



Diocese of Palmerston North

Guiding Principles for the Development of Lay Ministries

Pentecost 1994

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During the Easter season we were treated to readings from the Acts of the Apostles - wonderful vignettes of the life of the early Church. We need constantly to measure ourselves - our parishes, our diocese - against how it was in the beginning, when the impact of the Resurrection was fresh, and the gospel really was exciting good news.

It's interesting also to see how the early Church organised itself and dealt with difficulties. Often it was a crisis that led to new developments and growth.

For example, when the Apostles realised they simply couldn't keep up with it all, (Acts 6:1-7). They called a meeting of "the whole people" (consulted the parishes, so to speak). First, they clarified their own position: they said their first responsibilities were prayer and preaching the good news, and that this was a full-time job. Then the community agreed to choose others who would share the rest of the work. The apostles set the criteria: they were to be people of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Eventually they were chosen, prayed over and mandated.

You will recognise the parallel between this and what is happening in our own diocese right now. All the parishes have been consulted; they have told us they want to keep their identity as communities which have their own celebration of the Eucharist - they don't want to lose their identity through being submerged in some other parish. If there aren't enough priests for residence in each community, they want to select parishioners for special formation and leadership.

I want to share with you what I believe should be the guiding principles of this development:

1. What it means to be Church:

I think St Peter's definition is still the best: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to proclaim the wonders of God who has called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light." This means that however we organise ourselves, it needs to be for the purpose of better proclaiming the wonderful things God has done. This is what we do in worship and in sharing the news with others.

2. The Church's job is not

to save the world. Jesus has already done that. Our job is to prepare for the victory celebrations, and make sure everyone knows they are invited. Knowing the outcome of human history makes it possible for people to live their lives with meaning, joy and thanksgiving. But how shall they know if we don't share the good news with them, and invite them to belong to the "people set apart to proclaim the wonders of God..."?

3. Responsibility for the Mission of the Church

belongs to the whole consecrated people of God, not just to those who happen to be in ministries of one kind or another. The real reason for this is not the shortage of priests, but what it means to be a baptised/confirmed people. The shortage of priests is only a reason for not kidding ourselves that priests can do it all.

4. Disciples first

The ones Jesus “sent out” were first of all called to be “with him”, and to know him well. Only those who talk with Jesus can talk about him. The witness of one’s personal life is the first requirement of every ministry; cf Pope Paul VI, *Evangelisation*, nn 21, 26, 76. And, only those can be leaders who, like Jesus, are servants.

5. Differences of Role

result from different charisms, different services, and different ministries:

- a charism is a grace given by God to individuals for the benefit of others. We have all been gifted in various ways.
- services are ways of using our gifts or charisms for the good of the Church. For example, one might put one’s trade skills or professional skills at the service of the Church; or participate in works of mercy or in the work for justice and peace; or help with other needs of the parish. “Services” are offered, and freely given, as occasion arises.

Many young people, married couples, and even retired people have given a generous part of their lives to Catholic Overseas Volunteer Service; perhaps we need something like that “at home”.

- ministries are ongoing ways of serving, which require formation, a mandate, and in some cases ordination.
- apostolates are ways of putting the Church at the service of the world, whereas ministries are ways of serving the Church itself. (Sometimes the term ministries is used to include apostolates.)

6. To be a Sign

of God’s gift of salvation and God’s love for the world is the vocation of the whole Church. In different ways, it is also the vocation of individuals. For example, the vocation of Christian spouses is to be signs of what God’s love is like - faithful and forgiving, life-long and life-giving.

Persons whose lives are consecrated to God through the vows of poverty, chastity

and obedience put aside personal family, earning power, independence, and career opportunities not only in order to serve, but first of all to be signs. Their choice signifies that nothing is too much to give up for the sake of the wonderful destiny still waiting for us. The world needs their sign.

Priests are authorised by Christ (in the sacrament of Holy Orders) to speak for him, as when they say “your sins are forgiven,” “this is my body....” In this way they make visible (are signs of) Jesus’ relationship to his body. We need more priests to make visible the ministry of the Good Shepherd.

An aspect of “sign” is the public commitment which spouses, religious and priests make. But this is not the measure of one’s contribution to the reign of God. As Pope John Paul II recently said: “The greatest in the kingdom of God are not the ministers, but the saints.” No matter what our state in life, we are all equally called to love.

7. In the name of the Church

A vocation carried out in the name of the Church must first be recognized by the Church. That is why the Church is officially involved in Christian marriages, the vows to Religious life, and Ordination.

The same applies to ministries carried out in the name of the Church; God’s call is made known through the Church’s call.

Even God’s call to belong to the Church and to share its mission is mediated, or given voice, through the Church’s sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

8. “In the world”

The ordinary apostolate of lay people is to make the Church present in the wider community. To be a “leaven” in the world is a requirement of our baptism and confirmation, and does not require being in any particular ministry. (cf Pope Paul VI, *Evangelisation* n.70; Pope John Paul II, *Laity*, n.15)

There are particular apostolates - e.g. in health, social services, education, communications media, etc.

We are all called to share the Church's mission; some are called to ministries; (cf Evangelisation, n.73; Laity n.23).

9. Pastor - Good Shepherd - Servant of all

In Catholic theology and in Church law, the "pastor" is the ordained priest, (c.519). The same is true of the "chaplain" (c.564 ff). When lay persons exercise pastoral ministry, in a parish or a chaplaincy, they are said to "participate" in pastoral care, alongside a priest.

This participation can be in the form of a team looking after a parish or several parishes. Or, when lay persons are appointed to take charge of a parish, the bishop is to appoint a priest from some other parish to provide pastoral oversight; (c.517). The same applies to chaplaincies (cf c.516)

The priest exercises his pastoral ministry by calling forth, encouraging and uniting all the other ministries. He would be failing in his own ministry if he were not promoting the participation of others.

10. Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministries

Extraordinary ministries for lay persons are those whose ordinary minister is a priest or deacon (and who, in the circumstances, is not easily available.) For example, presiding over liturgical prayers, exercising the ministry of the word, baptising, distributing Holy Communion, taking Holy Communion to the sick in the form of Viaticum, and exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adoration; (there can be circumstances when lay persons may be invited to preach even though the ordinary minister of the word is present); cf cc.230/3, 766, 767, 861, 911, 943.

Ordinary ministries for lay persons include catechising, the ministries of the RCIA, readers in the liturgy, altar service (acolyte), administration, etc; cf cc.230/1 & 2, 1282.

Lay persons may also be authorised by the bishop to assist at marriages and to conduct funeral services; cf c.1112, Congregation Div. Worship Prot.N.720/69.

11. No vocation is at the expense of others:

Each has its own dignity and purpose; each needs the others.

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. (1 Cor. 12:4-7)

12. New vocations

When people's experience of the Church is focused predominantly around the work of priests and religious, only some aspects of the Church's life are being experienced. By activating the greater variety of charisms, services, ministries and apostolates that have their origin in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, we effectively re-focus people's experience around "what it means to be Church" (cf above).

This makes for greater vitality in the Church; after all, these are the sacraments through which we all enter the life and mission of the Church. Out of this greater vitality, people will experience the need for new vocations, including vocations to priesthood and religious life, and a new appreciation of the sacredness of marriage, and the specialness of every person's life and every calling.

13. Now is the time:

We are not waiting for some future moment when all this will happen. We need to bring it about - with sensitivity, imagination and courage.

A glance at the origins of the Church is very illuminating, and gives the benefit of an early experience in the matter of ministries. It was an experience which was all the more valuable in that it enabled the Church to consolidate herself and to grow and spread.

Attention to these sources, however, has to be complemented by attention to the present needs of people and of the Church.

....(From both these sources) it will be possible to seek wisely and to discover the

ministries which the Church needs and which many of her members will gladly embrace for the sake of ensuring greater vitality in the Church community. (Pope Paul VI, Evangelisation, n.73.)

The promotion of the Hands On programme in the parishes, the methods used to help people reach good decisions, and the plans for providing formation have all been excellent. The response of the people has been overwhelming. I congratulate all concerned.

Seven years ago, the Catholic Maori people asked for my blessing on a programme of formation for lay ministers over a 6 year period. They thought of it, they planned it, and they successfully carried it out. It has given them a whole new sense of what it means to be the Church, and they have found great gladness in it. But they did something special: when they selected and sent people forward for this training, they accompanied them: they physically accompanied them on the training weekends. I wouldn't take a chance on asking others to do that, but I'm sure we can think of some ways of showing our support for those who are selected. Put it

this way: if you send them forward, you're responsible for what happens to them! If they are good enough to step forward for us, we should want to show an ongoing interest in them.

14. Most important - prayer

The early Church turned difficulty into opportunity - so shall we. The early Church consulted the people - so have we. The early Church set criteria for the selection of new leaders - so shall we. The early Church prayed about it and expected the Holy Spirit to guide them - so shall we. (I am grateful to the Task Force for giving prayer such a central place in the Hands On programme, and to all the parishes for participating so fully in the Holy Hours.) In the early Church God's choice was manifested through the Church's choice - so it is for us.

In 1982 I invited the diocese to look to the Acts of the Apostles for a sense of how to be Church (This is Your Diocese, p.28). For Pentecost 1994, I renew that invitation. We need to have a feel for the ways of the Holy Spirit. This is something we can all do together.

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