

Equipped for Ministry?

The Catholic Review

One of the great joys I have experienced in my visits to parishes and schools in our Archdiocese over the past three-plus years has been the witness of so many dedicated lay Catholics who serve the Church in many and diverse ways.

Much of the work of these lay ministers is visible to us. They share their gifts and talents as music ministers at Mass, making “a joyful noise to the Lord,” and as lectors, ushers and Eucharistic ministers who, Sunday after Sunday, show great care for the liturgy. Catechists minister in our parishes, passing on the faith to Catholics of all ages - from converts to “cradle Catholics” - who are hungry for spiritual nourishment. And the youth ministers of our Archdiocese share their enthusiasm for being Catholic and the Gospel message of God’s love with young people “on fire” for their faith.

Meanwhile, others bear witness to our faith in quieter ways. Lay women and men volunteer as prison ministers, bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ and His love and mercy to those who have lost their way and are now marginalized from society. Others visit the sick and offer the healing power of God through the Holy Eucharist in homes, nursing facilities and hospitals.

These modern-day disciples of Jesus are the unsung heroes in our Church and we will need more and more people like them to respond to their baptismal call and to the needs of the Church in the coming years. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI said:

“I believe that one of the important and positive results of the Council: the co-

responsibility of the entire parish, for the parish priest is no longer the only one to animate everything. Since we all form a parish together, we must all collaborate and help so that the parish priest is not left on his own, mainly as a coordinator, but truly discovers that he is a pastor who is backed up in these common tasks in which, together the parish lives and is fulfilled.”

Pope Benedict’s vision is one in which we all share; it is a vision of parishes that are vibrant, priests freed to be the pastors God has called them to be, and lay ministers who collaborate with priests to animate parish life.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to our Church’s lay leaders, but we owe them so much more. We owe them, and those who will follow in their example by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the opportunity to grow in confidence and competence in their ministry. They have a need to be formed in their roles of service to God’s Church. Parishes and our Catholic schools need to create a culture of formation, where people are encouraged and supported to grow as disciples of Christ. We need to help each person discern God’s call, and to grow spiritually, intellectually, humanly and pastorally.

Throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore, almost 500 pastors, principals and lay ecclesial ministers have agreed to come together to learn about what it means to create a culture of formation. They are also learning about Equip for Ministry, a process for formation of lay ministers, and they are assisting me in creating a new culture of formation which is needed in these challenging times. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that we are “to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Our goal is to equip all who are called or are willing to answer a call to lay ministry, to provide them with the necessary formation and preparation for ministry, and to encourage their participation in the building up of God’s people.

Pope John Paul the Great said:

“It is essential for us to understand that Jesus has a specific task in life for each and every one of us. Each one of us is hand-picked, called by name – by Jesus! There is no one among us who does not have a divine vocation!”

A culture of formation enables pastoral leaders to see in everyone who comes through the doors a person who has been called for a purpose. A culture of formation invites us to examine ways that we can be intentional about sharing in the mission of Christ, intentional about forming disciples for that mission, intentional about reaching out to a digital age, and intentional about growing in Catholic identity.

In the coming years, our Archdiocesan Church will undergo many changes. If we are to continue serving God and those we are called to serve, as outlined in our mission priorities of Evangelization, Liturgy, Education, Service and Stewardship, we are going to need more of the faithful to share their gifts. I encourage you to join me in praying that we use those gifts for the building of the Kingdom. And may we be busy about the work of “equipping the holy ones for the work of ministry.”