

□ CHAPTER EIGHT □

*Full, Conscious, and Active Participation:  
The Laity's Quest*

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**A Fundamental Theme**

**T**HE URGE TO participate more fully and actively in the life and mission of the Church is a dominant motif running through the story of U.S. Catholic laity. Participation is also the underlying theme of the Second Vatican Council's teaching about the laity. In the years since the council, it has become the key to interpreting what has been happening among lay persons as well as what remains for them as the continuing agenda of Vatican II.

Participation has been a concern of Catholics in the United States since the beginning. When Vatican Council I ended in 1870, they were outsiders wrestling with the question of how to participate fully in American life as Roman Catholics. One hundred years later, when Vatican II ended, they struggled with the opposite question. How would they, who were now part of mainstream American society, participate in the Catholic Church? What did it mean to be Catholic in the context of their American experience and in the light of Vatican II?<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that U.S. Catholics value participation so highly. It is, after all, a defining characteristic of the American way of life which is shaped by such values as equal opportunity, free expression, democratic process, and volunteerism. All these create and maintain a participatory climate.

In the postconciliar Church, U.S. Catholics have embraced the goal of participation at many levels. There is extensive lay activity in Church life: serving in paid and volunteer parish ministry positions, taking leadership on pastoral councils and governance boards, staffing diocesan offices, establishing educational, spiritual renewal, and social outreach programs, organizing advocacy efforts to influence legislation and public policy. Laity also participate through consultation and the shaping of policy. Several times in the past few decades, the U.S. bishops have conducted extensive listening processes, involving hundreds of thousands of laity, as they developed pastoral letters or prepared for synods. Lay people have also taken the initiative to make their voices heard through lay organizations, national publications, and many special interest groups.

U.S. Catholics demonstrate their interest in participation in other ways. Studies show that financial giving increases as a parish welcomes lay participation and leadership.<sup>2</sup> Consistently, national surveys show that lay people want more involvement, not only in parish activities, but in making decisions about certain beliefs and Church practices.<sup>3</sup> Even more to the point are studies of young people raised entirely in the post-Vatican II Church. This generation, and particularly its female members, has higher expectations for participation than any other.<sup>4</sup>

There is variety, depth, and conviction about lay participation in the U.S. Catholic Church, not only among laity but also among clergy. Pastors cite involvement of the laity as the top reason for parish vitality.<sup>5</sup> In short, participation has become a defining characteristic of Church life for U.S. Catholics.

Is the Second Vatican Council responsible for the impulse toward lay participation and for the variety and extent of it we now see? The answer is yes, but not entirely so. By means of the Council's deliberations and documents, the Church officially began to reshape its self-understanding and to rethink its relationship to the modern world. This process sanctioned, and even accelerated, social and theological developments already at work for several decades in the United States and elsewhere. Then the Council's teaching itself planted seeds that have since flowered in U.S. soil, though sometimes in ways not entirely envisioned by the Council.

Vatican II functioned as both a point of arrival and a point of departure for developments in the roles and responsibilities of lay persons. In this chapter I want to examine that idea which, particularly in the U.S. situation, illustrates the dynamic relationship between Church experience and Church teaching. By this I mean the ongoing cycle whereby conditions in society and Church developed a climate of readiness for the Council's teaching. In turn, its teaching brought focus and new energy to the experience. This encounter produced, sometimes through conflict, further elaboration and refinement in the teaching.

### Preconciliar Experience

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the first document it promulgated, the Council declared that the "aim to be considered above all else" is that the faithful be led to "full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations" (n. 14). As if it were viewing the liturgy as a microcosm of all Church life and ministry, the Council then applied this goal more broadly to lay roles and responsibilities. Its call to participation resonated well with U.S. laity because it connected with developments that had been occurring in their society and Church for at least a generation. With the announcement of Vatican II, a powerful point of convergence was reached.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the late 1920s, the Catholic Church in the United States was mostly a church of immigrants. In 1925, when Congress restricted the waves of immigration by law, coping with the needs of newly arrived European groups ceased to dominate the Church's pastoral agenda. Historian Debra Campbell marks the late 1920s as a time when "the laity turned a corner and saw its own situation, both within American society and within the Church, from a new perspective."<sup>6</sup>

This new perspective was created by the gradual movement of Catholics out of immigrant ghettos, poverty, and the working class into a more prosperous, mainstream, middle-class life. By the 1960s this movement was irreversible. The election of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president was the symbolic climax.

U.S. Catholics, buoyed up by higher educational levels, postwar economic prosperity, and increased social acceptance, entered the 1960s with a new spirit of optimism and confidence.<sup>7</sup>

A cumulative effect of these social changes was to dispose U.S. Catholics toward more active and self-directing participation in the religious domain, since this is what they were experiencing in other aspects of their lives. Gradually they were constructing a bridge out of the immigrant church, with its tendencies toward insularity and passive obedience. When the Second Vatican Council began to think in new ways about the Church as a People of God and to focus on a relationship with the world and with other religions, it definitely helped U.S. Catholic laity to build their bridge.

Along with social factors, there were new movements and currents of thought within the Church, most of which were imported from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, that took hold among U.S. Catholics and helped them to achieve new levels of participation in Church life. For example, advances in biblical scholarship, the liturgical movement, and the rediscovery of the Pauline understanding of the mystical body of Christ paved the way for thinking about the Church in more communal, and less hierarchical, terms. The many groups and associations (e.g., Young Catholic Workers, Young Catholic Students, Christian Family Movement, Grail Movement, Catholic Worker Movement, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Catholic Youth Organization) that are examples of a phenomenon known as the "lay apostolate" helped lay people to learn Church leadership and to experience a new measure of cooperation with the clergy.

Since the beginning of the century, the terms "Catholic Action" and "lay apostolate" had been used to refer to the laity's responsibility to take action in the world on the Church's behalf. Though this notion rested on a fairly sharp dichotomy between Church and world and on a clear understanding that the hierarchy maintained ultimate control of the effort, nonetheless it did underscore the call of laity to participate in apostolic work.

In the teaching of Pius XI, Catholic Action came to be defined as "the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy," though he acknowledged that circumstances of time

and place would require adaptations and that laity could, on their own, sometimes accomplish things impossible to the clergy.<sup>8</sup> This understanding produced two consequences. First, the definition of the lay apostolate as derived from and subordinate to the clergy's apostolate formed the theological horizon which most bishops brought to Vatican II (see *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* 20). Second, the flexibility allowed in how the lay apostolate actually functioned created an opening for the major development in thought that was soon to occur in the teaching of Vatican II.<sup>9</sup>

### The Conciliar Teaching

Within the Council itself a major shift in horizon occurred that, in an immediate sense, made it possible for the bishops to turn their attention to the laity in a new way. This shift in horizon involved a renewed understanding of the inner nature of the Church (communion) and of its relationship to the world (mission). These teachings are contained in the *Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* and the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*. In a sense, the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem)* is an application of the relevant sections of these two constitutions.

Gene A. Scapanski offers a helpful summary of the key insights contained in *Lumen Gentium (LG)* and *Gaudium et Spes* that opened a new window on the roles and responsibilities of lay persons:

- 1) The Church is the mystery (*sacramentum*) of God's loving and saving presence in the world. The Church's external structure is not the starting point for understanding its nature. This recovers a more ancient emphasis on the Church's inner life of *communio* with the Trinity.
- 2) Participating intimately in the life of God, the Church experiences the Good News of the reign of God to which all humanity is called. The Church becomes a sign and instrument within

history of the coming reign of God. Its mission is to draw all into *communio* with God.

- 3) The Church is described using the biblical image of the People of God. This expresses the sense of election and consecration of everyone, clergy and laity alike, for communion and mission.
- 4) The Church understands its relationship to the world in a manner that moves toward overcoming dualism and an attitude of rejection and condemnation. The world has a legitimate autonomy. The Church is a community of mission within the world. Engagement and dialogue are valued inasmuch as church and world each have something to learn from one another.<sup>10</sup>

These were fundamental themes within the documents of Vatican II, but they were not the only ideas competing for attention. The Council's teaching, often worked out through compromise among theological viewpoints, was not entirely integrated or systematic. As a result, in the *Constitution on the Church*, one can detect a juridical/hierarchical ecclesiology standing alongside the newer ecclesiology of sacramental communion. Likewise, Joseph A. Komonchak cites certain "obscurities and difficulties" concerning the relationship of Church and world that remain unresolved in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.<sup>11</sup> The somewhat uneven heritage of Vatican II's teaching, therefore, allows various points of departure to be taken when implementing it on a practical level. This will eventually lead to questions and tensions in the postconciliar Church over such matters as lay-clergy relationships, the meaning of ministry, the nature of Church authority, and the proper sphere of lay activity and influence.

Nonetheless, Vatican II did begin to construct a renewed framework of understanding the Church's life (a sacramental communion) and its mission (salvation and the renewal of the temporal order). Within this framework, the Council considered

the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of lay persons. Though it articulated a rather minimal definition of the lay person (someone not ordained or in vowed religious life), it did offer four related viewpoints about lay identity. Together they help to shape a fuller definition of laity. Each also leads to distinct developments in the U.S. Church after the Council. The four viewpoints are: fundamental equality, sacramental union and mission, secular character, ordered relationships.

### *Fundamental Equality*

Laity participate, with ordained and vowed religious, as equal members of the People of God (LG 9-17). Equality comes from the Sacrament of Baptism which, along with Confirmation and Eucharist, joins all to Christ. By reason of this sacramental union, the People of God receive the gifts of the Spirit (charisms) enabling them to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. All differences and distinctions among the People of God are secondary in view of the fundamental unity they share as a “royal priesthood” derived from their baptism.

### *Sacramental Union and Mission*

Not only their dignity, but also their warrant for participation in the mission of the Church, comes to the laity because they have been united with Christ in the sacraments of initiation. This effectively redefines the apostolate of the laity. The Council declares, “The lay apostolate . . . is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself” (LG 33). This statement is repeated in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (AA 3), though elsewhere in the same document the older definition of Catholic Action as “collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy” is reintroduced (20). One could interpret the reference in the context of this section of the *Decree* dealing with organized groups and associations of laity. Here the Council is concerned that there be a “close union” in the manner of “an organic body” and

“cooperation” with the hierarchy in work which is “properly apostolic.” Specifically, this seems to refer to times when laity offer or are invited to cooperate in the apostolate of the hierarchy. In such instances, direction comes from the hierarchy.

The *Decree* makes it clear, however, that the individual form of the apostolate, not the organizational form, is the fundamental expression (AA 16) and is to be valued above all else. Examples of the lay apostolate are to be found in the family, parish, work and professional life, civic and political arenas (AA 10-14).

In short, the gifts of the Spirit, received in the sacraments of initiation, impose upon lay persons the right and duty of exercising their apostolate in the Church and in the world (AA 9). As a consequence, a genuine initiative and autonomy was granted to the lay apostolate.<sup>12</sup>

### *Secular Character*

What the Council said about fundamental equality and sacramental union applies to the whole People of God, not just laity. What the Council identifies as distinctive of the lay vocation is its secular character. This term indicates that the laity’s “proper vocation [is] to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to God’s will . . . so that, led by the spirit of the gospel . . . they may, like a leaven, contribute to the sanctification of the world” (LG 31).

Though it allows that the ordained can at times engage in secular activity, Vatican II squarely places responsibility for the Church’s secular apostolate on the shoulders of lay people. This form of the apostolate expresses in a special way the Church’s understanding of its responsibilities with regard to human dignity, community, and activity. Unique to this apostolate is its being identified as “so much the duty . . . of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others” (AA 13).

Though it is distinguished from the hierarchical ministry, this secular apostolate is nonetheless profoundly religious. It is in fact the means by which the ecclesial mission is accomplished because, in this sense, the Church is most fully a leaven within society.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the Council sees new meaning in lay people doing their

ordinary tasks as parents, spouses, workers. This activity, prior to any hierarchical authorization, constitutes an ecclesial role. In turn, the laity's secular involvement gives them unique competence to make a contribution (which should not be restricted to advice on properties and finances) to the life of the Church community.<sup>14</sup>

### *Ordered Relationships*

In keeping with its ecclesiology of sacramental communion, Vatican II emphatically taught that "In the Church, there is diversity of service but unity of purpose" (AA 2). It underscored the collaborative relationship that should exist between laity and clergy as well as the distinction in their roles and responsibilities (LG 10), going even so far as to declare that ordained and lay faithful "are bound to each other by a mutual need" (32).

The Council distinguished various levels of lay-clergy collaboration. There are: 1) activities in the temporal order, that are properly the laity's and for which the hierarchy teaches the moral principles involved; 2) apostolic undertakings freely established and regulated by lay people, to which the hierarchy may give support by praise and recommendation; 3) forms of lay activity having an immediate spiritual purpose, which the hierarchy may join more closely to its own work, while maintaining the lay nature of the activity and the right of the laity to act on their own accord; 4) some functions proper to the hierarchy that can be entrusted to the laity; in this instance, laity become fully subject to hierarchical direction in the apostolate.<sup>15</sup>

Vatican II was a turning point for the laity if for no other reason than it was the first ecumenical council to give explicit attention to the layperson's role, responsibilities, and relationships. It gave lay participation a new grounding in a person's sacramental union with Christ and linked it more fully to the life and mission of the Church. It acknowledged that lay people could assume a properly ecclesial role both within the Church community and within society, though it placed much more emphasis on the latter. It offered an approach to the question of lay-clergy relationships in the apostolate. These initiatives were seeds, planted in soil

already cultivated by movements of reform and renewal sweeping through U.S. society and the Church. These seeds took root and grew in many directions during the next three decades.

### Postconciliar Experience and Teaching

When the Church in the United States began to absorb and implement the Council's teachings, it did so in a social environment that was becoming more pluralistic in everything from religious beliefs and cultural values to political viewpoints and styles of dress. A climate of pluralism gives rise, among other things, to tensions about diversity, dissent, and protest, as well as new forms of participation and new groups clamoring for it. All these constitute a framework for the unfolding of lay participation in the postconciliar Church.

An additional conditioning factor for the U.S. reception of Vatican II was the rapid change in the demographics of ministry. From 1965 to 1995 the number of priests declined by 15%, and the number of graduate-level seminarians dropped by 62%. The trend toward fewer ordinations, combined with the number of resignations of younger priests from ministry, has created a rapidly aging (average age about 55) and less active clergy. This has been occurring at the same time that the U.S. Catholic population rose nearly 32% from 45 million to 60 million.<sup>16</sup> There are projections that, by the year 2005, U.S. Catholics will number 74 million and the ratio will be one priest to 2200 parishioners.

The rapid growth of the permanent diaconate in the U.S. has added to the ranks of official ministers. Since its restoration twenty-five years ago, the permanent diaconate in the U.S. now includes almost 12,000 men. But this growth has been offset by a decline of 46% in religious brothers and 48% in religious sisters. The obvious effect of these trends was to leave parishes, schools, and Church institutions with fewer religious professionals. Faced with an institutional crisis, U.S. lay people have moved into many positions of leadership and service and have even created other roles not formerly played by priests and sisters.

It is against this ecclesial and sociocultural backdrop that I want to identify and reflect upon some key expressions of U.S. lay

participation in the postconciliar Church. I group them into three categories — lay spirituality, lay voice, lay ministry — and connect them to themes in the teaching of Vatican II. The three categories are a set of perspectives on lay life and the quest for more active and meaningful participation.

### *Lay Spirituality*

Many lines of activity converge under this umbrella. All have been inspired to one degree or another by the Council's emphasis on the universal call to holiness: "all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*LG* 40). This call flows directly from the Council's understanding of the Church as a community of the People of God who share a common bond of unity by reason of their baptism.

Postconciliar teaching has returned again and again to this central point that there is one Christian spirituality, rooted in the priesthood of Christ, and many ways to respond to the call to holiness. Pope John Paul II declared that responding to the vocation to live holy lives is a "first and fundamental way" in which lay people participate in building up the Church.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. bishops, in their first pastoral statement on the laity (1980), said:

It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence, in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss.<sup>18</sup>

Holiness is not opposed to ordinary activity. However, spiritual growth does not occur automatically just because one lives daily in the world. Spiritual growth happens when it is supported by a conscious process of Christian formation. Calling it "not the privilege of a few, but the right and duty of all," John

Paul II urges that lay formation be a priority in every diocese. He urges repeatedly that it take place in family life, parishes, small communities, schools, and lay organizations.<sup>19</sup>

In the decades since Vatican II, U.S. laity have established and participated in a wide range of formation experiences. Examples are: bible study and prayer groups; adult education and renewal programs like *Renew* and *Christ Renews His Parish*, and the larger Cursillo movement and the Charismatic Renewal movement; graduate theological education as well as participation in diocesan-sponsored programs for lay ministry formation. In graduate-level theological programs alone, there are over 3,000 lay students, slightly more than the number of seminarians in theological schools. A majority of the lay students are women.<sup>20</sup> Thousands of lay men and women participate in two- or three-year, part-time, non-degree programs of lay ministry formation sponsored in 135 U.S. dioceses.

Participation in the liturgy is a common means of spiritual formation. Though weekly Mass attendance has declined in the past two decades, laity are participating in worship more extensively and in greater depth through the ministerial roles of reading, singing, distributing communion, assisting at the altar, providing hospitality, and so on. The restored catechumenate has been a path for many to return to the practice of their faith as well as a process for those seeking to convert to Catholicism.

Another response to the call to holiness and spiritual formation is small Christian communities. U.S. laity have been drawn to them, sometimes from their involvement in a renewal program or prayer group, or as a result of their desire for a more intimate experience of Christian living and mutual support. Longstanding membership in a lay movement like Cursillo or the Christian Family Movement can function as the equivalent of a small Christian community or can lead people into such communities, which often are established on a neighborhood basis. The Hispanic/Latino influence within the Church in the United States has been a major stimulus to the growth of these small communities. The U.S. bishops called attention to this creative development in their 1995 pastoral statement on the laity, entitled *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, a mark of the laity's awareness of the call to holiness is their own testimony about their experience of God and their desire for spiritual leadership from the clergy, expressed in preaching, meaningful worship and prayer, spiritual direction. Such leadership is a resource that lay people say brings them to a deeper awareness of God in their marriage and family life, in their parish and workplace.<sup>22</sup> The naming and claiming of spiritual experience from a distinctly lay perspective is surely a way of participating in the life of the Church. As the U.S. bishops observed, it has "contributed greatly to the spiritual heritage of the Church, enlarging our understanding of what it means to be called to holiness."<sup>23</sup>

### *Lay Voice*

Vatican II gave prominence to the lay person's responsibility to spread the gospel in the world. As a result, it recognized that this "secular apostolate" provided him or her with a unique and valid point of view to bring to the life of the Church. The *Constitution on the Church* (n. 37) declared that a layperson "is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the Church." It urged clergy to "willingly make use of his prudent advice."

Accustomed to free expression and open discussion in other aspects of their lives, U.S. laity responded energetically to the Council's receptivity toward lay influence in Church life. A major development in the postconciliar Church in the U.S. has been the establishment of structures for lay consultation. Examples are: pastoral councils at parish and diocesan levels, diocesan synods and planning processes. The 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law took account of this development. It urged the establishment of pastoral councils in parishes and dioceses and required finance councils for the same (Canons 511-14; 536-37).

At the national level, the U.S. bishops deliberately sought lay input for pastoral letters on peace (1983) and the economy (1896) and on other policy documents, such as family life (1979), evangelization (1993), and young adults (1996). In addition, they supported the process of three *encuentros* within the Hispanic

community that led to a pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry (1987). The custom of Black Catholic Congresses was reinstated after a lapse of a century. These gatherings enabled an under-represented lay voice to be heard and led eventually to national initiatives on racism and evangelization within the African-American community. Although the U.S. bishops did not succeed in publishing a pastoral letter responding to women's concerns, after nine years of work, they did systematically listen to the ideas of thousands of women and, in an early draft of their document, included within the text quotes from those sessions expressing the "voices" of women.

Lay voices have spoken in an organized way, not only to the Church, but as Catholics to the wider society. A few groups exemplifying this are: Women Affirming Life, the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network, and the Catholic Campaign for America.

Whether expressed through structures set up by the hierarchy or through other channels, the voices of U.S. Catholic laity have not always been in agreement with one another and with ecclesiastical leadership. Differences of opinion and varying levels of dissent have become a common feature of Church life. As early as 1968 Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter, *Humanae Vitae*, provoked great controversy and dissent among laity and clergy alike. Contraception and other issues of sexual morality have continued to evoke many and differing voices from among the laity.

To judge whether these are instances of dissent, rebellion, or simply legitimate disagreements is beyond the scope of this essay. Persons to the right of center tend to interpret such activity as dissent and have organized lay groups precisely to counteract such dissent.<sup>24</sup> A highly visible and symbolic moment occurred in this debate when Pope John Paul II visited the United States in 1987. One of the spokespersons at his national meeting with laity, a woman named Donna Hanson, placed the issue in a context, citing the diversity present in U.S. society and the cultural value placed upon open discussion. She spoke for many when she said: "In my cultural experience, questioning is neither rebellion nor dissent. Rather, it is a desire to participate and is a sign of both love and maturity."<sup>25</sup>

The urge to participate through having one's voice heard and seeking to influence the direction of Church policy continues vigorously among U.S. laity. Responses from official Church leadership have also kept pace — ranging from outright denunciation to a reassertion of Church authority in teaching and disciplinary matters to calls for more patient listening and dialogue — depending upon the issue and the persons involved. As I write this, an initiative has been announced by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin, the Archbishop of Chicago, lamenting an increasing polarization within the Church and seeking to re-establish a “common ground” upon which people of diverse viewpoints can engage in dialogue and possibly recommit themselves to unity and service.<sup>26</sup>

### *Lay Ministry*

Perhaps the most sustained way by which lay persons have made their voices heard within the postconciliar Church is through lay ministry. Currently, over 12,000 lay women and men (not including religious sisters or brothers) work, at least part-time, in pastoral roles (sometimes involving responsibility for the entire parish in the absence of a resident pastor) in half of the nation's 20,000 parishes. In addition, 96,000 lay people constitute the majority of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools. There are thousands of other lay persons performing roles of leadership and service in diocesan agencies, retreat centers, national offices and organizations. All these can be counted as part of the formal ministry of the Church.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, a major national study of parish lay ministers concluded that, in the opinion of priests and parishioners, lay ministers have made a significant contribution to parish life. “They have enabled the parish to reach more people, . . . they have also contributed to religious education, liturgy, spirituality, hospitality, and pastoral care.”<sup>28</sup>

Vatican II's documents did not use the term “lay minister.” Nonetheless, in the space of thirty years, lay ministry/minister is widely referred to and accepted by U.S. laity and clergy alike. It has also acquired a wide variety of meanings. This has sparked a running debate as to “whether the term ‘ministry’ should be used

expansively to include all apostolic activity by whomever performed, or restrictively to include only some apostolic activities such as those carried out pursuant to an ecclesiastical office, or more narrowly, only those carried out by the ordained."<sup>29</sup>

Whether or not it should be called ministry, it is clear that the Council intended lay persons be involved in the life and activity of the Church (AA 10) and even recognized that laity could be deputed to "exercise certain church functions for a spiritual purpose" (LG 33). In addition to creating a climate of openness for more substantive and responsible involvement in Church life, an overall effect of the Council's teaching on the Church was to engender a broader sense of ownership for Church mission among the laity.

But, aided by better theological education after Vatican II, laity seemed less willing to accept the distribution of effort for mission taught before the Council and, to some extent, still present in its documents. The distinction between clergy/church and laity/world began to blur and, with it, the distinction between ministry/clergy and apostolate/laity. Lay people began to understand ministry as the operationalizing of mission, a responsibility given to all in Baptism, and thus started applying the term "ministry" to their own faith-inspired activity. This development is significant for it reveals a level of awareness and of reception of Vatican II arising directly from laity, not something given them by the hierarchy. For many, lay ministry has become the primary mode of full and active participation in the Church as well as a symbol of hope for further developments in collegiality, collaboration between men and women, consultative decision making, accountability for Church resources, and so on.

Accompanying the rapid expansion of lay ministries in the postconciliar Church — and no doubt because of it — has been the attempt by theologians, lay persons, and hierarchy to achieve greater clarity about the proper scope of the term and thereby to guide its development in harmony with the ordained ministry. Volumes have been written about the historical, scriptural, and theological underpinnings of ministry.<sup>30</sup> In 1977 a group of Catholic laity issued *The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*, in which they voiced alarm that the involvement of lay people in

Church ministries was leading to a devaluation of the lay responsibility to witness and serve in the worlds of family, work, education, politics, and so on.<sup>31</sup> This statement sharpened the terms of the discussion and even tended to polarize it in the years to come. Subsequently, frequent warnings have been heard about the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the clergy.

Official Church statements have tried to bring order and focus into the discussion. The U.S. bishops twice addressed the topic of lay ministry, making a distinction between "ecclesial lay ministry" (professionally prepared lay persons serving in designated Church roles) and a broader ministry of the laity (service and witness of holy lives in the world).<sup>32</sup> The revised Code of Canon Law applies "ministry" to certain lay activity within the Church that requires some type of ecclesiastical authorization for its exercise (Canons 230; 759; 910; 943; 1481; 1502; 1634). Furthermore, in his Apostolic Exhortation (*Christifideles Laici* 22-23) following the Synod on the Laity in 1987, John Paul II outlined certain points: 1) ordained ministries are primary in the Church, but they are always oriented to service in relationship with other ministries and gifts of the laity; 2) ministries proper to lay persons derive from their baptism and should be exercised in keeping with the laity's secular character; 3) lay persons can be authorized to perform pastoral functions, such as distributing communion and leading liturgical prayer, in the absence of priests, but this does not make them pastoral ministers; 4) "ministry" should not be used indiscriminately to describe every function in the Church. All this notwithstanding, the same pope also declared that the lay vocation includes specific roles and ministries in ecclesial life as a right and duty flowing from baptism.<sup>33</sup>

Lay ministry, at least the kind known as "ecclesial," seems firmly planted within the U.S. Church. In fact, there is every reason to claim that the institution could not function without it. However, the experience and practice of lay ministry has developed beyond most attempts to understand and articulate it theologically, and much less to fully accommodate it pastorally and legally. Because "lay ministry" is so highly symbolic for the entire impulse toward meaningful lay participation, this theological, pastoral, and canonical task must continue. To the extent

it does, it will be a singular example of the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between experience and teaching unfolding within the great stream of Church tradition.

### Continuing Agenda

The main lines of development for lay participation, already in process before the Council and then given official approbation by it, are likely to continue and intensify in the decades ahead. It will be — to quote the phrase of Rev. Bernard J. Lee, S.M. — “a same and different future.” The difference will consist in how the challenges embedded in the categories of lay participation (spirituality, voice, ministry) are addressed in interaction with three emerging groups of lay persons: women, youth, and members of minority cultures in the United States. The concerns and perspectives of these specific “types” of laity are giving a shape to lay participation now and into the future.

Women, youth, and minority cultures (principally Hispanic/Latino) have several things in common. First is their size and relative representation within the U.S. Catholic Church. Not only are women more churchgoing than men, but they also comprise 85% of lay ministers. Young people in their twenties and thirties, though not usually Church members, are nonetheless the largest population group and characteristically searchers for spiritual meaning. Hispanic persons are historically and culturally Catholic. They are the fastest growing sub-group within the U.S. Catholic population and by far the youngest.

Second, each of these groups traditionally has been excluded, in one way or another, from leadership and influence within the Church. Together they feel their experience has not been taken seriously in the formulation of Church teaching and practice.

This situation produces a third common characteristic — namely, the development of distinct perspectives on Church life and mission by each group. Many of these perspectives represent the most influential forces for reform and renewal within the Church. Women’s concern for equality and for being treated with the same dignity as men; young people’s challenge to autocratic forms of authority and their lack of institutional commitment; the

Hispanic way of inculturating faith through family, home, and specific devotional practices — all these act as filters through which lay people themselves will interpret what it means to be a Catholic layperson within an increasingly pluralistic U.S. society.

The emergence of a distinct and more mature “lay interpretation” of reality will influence how lay people hear the call to holiness and integrate their spirituality with marital and family relationships, work, politics, and the creation of culture. It will underscore the necessity and diversity of the lay voice as well as intensify the need for creating forums in which people can speak to and listen to one another without fear of reprisal or acrimony. It will accentuate the desire for shared responsibility and for more collaborative forms of leadership and ministry and will also identify areas and persons in need of ministry and help determine who can best minister in given situations.

As before, the fundamental theme is participation. The issues and perspectives giving it flesh, however, will be unique and responsive to the signs of the time. It will be a same and different future for laity and for the Church.

#### Notes

1. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 428.

2. Patrick McNamara and Charles Zech, “Lagging Stewards,” *America* 175, no. 6 (September 14, 1996).

3. William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Ruth A. Wallace, *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1989), and *Laity, American and Catholic: Transforming the Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

4. James D. Davidson and Andrea S. Williams, “Generations of Catholics: Results From Focus Groups,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, 1993. This material also forms the basis for two chapters in *Laity, American and Catholic, Transforming the Church* (cited above).

5. Jim Castelli and Joseph Gremillion, *The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life Since Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 197.

6. Jay P. Dolan, R. Scott Appleby, Patricia Byrne, and Debra Campbell, *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 222.

7. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 349-62.

8. Dolan, Appleby, Byrne, and Campbell, *Transforming Parish Ministry*, 224-25.

9. Dolan uses the Christian Family Movement (CFM) as an example of the transition occurring within the lay apostolate of the 1950s. CFM groups were led by couples; the priest was a chaplain. CFM was based in homes; it transcended parish boundaries. CFM had a definite focus on social action, particularly within neighborhoods and communities where laity exercised primary influence. See *The American Catholic Experience*, 396.

10. See Gene A. Scapanski, *The Role of the Laity in the Context of Communio and Mission*, dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Theology, Pontifical University of St. Thomas, Rome (1988), 83.

11. Joseph A. Komonchak, "Clergy, Laity, and the Church's Mission in the World," in *Official Ministry in a New Age*, ed. James H. Provost (Washington: Canon Law Society of America Permanent Seminar Studies, No. 3, 1981), 177-85.

12. Komonchak, "Clergy, Laity, and the Church's Mission," 174.

13. Michael D. Place, "In the Manner of a Leaven: The Lay Mission to the Secular World," *The Jurist*, 47, no. 1 (1987): 86-102.

14. Komonchak, "Clergy, Laity, and the Church's Mission," 174.

15. Sharon A. Euart, R.S.M., "Council, Code and Laity: Implications for Lay Ministry," *The Jurist*, 47, no. 2 (1987): 494.

16. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *The CARA Report: Research on American Catholics and the U.S. Catholic Church 2*, no. 1 (summer 1996): 6.

17. Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Christian Lay Faithful (Christifideles Laici)*, December 30, 1988, 17.

18. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1980), 4.

19. Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 57-63.

20. Charles Topper et al., *A Survey of Graduate Programs in Ministry 1992-93*, A Report Funded by the Lilly Endowment and Published by the Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry, October 1993.

21. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1995), 10-13.

22. John L. May, Joseph L. Bernardin, Rembert G. Weakland, and Stanley J. Ott, "What We Have Heard and What We Will Say," *America* 157, no. 5 (August 29, 1987): 102-04.

23. *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, 3.

24. A marvelous social and ecclesial mapping of this phenomenon can be found in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

25. "Meeting U.S. Laity," *Origins* 17, no. 18 (October 15, 1987): 320-21.

26. For a reprint of the statement providing the rationale for this project see: *America* 175, no. 5 (August 31, 1996): 5-8.

27. For the most current social research on this phenomenon, see Rev. Philip J. Murnion, *New Parish Ministers: Laity and Religious on Parish Staffs* (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 1992).

28. Murnion, *New Parish Ministers*, 110.

29. Sharon A. Euart, R.S.M., "Council, Code and Laity," 494-95.

30. For example: Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M., *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church — Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

31. Ed Marciniak, Michael Novak, John A. Coleman, S.J., and Sargent Shriver, *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 19-27.

32. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*, November 1980, and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, November 1995. Both documents published by U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington DC.

33. Pope John Paul II, *Angelus Address of December 10, 1995*.

