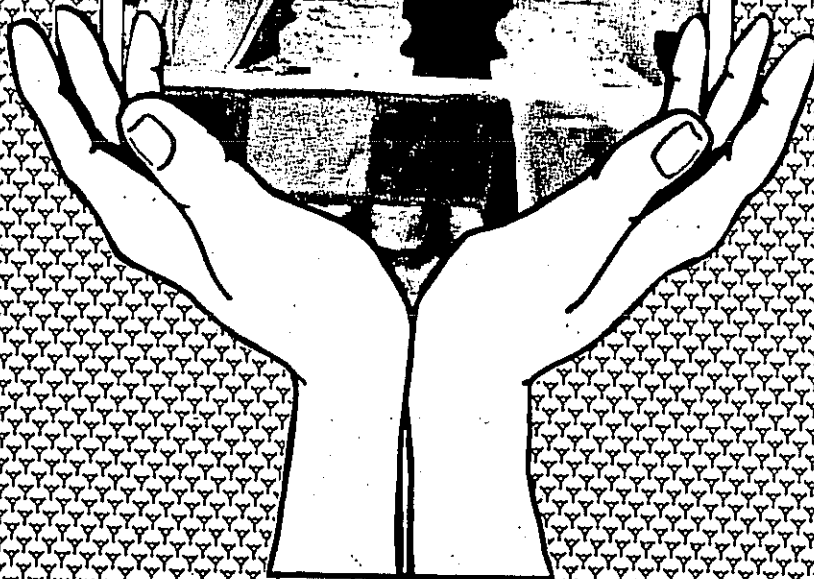


"You are a royal priesthood"

A pastoral letter on ministry

By Archbishop William D. Borders



Special supplement to the Catholic Review, June 8, 1988

"You Are A Royal Priesthood"

Part I: The Call to Ministry

Introduction

My brothers and sisters in Christ!

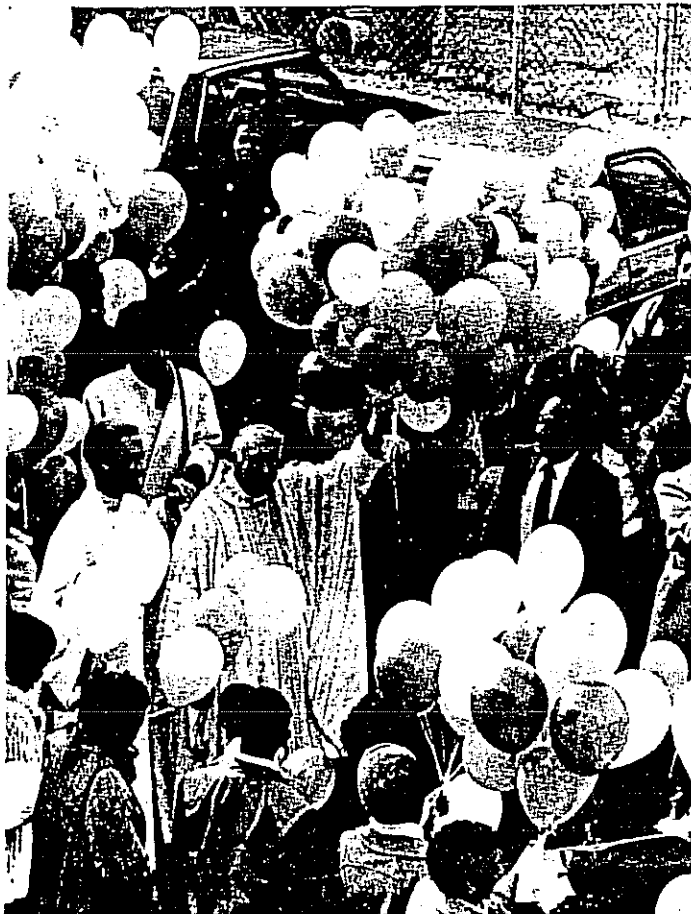
For the past several years I have looked forward to addressing you on the nature, challenges and rewards of Christian ministry. You will recall that two years ago, I sought your thoughts on the quality and needs of ministry in the church. Your response was beyond my expectations. Along with soliciting your counsel, I also joined with a number of collaborators to examine in depth the issues and needs shaping the ministry of our local church and the challenges these present for our future. In bringing together the insights of these consultations for this pastoral reflection on ministry, two points seemed most important for us to keep clear in our minds.

First, our present reflection on ministry is not of recent origin. It is itself a product of years of numerous studies and experiments aimed at developing the ways in which the church can most effectively preach the Gospel and minister to people's needs in contemporary society. Over these years we have had the benefit of many excellent programs and experiences which have nurtured our life as a local church. One of the challenges facing us today is to learn from the successes and failures of the past two decades, as we make a critical assessment of where we are, and attempt to formulate a compre-

hensive vision for the future development of the church's ministry.

An outstanding example I would like to mention is the experience of the RCIA apostolate, which reflects one of the best efforts to combine the church's tradition with contemporary methodologies and insights. In this movement of spiritual renewal the faith community reaches out to those who would become full members of the church. At its heart the RCIA seeks to combine an understanding of the cognitive content of revealed truth with the lived experience of being embraced by a community of believers. Catechumens entering the church are taught that religious knowledge and love must always be open to growth. It is this spirit of commitment and openness to continuous growth which must infuse our efforts to continue to develop the church's ministry in ways that are both faithful to the Gospel and responsive to the challenges of the times.

Second, we do not undertake our reflection on ministry in a vacuum. Our efforts as a local church must always be understood in the global context of the Universal Church. The challenge to reflect on the issues of ministry arises in the historical context of the church's need to reexamine and rearticulate its relationship to the world, which is seeking direction and meaning as it copes with problems such as the threat of nuclear



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war, terrorism, world hunger and poverty, and the quest for spiritual substance in an increasingly technological society.

The Second Vatican Council was very much centered on the role and place of the church in the world, and the challenge of embracing the struggles and aspirations of the world's peoples, and bringing to those struggles the light and comfort of the Gospel. The theological and pastoral reflection and debate sparked by the Council has increasingly focused on the issues of ministry as central to the task of thinking about how we as a church should live today. These issues are complex enough that no one document could pretend to exhaust them. Yet our experience in the years since the Council reflects the need for a renewed and comprehensive vision of ministry which can bring together critical reflection upon both the long tradition of the Universal Church and our contemporary

experience as a local church. In this pastoral I wish to make a contribution to that needed vision.

In my preparation for writing this pastoral I requested the archdiocesan consultation which I previously mentioned. In requesting this consultation I had two purposes in mind: 1) to elicit the opinions and concerns of the people of the archdiocese for consideration in preparing this pastoral; 2) to encourage a process of reflection and study on the nature and meaning of the church's ministry and how we can develop and improve the various ministries of the local church.

This consultation raised many specific concerns about the development and use of our human and material resources in the furtherance of the church's ministry. The consultation also served to make evident the very different understandings and experiences of ministry and church which often come into conflict when we

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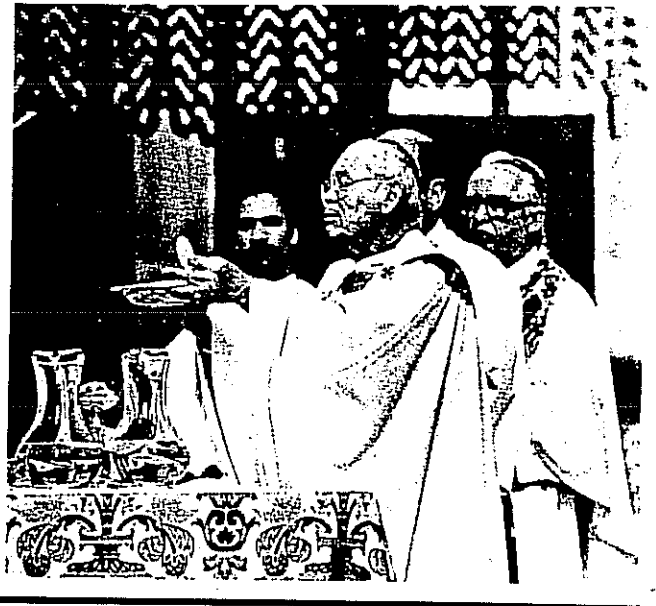
discuss these issues. Yet most of all, the consultation revealed a tremendous interest in the work and mission of the church, and a profound desire on the part of many people in our local communities to be an active part of that work and mission.

If anything, the overwhelming theme of the consultation was the challenge we face to develop as a true community of collaborative ministry. That is, a community in which each member is challenged to see in his or her baptism a personal call to holiness and ministry; a community which seeks to help its members discern the personal charisms given them by the Spirit and to enable them to employ those gifts in the mission of the church; and a community whose official ministers and leaders see the fostering of greater participation in the work of the church as essential to their responsibility as leaders.

What emerges very clearly in our archdiocesan discussions, as well as in national debates on the issues, is the need for a clear framework within which to consider the issues of minis-

try. Our consideration of more immediate and pragmatic questions of ministry and church structures can only occur constructively in the context of a vision and framework which allows us to reclarify our fundamental understanding and belief concerning the nature of the church and its mission. For it is our vision of the church's mission which will condition our understanding of ministry and shape its future development.

Thus in this pastoral letter I will seek: first, to articulate a basic framework for approaching the question of ministry as it arises from the nature of the church and its mission; second, to speak to the question of responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church as belonging to all the baptized; third, to address some basic elements of our understanding of the relationship between the official ministries of the church and the vocation of each baptized Christian, and also the relationship between the ordained and unordained ministries; fourth, to speak to the prime importance of the development of lay ministry.



Christ and the Church — From Incarnation to Mission

The Church and Christ

Our approach to the subject of ministry must begin not with church structures but with the deeper question of the church itself. That is, with the question of why the church exists and the nature of the church's mission which determines the shape of its ministry.

When we speak of the church we are dealing with a living mystery. As the Second Vatican Council expressed it, the church is a mystery prefigured in creation, prepared in the history of Israel, initiated by the Holy Spirit, and reaching its fulfillment only at the end of time (*Lumen Gentium*, par. 2). The church is that mystery in which is made visible God's saving presence in Christ Jesus. Such a mystery cannot be fully captured in definitions or exhausted in theological explanations. That is why so much of the church's language about itself is filled with a variety of images to present in picture and metaphor the living mystery which eludes capture by our words.

Central to all the images used to describe the church is the understanding of the church community as a sacrament of the Risen Christ. As St. Augustine reminds us, a sacrament of a reality is that reality. To describe the church as the sacramental Body of Christ in the world is to confess our faith in the literal and intimate relationship of Christ with his people.

This relationship is most fully expressed in the Eucharist and in our understanding of the church as a eucharistic fellowship. In the Eucharist the church celebrates its intimate

relationship with Christ in present identity and future promise. It is in the Eucharist that the church discovers itself to be the sacramental gift of Christ which proclaims the inbreaking of the kingdom to the world.

It is through the church that Christ himself literally continues to give voice to his saving work and mission as he did in the synagogue in Capernaum when he began his own public ministry with the proclamation that he had come to fulfill the promise of liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to those in chains (Luke 4:17-19). Thus in the Eucharist the church is called to experience itself as the direct result of the Incarnation—the visible sign of the Risen Lord working to bring about the final triumph over evil and the victory of that kingdom where God shall be all in all.

In the vision of the Second Vatican Council, the church is not itself identified with the kingdom of God. The church, as sacrament, is not a prison in which the saving power of God is confined. The church is the seed and herald of the kingdom; it is that dynamic principle which makes visible what God is doing in and for the world.

The church is still growing to maturity even as the kingdom it serves is growing (often invisibly) through the action of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, there is always a "shadow" in the church in that the church never fully embodies the Gospel in any one time and place. Yet the church, as the sacramental Body of Christ, is constantly called to be a sign of Christ in and for the world—a sign of the destiny and meaning of human life. Its mission is to both proclaim the message of Christ to

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enlighten the hearts and minds of people, and to provide a place where his healing presence can be experienced. As such, the church must always understand itself as not existing for itself but for the world. The church can never be a mission or ministry to itself—it is a community of ministers to the kingdom.

Thus, through sharing in the divine life made available to us in the sacraments and through mutual service and care for one another, we are called to build up the community of the church—to reflect first of all in our life together the healing ministry of Jesus to a wounded and lonely humanity. We are called to be that community described in the New Testament where all things were held in common; where Paul urged that competition should be in giving service; where Jesus said those who would be great should be the servants of all.

Yet that community which we build does not exist for itself but for the mission of Christ to the world. The church is not the refuge of the elect from a sinful world, but the worshipping, serving community of those people in the world who, while sinners, have discovered the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Spirit they are called to extend the saving ministry of Jesus to their brothers and sisters in the world who share a common Father and Savior.

This understanding of the church as Christ's sacramental gift of himself to the world is crucial for our approach to ministry. For it determines our understanding of the church's mission, and it is that mission which shapes the development of the church's ministry.

The Church and the World

There are several aspects of the church's relationship to the world which are firmly rooted in the vision of the Second Vatican Council, but which are still in the process of being assimilated in the active consciousness of the ecclesial community. I wish to state them here because they are crucial to a proper understanding of the church's mission and the development of its ministry.

The church's approach to the world must first of all be to identify with it. Among the most powerful words spoken by the Council are the opening lines of the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which said, "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

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(Gaudium et Spes, par. 1)

The church's mission is not to bring salvation to a world totally bereft of God's saving presence, but to be a sign and symbol of the "grace-filled riches" present in the mystery of human life. Christianity does not seek to replace the human quest, but to deepen it and place it in the perspective of God's plan. The Christian community must be the sign in the world which reveals the origins and goals of the human longings which give rise to culture and civilization. The church must model the understanding of the human person and human community essential to the realization of the world's deepest longings for wholeness and salvation.

Secondly, the witness which the Christian community must give to the world is *prophetic* and *eschatological*. As we are called to identify with the world's struggles, so too we are called to keep in loving tension with them. The Christian community is called to be a constant witness to the inability of human effort and programs to completely fulfill the human quest for wholeness. As such we are called to be a witness that offers meaning and hope before the tragic dimension of human life — a witness that speaks of the redemptive power of suffering, and the importance of human moral struggle even in the face of sin and failure.

Thirdly, the ministry of the church must be *wholistic*. It must be addressed both to persons and to the structures of society. As Pope Paul VI said, the church must seek the evangelization of both peoples and cultures:

"... The Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by people who are profoundly linked to a culture and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human cultures... The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure the full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, par. 20)

The church's ministry, therefore, can never ignore the political and social and cultural dimensions of human life. As the Synod of Bishops proclaimed in 1971, the pursuit of justice and the building of true solidarity is a constitutive element of the vocation of the Christian community,

Thus can be seen in the understanding of the church as the sacramental body of Christ a dynamic spiritual power flowing from the Incarnation to the mission of the church. The church, founded on Christ, nurtured by the Eucharist, and built up as a community, sends its members on a mission of healing service to the world for the sake of the kingdom. The sequence of this movement of ecclesial life flows from the Incarnation and determines the tasks of ministry.



'When we speak of priesthood, we must speak first of the priesthood which belongs to all who have been baptized in Christ Jesus. Consequently, when we speak of the ministry of the church we must speak of that priestly task and service which is primarily entrusted to the whole community of the baptized.'

From Mission to Ministry

The Priestly Ministry of the People of God

Just as the mission of the church is rooted in its identification with Christ and the continuance of his mission, so too the ministry of the church is a sacramental continuation of the ministry of Christ to the world — a continuation of the way Jesus sought to touch the hearts and minds of people to open them to the experience of God.

The exercise of this ministry is essentially a priestly task. As the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, there is one High Priest and mediator of grace, Jesus Christ (Heb. 5: 7-10). In the New Testament the term priesthood refers first and most fully to the one priesthood of Christ.

Yet the community of the church, as Christ's sacramental presence in the world, is constituted "a royal priesthood, a holy people set apart" (1 Peter 2:9) for a mission and ministry to the world. It is through our baptismal relationship with the person of the Risen Christ that we are formed into a people and are given a

share in what St. Paul called the priestly ministry of spreading the Gospel (Rom. 15:16).

This understanding of the priesthood of all the baptized is most important for our understanding and approach to ministry. Many of us have come to identify the term priesthood with the ordained priesthood. Yet in the New Testament the primary application of the word priesthood (after the unique priestly role of Jesus Christ) is to the priesthood of every baptized man and woman.

Thus, when we speak of priesthood, we must speak first of the priesthood which belongs to all who have been baptized in Christ Jesus. Consequently, when we speak of the ministry of the church we must speak of that priestly task and service which is primarily entrusted to the whole community of the baptized. For we are a priestly people, a community of priests of the kingdom, set apart for a ministry which is greater than any of us and which belongs to all of us.

Two consequences of this understanding of priesthood as our common baptismal sharing in the life and power of Christ should be highlighted here. First, true ministry must be understood as being more than human activity or program. Ministry is an expression of God's continuing call and presence in the life of his people. Ministry is what happens when people

open themselves to God's saving power and purposes. As true priests of the Lord, we his people truly exercise the ministry given us when we allow our lives and actions to mediate his presence. For it is of the essence of our priestly role to be the mediator of Another's healing power, and not to pretend to be the source of that power.

Thus, as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the model and symbol of the church, so too is she the model of the essence of priesthood. For it is she who most clearly models what it is to be the handservant of the Lord; it is she who reminds us that the source of sanctity and honor is hearing the word of God and keeping it. It is also she who reminds us that, as ministers of the Lord, it is not we who can judge the success of our efforts, but only the One in whose name they were done (Luke 1:38, 11:28).

Second, a correct appreciation of the priesthood of the baptized serves to make clear that the mission which Christ has given his people and the essentially priestly ministry by which it is carried out belong first and primarily to the whole church. The mission and ministry of the church does not belong to any one group within the church, which allows others to share in it. Nor is any one group in the church closer to the "full stature of Christ" than any other.

Before any distinction of roles or offices in the church we stand as one family of the baptized. It is the community as a whole to whom is given the primary responsibility for the mission of the church, and it is the whole community which stands as the first minister of the kingdom. Thus, when we speak of the church's mission and ministry to the world, we must be clear that we speak primarily of the whole church and not only a part of it. It is the exercise of the collective priesthood of the baptized that most fully continues the sacramental presence of Christ in the world.

The Structures of Ministry

The heart of the exercise of the priesthood we all share in baptism is the giving of our whole lives in everything we do, so that in our dedication and faith others will find a challenge to believe. As Peter said, our priesthood is to manifest itself in "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God". (1 Peter 2:5). The spiritual sacrifice of our lives in worship and the healing service of others is the very heart of the priestly ministry of the People of God.

Yet over the years scholars have come to recognize that the exercise of this priestly ministry reflects four basic structures or dimensions. There are, if you will, four basic ministries or ways in which the Christian community seeks to express its message and to touch human hearts with the transforming presence of the Risen

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Lord. These four basic ministries are:

1) *Proclamation of the Word*: In the ministry of proclamation the church is called to proclaim the Good News in the direct preaching of the Gospel message and by explicitly confessing our faith in Jesus and what God has done for us in him. As part of this proclamation, the church must speak the prophetic word in which the experience and understanding of faith is brought to bear on the concrete issues and problems of our day and society.

2) *Worship*: As a Eucharistic community the church fundamentally expresses itself in worship, in which it constantly offers thanksgiving for the wonders of salvation which God has worked in human flesh. Worship is the focal point of the church's celebration of all the ways God offers life to his people.

3) *Community Building*: In this ministerial activity, the church seeks to grow in understanding of the faith which binds us together and seeks to grow as a community built upon a shared faith and commitment to Jesus' vision and promise of human destiny.

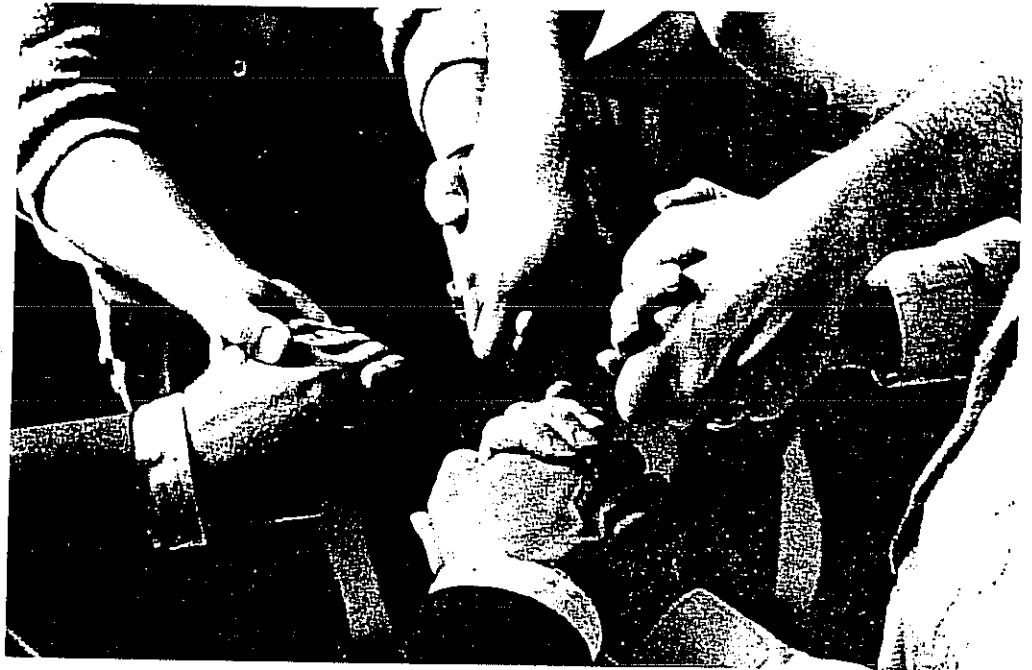
4) *Service*: This is the ministerial activity in which the church seeks to identify with the specific needs and sufferings of the society in which we live. It is the ministry by which the church seeks to promote the cause of human dignity, ease human suffering, advocate for peace and justice, and help people to experience the presence of God in their powerlessness and suffering.

These are fundamental ministerial modes of action through which the church conducts its mission to the world, and which are required by the church's fidelity to the Gospel. As all members of the church are responsible for the church's mission, so all are called to participate in these basic ministerial activities of the church's discharge of its priestly task.

The Baptismal Vocation and Ministry of the Individual Christian

Each Christian man and woman by his or her Baptism is incorporated into the People of God and is given a call — a vocation — for his or her unique personal participation in the priestly ministry of the church. As the bishops of the United States described this baptismal vocation, it is a call to holiness and to ministry ("Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity," 1980).

In the vision of the Second Vatican Council it is thus the sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, which should be the starting point for any consideration of the church's ministry, for it is here that



each Christian is called and empowered for ministry.

In Baptism God has given each of us certain charisms or gifts to carry out our call to holiness and ministry. These charisms are not primarily miraculous gifts, but empowerments of grace which create in us a spiritual capacity for service. It is through the empowerment of these charisms that each of us, in ways appropriate to our talents and state in life, participates in the priestly ministry of the church:

- in proclamation of the word, by expressing the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15);

- in worship, by joining with the eucharistic celebration of the community and through personal prayer;

- in helping to build up a community of shared faith and human solidarity;

- in healing service to the human needs around us.

If in our Baptism each of us is both gifted and called, then we are also charged with a responsibility to answer that call and to develop the gifts we have been given for service. Our baptismal call to ministry is a challenge to see that faith is not passive and requires more than Mass attendance, and ministry is not something that can be left only to the ordained and religious, or church staff professionals. Our baptismal vocation is a call to consciously develop ourselves to give the service and witness of faith in the individual circumstances of our lives — in our families, our jobs, and our parish and civic communities.

This responsibility of the individual is also paralleled by the responsibility of the community. The church needs the diverse talents of many. The leaders and members of the church community must, therefore, accept as one of their primary responsibilities

the creation of an environment where all are challenged to develop their gifts, and where all are welcomed and encouraged to use those gifts in the work of the church.

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as in dioceses across the country, the past 20 years have witnessed increasing numbers of lay men and women becoming involved in numerous and varied ministries on both the parish and diocesan level. To the extent that there has been a true promotion of the recognition of the baptismal call given to each of us to take personal responsibility for our participation in the mission and ministry of Christ, there has been a greater outpouring of people's desire to more actively participate in the work of the church.

As people have responded to their baptismal call by seeking more visible and active ways of participating in the church's ministry, the community has been challenged to provide better structures and means for discerning, developing, and utilizing the many gifts our people have to offer. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore we have been developing and improving on training and educational programs to help people develop skills in a wide

variety of areas such as liturgical, health care, catechetical, and youth ministries, pastoral counseling, shared decision making, and administration. Since 1982 we have been developing archdiocesan-wide programs in ministry discernment and formation designed to help lay people discern their individual gifts and prepare for specific ways of offering them in ministerial service.

The continued development of such programs and collegial structures for ministry discernment and formation are crucial to the future development and shape of the church's ministry. For the foundation of that ministry and its development is the recognition and acceptance of the baptismal vocation and responsibility given to every one of us who claims to follow Christ. Thus, we are constantly challenged to build that community which recognizes that each member is called and gifted to his or her own task and role, and that each is equally blessed and cherished by Our Father. For only when every Christian conscience is called to that baptismal responsibility can the whole community fulfill its priestly task as the sacrament of Christ for the world.

Our baptismal vocation is a call to consciously develop ourselves to give the service and witness of faith in the individual circumstances of our lives — in our families, our jobs, and our parish and civic communities.

Part II: The Official Ministries of the Church

Ministry as Spiritual Catalyst

Beyond the baptismal call for holiness and ministry given each Christian there are also specific callings given to individuals for more specified, defined ministries as part of the official ministry of the church. Such official ministries are designated lay ministries, and the roles of vowed religious and ordained clergy. These ministries are specific pastoral services rendered in a stable manner, and which are commissioned by the church, usually after a period of appropriate preparation and training. Such services are ones which are recognized by the church as necessary or even indispensable to its life and growth, and those appointed to do them are recognized, in varying degrees, as acting in the name of and on behalf of the entire church community.

Within the church today debates over the issue of ministry often reflect a conflict between two different views or approaches. One is a more restrictive view which would limit the understanding of ministry to only what is done by the ordained, vowed religious or designated lay ministers. Another, broader, view of ministry would see it as something to which every Christian is called and in which all the baptized can participate.

I have sought to make clear in this pastoral my conviction that a wider sense of ministry as a call given to each of us in Baptism and Confirmation is essential to a correct and dynamic understanding of the church, and necessary to enable us to respond to the challenges facing the church today. Yet over and above the baptismal vocation to holiness and ministry given to each of us, the church has a need to define designated ministries as part of its official ministry, as distinct from the common ministry of the church in which all participates.

In speaking of these official ministries of the church we must be clear on their relationship to the church's mission in which by baptismal vocation all believers are called to participate. As Bishop Chaisson very aptly stated at the recent World Synod of Bishops, "Certain persons and groups are chosen from among the baptized for particular tasks, and for a particular witness within the community itself. But these tasks and the witnessing are carried out in the service of the *communio*, of this one and indivisible 'priestly people' which is the local church. They do not set up

higher or lower classes among the people of God." (Origins Nov. 12, 1987, p. 394)

Thus, in defining the relationship of the official ministries of the church to the baptismal ministry of the People of God, the primary insight that must guide us is that all officially designated ministries of the church are essentially meant to be *catalytic*. That is, the function of specialized official ministries by some members of the church is the empowerment of all members of the church to realize their call to holiness and ministry.

Some are called and designated to provide the special ministries of service which are needed to sustain the church's internal order and health, and to direct the life of the Christian community in proclamation, worship, community building, and healing service, and thus to empower the community to successfully execute its mission in and for the world. The object and purpose of such a ministry, and of any juridical or pastoral authority which may be attached to that ministry, is always the empowerment of the community to be faithful to the mission of Christ.

Some of the church's official ministries are seen to originate in Christ and are part of the fundamental structure of the church. Other ministries originate in the church's authority to structure itself according to the needs of the times, and are clearly open to change or even elimination. Yet with all the church's official ministries, designation as a minister of the church never implies a monopolization of responsibility for the church's mission by a few, nor does it imply that participation in the mission and ministry of the church originates elsewhere than in the common Baptism of the priestly People of God. Thus, the official ministry of the church arises out of the priestly calling of the whole community, and exists as an enabling service to the priestly ministry of the community. With this understanding, I would like to address some dimensions of that official ministry in lay ministry, the ordained ministry and religious life.

The Mission and ministries of the Laity

One of the most striking and important features of the development of the church's history in the modern era, especially since Vatican II, has been the renewal of the role of the laity in the mission and work of the church. The



renewed examination of the church's relationship to the world, which the Second Vatican Council embraced, necessarily served to initiate a renewed understanding of the role of the laity.

The Council strongly emphasized that the laity are the primary focus of the essentially outward thrust of the church. The laity are in a special way the primary witnesses to the nature of the church as being in and for the world as a sign of God's salvific presence. ("Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," par. 2; *Lumen Gentium*, par. 31)

Thus, the very nature of the laity's presence in the world is infused with a call to ministry — a ministry of the transformation and creation of human community. The laity's baptismal vocation to holiness and ministry is of its essence directed toward the evangelization of culture.

This emphasis, which is so strong in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the modern papacy, represents a renewal in our understanding of holiness as well as the church's relationship to the world. As the recent World Synod of Bishops stated:

"The Holy Spirit leads us to understand more clearly that holiness today cannot be attained without a

commitment to justice, without a human solidarity that includes the poor and the oppressed. The ideal holiness of the lay faithful must integrate the social dimension of transforming the world according to the plan of God." (World Synod of Bishops, 1987, "Message to the People of God," par. 4)

The period since the Second Vatican Council has also witnessed a growing movement of participation by the laity in the internal life of the church. This participation has been in both roles of ecclesial service and ministries (some of which are full-time professional ministries), and also in collegial processes of decision making. This greater involvement of lay people in the work and service of the local church community is a direct result of the renewed understanding of church and ministry encouraged and initiated by the Second Vatican Council.

The basis of lay people accepting ministries of service in the church and participating in collegial structures is the personal call each has received in Baptism — a personal call from Christ to participate in the life and ministry of his priestly people. As the Council stated it: "As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the

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Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the church." ("Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," par. 10)

In both the areas of the evangelization of society and participation in the internal life of the church, the developing role of the laity reflects the renewal of our understanding of our baptismal vocation to ministry and the priestly nature of the entire People of God. I would now like to address some aspects of the development of lay ministry in light of the vision of church and ministry I have been setting forth.

The Family and the Parish: Ministry as a Function of Community

The function of true ministry is to build and transform human community in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, no ministerial role can ever be properly understood apart from the community (*communio*) which gives it birth and meaning, and towards the service of which its exercise is directed. In all the consultations I have had with lay people in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as well as in similar consultations held around the nation, a theme which constantly emerged was that the two places people said that they most met God and found nourishment for their lives as Christians and human beings were their families and their parishes.

The family is the primal community in which we first and foremost discover what it means to be a human being and where we are first introduced to the Word and Love of God. For the majority of the laity their families are where their lives are primarily committed and where the relevancy of their faith is first tested.

This is why the Second Vatican Council spoke of the family as the "domestic church" (*Lumen Gentium*, par. 11). The Council clearly meant that the mission of the family and the church are directly linked. The growth and holiness of the family is more than a personal matter for its members. It is an essential part of the mission and very being of the church, and therefore of the mission and ministry of the laity. For to the extent that the family is the place where a person first comes to hear the Gospel and to appreciate the importance of a wider family and community of faith and worship, then to this extent the family gives the person the constitutive elements of the mission and ministry of the Christian in the evangelization of the world. Thus the strength and well-being of the family is essential to any renewal of the church's ministry.

Beyond the family, the parish is the first and often most important

experience which many individuals have of the church. In fact, for most Catholics the wider diocesan and universal church is made present to them precisely through their experience of parish membership. For all its present difficulties, the parish community remains the primary means for providing a context and resources for individuals and families to find community, and for equipping the followers of Christ to carry out their mission of bringing the Divine message of salvation to the world.

Thus, if we are to address seriously the development of ministry in the church, we must focus on the central importance of the quality of parish life and community. For it is only in such a community that the call to ministry will be given and heard, and in which the opportunity to respond can be made available. The development of lay ministry is inseparable from the development of the parish, and the parish cannot develop without developing the call to ministry among the laity. The future development of the church's ministry depends upon the parish community's understanding of our baptismal vocation to holiness and ministry and its commitment to invite its members to join in the experience of collaborative ministry. There are several aspects of parish life which are crucial to developing a church of collaborative ministry which I would like to comment on further.

Parish: A Community of Formation

Christian formation is enabling people to live their daily lives in the world as the mission given them by Christ. A community

of formation seeks to give to its members the confidence and support to discern their individual callings and ways of contributing to the mission and ministry of the church. Thus, the parish, as a community of Christian formation, is called to be a place where people experience the joining of faith and daily life. It is to be a community in which people learn that their daily struggle to be loving and faithful to the Gospel and to each other, with all of its joys and sorrows, its successes and failures, is the life blood of the church and the hope of the world.

A community which forms ministers for the kingdom must also be essentially outward looking. The parish does not exist for itself but for the world in whose heart it lives. The parish cannot fully be a community of formation without a pastoral vision which integrates the sacred and the secular, and promotes the sense of a communal ministry to the surrounding society.

In this regard, a deep sense of personal satisfaction, which I have experienced in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, has been the evolution of social outreach ministry in the majority of our parishes. Social outreach extends not only to members of the parish in need of material assistance, but to the surrounding community and to support of archdiocesan programs such as *Our Daily Bread* and *Beans and Bread*. Many of our parishes twin with other parishes less fortunate and share resources with them. With the assistance of archdiocesan programs and their associations with civic groups, many parishes have initiated educational efforts aimed at increasing people's awareness of the social and political dimensions of their faith.

We must assure that such efforts continue to become more of a priority for our parish communities. For no parish community can be true to

Christ and the ministry to which we are all called in Baptism if it becomes too obsessed with itself, its buildings and activities, to the exclusion of its purpose in the wider community.

Parish: A Community of Communities

For most large parishes it is not possible to be a single community meeting all individuals on all levels of their needs. This is why our parishes, when functioning well, are really a community of communities, joined into a single *communio* by a shared faith and purpose.

Small support groups and apostolic movements serving particular needs are most important to parish life in providing a personal connecting point for individuals and families into a wider community of faith and ministry. Such groups have played an important role in parish renewal in the years since Vatican II.

I have been very impressed with the growth of such groups in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Small groups for the sharing of faith and the study of Scripture, peer ministry groups for youth, parents, separated and divorced people, people suffering from chemical dependence, and many other areas of need and support, have become a common and growing feature of our parish life. These support and peer ministry groups put a human face on the local church, and provide the starting point for many people's experience and understanding of ministry. Their continued promotion will be an essential ingredient to the future development of the ministry of the local parish community.

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Parish: A Community of Collaborative Ministry

The church needs the gifts of many in the diverse forms of service and ministry which have emerged and which are even now evolving in the church. One of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council has been the development of a wider sense of church which has allowed increasing numbers of people to think and speak of the church as "we." To develop the sense of each individual's baptismal call to holiness and ministry, and responsibility for the mission of the church, is essentially to be about developing a collaborative understanding of ministry.

Collaboration is of the very essence of the church's ministry. For by collaboration I simply mean lay people, ordained ministers, and religious working together in mutual trust and support, and in mutual dedication to a common goal. Such collaboration is of the essence of the church's life and mission because it is a way of calling upon everyone to be responsible for developing oneself and one's gifts and placing them at the service of the community.

Where people join in genuinely collaborative ministry they model the church community which needs and welcomes the contribution and participation of all. This is why it is vitally essential that parish staffs should be models of collaborative ministry. Parish staffs provide the immediate image and experience of ministry to which most people in the church are exposed. Only when parish staffs engage in genuine collaborative ministry are they able to challenge the members of their community to actively accept their own responsibility for the mission of the church. When parish staffs fail to function in a collaborative manner, they undermine the sense of common mission among the parish, and to foster a passive attitude toward the work of the church.

In this regard, one of the most significant developments since the Second Vatican Council has been the diversification and development of parish staffs to include both laity and men and women religious in full-time ministry. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as elsewhere, the last 20 years have witnessed significant development of official ministerial roles such as pastoral associates, directors of religious education, youth and health care ministers, music ministers and parish administrators. The growth of such full-time ministerial positions has in turn helped promote larger numbers of laity becoming involved on a more limited basis in a variety of areas of ministry, such as health care, social outreach, education, youth ministry and stewardship.

The desire for collaboration in the work of the church has also been

evident in the many lay men and women who have come forward to participate in collegial structures such as parish, regional and diocesan pastoral councils. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the past 20 years have also seen great progress in the development of parish councils and their related committees in all of our parishes. This area of development has obviously not been without problems, misunderstandings, or even outright conflict. But beneath it all there has been the growing sense of the need and desire of the people of our parish communities for greater participation in helping to shape the direction of their life and ministry as a community — that is, helping to shape the communal life and ministry which needs their gifts and talents.

Obviously, just as the development to date of greater collaboration in ministry and collegial structures has not been without problems, so too there has not been an even development of collaborative ministry in all our parishes. In general, the development of genuinely collaborative ministry remains an ongoing challenge rather than an established reality.

I am convinced that the future development of parish life and ministry depends upon a clear re-commitment to the vision of collaborative ministry I am seeking to set forth here. This means that we must be willing to critique the ways we organize and operate our parish life and affairs, and ask do they model collaborative interaction between ministers and people? Do they challenge people to develop themselves and welcome their participation? Parish staffs must ask themselves if the way they interact models collaboration, and if they in fact have a conscious priority of developing and welcoming the participation of their people in the work of the church. For unless parish staffs and communities deliberately pursue collaboration as of the very essence of the ministry of God's priestly people, then the future development of ministry, and lay ministry in particular, will have no basis on which to stand.

With this understanding of the importance of parish community and structure, there are some further dimensions of the development of official lay ministries which I would like to address here.

The Development of Official Lay Ministries

In 1972 Pope Paul VI instituted the ministries of Lector and Acolyte (*Ministeria Quaedam*). The significance of this event was in the pope's stressing the lay character of these new ministries. That is, Lector and Acolyte were no longer to be seen as "minor orders," or steps leading to ordination. They were officially recognized ministerial positions of ecclesial service for laity. Paul also stated that the church could create other such official lay ministries and he urged

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local bishops' conferences to approach the Holy See with such requests when they specified their own ministerial needs.

I believe this action by Pope Paul opened the door to a most significant development in the church's ministry with which we are only beginning to come to terms. Since 1978 some bishops' conferences have petitioned the Holy See for the recognition of new lay ministerial titles and positions for their countries, but on the whole there has not been marked development in this area. I believe that this is because most bishops' conferences, certainly our own, are still seeking to discern the best actions to take in this area where there is so much continuing development.

Yet I am convinced that the future development of the church's ministry will require our fashioning officially recognized and commissioned lay ministries whose title and status will mark them as an integral part of the church's official ministry of leadership and service.

The growth of lay involvement in the work of the church, and especially the increase of lay people in full-time professional roles of church service on both the parish and diocesan level has provided us with ample evidence of both the need and the possibilities of such a development of official lay ministries. I would like to briefly address some aspects of this need in

the two major areas of lay ministerial activity.

Ministries of Social Transformation

The work of social transformation and the evangelization of culture is one to which all the baptized are called in some way to participate. It is, in a special way, the baptismal vocation of the laity. Yet, if the mission of the laity to transform the social order is to achieve its fullest realization we need the witness of official lay ministries given to catalyzing the People of God to address this task. For to articulate the laity's mission to the world as a vague mandate to witness to the Gospel in secular affairs, without corresponding ministries to help organize and focus that witness on a communal level, is to leave that mission to the world inadequately developed. Such lay ministries should encompass a variety of activities such as education, political and community organization, social advocacy and direct service.

Obviously there are already numerous lay men and women engaged in this type of activity as an expression of their faith commitment. The purpose of creating official lay ministries

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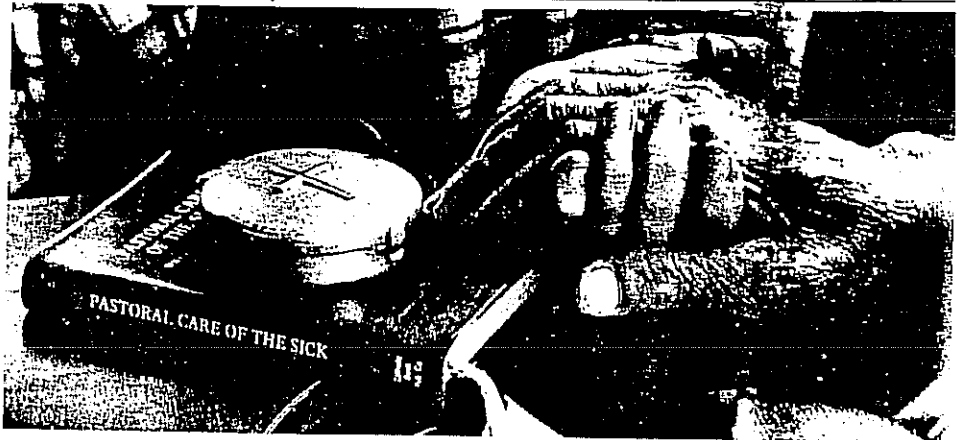
for this work of social transformation is to recognize in a special and unique way the importance which the church community places on such apostolic tasks. The function of those in such ministries is to be a catalyst in galvanizing other members of the ecclesial community to take up these tasks. Such ministers also provide a powerful ecclesial witness to the Christian community of the intrinsic relationship of such work to the baptismal vocation of the Christian, and they also provide an equally powerful witness to the wider secular community of the religious mandate of faith behind Christian involvement in such work.

Thus, I believe it is crucial that parishes seek to develop ministerial roles for lay people in the area of social outreach and involvement. On the archdiocesan level we have made and must continue to make social service and political advocacy a priority through such agencies as Catholic Charities, The Maryland Catholic Conference, and the Justice and Peace Commission. In so doing we need to seek to develop positions of lay leadership and service which are increasingly recognized as ministerial positions officially called and commissioned by the local church to represent in a special way the entire ecclesial community in the work of social transformation. Similarly we need to work with the other dioceses of the country, through the National Conference of Bishops, and through them with the Holy See, to seek a more definite development of official lay ministries on the level of the Universal Church which can include an official ecclesial lay witness in the ministry of social transformation. In the same way, the local church community must have a priority of seeking to develop individuals with both the technical social-political skills and the theological background and competency to provide the witness of these ministries.

Ministries of Ecclesial Service

The Second Vatican Council recognized the baptismal right of the laity to cooperate with the clergy in the common work of the church and to join in more intimate ministerial cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy. The Council specifically recognized the role of the laity in: teaching doctrine; assisting in the liturgy; and special services in the care of souls (*Lumen Gentium* par. 3, 30, 35; "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," par.2).

In Baltimore, as throughout the country, the post-Conciliar years have seen increasingly large numbers of laity seeking to serve as liturgical ministers, catechists, health care and youth workers and so on. For many these ministerial activities take the form of service offered on a limited or temporary basis. But for some, these services are offered on a more



permanent basis. Many lay people have offered their lives in full-time professional commitments to the service of the church.

I believe the future development of the church's ministry requires us to give greater recognition to those lay men and women who have devoted their lives to the work of the church. As a community, we need to recognize that these individuals are not just employees of the church. We need to recognize the work and role of these people as a legitimate and necessary vocation in the church, to which God has called these lay men and women just as he has called religious and ordained ministers to their roles of ecclesial service.

Therefore, I believe that we must also work to develop the status and recognition of official ministries for those lay men and women who give their full-time service to the community of the church. On the level of the local church of the archdiocese, we must work to provide a greater institutional recognition of the ministry these lay people provide for us, and we must actively seek to recruit and train lay people for significant ministerial roles of leadership and service. I believe such lay ministers will become increasingly significant in helping to administrate and direct the local church community, and in providing the services which that community needs to maintain its own welfare and to fulfill its mission. In this area of ministerial service we must also work on the national and universal levels of the church to seek the development of greater official ministerial status for these lay ministers.

The Pastoral Care and Leadership of Communities

An important dimension of the development of lay ministry, especially of full-time professional lay ministers, is the expansion of our understanding of the pastoral care and leadership of local church communities. A fuller and more developed understanding of the nature of pastoral care and pastoral leader-

ship is very crucial to the future development of the church's ministry and ecclesial life. Pastoral care must be seen as involving more than the provision of the sacraments and the services of an ordained priest. The total pastoral care of a community involves the attempt to respond to the myriad needs which invites and requires the services of many others who can work in collaboration with ordained ministers to provide the quality and scope of healing service, education and religious witness needed by the People of God.

Similarly, the pastoral leadership of a community is not exclusively tied to the role of the ordained minister. In the past 20 years lay people and religious have to a significant degree assumed roles involving the direction and administration of pastoral care programs in institutions and administrating parishes in the absence of a resident pastor. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, for example, we have one parish which is under the pastoral administration of a religious woman, and another parish being administrated by a deacon. In many of our health care institutions, the direction of pastoral care, which was formally almost exclusively done by ordained priests, has now been assumed by religious and lay men and women. In some cases, priests on the staffs of these programs provide the sacraments and other priestly services and witness, but the administration of the pastoral care program is in the hands of a non-ordained minister.

In part this change has obviously been related to the shortage of priests, but its significance goes far beyond this fact. The work of these religious and lay ministers has helped to demonstrate that providing leadership and direction to the pastoral care of communities is not exclusively tied to the role and permanent presence of an ordained priest. It is most important for us to understand this fact and its implications.

The assumption by non-ordained ministers of pastoral leadership roles involving the direction of the pastoral care of communities is not meant to be a replacement or substitute for the role of the ordained priestly ministry. There is no substitute for the ordained ministry.

Rather, it is an expression of the growth of the wider, more collaborative sense of ministry which I have been speaking of in this pastoral. The advent of religious and lay men and women into pastoral leadership roles has reflected an expanded understanding of the degree of responsibility for the pastoral care of communities that can be shared beyond the ordained ministry.

This expansion of ministerial leadership roles has not been without its problems or misunderstandings. Yet I am convinced that we must continue to address the issues involved in this development of ministerial leadership as crucial to the future of the ministry of the local church. We will inevitably be faced with the experience of other parishes without an ordained resident pastor, as well as other types of pastoral care programs which will not have the benefit of a permanent priest on staff. If we are to provide for the many pastoral services which our people need, we must face the challenge of expanding our view, not only of the exercise of pastoral leadership of a community, but also of the many types of ministries needed for its total pastoral care.

Recognition and Development of the Role and Contribution of Women

A further aspect of the development of our understanding of the church's ministry has been the rise in prominence of the participation of women and the issues and concerns of women. No one can look at the increase of lay involvement in the work of the local church, and the immense importance of this fact for the church, without recognizing the irreplaceable role of lay and religious women. In most cases women constitute the majority of the laity actively involved in the work and service of the church.

Because in many aspects of society the dignity and contributions of women are not recognized, it is important

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that the church struggle to overcome all such attitudes and practices both in civil society and in its own communal life. As the World Synod of bishops stated in 1971, it is a matter of justice that: "... women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the church." ("Justice in the World," par. 42).

In consultations and forums which have been held in the Archdiocese of Baltimore the responses I have received from women only served to confirm the strong desire of many women to be a creative and active part of the ministry of the church community.

They also confirmed in me the conviction that women do not, any more than any other group in the church, expect answers and solutions ready-made from the hierarchy. What they want is to be genuine partners in ministry, seeking better ways to serve and create community and human solidarity. Women want to be judged by their character and ability and not by preconceived notions of their roles. They want the church as an institution and community committed to creating a human environment of collaboration in which the dignity of every person is respected, and each baptized believer is called and given a chance to make the most of the gifts God has given to him or her.

It is particularly important that the church's evangelization of culture involve a sensitivity to and a willingness to champion the concerns of women about such issues as: just wages; equality with men in the workplace; equal opportunities for education; and the value of parenting and family life.

The church must be an advocate for women in a society in which they tend to be economically disadvantaged because of discrimination, especially women of color. The church community must speak out strongly against the exploitation of women through pornography, rape, prostitution, and all which would diminish their dignity as human beings.

The church must also strive to ensure that sexism (the belief in the innate inferiority of women) is also eradicated from its own life. To achieve that end certain efforts are essential.

First of all, it is necessary to promote the genuinely collaborative models of ministry I have advocated in this pastoral letter. A genuine commitment to collaboration in ministry requires that parish staffs and archdiocesan offices promote the entrance of women to ministerial work and collegial decision making.

Shortly after my arrival in Baltimore I committed the archdiocese to actively seek to include women in leadership positions, and to provide training where necessary to promote a greater involvement of women in significant positions of archdiocesan ministry. That commitment has con-

tinued and must continue.

Secondly, the local church community must encourage an approach to pastoral care which supports family life and the domestic roles of women, without in any way denying the importance of major roles for women in public and societal life.

Thirdly, the church community must be sensitive to the use of language in liturgical and official texts to ensure that it is inclusive of women, and avoid perpetuating negative or condescending attitudes toward women which are in some historical and biblical texts.

Fourthly, in a previous pastoral letter on "Women in the Church," I promised my support to work with my fellow bishops to promote on the level of the Universal Church the opening of all church positions which do not require priestly ordination to all lay people, and therefore to women. I believe that this is still something which the local church should promote on all the levels in which we have contact and dialogue with other levels of the church. Ultimately, this is a matter of discipline which can only be decided on the level of the Holy See and the Universal Church. Yet I believe that it is part of the challenge to the local church to promote a wider and more inclusive vision of collaborative ministry — a vision which does not confine to those in sacred orders roles and functions which are not exclusively sacerdotal.

To build a community of collaborative ministry is to build a community characterized by respect for the gifts of all of its members, and an openness to their participation in the life of the community. In our historical moment this requires a renewed appreciation of the gifts and participation of women. The willingness of the local church community to welcome and develop their gifts and participation will be a vital element in the continuing development of the church's ministry and its capacity to meet the challenges of evangelization.

The Development of Lay Ministry: An Institutional Commitment

Thus far in this section I have set forth what I see as some of the major dimensions of the challenge which faces us in the development of lay ministry. The needs of the church community and the demands upon the church's official ministry will continue to grow, and the challenges of addressing the Gospel to contemporary society will only increase. I am convinced that the development of stronger lay ministry is a basic necessity of the church's ministerial response to the challenges of the times. In particular, the development of official lay ministerial positions is crucial, not only to providing the services needed by the local church community, but also to the development of a wider sense of the

baptismal vocation and responsibility which we must engender in every member of the community.

This development of lay ministry must be more than mere exhortation. It must be an institutional commitment. For to accept seriously this task is to be faced with the particular challenge of how we prioritize the use of our material as well as personal resources. To develop needed levels of full-time lay ministerial service, the local church must provide adequate salaries and benefits. Providing for this will need to be ever more of a priority in the future development and use of the church's resources.

Similarly, we need to continue to give more attention to the development of programs aimed at increasing the sense of personal responsibility for the mission of the church, and helping lay people to discern and develop their gifts for contributing to that mission. The development of such programs for ministry formation must be a priority for how the archdiocese and parishes utilize our financial and personnel resources.

As I stated in the beginning of this

pastoral, the church has been in a profound process of renewing its understanding of its relationship and mission to the world. This process of renewal has sparked a growing sense that, to be true to itself and to fulfill its mission to the world, the church community must develop among its members a deeper sense of personal responsibility for the mission of Christ and a wider degree of active participation in the ministerial activities of the church.

An enhanced appreciation of the role of the laity and the need to develop that role has been both a gift and a challenge to come out of the church's renewed look at itself. It is a gift we must accept in gratitude for the ever-dynamic Spirit that animates the church. It is a challenge which must be taken up in the hope which comes from the presence of that same Spirit and Paraclete, who is the gift of the Risen Christ.

I would now like to address some aspects of the ordained ministry of the church, and its relationship to the development of a community of collaborative ministry.



The Ordained Ministries in the Church

In speaking of the role of the ordained ministry we immediately confront a marked shift in thought and perspective which reflects much of the changes which have marked the life of the church in the years since the Second Vatican Council. In slightly over two decades since the Council, the image and role of the priestly ministry, in the minds of many, has gone from being clear, solid and esteemed, to being less clear, uncertain and controversial.

Prior to the Council, ministry was primarily identified with the ordained ministry. The ordained priest himself was primarily identified with certain sacramental powers, which were themselves understood as differentiating the priest from the laity.

The renewed vision of the Council,

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with its emphasis on the entire church community as the primary locus of the mission and ministry of Christ, placed the role of the ordained in a new perspective. From this perspective the ordained priesthood more clearly emerged as existing within the ecclesial community for the purpose of enabling it to be a priestly people and assume its responsibility for the mission of the church.

Today we face the challenge of affirming the traditional value and importance of the ordained ministry for the life of the church, and of clarifying how that ministry should best function to develop the ministerial potential of the whole church. In effect we need to articulate a clear vision of the ordained ministry within the context of the vision of collaborative ministry I have been setting forth here.

Thus, I would like to address what I see as certain fundamental elements of that vision which unites our traditional understanding of the importance of the ordained ministry with the necessity of developing a more inclusive and collaborative ministry for the present and future of the church.

The Ecclesial Context of the Ordained Ministry

The ordained ministry is a permanent part of the structure of the church and is essential to the realization of the church's life and mission. Yet the role of the ordained ministry must always be understood within the context of the mission of the church as the priestly People of God.

The ordained ministry does not exist by or for itself, but only in and for the church. It exists to offer the service of leadership and sacramental nourishment through which it acts as a catalyst to enable and empower the whole community of the church to realize its mission in the world. Thus, the theology of Holy Orders arises out of the theology of the church and not vice versa, and the apostolic responsibility inherent in the Sacrament of Orders does not stand apart from the responsibility and mission given to the entire priestly People of God.

Those who are called to the ordained ministry fulfill their role through the service of leading God's people in the fourfold ministry of the church — in proclaiming the Gospel, in worshipping, in building community, and in offering healing service to human needs.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders has traditionally been seen by the church as expressed in three different ministries of bishop, priest and deacon. Each of these ministries of Holy Orders has its unique sacramental expression and character. I wish to address certain aspects of each of these which are fundamental to our understanding of the relationship of the ordained ministry to the overall

mission and ministry of the priestly People of God.

The Episcopacy and the Ordained Priesthood

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the tradition of the church in affirming that the primal ministry in the church is that of the bishop, in whom resides the fullness of the ordained priesthood. As the Council stated: "The order of bishop is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule . . . in the episcopal order the apostolic body continues without a break." (*Christus Dominus*, par.4) Through their union with each other and the successor of Peter, the college of bishops is called to ensure the worldwide unity of the church, and they jointly bear responsibility for its fidelity to the mission and teaching of Jesus.

Thus in the order of bishop is given the unifying locus of the pastoral leadership and care of the local church. As such, one of the chief responsibilities of the bishop is the coordination and development of the other ministries of the church.

In the exercise of his mission to direct the pastoral care of the ecclesial community, the bishop shares a unique relationship with those called to join him in the ordained ministry — with the priests who share with the bishop the sacramental priesthood of Jesus, and with the deacons, who share with the bishop a sacramental service of charity to the People of God. It is through the bishop that these others are admitted to the orders of presbyter and deacon, and it is in union with him that they exercise the ministries of leadership and service to which they are called in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

In speaking of ordained priests, the Second Vatican Council affirmed their unique relationship with the bishop as sharers of a common sacramental priesthood of Christ. Priests share with bishops one ministry of leadership and sacramental nourishment of the ecclesial community. So close is their relationship that the Council spoke of priests as co-workers, brothers, and sons of the bishop, and as taking the place of the bishop in the communities they served (*Lumen Gentium* 28, 41; *Christus Dominus*, 15; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42; *Presbyterum Ordinis*, 6). Yet in the vision of the Council, the priest is not simply a surrogate or shadow of the bishop. As the Council stated, priests are themselves consecrated true priests of the New Testament (*Christus Dominus*, 15) and by ordination "as so configured to Christ the priest that they can act in the person of Christ the head." (*Presbyterum Ordinis*, 2, 13).

Thus, the bishop is both the focal point of the fullness of the ordained priesthood and the head of a college of presbyters. Together, the bishop and his priests constitute the college

of ministers who bring the ordained priestly ministry of Christ to his people.

Therefore, in the light of the vision of ministry I have been articulating here, it is imperative for their ministry to the local church that the bishop and his priests should model in their relationships with each other the collaborative ministry that it is their responsibility to develop and promote throughout the ecclesial community. In this regard, it is important to address certain aspects of the ordained priesthood: its essential relationship to the Priesthood of the Baptized, and the nature of the pastoral leadership which is given to the ordained priesthood. For a correct understanding of these two realities is essential to understanding the relationship of the ordained priesthood to the wider development of other ministries among the Priestly People of God.

The Relationship of the Ordained Priesthood to the Priesthood of the Baptized

The Second Vatican Council affirmed the tradition that the priesthood conferred in the Sacrament of Orders is different in essence, not degree, from the priesthood of all the baptized (*Lumen Gentium*, 2). In ordination a priest is not given more of the priesthood of the baptized, but a different kind of priesthood.

It is most important to understand this distinction for our reflection on ministry. For, to some, this distinction has been misunderstood as implying a separation of the ordained priesthood from the People of God so as to imply a certain spiritual superiority and dominance. This is far from the truth.

The ordained priesthood is not an essentially greater share in the common priesthood of all baptized, for to view it as such would be to imply that the ordained minister enjoys a greater participation in the life of Christ, which is the baptismal life of the church. It would thus imply that the ordained minister enjoyed a superiority of personal grace and relationship to Christ and his saving mission.

Whereas, to recognize the distinction in kind of the ordained priesthood from the priesthood of the baptized, is to uphold the equality of all believers in Christ. It is to recognize that the essential purpose of the ordained priesthood is the service of the priestly People of God, in which its service of leadership and sacramental nourishment is to be a catalyst enabling the community to realize its mission in and for the world.

Thus, the ordained priesthood presupposes the baptismal vocation of the Christian, but it is an essentially different way of specifying and sharing in that vocation, which involves a

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unique role for the sake of others. The ordained priesthood exists in the midst of the Church as the sacramental embodiment of the essence of all ministry to be a catalyst to enable others to realize more fully the saving presence of Christ in their lives, and to enable them to develop the charisms of the Spirit to take their full part in the mission of Christ to the world.

In this context we can see that the ordained ministry is one ministry in the church. It is not the sum total of ministry, nor does it contain all other ministries in itself, which it only shares with others when there are not enough priests to do all ministerial tasks. Thus, the very nature of the distinction between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the baptized implies the charge of the ordained priesthood to develop the ministerial potential of all the priestly People of God.

Pastoral Leadership and Collaborative Ministry

In speaking of the episcopacy and the ordained priesthood, the Second Vatican Council affirmed their role of exercising a ministry of leadership which involves a share in the authority of Christ to secure the care and order of the Christian community and the preservation of its faith. As I stated in an earlier part of this letter, this role of pastoral leadership in the administration and pastoral care of communities can be shared in a substantive and significant degree with non-ordained ministers.

Yet, as the Council affirmed the church's tradition, that responsibility of pastoral leadership is given in a unique way to the ordained priesthood as it is most fully expressed in the order of bishop. I believe that a correct understanding of the nature and purpose of this priestly service of leadership is crucial to the future development of a community of collaborative ministry in the local church.

The Second Vatican Council never spoke of the rights or privileges of the clergy, but only of the servant roles of bishops and priests. The Conciliar teaching makes clear that pastoral leadership and authority cannot be separated from the action of service which builds community and empowers its members to reach their full individual stature.

The pastoral leadership of the episcopacy and ordained priesthood should be understood in terms of their role as presiders of the Christian community. The presidential role of the ordained priesthood is particularly clear in the cultic role of priests in the eucharistic gathering and worship of the community. Yet on many other levels the ordained priesthood functions as the convener and presider to offer the service of bringing the community together in a manner



which enables it to effectively take up its mission to the world. This objective of bringing the community together for mission and ministry constitutes an overarching and unifying theme to the many ways in which bishops and priests are called upon to exercise their ministry of preaching the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and offering healing services.

This broader understanding of the convening or presiding role of the ordained priesthood also serves to make clearer the function of the ordained priesthood as a catalyst for the church community. The pastoral leadership which is an inherent responsibility of the ordained priesthood is necessarily directed toward advocacy and the enablement of all the members of the community to join together in the tasks of ministry.

Understanding the nature of pastoral leadership and authority in this way, as envisioned by the Council, bishops and priests cannot rely simply on their institutional standing in the hierarchy. They must embrace the role and challenges of being a

leader of a community of faith whose members are invited to be involved in a truly collaborative way in ordering themselves and carrying out the work of the church. As administrators, bishops and priests must be servants and enablers who view themselves as leaders of an adult community gathered with their pastor in prayer and evangelization, and not as solitary sacred mediators of grace to a passive audience.

The collegiality which the Second Vatican Council spoke of as existing between the bishops and the pope, has implications for the relations of bishops with priests, and pastors with their people. Collegiality, obviously, is not democracy, as some would have it. But to say that the church is not governed by majority rule is not to say that it need not strive for unanimity. The very nature and purpose of any role of pastoral leadership demands a collegial mode of exercise to achieve its goal which is the building of a community of collaborative ministry among the priestly People of God.

'The ordained priesthood is not an essentially greater share in the common priesthood of all baptized, for to view it as such would be to imply that the ordained minister enjoys a greater participation in the life of Christ, which is the baptismal life of the church. It would thus imply that the ordained minister enjoyed a superiority of personal grace and relationship to Christ and his saving mission.'

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The Diaconate

In a unique way the restored permanent diaconate, and its availability to married men, is pertinent to our reflections on ministry, for it reflects the developmental potential of the church's ministry and the need and right of the church to structure and develop that ministry according to the needs of the time.

For the diaconate, which appeared in the New Testament by the time of Paul's letter to the Philippians and the first letter of Timothy, went into decline around the 4th century and eventually disappeared as a distinct ministry in the church. It became only a stage on the way to priesthood.

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The Second Vatican Council called for the restoration of the diaconate as a distinct ministry (*Lumen Gentium*, 29). In 1967 Pope Paul VI officially reinstated the permanent diaconate, and in 1968 it was established in the United States.

The Council listed the ways in which the deacon assists in the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, but also stressed that the deacon was dedicated to a ministry of charity and administration. The liturgical duties of deacons reflect the essential nature of the ordained ministry as rooted in the eucharistic life of the church.

As ministers of charity deacons are ordained by the bishop to be his special assistants — to represent in a unique sacramental way the presence of Christ in the healing ministry of service to the human needs which exist in the Christian community and the wider society of which it is a part. As ordained ministers of charity, deacons also reflect the catalytic nature of the church's official ministry in being permanently and sacramentally dedicated to a life of service in the name of the church, and thus represent Christ calling his people to the service of each other's needs.

As such, priests do not join with the bishop in ordaining deacons. They are ordained by the bishop alone to be his assistants in carrying out his episcopal charge to take care for the needs of God's people. Deacons are thus close collaborators with the priests, but they are not subservient to them as an "inferior" order. Thus, they should be assigned directly by the bishop in accordance with the needs of the local church to collaborate with priests in conducting the liturgical life of the community and dedicating themselves to meeting particular human needs of the community.

Yet the existence of the restored diaconate presents a challenge to us. Because of its relative newness there is a need to further clarify and develop, in light of the experience of both the local and universal church, the special ways in which this ordained ministry should best be used by the church.

This challenge is especially true in the church in the United States where we have one of the largest corps of

deacons of any local church in the world. Presently over 7,500 deacons serve in the United States. This large number of deacons has only served to make more pressing the need for education on the role of the deacon and to specify the ways in which the diaconate can best function in our situation. Too often, the larger number of deacons, combined with a lack of awareness as to their role, has led to deacons being underutilized, or functioning in ways which need not require ordination to this special ministry. In some cases, deacons have been employed only in liturgical roles without any special ministry of service which is essential to the role and purpose of the diaconate.

Thus, as we affirm the importance and value of the role of deacon, on both the local and national level, we must also accept the challenge of addressing the questions its presence raises for us:

□ how to better structure the diaconate to reflect its direct tie to the bishop rather than the parish as the source of diaconal service;

□ how to better clarify and specify the roles of service to which the diaconate should be called in our contemporary situation, and to use and regulate the numbers of deacons accordingly;

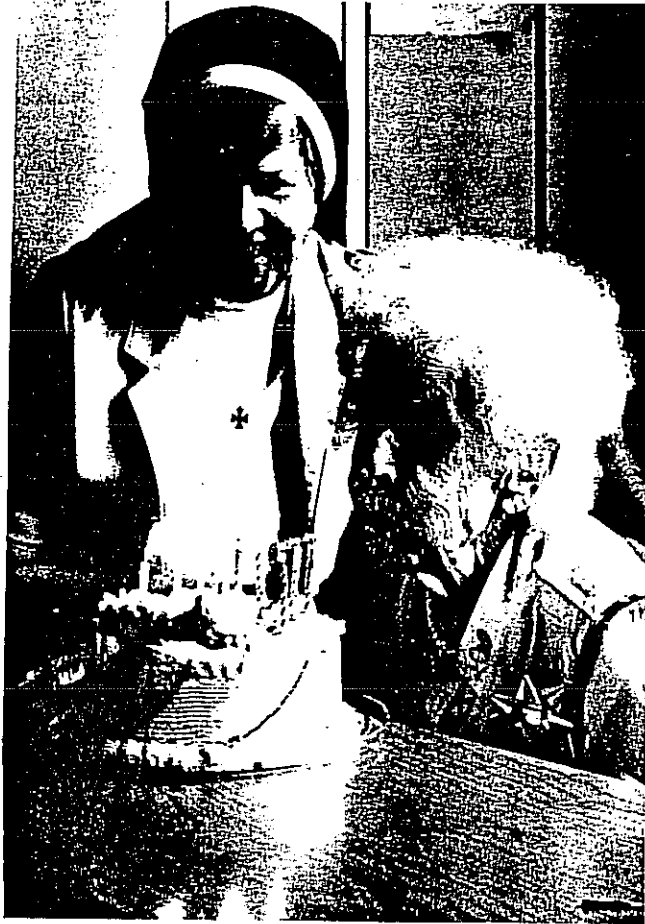
□ how to better educate our people on the role of the diaconate and to clarify the relationship of deacons to other ministries in the church.

These questions and challenges will take some time to resolve. No role as significant as that of the diaconate develops overnight, and the 23 years since Vatican II is not really a long historical period. Yet we must address these challenges in the spirit of hope which the diaconal ministry offers. We must approach these questions in the spirit which recognizes that the very restoration of the diaconate and its extension to married men reflects the dynamic nature of the church's ministry and the power of the Spirit acting to give the church the charisms needed for the times.



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The Religious Life

This pastoral letter cannot begin to treat adequately the dimensions of the religious life and vocation, but no vision of the church's ministry would be complete without a recognition of the unique service given by the communities of men and women religious. The witness and service of the men and women living a life of religious consecration by special vows to follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience is a rich treasury of spiritual gifts for the life of the church.

Throughout the church's history various forms of religious life have grown up as ways to live the evangelical counsels according to the rule of prayer and work of each specific religious community. The official recognition which the church has given to such a way of life reflects the desire both to endorse this way of life as a means of personal holiness for those called to it, and to make this life a part of the official witness and ministry of the church.

As the Second Vatican Council affirmed, the religious life is not meant to be an intermediate state between clergy and laity. Rather, it is a way of life to which both clergy and laity

'As the Second Vatican Council affirmed, the religious life is not meant to be an intermediate state between clergy and laity. Rather, it is a way of life to which both clergy and laity can be called, that each in his or her own way can forward the mission of the church (*Lumen Gentium*, 43). They are in effect called to be a sign which attracts all members of the church to fulfill the challenges of their Christian vocation.'

can be called, that each in his or her own way can forward the mission of the church (*Lumen Gentium*, 43). They are in effect called to be a sign which attracts all members of the church to fulfill the challenges of their Christian vocation.

The service that various religious families offer may vary from the witness of a life consecrated to contemplative prayer to a life which includes apostolic service. Yet all of these communities, by virtue of their religious consecration, offer a public, official witness in the name of the whole Christian community that the "Kingdom of God and its overriding necessities are superior to all earthly considerations." (*Lumen Gentium*, 43)

Thus, contrary to the attitudes of an

earlier era, the religious life is not to be viewed as a state superior to other ways of Christian living, and certainly not as a means of withdrawal from the struggles and realities of Christian life in the world. Rather, it is a specific mode of consecration to Christ, which seeks to offer a public witness to remind all Christians of the radical claim which Christ makes upon them in the circumstances of their lives.

Thus, the vowed religious life is a way of specifying our baptismal vocation which also reflects the catalytic nature of all of the church's ministries. In this time of historical change, I believe that the communities of men and women religious face challenges calling them to sacrifices comparable to the generosity of their

founders and foundresses. I see the communities of vowed religious as having unique gifts and resources to contribute to the development of lay ministry and empowering lay people to assume a more substantive role in the life and mission of the church.

Few of us, in one way or another, have not been affected by the service of religious orders, not only in the prayer they offer, but also in apostolic services in education, health care, social work, work for justice and peace, and pastoral ministers in parishes. As Archbishop of Baltimore I know in a most intimate way that our life and ministry as a local church would be unthinkable poor and diminished without the presence and service of the religious communities which have been an integral part of our archdiocese throughout its rich history.

The continued leadership and service of men and women religious in both specialized institutions and in parish-based ministries will be an indispensable part of the continued development of the church's ministry. For our local church community needs not only the particular services provided by these religious, but also the spiritual enrichment and challenge of a life consecrated to poverty, chastity and obedience.

Conclusion: "You are a Royal Priesthood"

In 1980 the bishops of the United States, in reflecting upon the 15th anniversary of the Vatican Council's "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," said: "The church is to be a sign of God's kingdom in the world. The authenticity of that sign depends on all the people: laity, religious, deacons, priests, and bishops. Unless we truly live as the People of God, we will not be much of a sign to ourselves or the world."

In this pastoral statement, I have tried to set forth the parameters of a vision of ministry which can allow us to be that sign for ourselves and the world which we are called to be as God's priestly people. It is a vision of a church community which calls forth the development of mutually supportive and complementary ministries to achieve the one mission which belongs to all. Most of all, it is a vision which challenges every Christian to see that the different roles of service to which each of us is called exist for each other, and have no meaning apart from each other. The development and actualization of this vision in the life of the church depends upon both the acceptance by each of us of our baptismal responsibility, and the openness of the community to the gifts and participation of all its members.

In my ministry as priest and bishop, I have become convinced that understanding and integrating such a vision of collaborative ministry into our communal life is one of the most significant challenges of the contemporary church. I believe that much of the misunderstanding and conflict that often mars the life of local church communities today serves to underscore our need for a renewed sense of a common baptismal purpose and mission, and of the right and need for all the baptized to find a way to participate actively in that mission and ministry.

To help in the practical development of the vision set forth here, I have directed the formulation of guidelines for the development of pastoral ministry, which I will share with you in another document. It is my hope that these guidelines will chart some concrete directions which will help us to continue to build on the good beginnings we have made in such programs as *Foundations in Ministry* and *Leadership in Ministry*.

Yet more crucial than any programmatic scheme is the fundamental attitude and vision of the church community, for this will finally determine our future. If we are to pursue seriously the vision of a dynamic community of faith and collaborative ministry, then we cannot be afraid to experiment and take risks. We must be willing to listen and learn from the

"Times of change and growth — times like ours — are by their nature difficult and often painful. But they are also times of hope for those who trust in the Spirit Whom Christ has sent to guide his people. In the hope which is the gift of that Spirit I ask you to join with me and each other to share the work and risks of making the vision of genuinely collaborative ministry an ever greater reality in our life as a church community. Personally, one of my greatest satisfactions as your archbishop has been the experience of the growing number of clergy and laity in the archdiocese who are making great personal sacrifices to bring about that vision."

pastoral staffs who are relating daily with people who are generously seeking to give themselves and their services to the church.

We must not be afraid to admit that we don't know all the answers. We will also make mistakes, as we have in the past. Obviously, the promise of Christ to send the Holy Spirit was not a guarantee that we would not make mistakes. It is a promise, however, that by the power of the Spirit we can learn from our mistakes and continue to pursue the ideal which ever calls us onward.

We must be open to our need for

those people in our midst who prophetically prod us out of our complacency, and remind us of what still needs to be done, and what new things should come to be. Yet we must also be clear that the ultimate test of our ideas is in seeing how they can be accepted and implemented in practice, and the beneficial fruit they bear for the life of the community.

Times of change and growth — times like ours — are by their nature difficult and often painful. But they are also times of hope for those who trust in the Spirit Whom Christ has sent to guide his people. In the hope

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In gratitude for all of you, and with a heart filled with hope, in this last pastoral statement which I shall address to you as your archbishop, I want above all to shout like Peter did to the first Christian community: "Remember! You are a royal priesthood!"

You are a priestly community of ministers chosen by God for a mission to the world. By the power of that Spirit who has gathered us together, may all of us open our minds and hearts to that call which, in the words of Pope Leo the Great, summons each of us "... to be ministers, as best we can, of that grace which invites all men and women to find Christ."

William D. Borders

Archbishop of Baltimore
May 22, 1988

