

AWAKENING OUR PASTORAL IMAGINATIONS: THE EVANGELIZING PARISH

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I appreciate the honor of addressing my brother priests on the topic of evangelization and its implications for the parish today and tomorrow. For many years I have felt that the Church's teaching on evangelization as developed in landmark documents of the Church such as *Gaudium et spes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and *Redemptoris Missio* and spelled out over and over again by Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI has really not been adequately received by the People of God and us church leaders. This is true especially here in the United States. The word evangelization is used in church circles but often in such a way as to mean mere outreach rather than the much more robust notion that includes at least these four fundamental components: 1) an encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ -- ongoing conversion 2) the inculturation of the gospel message¹, 3) transformative action on behalf of justice and peace, and 4) ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.² The idea of evangelization shows itself in our rhetoric, but does not generally undergird our vision of ourselves as ordained ministers or of our parishes.

¹ Missiologists also use the word "interculturation" to refer to the fact that the communication of the gospel is not a one-way process. Pope Benedict XVI likes to refer to it as a "giving and taking."

² See Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, "Evangelization as Conceptual Framework for the Church's Mission: The Case of U.S. Hispanics," in Thomas P. Rausch, SJ, ed., *Evangelizing America*, NY: Paulist Press, 2004, p.85

I am certainly not the first one to make this point. Cardinal Avery Dulles once observed that “The majority of Catholics are not strongly inclined toward evangelization. The very term has for them a Protestant ring. The Catholic Church is highly institutional, sacramental and hierarchical in its structures...and contemporary Catholics feel relatively little responsibility for spreading the faith.”³

Yet Pope John Paul II insisted that the Church is evangelizing in its entirety which means that every aspect of the Church’s life must be critically discerned in terms of its mission and identity which is evangelization. The failure to ground the critical questions of ministry, priestly identity and practice, and, yes, the parish from the point of view of evangelization makes it virtually impossible to discover a path forward that is faithful to the Church’s identity. It is my contention that the Church’s vast and substantial teaching on evangelization provides us with a truly credible, ecclesially-sanctioned framework for assessing the present reality and future direction of the Church. Yet, as Dulles points out, we are more than a little “tuned out.”

In these reflections I want to lay out a vision of the parish as nothing more nor less than an instrument of evangelization, certainly not as an end in itself. I think it is essential to remind ourselves that Jesus Christ did not establish the parish as institution. The parish did not always exist. It has a history. It can, will and did evolve and will continue to evolve if, indeed, it is going to gain new life in the Church’s changing contexts.⁴ What this means is that the Church’s current insistence on evangelization as

³ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” *America Magazine*, Vol. 166, No. 3, Feb. 1, 1992, 52

⁴ See the interesting entry by Francois Houtaart on “Parish” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 4, NY: Herder, 1967. Houtaart points to the serious challenges that the parish in its mid-twentieth century form was undergoing as a result of urbanization and modern anonymity. The reality now is even more complex..

identity and mission requires that our prized objectives about the parish, our historical experience of it up to now, our practices, must in some sense be re-thought from the larger, overarching perspective of evangelization.

I would like to lay out a vision of evangelization today that situates the parish as instrument of evangelization within the larger picture of Catholicism in the 21st century. In doing this I think I will also be touching on the neuralgic point of priestly identity and the configuration of the priestly life now and in the future, since it too must somehow stand in judgment before the Church's identity and evangelizing mission.

THE PARISH AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

One of the greatest accomplishments of the Church in the U.S. was the development of the parish system. One could argue that the parish as a worldwide institution reached its zenith in the U.S. There are at least two reasons for this: U.S. organizational ability, yes, but, more than that, the particular dynamic that has been and still is the key to U.S. Catholic Church growth and vitality, namely, the immigrant experience. The parish has been fabulously successful in the United States because generations of immigrants found in it a place to huddle, a home, a community where they found clergy congenial to their needs and temperaments and turf where they felt welcome and secure in a relatively hostile world. As Mary J. Oates tells us in her benchmark study of Catholic philanthropy, the usually friendly rivalry among generations of European immigrants was the formula for generating the foundational wealth of the Catholic Church in the U.S.⁵ The motivation to give of time, talent and treasure has never been greater than when these generations of blue-collar immigrants invested themselves in

⁵ Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

building a Church with which they felt deeply identified. How else can we explain the outpouring of support behind the vast building projects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries like the ethnic churches of Chicago, the Catholic schools, universities and colleges or stunning, monumental seminaries like Mundelein or St. Mary's in Baltimore?

Was this golden age of parishes from 1850 to 1950 when more than one third were national parishes identified with the service of foreign language and cultural groups, just a passing historical phase? Or does this experience provide a lesson not to be forgotten about how to build ownership and a profound sense of belonging among the faithful? The critical question today for parishes as in the past is precisely how to attract, appeal to and build deeper relationships with the faithful. The Church has become as much an immigrant Church today as it was a hundred years ago. Now, however, the faithful are not uniformly of European backgrounds but massively Latin American, Asian and Pacific Islander, African American, African and Caribbean peoples. Nor should we forget the Catholic aboriginal peoples of the Americas. Nothing in our U.S. Catholic past compares to the wild diversity of today's U.S. Catholics. So the key to a successful parish is precisely what is always was: creating the conditions whereby many diverse groups experience a sense of real belonging. As we all know, that is easier said than done.

The critical issues facing parishes today, then, have to do with the capacity of pastors, deacons, religious and ecclesial lay leaders to provide a range of differentiated ministries and contexts that respond to the ever-growing reality of cultural diversity. A highly diversified church requires highly diversified responses, not a deadening cookie-cutter approach. Indeed, the word pastoral points in the direction of adaptability and

flexibility. That ability is more at a premium today than ever in the history of the U.S. Catholic Church. We must be on our guard about a certain tendency in U. S. culture with its strong Nordic and Calvinist influences to get trapped as church leaders in the one-shoe-fits-all mentality with its compulsion for dialectical, exclusivist and univocal thinking. The authentic Catholic imagination goes in a radically different direction -- that of analogical and inclusivist thinking -- in a word, the “catholic” mentality that someone once described as “Here comes the world.”

FORGING MINISTERIAL STRUCTURES FOR DIVERSITY

But we have a few elephants sitting in our living room, don't we? The first is a ministerial structure that struggles to respond to diversity and to the opportunities of new life for our parishes as a result of the demographic trends. We recall, for instance, that more than half of our U.S. Catholic youth today are Latino. But we lack priests, deacons, religious and ecclesial lay leaders to minister with and to them. Studies by Instituto Fe y Vida and the National Study of Youth and Religion⁶ have documented the serious lack of parish-based youth ministry throughout the country, especially ministry focused on Latino youth.⁷ The lack of ministers of every kind has something to do with our failure so far to reconfigure ministries in such a way as to attract, form, effectively finance and deploy the ones we have and deploy new ones in numbers adequate for the Catholic population of youthful Latinos, blacks, Asian and Pacific Islanders and others of non-European origin who constitute the overwhelming majority of today's Catholics.

⁶ See “ The National Study of Youth and Religion: A Brief Summary” Robert McCarty, ed., Washington, DC: NFCYM publication, 2005.

⁷ See Ken John-Mondragón, *Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens*, Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007, pp.1-33

What do I mean by reconfiguration of ministries? For me theologian David Power's latest book Mission, Ministry, Order provides a clear, balanced vision of what is involved in the Church's current ministerial crisis and the way forward. In this stimulating review of the status of ministry worldwide by an accomplished systematic theologian, Fr. Power rethinks ministry from the starting point of the mission to evangelize.⁸ Certainly within Power's vision and the one I am developing here there is a basic need to form priests who can fruitfully work collaboratively and collegially with permanent deacons, religious men and women, and lay ecclesial ministers.

What has to be confronted within the context of changes taking place in the exercise of ministry today, however, is a lingering clericalism that distracts and discourages laity in their God-given calling to serve. Closely linked to respect for the baptismal call of the laity is the need for greater regard for the role women play in the Church. Priests, deacons, men religious and laymen ministers today often find themselves working under the supervision of a woman and/or in a working relationship in which laywomen may have more expertise and authority than they do. That situation should not be a source of chagrin or discomfort for them. On the contrary, the whole Church should rejoice that competent lay ministers are stepping up in ever-growing numbers to do what we priests and other male ministers for whatever reason are not able to do or can better be left for others to do. We priests sometimes hold on to certain functions when those functions are not essential or exclusive to us and when others can successfully do them. This unwittingly works against the Church's evangelizing mission and identity. A Church cannot be in its entirety evangelizing when one component overreaches and/or fails to enable others who by reason of baptism (not ordination) have a

⁸ David Power, OMI, Mission, Ministry, Order, NY: Continuum Books, 2008.

legitimate call to service in the Church as well as in society. Clericalism strikes at the heart of a Church professing to be evangelizing by often unwittingly putting down or limiting the calling and gifts of lay people for building up that very Church. A Catholic view of ecclesial leadership proposes the idea that the relation between laity and ordained is one of complementarity not competition.⁹

At this point I have to mention a complaint that I have heard a few times in my travels across this country in connection with my work at the Bishops Conference. It is said that some newly-ordained priests coming out of our seminaries have developed a priestly identity that is not congenial to the collaborative, collegial way of working demanded by a Church whose mission and identity is to evangelize. It is alleged that some of them seem to have a narrow understanding of their role and certain expectations that cannot be met in the highly diverse and demanding, evolving environments of today's parish. I have even heard pastors say that they really do not want the bishop to assign one of these priests to their parish in order to avoid the risk of getting someone who is disruptive and cannot work collegially and collaboratively with laity, especially women. We all know that a lion's share of the day-to-day work that keeps most of our U.S. parishes going is done by women. Perhaps this concern is exaggerated. I hope so. But to the extent there is truth to it, we have a critical issue to put on the table.

On the one hand, it is important for priests to develop a robust priestly identity, but one that is consistent with the Church's mission and identity. There is no question that now as in the past the priest plays a key role in church leadership, an indispensable role. Today, however, in an age of evangelization that role must include the facilitation

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Rome: Editrice Vaticana, 1988, No. 20.

and empowerment of laity to assume varying leadership functions along with the pastor and priests, in true partnership.

Cardinal Dulles suggests in the above quotation that the Church's institutional framework, along with the clearly defined ritual/sacramental and hierarchical structures can somehow militate against the Church's and the parishes' need to burst out beyond a static, self-satisfied image and cut-and-dried functions, if, indeed, they are to become evangelizing parishes. That is why today's successful parish is often characterized by a variety of programs and services that certainly include effective sacramental and liturgical ministries but go well beyond them in order to respond to the social, economic and cultural possibilities of the faithful. But it is never just a question of serving only the faithful but also the wider population who may have little or no connection to the faith, indeed may be turned off by the Church for any number of reasons, but may be searching, nevertheless, for transcendence and meaning in life offered by the gospel.

Journalist John Allen has suggested that there are two basic trends in Catholicism today. One is the birth in our lifetime of a truly global Church, one in which the vast majority of Catholics for the very first time in history is made up of Latin Americans, Africans and Asians. The other is the urgent need to assert Catholic identity in the face of serious challenges from a secularized world that is either antagonistic or indifferent to religion of any sort, particularly Catholicism with its deep roots and moral demands. A vigorous Church requires that these two seemingly disparate trends be brought into relationship and function in a synergistic way.¹⁰

In my view the approach to Catholic identity has simply been too narrow, too focused in "preaching to the choir," as it were. The pursuit of Catholic identity has to do

¹⁰ John L. Allen, Jr., "The Word from Rome," National Catholic Reporter, June 16, 2006, Vol. 5, No. 40.

with the clear and confident assertion of Church teaching. Tools like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, along with useful methodologies like the New Apologetics are necessary and helpful. However, they are far from being enough. Moreover, at times they actually may be unhelpful for the simple reason that effective evangelization requires careful study of one's audience. In an ever-growing Church, as in today's urban and suburban parishes, the audiences are many and varied. What works with some of the unchurched and lapsed Catholics, or with one generation or cultural group, will not work at all with another. Indeed, approaching many of today's middle class, Anglo American Catholics with the *Catechism* or with the New Apologetics will guarantee their flight in exactly the opposite direction. Resources, no matter how doctrinally sound, must also pass muster with regard to tone and attitude. More importantly, they must also provide affective links with their audiences that demonstrate that Church leaders really know where people are coming from and therefore encourage real dialogue.

Neither so-called conservative nor progressive/liberal responses are adequate for a Church or parish seeking to evangelize. Those ideologically driven responses are generally too narrow, impractical, and limited to one context rather than the wide gamut of circumstances that characterize a multicultural, multi-generational Church. In the ongoing debate over the proper implementation of Vatican II it is no secret that there has been an unhealthy polarization of thought. One group insists on dialogue with the modern world, openness and innovation and another insists on a robust proclamation of the Christian message, the content of the faith, and continuity with the Tradition. May I suggest that the way forward has to do with a both/and rather than an either/or approach?

The diversity that characterizes our parishes today requires a rich diversity of responses that run the gamut from the traditional to the innovative. The Catholic Church is fully able to hold in creative tension a bewildering range of cultural, language and liturgical preferences from the Latin Extraordinary Rite to the Life Teen Masses, from Charismatic Renewal devotees and Sister Faustina's Divine Mercy disciples to Pax Christi social activists and the ecumenical Spirituality of Taizé practitioners, from Guadalupana Associations to the Knights of Columbus. This sometimes baffling and confusing hodgepodge of tendencies, preferences and underlying theologies bears directly on the vision and practice of parish ministry as grounded on the mission to evangelize. The catholic instinct seeks to find outlets for the vast range of peoples, realities and gifts that constitute the Church today. The challenge for an evangelizing parish is to create an environment of real hospitality strong enough to overcome the innate tendency, the default drive, of many ecclesial communities to close in on themselves and huddle together in homogeneous groups. For a contemporary ecclesiology of communion takes as a given that there will be much more diversity than uniformity in today's Church and parishes.

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR AN EVANGELIZING PARISH

At this point you may be asking what does all this really mean at the practical level. Here are some critical practical issues for an evangelizing parish.

1. Know Your Parish

I am old enough to remember something called the "Parish Census." Old-time pastors were very committed to the census that I believe was highly recommended if not mandated by the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Being responsible for each and every

Catholic in their territorial boundaries, pastors were serious about knowing who and where they were. The parish census was a big deal as was something called the *Liber Status Animarum* that pastors kept with up-to-date information on parishioners' engagement with the parish. Today we must ask whether there are comparable commonly accepted methods and mechanisms available to pastors and how knowledgeable pastors are regarding the real demographics, the trends, the social and economic indicators affecting Catholics in their communities? My father used to say, "Ignorance is bliss." And I have met a pastor or two who seemed quite happy not to know much about the people around him. But bishops, pastors, religious men and women and lay leaders imbued with a vision of the Church's mission to evangelize have to have their eyes and ears wide open to the realities around them.

What this means is that an evangelizing Church seeks to find the proper balance between deduction and induction. On the one hand our ministry must be grounded on Catholic identity as formulated in sound, authoritative teaching. On the other our applications of it must reflect knowledge and insight into the concrete reality of the people we are called to serve and prudence regarding how to accomplish the task.

What is not helpful here is an either/or mentality, as if fidelity to Catholic identity and the content of the faith meant excusing oneself from the critical questions and hard work of finding the proper and effective correspondence between faith and the world as it is, the only world in which faith can be incarnated and become life. Pope Benedict reminded us last April that information is not enough but rather there must be formation and, more than anything else, performance, that is, the faith has to show itself concretely

in the lives we lead and the decisions we make.¹¹ St Augustine got it right centuries ago when he insisted that preaching and teaching in the Church, what today we call evangelization, demands not only that we know those to whom we preach and teach, but, more importantly, that we actually love them.¹²

2. Parish: Community of Communities and Movements

Today's parish characterized by so much diversity needs to be a real community of communities. Parish leadership must have a sense of how the dynamic of community-building unfolds. This is more critical than ever today because the average size of Catholic parishes has grown dramatically over the past decades. As parishes grow and the number of priests and religious declines parishes risk becoming mere sacramental way stations where anonymity reigns and viable communities of prayer, faith, life and service become more and more rare. Missiologist Marcello Azevedo and others have shown how evangelization as inculturation is furthered principally by participation in real communities of faith.¹³ The analogy can be made with Alcoholics Anonymous, probably one of the most successful methodologies for bringing about real change in people's addictive behavior that has even been developed. It is in community like AA that people find motivation to put the "shoulds" of their life into practice. This includes making the faith come alive through one's choices and actions. Undoubtedly, small Christian communities of one sort or another, including ecclesial movements like Cursillo, the Charismatic Renewal, Communion and Liberation, or Opus Dei provide an authentic

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Nov. 30, 2007, Vatican City: Libreria Edirice Vaticana, No. 4

¹² St. Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book 4, chapter 12.

¹³ Marcello Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987, p. 188

experience of Christian community that constitutes the best environment for motivating people to put the faith into daily practice.

It is no secret that some of us priests, especially parish priests, for whatever reason do not pay much attention to ecclesial movements. Yet, as we know, the movements have become one of the signs of the times, a source of great enthusiasm and fruitfulness in the lives of the faithful. They are usually led by laity themselves and the Vatican more and more has been recognizing the rise of the movements as a positive development for the Church in our times.¹⁴ Pope John Paul II suggested that one of the ways to make the parish come alive, especially in urban contexts, is by making it a “community of communities and movements.”¹⁵

3. Multilingual and Multicultural Capacities

Today’s parish must also have some bilingual or multilingual capacity. In this connection it must be made clear that I do not include Latin in the list of strategic languages to learn. There are good reasons to have some familiarity with Latin, but they do not bear much on what I am talking about here. I say this because I have heard that some seem to be putting study of Latin on a par with study of Spanish or some other fundamental language of ministry. That, in my view, makes little or no sense for a Church truly aware of the urgent pastoral demands of its multilingual, especially Spanish-speaking membership.

Closely linked to the need for parishes to have language abilities beyond English are the corresponding needs for cultural immersion and cultural competencies. By cultural immersion I mean programs that give would-be ministers the opportunity to

¹⁴ See Allan Figueroa Deck, “Where the Laity Flourish,” *America*, August 14, 2006.

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America.*, No. 41

experience other cultures at greater depth whether that be by field work in *barrios*, urban centers or rural missions in the U.S. or seminary and priestly continuing education and ministerial formation programs that immerse seminarians, priests and lay ministers in other cultures by traveling to the mother countries of today's immigrant Catholics.

By cultural competency I mean providing learning opportunities that provide an adequate level of familiarity with the principles and dynamics of cultural interaction and relations so as to prepare priests, deacons, lay ministers and leaders of all ethnicities, races and cultural backgrounds to succeed in providing pastoral care for today's parishioners. For example, the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) here in San Antonio (formerly the Mexican American Cultural Center) has pioneered such formation programs in cultural competency over the years as has the Rev. Eric Law at the Kaleidoscope Institute in Los Angeles. The Center for the Study of Religious Life, moreover, under the auspices of several organizations of men and women religious has produced an excellent Cultural Audit that helps religious men and women orientate themselves to changing demographics within their communities and among those they serve. The methodologies and contents of this program are among the best we have for developing these essential cultural competencies. The U.S. bishops have made recognition of cultural diversity with an emphasis on Hispanic ministry one of their five priorities for the next several years. A major implication of this is the development and dissemination of guidelines on cultural competency for implementation at every level of the Church's life including, of course, parishes. At the USCCB we are currently mounting a major effort in this direction and we will be hearing more about it in coming months.

4. Where Are the Foot Soldiers?

Msgr. David Malloy, my boss at the Bishops Conference, often refers to the two Jesuits who work there, Father Jim McCann and me, as the “phalanx.” He jokingly uses an old Latin word to evoke the past militaristic image of the Jesuits as the “Pope’s marines”. That word made me think of another military Latin phrase I picked up as a youthful member of the Legion of Mary. The Legion would refer to its members as the *acies ordinata*, the “ordered battalion” These military terms have some bearing on my words to you today because an evangelizing church more than ever needs foot soldiers. The faithful ranks of priests and religious men and women are obviously not in a position to meet the needs of so many millions of Catholics, let alone branch out to proclaim the faith and dialogue with more millions of unchurched people. The limited ranks of priests and religious, moreover, generally do not possess the range of skills and talents needed to respond today to the diversity of globalized parish congregations and the wider Church. The Church’s ministerial structures therefore must expand. Otherwise we can reasonably expect ongoing ministerial fatigue and crises.

5. Lay Ecclesial Ministry: the Parish’s Future

We know, however, that those ministerial structures are expanding, and this is a hopeful sign that was dramatically witnessed to us just a year ago in Orlando at the Emerging Ministries Summit. Three reflections stand out in my mind about the historical gathering in Orlando. The first is that lay ecclesial ministries are here to stay.¹⁶ The Church and parish of the future have a big stake in the success of this hopeful trend. The second is that we continue to experience resistance in parishes and dioceses to the new

¹⁶ The approval and publication by the USCCB of *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* was a watershed moment in the development of ministerial practice in the U.S.

reality of lay ecclesial ministry. We continue to be caught between an older and no longer adequate clerical system and a still unclear reconfiguration of ministry that puts a premium on partnership with laity and collaborative styles of leadership. We suffer still from an attitude that views the current role of laity in ministry as a passing phenomenon that will somehow disappear when priestly vocations return to their 1950's levels rather than a permanent and positive retrieval and adaptation of tradition for the Church's well-being. Lay ecclesial ministries are not a threat to the Church's hierarchical constitution. I do not think that is negotiable. Rather, it is a matter of finding the right balance, one that is faithful to Catholic identity, priesthood and ministry while responding to the Church's deepest calling to evangelize. The path along this road of ministerial development passes through instruments such as better lay ministry formation programs, better communication with lay leadership, parish and financial councils that really work, more financial transparency and accountability, and, yes, greater diversification of ministries in response to the diversification of membership.

This new configuration of parish and church leadership increasingly calls into question, it seems to me, the *cursus honorum* that we priests have gotten used to. Our expectations and approach to recognition of service must reflect the new conditions of a Church that is evangelizing in its entirety, one that is counting just as much on the baptized as it is on the ordained to accomplish its mission.¹⁷ For example, our ceremonies and rites need to show sensitivity and acknowledge the role of the wives of deacons not just the deacons themselves in that ministry. We may also ask, How are our lay leaders recognized for all they do to keep our parishes afloat? Bishop Todd D. Brown of Orange,

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of the need to dismantle the *cursus honorum* see Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008, p. 167

CA, for example, recently created a number of monsignors; yet, at the same time he chose to honor an even larger number of lay leaders with a papal medal. Good human relations and Christian love require that we give more thought to these questions as Bishop Brown has.

Of course, linked to this question is the more fundamental one of parish and diocesan finances. Just as ministries are being reconfigured, so must budgets come to reflect the role played by laity, often full-time workers, who require like other laborers a just family wage and some help (financial and otherwise) in gaining the education and skills needed to serve.

Pope John Paul II gives us food for thought when he states in *Ecclesia in America*: “The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church.”¹⁸ In my view the implications of the laity’s essential role in carrying out the Church’s mission to evangelize either in ministry *ad intra* or, more importantly, in the lay apostolate *ad extra* have not been adequately assimilated in our policies and practices.

The third issue that stands out in my mind from the historic lay ecclesial ministry gathering last year in Orlando is the absence of Hispanics, African American, Asian and Pacific Islanders and Native Americans in the burgeoning ranks of these ministers. It was generally conceded by the organizers and those in attendance that current resources and programs for the formation of lay ministers and leaders of non-European origin are still exceedingly limited. Yet the demographics lead one to conclude that either our parishes of the future will be staffed and largely led by laity of non-European backgrounds or they will be poorly or not staffed at all. The conclusion is that we must “get on the stick”

¹⁸ *Ecclesia in America*, No. 44, Underlining is the current author’s.

about this. What is at stake is the vitality of the Church's life at the most basic level of all—the parish. The missiological principle enunciated by Propaganda Fidei in the 17th century is still sound as ever: a church—I would add, a parish-- that does not produce its own local leadership is not a strong church. If Hispanics, Asians, African Americans and Africans are in great part the local church, they too must step up to roles of leadership and find the means to attain those roles.

THE PARISH OF THE FUTURE

So what will the parish of the future look like? Here I will attempt an exercise in imagination. The first and most important observation to make about tomorrow's parish is that there will not be one model or even a few models of it, but, rather, a number of models that reflect the vast diversity of real life situations. Certainly there will continue to be what Canon Law calls personal parishes (Canon 518) that cater to certain language groups. The models for this today serve primarily Hispanic, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese immigrant communities. While there is some downturn in immigration due to the current economic recession, most experts predict that significant immigration will continue into the future as a function of growing globalization and economic interdependence.

Hispanic and other non-European leadership have work to do in the area of cultural competencies within their own ranks. Hispanics themselves are quite diverse given all the Latin American nationalities, their levels of English proficiency and notable social class differences. Parishes today more than in the past are dealing with a pan-American reality not just the people of Mexican origin that have been present in the Southwest and West for centuries.

In “regular” English-speaking parishes the pressing need to serve a diverse, ever growing membership puts pressure on pastors to offer services in more than one language. This leads to the so-called multicultural, two or three track parish. I prefer to call them “shared parishes” where understanding pastors and lay leaders in good faith reach out and find practical ways to accommodate new groups rather than create the impression that “everyone is welcome as long as they do things the way the in-group likes them.” In these parishes the trick is being patient with the process whereby disparate groups eventually form something resembling real Christian community. This is not done quickly. The historical experience of the U.S. Church suggests that this process takes a generation, not a year or two. In the meantime it is ok for the Spanish-speaking to have their track, the English-speakers theirs and the Vietnamese yet another. Unity is not the product of wishful thinking, but of hard work and time.

In a world moving toward more cultural and foreign language encounters as well as generational and social class differences, religious education and faith formation programs cannot work with only one set of methods, priorities and goals. Differentiation is fundamental. This means forming priests, deacons, religious and laity with the cultural competencies to know how to adapt. It demands the willingness to be flexible. It means having standards and norms for accreditation and certification that take into account the very different realities of the communities served. For Hispanics, for instance, the lack or limitations of general education background place them in an awkward position with respect to many of our lay ecclesial ministry programs which presuppose certain levels of educational attainment. How to adjust our standards without dumbing-down our expectations is the challenge. In any event, outreach to Hispanics often involves

maintaining religious education programs in more than one language. Even though the children speak English, the main religious educators, the monolingual parents, are often left out of the loop if the program is not available in Spanish.¹⁹

Given the current trend toward clustering and/or enlarging parishes, they must attend in these challenging situations to the quality and vitality of liturgy and preaching as well as to parishioners' opportunities to experience fellowship and spiritual growth. This requires a range and diversification of skills that priests by themselves cannot reasonable be expected to have. This means that teams must be formed to accomplish the multilayered task of parish community building. Consider the daunting number of ministries required for a lively parish today. Team-building, therefore, becomes an indispensable feature of a successful parish.

One of the biggest success stories and an inspiration for future parish ministry is the RCIA which every year brings many thousands of new members into the Church. Yet we all have heard anecdotal stories about RCIA initiates who leave the Church within a few years of baptism. What's the problem? It is suggested that the key for retention of RCIA initiates (and, I might add, for people who were born Catholic as well) is the availability of Christian community in the form of a prayer group, or engagement in an ecclesial movement such as Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, Liberation and Communion, Charismatic Renewal and so forth. Engaging social ministries with a strong spiritual component can also be essential in keeping the faith alive in RCIA initiates or any other parishioners. Local spirituality centers and retreat houses become allies for parishes in their need to ground the life of faith on prayer and discernment. In a highly secularized

¹⁹ This does not always mean that programs need be totally bilingual or completely in Spanish. But care must be taken to somehow keep the parents who are often monolingual Spanish-speakers engaged. Otherwise the main religious educator of the child is left outside the loop.

world nothing short of real conversion, a deeper encounter with the Lord and a habit of daily prayer, will carry people through distractions and temptations of modern life This means giving more importance to spiritual growth opportunities at the parish level.

Then there is youth and young adult ministries. This is a reality all to itself that requires so much attention, expertise and, more than anything else, energy. Tomorrow's parish even more than today's must have volunteers and professionals planning, carrying out and evaluating this essential ministry. Not only is cultural competency required, but a keen sense of generational diversity is important. In this and other areas of parish life, expert use of the internet and modern media becomes increasingly essential. But, once again, cultural competencies are needed to do so effectively.

One final area that is essential today and will become more necessary tomorrow are parish-based social ministries. A Catholic conception of evangelization makes transformative action in the social, economic and political order a constitutive dimension of the Church and that means the parish as well. A parish becomes "churchy" when it closes in on itself and fails to see its connection with what is going on around it. Today, for instance, parishes are being pressed as seldom before to respond to the economic distress of the faithful, to the loss of jobs, struggles to gain access to medical care, the assault on life by misguided abortion and bioethical policies, trends toward euthanasia, persecution of immigrant parishioners by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the failure of the public schools and decline of the Catholic ones, and the list goes on and on. The parish often becomes an important link for the diocese and the local civic community in finding adequate responses for these and many other pressing needs. Many priests and bishops, deacons and lay leaders have benefitted from community organizing

experience that helps parishes find their way forward in doing the Church's work of advocacy, empowerment and, of course, social charity.

How in God's name can a parish experience any level of success in meeting these expectations without personnel starting with the pastor, who have a vision that goes way, way beyond essential ecclesiastical services like saying Mass, hearing confessions and visiting the sick? The answer, of course, is that today's and tomorrow's parishes require generous pastors and ministers with a bigger-than-life vision of their calling. For without that they might get a bit discouraged!

PARISHES BEING LESS "PAROCHIAL"

Finally, to get back to my initial point about the Church and the parish being an instrument for evangelization and not an end in itself, I think we see the need for the parish to position itself, to work with ecclesial movements as well as with internet and mass media resources in order to really reach people who for whatever reason will not go to a parish. Sometimes one gets the impression that the message our parishes want to give is, "If you do not want to come to us, that's too bad. We certainly will not go where you are." In this regard we have much to learn from evangelical Christians. The gospel must be preached in the public square not only in the parish church, in the workplace, the mall and wherever people might want to listen. It must be preached as well in a tone and with an attitude that gains people's interest and shows respect for them wherever they are. Evangelization means both to proclaim with conviction the truth about God and to invite others to true dialogue about these truths just as Jesus did in his famous parables. The reality of modern communications offers parishes, dioceses and, as we have seen, even

the Vatican, unprecedented opportunities to reach out and enter into relationships with a vast array of people, especially today's youth.

The parish can take advantage of these wonderful opportunities by seeking to be part of a bigger network, by working organically rather than territorially as it has tended to work in the past. This demands a change of heart on the part of pastors. For a starter, they need to talk to each other and collaborate across parish and deanery boundaries, maybe even share resources and personnel more. A similar observation could be made about dioceses as well. At the Bishops Conference we are trying to give good example, to be less "parochial," for instance, by working more organically and sharing activities and budgets across the range of departments. This is something new, but totally consistent with the opportunities that modern communications and the complexity of the challenges we face make not only possible but necessary.

The picture that emerges of tomorrow's parish is daunting indeed. The times are changing. The Spirit, through events like immigration and globalization over which we have no control, seems to be moving the Church and its ministerial structures in new and positive directions. At the heart of the transformation we are now living through is a fuller and more robust theology of ministry that recognizes distinct functions while placing the baptized on a par with the ordained as far as the call to evangelize is concerned. The biggest obstacle, no doubt, will be fear of the unknown and the inability to let go so that something continuous with the past but also very new can emerge. For me it is exciting to live at this turning point in the church's practice of ministry. Parishes, together with every aspect of the Church's life, must be assessed and imagined from the

point of view of the Church's mission to evangelize in the rich, deep and nuanced way that this term is understood today.