

# Co-Workers

## In the Vineyard of the Lord

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

### **The Mission:**

The mystery of God is one of love, the love of Trinitarian communion revealed in mission. “At the heart of the divine act of creation is the divine desire to make room for created persons in the communion of the uncreated Persons of the Blessed Trinity through adoptive participation in Christ.” (Page 17)

For, by its very nature, a life of holiness involves a dynamic openness and movement toward others. The Church exists to give glory to God and to continue Christ’s work of salvation...In the Church we are all at one and the same time brought into communion and sent on mission. In fact, “communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.* (Pages 19-20)

### **Call:**

Lay men and women hear and answer the universal call to holiness primarily and uniquely in the secular realm. They are found “in each and every one of the world’s occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world from within, like leaven, in the spirit of the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties. (Page 8)

All of the baptized are called to work toward the transformation of the world. Most do this by working in the secular realm... (Page 8)

Lay ecclesial ministers are members of the lay faithful, sharing in the common priesthood of all the baptized...The further call of some persons to lay ecclesial ministry adds a special grace by which the Holy Spirit “makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church.”... Their call, however, should not foster an elitism that places lay ecclesial ministers above or outside the laity. Like Jesus, they are called to serve and not to be served. They are to use their gifts and leadership roles always for the good of the Church, equipping the community for every good work and strengthening it for its mission in the world. (Pages 25-26)

### **Lay Ecclesial Ministers:**

The term reflects certain key realities. The ministry is **lay** because it is service done by lay persons. The sacramental basis is the Sacraments of Initiation, not the Sacrament of Ordination. The ministry is **ecclesial** because it has a place within the community of the Church, whose communion and mission it serves, and because it is submitted to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy. Finally, it is **ministry** because it is a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet, and king.” (Page 11)

Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Men and women whose service is characterized by

- *Authorization* of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church
- *Leadership* in a particular area of ministry
- *Close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons

- *Preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them (Page 10)

### **Discernment:**

Throughout the discernment process a person needs to ask: What talents, virtues, and limits do I possess that indicate my ability to serve God's people through a commitment to lay ecclesial ministry? Lay persons with a call to lay ecclesial ministry possess certain dispositions, which are further developed during the formal preparation process. These include

- Being in full communion with the Catholic Church, able to minister joyfully and faithfully within the hierarchical communion that is the Church
- The desire to serve the Church and its mission, which proceeds from love of God and God's people
- A commitment to regular personal prayer, frequent participation in the Mass beyond the Sunday obligation and in the other sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance
- Zeal to live a Christian life, and willingness to live and teach as the magisterium teaches
- Emotional maturity, including the ability to sustain friendships and professional relationships and the management and appropriate expression of both anger and affection
- The intellectual gifts needed for the specific ministry
- A commitment to good communication and conflict resolution skills (Page 30)

### **Formation:**

The Church has always required proper preparation of those who exercise a ministry. In the same way, CIC, canon 231, states that "lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly." Lay ecclesial ministers, just like the ordained, need and deserve formation of high standards, effective methods, and comprehensive goals.

Effective formation methods address the whole person: emotions, imagination, will, heart, and mind. It is the whole person who ministers, so the whole person is the proper subject of formation. The four areas of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—that provide a framework for the formation of deacons and priests provide a framework for lay ecclesial ministers as well. Lay ecclesial ministers need

- *Human qualities* critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God's love and compassion
- A *spirituality* and practice of prayer that root them in God's Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry
- Adequate *knowledge* in theological and pastoral studies, along with the *intellectual skill* to use it among the people and cultures of our country
- The practical *pastoral abilities* called for in their particular ministry (Pages 33-34)

All formation is ultimately self-formation, and lay ecclesial ministers themselves are the pivotal agents of their own formation. We call them to nurture in themselves a deep and powerful hunger for formation, willingness to learn and grow, and desire to serve the Lord with excellence and generosity. (Page 53)

### **Authorization:**

Authorization is the process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent Church authority. This process includes... acknowledgment of the competence of an individual for a specific ministerial role (often called "certification")... (Page 54)