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To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry

Boston College Seminar on Priesthood and Ministry for the Contemporary Church

A Boston College seminar sponsored by its Department of Theology and School of Theology and Ministry has met regularly since September 2016 to study and craft a theological statement on a contemporary understanding of priesthood and ministry. The seminar's 12 participants included priests and laity, men and women, scholars and pastoral formators. One goal of the seminar was to deepen the theology of priesthood that began to emerge at the Second Vatican Council, especially the relationship between ordained ministry and the priesthood of all the baptized, and the threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral service. A second goal was to offer a theological framework adapted to the pressing pastoral questions facing the contemporary church, including the nature and function of priesthood, its required charisms and the formation of candidates for ordination. In its statement the seminar participants said, "Priests today — and certainly tomorrow — cannot be 'lone rangers.' The willingness to work collaboratively with others, men and women who are volunteers and also those who are formally engaged as lay ecclesial ministers, is necessary for effective ministry." The seminar was co-chaired by Professors Richard Gaillardetz, Father Richard Lennan and Thomas Groome. The names of all the participants are listed at the end of the following statement.

"The church and the world need mature and well-balanced priests, fearless and generous pastors, capable of closeness, listening and mercy."[1]

Pope Francis has stated repeatedly his desire to breathe fresh air into the theology and practice of the ordained priesthood. That desire aligns Pope Francis with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which recognized that "the often vastly changed circumstances of the pastoral and human scene" required

a renewed theology of the priesthood.[2] In addressing that need, the council retrieved neglected riches of the church's tradition, interpreting them in light of the contemporary context.

"To Serve the People of God," which is the fruit of Boston College's Seminar on Priesthood and Ministry for the Contemporary Church, sponsored by the School of Theology and Ministry and the Department of Theology at Boston College, also aspires to present the priesthood in ways attentive to both the faith of the church and current circumstances. The seminar that produced the text was a two-year project exploring the history, theology and practice of the ordained priesthood within the wider ministerial life of the Catholic community.

Gathered together for research and discussion in the seminar were women and men who are lay and ordained theologians and ministers working in pastoral and academic settings. In its composition and way of proceeding, the seminar embodied what this text itself promotes: the collaboration of all ministers for the sake of the church's mission in the world.

This paper seeks to encourage conversation about the priesthood and contribute to the church's discernment of appropriate theology and practices of formation for future priests. The text focuses particularly on diocesan priests and their formation.

If priests are to be "shepherds with the 'smell of the sheep,'" as Pope Francis urges, suitable formation is of primary importance.[3] Pope Francis seeks priests willing "to serve the people of God, to serve the poor, men and women who are outcasts living on the fringes of society to serve children and the elderly."[4] Programs of formation should nurture and channel that willingness.

Formation for the priesthood is an essential enterprise of the church. It flows from an understanding of the ways in which the ordained priesthood participates in the life of the church and its mission in the world. The arguments and conclusions in this text echo Vatican II's retrieval of the ecclesial identity of priests. This perspective interprets the specificity of priests within their relationship to the community of faith and the mission shared by all the baptized.

When such a perspective is lacking, as has happened in Catholic history, ordination can appear to create a gulf between priests and the other members of the church, with whom priests form the one body of the baptized. Similarly, a concentration on functions unique to priests also runs the risk of isolating priests from the community of faith or even of defining priests in terms of power over the community. If priesthood becomes a path to power, priests can understand themselves as gatekeepers of "discipline, rules and organization," rather than as disciples among disciples.[5]

Programs of formation can shape priests attuned to shared service within the community of faith rather than control over it. To do so, these programs must be underpinned by the wisdom of the theological tradition and committed to the church's "responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."[6]

Signs of the times, of course, are many and varied. They are also often unique to countries and cultures. For that reason, Vatican II acknowledged that "the wide diversity of peoples and countries" requires local churches to develop programs of formation fashioned for their own context.[7]

This text has its grounding in the Catholic Church in the United States of America, a grounding whose distinctive contours likewise require a particular approach to the ministry and formation of diocesan priests. The authors of this paper recognize that its analysis will not be fully applicable beyond the United States but hope that its approach may be beneficial for other local churches as they reflect on ecclesial ministry.

As part of the wider civic community, Catholics in the United States experience a range of influences whose impact is manifold and momentous. Those influences encompass ever-widening disparities in social, educational and economic opportunity, and also debates on race, gender, marriage and climate change.

The effects of technology, including the ramifications of social media on perceptions of truth, also affect members of the church as much as any other group in civil society. In addition, some contemporary social developments in the United States, notably the exponential increase in Hispanic immigrants and the shedding of religious affiliations by the "nones," have immediate implications for all ministers within the Catholic community.[8]

The present moment of Catholic history adds its own list of issues with specific consequences for the church's ordained ministry. Prominent among topics that call for urgent attention by programs of formation is the sustained and growing demand that all baptized men and women be able to share responsibility and participate together in the church's life and ministries. The continuing damage done by clerical sexual abuse, including the

responsibility, grass-roots action and international cooperation to combat the new and growing forms of "this abominable phenomenon" of human exploitation.

The 2015 message appeared in Vol. 44, No. 31, dated Jan. 8, 2015.

In his first message for the church's annual World Day of Peace observance, Pope Francis wrote that peace and social justice are impossible without a spirit of fraternity based on recognition that all men and women are children of God — a relationship fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The pope said, "Without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace." He added, "At the same time, it appears clear that contemporary ethical systems remain incapable of producing authentic bonds of fraternity, since a fraternity devoid of reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation is unable to endure. True brotherhood among peoples presupposes and demands a transcendent fatherhood."

Pope Francis surveyed contemporary attacks on human dignity — including war, economic exploitation, crime, environmental pollution and violations of religious freedom — he said require awareness and practice of humanity's brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ.

He decried a widespread "poverty of relationships as a result of the lack of solid family and community relationships," and wrote that "fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother."

The 2014 message appeared in Vol. 43, No. 30, dated Dec. 26, 2013.

radically flawed ways in which bishops responded to survivors of abuse, is also highly significant for the future of the priesthood.

The increasing gap between the number of Catholics in parishes and the number of priests ministering in those parishes is another area of the church's life that must engage anyone concerned about the future of the diocesan priesthood.[9] The fact that the declining number of priests coincides with the burgeoning of lay ecclesial ministry, whose roots are in Vatican II's recovery of the centrality of baptism, makes plain that the future of the church's ministry will not simply duplicate its past or even its present.[10]

Lay ministry is not a substitute or competitor for the ministry of ordained priests but rather a gift of the Holy Spirit and an integral part of the church's mission today. Imagining and implementing policies and practices conducive to more effective collaboration between various forms of ministry as well as the thriving of each particular form, is essential for the life and mission of the Catholic community.

"To Serve the People of God" adds its analysis of priestly ministry and its suggestions for the future to the body of official works that have accompanied the church's reflection on priestly life since the 1960s. What began at Vatican II with *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius* has continued with *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests (1994), and numerous other sources that include most recently "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation" (2016).

For Catholics in the United States, the local application of those texts has come through the Program of Priestly Formation (1st edition: 1991; 5th: 2005; 6th: expected in 2019).

This paper situates its discussion within the church's current discipline and teaching. While this stance may disappoint those who believe that there can be no future for the priesthood without the ordination of women and married men, the *consensus fidelium*, the "breathing-together" of the whole church, does not yet exist in relation to those possibilities.[11] Irrespective of who is to be ordained, however, the community of faith must be clear in its understanding and expectations of priestly ministry. It is this imperative that the paper prioritizes, leaving other questions to the ongoing discernment of the church.

Affirming that continuity in faith differs from immutability, "To Serve the People of God" looks toward a creatively faithful future for the church's ordained ministry.[12] The members of the seminar are confident that the Christian community and its leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit and united in faith, hope, and love, will exercise the wisdom and courage essential to the construction of a future rich in possibilities, a future embodying all that the grace of God enables.

Part 1
Ministry in the Life of the Church

The Second Vatican Council showcased God's self-revelation in love — grace — as the foundation of Christian life, faith and worship. This section of "To Serve the People of God" frames the church's mission and ministry, including the ordained priesthood, in light of that revelation.

The text connects all ecclesial ministries to the church's mission to embody and mediate grace in the world. As it pursues that mission, the church must ensure that the practice of ministry and programs of formation for ministry respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit in different cultural and historical contexts.

Mission of the Triune God

To the eyes of faith, creation reveals God as life-giver (Rom 1:19-20). God gives life as an act of love, establishing a relationship with all that exists. In the covenants with Israel, covenants that God initiates, the breadth and depth of God's love take shape in a singular promise, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lv 26:12).[13]

In Jesus Christ, "the mediator and the fullness of revelation," Christians recognize the climax of God's self-communication in love and the fulfillment of God's covenant promise.[14]

In Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, God the Father "in his great love speaks to humankind as friends and enters into their life, so as to invite and receive them into relationship with himself."[15] In Jesus, God reveals the justice, mercy and compassion emblematic of God's reign. As crucified and risen, Jesus guarantees that the life-giving word of God will speak the final word in the story of creation, leading to its fulfillment in God's realized kingdom.

The unique mission of the Holy Spirit is to be the "Advocate" (Jn 14:16), the Spirit of truth, who "reminds" (Jn 14:26) humanity of the teaching of Jesus and of all that God has accomplished in Christ. In doing so, the Spirit "offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God."[16]

The Spirit extends God's creative and saving love by empowering the followers of Jesus Christ to live in the world as his disciples: "Christ is now at work in human hearts by the power of his Spirit; not only does he arouse in them a desire for the world to come but he quickens, purifies and strengthens the generous aspirations of humankind to make life more humane and to conquer the earth for this purpose."[17]

Grace encapsulates God's life-giving love that draws all creation into communion with God the Father, through Christ and the Spirit. As the self-offering of the God who has reconciled all things in Christ (2 Cor 5:18), grace can overcome all alienation and division. Without inhibiting human freedom, grace draws humanity into an ever-deepening communion with God and with God's creation through love, peace, generosity and the other gifts that express the presence of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). These gifts, accessible even amid the present-day ambiguities of human life, offer a foretaste of God's fulfilled reign.

Church as a Community for Mission

The Christian tradition, while acknowledging the universality of grace, professes the church to be a unique expression of God's effective love in the world. Since Christ and the Spirit are its "co-instituting" principles, the church is more than a human organization.[18] At the same time, the church, even as it embodies grace in history, is never less than a human organization. To illuminate the church's paradoxical identity, Vatican II refers to the church as being "in the nature of a sacrament," a term that links grace with the church's historical and social existence.[19]

As sacrament, the Christian community is "a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity

among all people."[20] As sacrament, the church "receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and beginning of that kingdom."[21] There is, then, an irreducible bond between the church's sacramentality and its mission:

"All those who in faith look toward Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the church that it may be for each and every one the visible sacrament of this saving unity [with God]."[22]

To accomplish their mission, members of the church "are to share with all people the spiritual goods of this life and the life to come."[23]

The church's sacramental identity shapes its existence as a visible community, a structured body of faithful disciples.[24] Reflecting God's Trinitarian life, grace forms the church as a people who, through sharing the Holy Spirit received in baptism, are to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The church's unity is that of a communion, a unity of difference that witnesses to the catholic dimension of God's grace, which "is neither divisive nor oppressive but gathers up genuine difference in an inclusive wholeness."[25]

Effective unity and catholicity in the church require ongoing conversion to deeper holiness as well as creative fidelity to the apostolic tradition; these are all sure signs of the Spirit.

The community of the church is a "pilgrim" people, simultaneously inseparable from history and oriented toward the fullness of God's kingdom.[26] As such, the Christian community experiences not only the ways in which God's reign is already evident in the world but the human and ecclesial realities still requiring the transformation that God's Spirit can accomplish.

Discerning how they might embody this life-giving Spirit more faithfully and creatively in each time and place is integral to the pilgrimage that the church's members undertake.

To sustain its pilgrimage and guide its discernment, the community of the church turns constantly to the liturgy, especially the eucharistic liturgy, in which "grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain."[27] Through the word and sacrament of the liturgy, the Spirit strengthens communities and their individual members to live the Gospel with greater freedom and deeper dedication to mercy, compassion and generosity.

The integrity of the church in history, no less than the robustness of its mission, requires that all the baptized appropriate their call to be disciples of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The relationship with Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6), is the heart of discipleship. Through grace, that relationship gradually transforms disciples: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Since the Spirit operates in manifold ways, discipleship is a multifaceted activity: It ranges from serving "the least of these" (Mt 25:45) to making "a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15). In all of its forms, discipleship engages history and culture: "We go out toward God only by entering into the world."[28]

Discipleship is nurtured within the communion of the church. As the first generation of Christians "were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44), so the members of today's church are to "witness also by their believing life together."[29] The nurturing of disciples in order that the whole church might be a sacrament "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51), provides the context for understanding the role of ministry in the ecclesial community.

Ministry Within the Mission of the Church

Ministry is fundamentally ecclesial, emerging from the life of the church and its mission.[30] The Pauline letters emphasize that through the Spirit all forms of ministry are for the sake of the community of faith: for the "one body" (Rom 12:4); "the common good" (1 Cor 12:7); and "God's church" (1 Tm 3:5).

These texts make clear that ministry is not inward-looking but at the service of the church's engagement with the world. Thus understood, ministry is "the vocation of leading disciples in the life of discipleship for the sake of God's mission in the world."[31]

Ministers are disciples before they are ministers; they remain disciples even as they engage in ministry. Ministry does not substitute for the mission of all disciples but strengthens the members of the Christian community to enact in their specific circumstances the faith, hope and love that the Spirit empowers.

As an ecclesial act, ministry requires the conversion of ministers to the grace of Jesus Christ at the heart of the church and a continual deepening of their bonds to the ecclesial community. Consequently, participation in ministry for both lay and ordained ministers is neither a promotion beyond the ranks of the baptized nor an indicator of superior holiness.

What is unique to ministers is their particular relationship to other members of the body of the church:

"Ordered church ministry is a reality broader than the ministry of the ordained (though inclusive of it) and narrower than Christian discipleship. Ordered ministry refers to any and all ministries that, once formally undertaken, draw one into a new ecclesial relationship within the life of the church; in undertaking an ordered ministry, one is ecclesially repositioned."[32]

Ministers, priests included, are to serve the community of baptized disciples in its responsibility for the one mission of the church in the world.

For the sake of the church's mission, ministers guide and support the members of the body of Christ, encouraging them to respond to the Spirit of their baptism. The heart of ministry, therefore, lies in forms of service that aid the realization of the church's mission, a mission that takes on new requirements in an ever-changing world. Building on that description, the following section of the paper explores the principal features of the ministry that the church's ordained priests exercise.

Part 2

A Profile of the Well-Formed Priest

The ministerial effectiveness of ordained priests is interwoven with their growth in personal maturity and Christian discipleship. In identifying why this is so, Part 2 offers a profile of priests who embody those characteristics. The relational dimension of the priesthood is integral to this profile: Relationships shape priests, as they do all people. For priests, the relationships with the Trinitarian God and with the people of God are pivotal.

Priests Within the Community of Disciples

Ordination, when situated within a relational approach to the priesthood, can never be understood simply as a ritual event that is independent of the humanity, faith and the capacity for service that formation seeks to nurture and enhance in seminarians.[33] As an act of the ecclesial community, ordination builds on the sacraments of Christian initiation that launch all disciples on their journey of faith and service.

For all the baptized, the journey of discipleship has a priestly dimension: "Persevering in prayer and praising God, [disciples of Christ] should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God."[34]

Holy orders, however, adds a new dimension to the discipleship of priests: "Priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and conformed to Christ the priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ, the head."[35] In the context of the ordination, *character* indicates a particular relationship between Christ and the priest within the ecclesial community. The grace of this relationship enables and empowers priestly ministry.

Just as baptism and confirmation, the other sacraments to which "character" applies, establish the identity of believers as disciples, orienting them to share in the church's mission, the character of holy orders is also for mission. Through the grace of ordination, priests "exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the church in the name and person of Christ, the head and shepherd."[36]

This expanded identity of priests, which repositions them within the community of faith, is for the sake of the community's mission. Priests, in short, are to "promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire people of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization."[37]

As ministers of word, sacrament and service, priests are "sent to give what one cannot give on the basis of natural resources or powers."[38] Since the relationship with Christ and the Spirit initiates and sustains priestly ministry, that ministry summons priests to grow in holiness: "The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfillment of their ministry."[39]

An ever-deepening conversion to Christ and the Spirit nurtures priests as ministers of God's merciful presence in the world: "Mercy is our way of making the entire life of God's people a sacrament. Being merciful is not only 'a way of life,' but '*the* way of life.'"[40]

For priests themselves, an appreciation of God's mercy for others and for themselves can cultivate freedom from the dangers of "workaholism," acquisitiveness and clericalism. The latter "forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the church belong to all the people of God, not only to the few chosen and enlightened."[41]

To support and deepen the ongoing conversion to grace, fruitful priestly ministry requires sustenance from relationships within the Christian community and the wider world. For priests, as for all disciples, it is "the faith, hope and love of their friends and companions in discipleship who will sustain and renew their deeper needs in faith, hope and love."[42]

The capacity for relationships marked by mutual support, challenge and forgiveness is important not merely for the psychological health of priests but for the effectiveness of their ministry:

"True ministry must be mutual. When the members of a community of faith cannot truly know and love their shepherd, shepherding quickly becomes a subtle way of exercising power over others and begins to show authoritarian and dictatorial traits."[43]

This feature of well-formed priests makes plain why human formation must be "the basis of all priestly formation."[44]

Priestly Ministry and the Goals of Formation

It is possible to distill from Vatican II and the teaching of the church since the council five central aspects of priestly ministry. The next section of this text focuses on those five aspects, identifying not only their foundation in the relationship that priests have to God and the community of faith but also their implications for programs of formation.

1) The priest as preacher. Since evangelization is a pressing challenge for the church today, particularly in the age of digital communications and social media, preaching is at the heart of priestly ministry. Indeed, Vatican II designated the authentic proclamation of the word of God in Scripture as the "primary duty" of priests.[45] This proclamation requires priests to be committed to growth as "a living contemplation of the word and not simply a cultic technician or manager."[46]

The word of God that priests are to proclaim to others must first touch their own lives and stimulate continuing conversion to Jesus Christ. The priest as preacher must be "a person of faith speaking."[47] For effective preaching, this person of faith must recognize "the complex social, political and economic forces that are shaping the contemporary world." This context touches the lives of priests as much as those to whom they preach.[48]

It is essential that anyone ordained to presbyteral ministry have the capacity to preach the Gospel with the creativity that engages people's lives while also being faithful to the good news proclaimed in the liturgical readings. Since a homily seeks to be "a kind of music that inspires encouragement, strength and enthusiasm," it necessitates education both in a theology that can speak to contemporary men and women and in an appropriate set of communication and pedagogical skills.[49]

Pope Francis stresses that "the homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people."[50] Preaching that does not express such qualities greatly inhibits the effectiveness of priestly ministry. Indeed, a priest unable to preach well would be a contradiction in terms.

2) The priest as leader of worship and prayer. A key element in the ministry of any priest is liturgical presiding and being a "pray-er" in various ecclesial and civic settings. The role of priests in the liturgy "is not simply to engage 'in a ceremony.'"[51] In presiding at the liturgy, priests "gather the community through Gospel and blessing into the common ritual action ... so that the communion of the church as the body of Christ and Christ's presence in this communion of Spirit may truly be expressed."[52]

While priests fulfill a unique role in presiding at the liturgy, fruitful participation in the church's worship for priests, as for all members of the Christian community, is inseparable from their life of faith, their relationship with the church

and their manner of engagement with the wider world.

Even the enrichment that priests are offered through the Eucharist comes to them more as recipients of that Eucharist alongside their sisters and brothers in the Christian community rather than only as a consequence of presiding at the eucharistic liturgy.[53]

3) The priest as collaborative leader. Collaboration brings into relief the fact that "Christian initiation gives us a shared but differentiated responsibility for the life and mission of the church, and calls us to work together on equal terms."[54]

Respect for this "differentiated responsibility" challenges ministers in their work with each other and with the wider community to accept not only that "our different vocations and gifts are complementary and mutually enriching" but that "we are accountable to each other for how we work and what we do."[55]

The forms of ecclesial ministry that have emerged since the Second Vatican Council have increased markedly the opportunities for collaboration between priests and other ministers. The many laymen and -women who have discerned vocations to these ministries and engaged enthusiastically in theological, spiritual, pastoral and personal formation are the "co-workers" of the ordained.[56] As such, lay ministers bring gifts that can enhance the ministry of the church. It is certainly true that the pastoral experience and insights of priests often enable them to mentor their lay colleagues, but effective leadership in this new context also requires from priests an openness to learn from, work with and support other ecclesial ministers, seeing in this collaboration, even in its challenges, a gift to their own ministry.

All candidates for ordination must be prepared to work positively and equitably with women, who make up the majority of lay ecclesial ministers. The likelihood that priests will appreciate the leadership of women in ministry increases when women — single, married and religious — have played a significant and positive role in diocesan seminaries. The experiences and insights of women can be a rich resource for formation programs, offering a broader vision than the one that prevails when the ordained alone are the architects and agents of formation.

4) The priest as a public representative of the church. The sacrament of orders is an action of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit through the church. The ministry of ordained priests, then, is always an ecclesial ministry: "As an activity of the church, pastoral office can only represent and act in the name of the Lord when it represents the life of faith of the church."[57] As ecclesial ministers, priests represent the teaching, values and wisdom of the church to the wider world. This ecclesial dimension also has a particular expression in the relationship between the priest and the bishop.[58]

A consequence of the representative role of priests is that the wider civic and non-Catholic public often judges the church by the words and actions of priests. This fact requires priests to be worthy representatives of the faith community by exercising responsibility in matters extending from sexuality to the use of time and to honest stewardship of personal and communal finances.[59]

5) The priest as practitioner of pastoral charity. Recognizing that priests, as part of the complex modern world, could be "perplexed and distracted by the multiplicity of tasks facing them," Vatican II identified the exercise of "pastoral charity" as the means by which priests could integrate their lives.[60] The council stressed that pastoral charity could become the hallmark of priests only if priests committed themselves to "penetrating ever more intimately through prayer into the mystery of Christ."[61]

If priests are to manifest the "joy of the Gospel," they must embody the love and mercy of God in consistent and recognizable ways. That responsibility, Pope Francis contends, is a consequence of the relationship between priests and Jesus: "When we let ourselves be chosen by Jesus, it is to serve: to serve the people of God, to serve the poor, men and women who are outcasts, living on the fringes of society, to serve children and the elderly."[62]

Pope Francis is clear that such service requires priests willing and able to encourage and nurture the people to whom they minister. He is likewise clear that encouragement and nurture differ from control over people and from any claim to be the sole sources of all wisdom among God's people:

"Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them? Are we constantly open to letting ourselves be challenged in our efforts to advance the good of the church and her mission in the world?"[63]

Priests must discern, individually and collectively, how they are to maintain the priority of pastoral ministry in the midst of other demands. Such discernment becomes particularly necessary when "the routine of inner church business" threatens to extinguish "the flame of the primordial responsibility to proclaim the Gospel, the joyful news."[64]

When "busyness" becomes a defining mark of priests, priestly ministry suffers: "Everybody knows that we are busy, but I don't think this is what we want them to know about us, not really, not first of all. We want them to know that we love them, that we are there for them in the ups and downs of their daily life."[65]

The need for priests able to give priority to pastoral charity in a world of competing demands is no less critical now than at the end of the council. The endeavor to satisfy that requirement underscores the importance of formation for ministry, the theme on which the next section of "To Serve the People of God" concentrates.

Part 3
Shaping the Future

The primary claim of the previous section is that creative and collaborative priestly ministry in service of the church requires priests committed to ongoing growth in faith and human maturity. The following pages identify ways in which programs of formation might aid the emergence of such priests, priests likely to provide effective ministry for the church's present and future.

Formation for Effective Priestly Ministry

Formation summarizes the multifaceted — human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral — and multistage — initial, seminary and ongoing — process that nurtures the church's ordained ministers prior to and after ordination.[66] While the elements of formation draw on myriad sources of human wisdom, Jesus himself, God's love incarnate in human history through the Holy Spirit,

is the model for the integration of those elements.

Thus, formation prompts priests to "deepen their love for Christ, the good shepherd, pattern their lives on his, [and] be ready to go out into the highways of the world to proclaim to all Christ the way, the truth and the life."[67]

Ever since the Council of Trent mandated in 1563 that local bishops should establish "a perpetual seminary of ministers of God," the formation of diocesan priests has largely taken place in seminaries. Although diocesan seminaries have nurtured many skilled and compassionate pastors, the enclosed settings of the seminary, often insulated from the everyday world of families, budgeting, commuting, and even grocery shopping and laundry, can isolate seminarians.[68]

This section of the text explores how seminaries might achieve richer outcomes for the church's mission by harvesting the spectrum of gifts available in the wider ecclesial community.

In its review of key areas of formation, the material in this section broadens the scope, personnel and duration of the process of formation beyond what prevails currently in diocesan seminaries. The section makes the case that the formation of effective priests must be a priority for the whole church, not merely for bishops and priests themselves.

Aligned with this focus, the material that follows also emphasizes the necessity of ongoing formation, an emphasis that underscores formation as a lifelong activity, rather than one that concludes with ordination. A further concentration of the following pages is the need for formation programs to be alert to the social context and other factors that shape the church of today and will influence the church of tomorrow.

1) Vocations and recruitment. The choice of candidates for formation has an impact on every aspect of seminary life and priestly ministry. This fact reinforces the urgency of discernment about the vocation of candidates for ordination. As Pope Francis notes, bishops in particular must accept responsibility for this discernment, resisting the pressure to increase numbers by accepting candidates indiscriminately:

"Today we have so many problems and in many dioceses because some bishops made the mistake of taking those who at times have been expelled from other seminaries or religious houses because they need priests. Please! We must consider the good of the people of God."[69]

This text has connected "the good of the people of God" to all that serves the church's mission. Pope Francis highlights missionary service as the test of authenticity for all Christians: "The ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love."[70]

Consistent with that focus, candidates for ordination must embrace the mutuality between priestly ministry and the church's missionary mandate to love and serve others. Accordingly, the community of faith must seek out and encourage candidates who are able to connect their faith with a life of self-giving: "Let the students most clearly realize that they are not destined for a life of power and honors but to be dedicated wholly to the service of God and pastoral ministry."[71]

The holiness integral to priestly ministry does not require a choice between personal spirituality and a life of service, between commitment to God and commitment to God's people. Holiness develops by holding together these two commitments.

Consequently, all those engaged in guiding the discernment and formation of diocesan seminarians must challenge forms of piety that tend toward a disembodied "perfection" or neglect engagement with the world in which the Holy Spirit is at work: "It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service."[72]

Since diocesan priests must value communion and be people who seek to unite differences for the sake of a shared discipleship, the capacity for relationship with a variety of women and men should be evident in those entering diocesan seminaries.[73] A principal task in assessing applicants for the seminary, therefore, must be discerning the presence of the human qualities conducive to the building of positive relationships.

Psychological screening can make a major contribution to this process of discernment. Affirming the value of such screening recognizes that the capacity for healthy human relationships can reveal the presence of the Spirit, underscoring that grace is always an incarnate reality: "Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit."[74]

2) Initial and seminary formation. Although the seminary is the primary venue for academic and pastoral formation leading to ordination, spiritual and human formation can begin prior to philosophical and theological studies. Whatever the venue of formation, the likelihood that a program of formation will produce positive outcomes depends in large measure on the willingness of candidates to engage in "a journey of faith and of gradual and harmonious maturity."[75] Openness to formation manifests itself in qualities of trust, generosity, patience and the desire to be with people and to serve them.

Given the demands of contemporary culture, it is imperative that human formation be a priority in the earliest stages of preparation for priestly ministry. Human formation aims at the "affective maturity" that arises from "convinced and heartfelt obedience to the 'truth of one's own being,' to the 'meaning' of one's own existence."[76]

Affective maturity is as essential to ministerial effectiveness as theological knowledge and the other goals of formation: "In order that [their] ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that [priests] should mold [their] human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ, the redeemer of humanity."[77]

Psychosexual development is a key component of affective maturity, a component whose importance the sexual abuse crisis has brought into sharp relief. Accordingly, initial and seminary formation must directly promote alternatives to "the celibate cloak of silence" that discourages attention to issues of sexuality.[78]

An atmosphere in which particular theologies of the priesthood lead to a lack of transparency or damaging repression in sexual matters leaves

priests and the wider church vulnerable to a repetition of the behaviors that have damaged many lives and the good standing of the church in recent decades.[79] History shows unequivocally that the failure to address such issues has only deleterious outcomes.

Since priests must be able to relate appropriately and comfortably with both men and women, it is essential that formation programs not limit themselves only to contributions from the ordained. The talents and insights of as wide a cross section of the church's members as possible are required to prepare priests for the world and church they will serve.

One aspect of current programs of formation for diocesan seminarians that warrants serious reconsideration is the relationship between the living situation of seminarians and the place where they study. Present practice in the United States generally privileges the seminary as the venue for all aspects of formation, thereby separating diocesan seminarians from lay and religious candidates for ministry, even though they are all undertaking similar philosophical and theological studies.

If, however, candidates for ordination study in universities and theological centers with others who are preparing for ministry, the shared learning is likely to contribute to a healthy future for ministry in the church, a future in which collaboration and co-responsibility are typical. This development could come about while also respecting that the residence of seminarians may be specific to their formation. The benefits that accrue when diocesan seminarians and those in formation for lay ecclesial ministry are able to study together argue for the importance of adopting this approach whenever possible.

This change would introduce diocesan seminarians to the gifts and talents of those with whom they will work as ministers. It would also open them to a greater diversity in theologies and convictions than is likely to be common in diocesan seminaries. This diversity can be enriching; it certainly reflects the reality of the church in which the ordained will serve.

As such, the experience of diversity offers a means by which those activities of the seminary that focus on personal and spiritual formation could find both verification and challenge. With this in mind, diocesan authorities must ensure that "efforts to maintain old structures, houses and programs that are no longer viable in their present forms," do not preclude the possibility of creative and future-oriented approaches to formation.[80]

3) Ongoing formation. As *professionals* — a term that acknowledges the training and responsibility of priests, and is fully reconcilable with *vocation* — priests require formation that is lifelong. In order to preach effectively and express the merciful compassion of God in their ministry, priests need consistent spiritual direction and attention to their spiritual lives. They require also updated theological reflection and continued development in key areas of ministry, including presiding, counseling and pastoral planning.

Too often, programs for ongoing formation lack both the support of bishops and the commitment of priests themselves. Indeed, among the latter there can be an "intergenerational unwillingness" to participate in ongoing formation.[81] The heavy demands that conscientious priests face can also subvert ongoing formation. It is vital, therefore, that diocesan authorities work with priests to create a culture in which priests value postordination development and bishops encourage it.

Since opportunities for ongoing formation can involve the absence of priests from their communities, it is crucial that bishops and priests help the members of those communities to recognize the importance of formation activities. That recognition can aid acceptance of the short-term disruption of normal schedules that the absence of priests may require. Since ongoing formation can enable priests to preach and preside more creatively and be more enthusiastic in animating local communities, its benefits flow ultimately to the whole church.

4) Environment of ministry. Priests today — and certainly tomorrow — cannot be "lone rangers." The willingness to work collaboratively with others, men and women who are volunteers and also those who are formally engaged as lay ecclesial ministers, is necessary for effective ministry.

Since the whole Christian community shares through baptism in Christ's threefold ministry as priest, prophet and shepherd, ordained priests must also be ready and able to collaborate with those they serve. Collaboration is more than simply a useful means to accomplish tasks: It is a way in which priests can be "sincere in their appreciation and promotion of laypeople's dignity and of the special role the laity have to play in the church's mission."[82] Collaboration, then, is an act of faith in the Spirit at work in the whole church.

Collaboration can be challenging. It necessitates receptivity to possibilities that come from beyond oneself and requires the readiness to "cross borders that protect one's safe space, dispel illusions of being invulnerable and in total control, and surrender the inviolability of one's good idea."[83] As such, the imperative of collaboration and partnership in ministry reinforces the importance of a spiritual life that embraces an identity formed by being part of a shared mission, an identity that reflects God's own existence as a loving communion.

The contemporary reality of cultural diversity is another aspect of the church's life in the United States that requires creativity from diocesan priests and those seminarians preparing for the diocesan priesthood. A willingness to learn from other cultures is a necessary prerequisite for priests to evoke the gifts for ministry present throughout all groups in the church.[84]

5) Openness to the future. The church's ordained ministry has a history precisely because it has changed over time. This fact suggests that further change can be expected as the future unfolds. In particular, it is clear that the presence and gifts of large numbers of women in ministry today, a phenomenon that, as this paper has noted, has moved the practice of ministry into new territory, ensures that "there can be no future for the church which women have not had a pivotal hand in shaping."[85]

Among other prospects for change in the immediate future is the possibility of priestly ordination of mature married men (*viri probati*), an issue currently canvassed in various parts of the church.

It is imperative that priests and those in formation for ordination embrace the reality of change and look toward the unknowable future with hope rather

than with anticipatory despair. Pope Benedict XVI stresses for all members of the church the irreducible importance of hope: "Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and persevere."[86]

To meet the opportunities and challenges of the present and the future, priests and the church as a whole require such hope, which is inseparable from courage, discernment, and an engaged and deep faith in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the pilgrim community.

Conclusion

Pope Francis cautions that ministry can lead to priests being "exhausted, broken into a thousand pieces, moved and even 'consumed' by the people."[87] He notes too that priests who "go out and give [the] people what was entrusted to [priests]," can experience that the people to whom they minister "will make [priests] rejoice in that hundredfold which the Lord has promised to those who serve him."[88] Those two seemingly contradictory statements from Pope Francis point to the way that priestly ministry reflects the central paradox of Christian faith: that life and death are inseparably connected.

There have been many expressions of "death" for the priesthood in recent decades, the sexual abuse crisis and the reduction in vocations being the most obvious ones. While acknowledging those deficits, this text, echoing what the Second Vatican Council initiated, has featured the seeds of life in the current theology and practice of the priesthood, seeds present especially in the renewed appreciation of the ministry of the word and the opportunities for collaboration with lay ecclesial ministers. Above all, the approach in this work has emphasized that the ecclesial nature of the priesthood, its share in the mission proper to the whole church, is integral to its thriving.

"To Serve God's People" is hopeful about the future of the priesthood. This hope reflects the conviction, mentioned in the introduction, that consensus regarding the profile of a well-formed priest can provide a foundation for discussion of all issues that affect the ordained priesthood.

To support the church's discernment that particular people have received a call from God to minister as ordained priests, this text has outlined five characteristics essential for effective priestly ministry:

a) The capacity to preach the word of God in ways that nurture the faith, hope and love of the disciples of Christ.

b) The ability to lead the Christian community in life-enhancing prayer and worship.

c) The willingness and aptitude to be a collaborative leader among lay ecclesial ministers and the whole people of God.

d) The disposition to lead an exemplary life of discipleship within the ecclesial community.

e) The commitment to practice pastoral charity in service of the Gospel.

The specifics of the priesthood's future, like all aspects of the church's life, are unknown (and unknowable). Nonetheless, the God who desires to make all things "new" (Rv 21:5), the God who is "eternal newness," empowers the church, through the Spirit, to construct a path to the future.[89] The analysis of the priesthood in this text offers a contemporary theological analysis for the church to consider as it takes up its task. In so doing, the text encourages the embrace of Pope Francis's oft-repeated promotion of "boldness":

"Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. …

"Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord."[90]

Notes

1 Pope Francis, speech to the October 2016 International Conference on Pastoral Work for Vocations, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161021_pastorale-vocazionale.html.

2 Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests (1965), 1. The texts of Vatican II are taken from Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II* [rv. ed.], (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2014).

3 Pope Francis, 2013 Chrism Mass homily, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html.

4 Ibid., speech to clergy, men and women religious, and seminarians in Kenya (2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151126_kenya-religioso-si.html.

5 Ibid., 2013 video message to pilgrimage-meeting at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131116_videomessaggio-guadalupe.html.

6 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965), 4.

7 Second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius*, Decree on the Training of Priests (1965), 1.

8 For an analysis of the "nones," including the perspective of those baptized as Catholics, see Kaya Oakes, *The Nones are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers and Those in Between* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 2015).

9 For information on demographic trends in the priesthood see, for example, Katarina Schuth, *Seminary Formation: Recent History-Current Circumstances-New Directions* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2016); Mary L. Gautier, Paul M. Perl, Stephen J. Fichter, *Same Call, Different Men: The Evolution of the Priesthood Since Vatican II* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2012).

10 For an overview of the number of Catholics involved in preparing for various forms of ministry see, Mary L. Gautier and Jonathan Holland, *Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollment: Statistical Overview for 2016-2017* (Washington, D.C: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2018).

11 The "breathing-together" of the church derives from John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859), ed. John Coulson (London: Collins, 1986); the notion of *consensus fidelium* receives a detailed treatment in Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

12 On the distinction between *continuity* and *immutability* see Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 99.

13 See also Ex 6:7; Jer 30:22; Ez 36:28; Rv 21:3.

14 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1964), 2.

15 Ibid., 2.

16 *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

17 *Ibid.*, 38.

18 Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Vol. 2), trans. D. Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 9.

19 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964), 1.

20 Ibid., 1.

21 Ibid., 5.

22 Ibid., 9.

23 Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (1965), 7.

24 *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

25 Richard Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008), 35.

26 *Lumen Gentium*, 48-51.

27 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963), 10.

28 Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), 120.

29 Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. L. Maloney (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2012), 109.

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31 Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010), 50.

[32] Richard Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry Within an Ordered Community," in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, ed. Susan Wood (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 36.

[33] Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1986), 236-37.

[34] *Lumen Gentium,* 10.

[35] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

[36] Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* "On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day" (1992), 15.

[37] Ibid., 17.

[38] Joseph Ratzinger, "Biblical Foundations of Priesthood," Communio 17 (1990): 620.

[39] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.

[40] Pope Francis, Spiritual retreat given for the Jubilee for Priests, third meditation (2016); original emphasis, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/june/documents/papa-francesco_20160602_giubileo-sacerdoti-terza-meditazione.html.

[41] Pope Francis, Letter to Cardinal Ouellet, (2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html. For a detailed study of the causes and effects of clericalism, see George Wilson, *Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2008).

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[44] *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* 43.

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[47] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly" (1982), 39; the text can be found at: http://www.usccb.org/_cs_upload/8090_1.pdf.

[48] Ibid., 34.

[49] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (2013), 139.

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[58] See *Presbyterorum Ordinis,* 5, and *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (1965), 28-33.

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[60] *Presbyterorum Ordinis,* 14.

[61] Ibid., 14.

[62] Pope Francis, speech to clergy, men and women religious, and seminarians in Kenya (2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151126_kenya-religiosi.html.

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[65] Michael Heher, *The Lost Art of Walking on Water: Reimagining the Priesthood* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2004), 5.

[66] For an overview of the four areas of formation see, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 42-59.

[67] Ibid., 82.

[68] The Council of Trent, Canon 18 of the Decree on Reform, in "The true and catholic doctrine of the sacrament of order, to condemn the errors of our time" (July 15, 1563); the text can be found in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Vol. 2), ed. Norman Tanner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 742.

[69] Pope Francis, 2014 address to the Congregation for Clergy plenary, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141003_plenaria-congregazione-clero.html.

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[74] *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 122.

[75] Congregation for the Clergy, "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation" (2016), 28.

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