foundation in God’s unconditional love for all creatures. Ordained priests are ministers of this good news, proclaiming it in word, celebrating it in the church’s sacramental life, and expressing it in pastoral service.

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The church’s convictions around priestly vocations have to be grounded in a renewed awareness of the baptismal vocation, which calls all members of the church to mission.
2. The entire process of vocational recruitment, priestly formation, and the assessment of suitability for ordination must be continually reimagined. The aim is to bring into relief the ecclesial identity of ordained ministry and give a much greater role to the whole church community in this endeavor.

3. It is important that seminarians be exposed regularly to the rich diversity of the people of God. Where possible, this broadening should occur in the classroom (where seminarians study alongside lay peers), among their instructors and formators (which should include lay women and men) and in multiple pastoral contexts where seminarians are called to collaborate with a range of other ecclesial ministers.
4. Ecclesial discernment of a candidate's possible admission to the seminary must identify a basic human capacity for healthy relationships, compassion, vulnerability, generosity, and other human qualities necessary for ministry.
5. Human formation within seminaries must foster authentic psychosexual maturity and integration.
6. In the U.S. church today, eighty percent of ecclesial ministers are women. This ecclesial reality demands that ordained ministers and candidates work constructively and positively with women. To facilitate this, it is desirable that women be included at every stage of the formation process—as peers in class, as teachers and formators, and as collaborators in ministry.
7. Cultural and racial diversity within the U.S. church manifests its catholicity. This ecclesial reality demands greater intentionality in cultivating and forming ministerial vocations from diverse communities. In addition, formation for ministry must prepare candidates to serve in diverse intercultural settings.
8. Seminaries must be free to evaluate candidates honestly, without a concern to “maintain numbers” by persevering with unsuitable candidates.
9. To meet the needs of the church for pastoral and sacramental ministry, we must creatively expand existing ecclesial ministries and explore new models for ordained ministry.
10. Ongoing priestly formation is an urgent necessity. Without it, the church cannot respond to the changing needs of the times and is out-of-step with the expectations placed on parallel professions. Priestly formation has yet to realize the vision for ongoing formation articulated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) and the new *ratio* “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation” (2017).

This communiqué reflects discussions within the conference, but final responsibility for its content rests with the co-chairs of the event, not with the participants. Co-chairs: Richard Gaillardetz, Thomas Groome, Richard Lennan. List of participants follows.

Participants in Boston College Conference on Priesthood and Ministry, Jan 2 and 3, 2020

Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Germany

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, Archbishop of Newark

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago

Archbishop John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe

Bishop Edward Weisenburger, Bishop of Tucson

Bishop John Eric Stowe, O.F.M., Conv., Bishop of Lexington

Bishop Robert McElroy, Bishop of San Diego

Bishop Timothy Senior, Rector of St. Charles Borromeo, Philadelphia

Bishop Mark O'Connell, Auxiliary Bishop of Boston

Msgr. Chester Borski, St. Mary's Seminary, Houston

Fr. John Kartje, Rector of Mundelein Seminary, Chicago

Fr. Philip J. Brown, Rector of St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore

Fr. Trung Nguyen, Rector of St. Mary's Seminary, Houston

Fr. Mark R. Francis, CSV, President of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Fr. Thomas Stegman, SJ, Dean of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

Fr. Bernard R. (Bob) Bonnot, Exec. Director, Association of US Catholic Priests

Bradford Hinze, Karl Rahner, SJ Professor of Theology, Fordham University

Steve Bevans, SVD, Professor of Mission and Culture, Catholic Theological Union

Susan K. Wood, SCL, Academic Dean and Professor, Regis College, Toronto School of Theology

Katarina Schuth, OSF, Professor/ Chair for Social Scientific Study of Religion, University of St. Thomas

Julie Rubio, Professor of Social Ethics, Santa Clara University

Catherine E. Clifford, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, St. Paul University, Ottawa

David G. Hunter, Margaret O'Brien Flatley Professor of Theology, Boston College

Thomas P. Brown, Chair of the Mundelein Seminary Board

David Wenzel, Chair of the Aquinas Institute Board

Sharon Euart, RSM, Consultant to USCCB

Kerry Robinson, Global Ambassador of Leadership Roundtable

Debra Hintz, Parish Director of St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Milwaukee

Carlos De La Rosa, Grant Manager, Porticus North America

Diane Vella, Pastoral Associate, St. Bernard's Parish, Levittown, NY

From the Boston College Seminar on A Contemporary Theology of Priesthood and Ministry:

Liam Bergin, Professor of Theology, Boston College

Boyd Taylor Coolman, Professor of Theology, Boston College

Richard Gaillardetz, Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology, Boston College

Thomas Groome, Professor of Theology and Religious Education, Boston College

Megan Hopkins, Doctoral Student in Theology, Boston College

Emily Jendzejec, Doctoral Candidate in Theology and Education, Boston College

Karen Kiefer, Director of the Church in 21st Century Center, Boston College

Richard Lennan, *Professor Ordinarius*, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

Elyse Raby, Doctoral Candidate in Theology, Boston College

Jacqueline Regan, Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Career Services,

Boston College School of Theology and Ministry