The Future of Catholic Ministry

By Maureen Fiedler

When I think about Catholic ministry, people like Barbara Wander come to mind. She ministers to poor children in Haiti. I think about Sally Dunne who runs Loretto’s office at the United Nations, where she speaks out for justice and peace and the integrity of Planet Earth. I think about Matt Myers who works for LGBT rights in the Catholic community at New Ways Ministry. I think about the selfless folks who live and work in Catholic Worker houses across the country. And of course, I think of my long-time friend, Dolly Pomerleau, who has worked for justice and peace all her adult life at the Quixote Center where she is a co-founder. And many more.

None of these people are clergy. None of them are vowed members of a religious community. Yet these are the faces of the future (as well as the present) when it comes to Catholic ministry: women and men, young and old, and – for the most part – not ordained.

The first three are co-members of my own Loretto Community where justice and peace ministries are encouraged and respected. Dolly is a Vatican II Catholic who has dedicated her entire life to ministries of justice and peace – reform of the church, women’s rights and LGBT rights, and the wellbeing of people in Nicaragua and Haiti.

We usually call these folks “laity,” but Rev. Helmut Schüller, on his recent US tour, encouraged us to call them “citizens of the church.” That title conveys a sense of equality and full participation. Indeed, equality and participation will be hallmarks of future Catholic ministry as parishes become less clerical and more “lay-run.”

Contrast all these images with the past when Catholic “ministers” were almost always male, ordained and appointed. In non-sacramental ministries, the “ministers” were usually nuns or brothers. No more. In an age of sharply declining numbers of clergy and members of religious communities, when parishes are closing or merging with other parishes so the dwindling number of priests can serve them, ministry is already taking new forms and faces.

At this point, some definitions are in order. Ministry is not, in my mind, limited to “ordained ministry” or “sacramental ministry.” Roughly defined, it involves serving others in a selfless way, meeting people where they are, working with them to discern their needs, and helping them walk toward God – whoever God is for them.

Understood according to this definition, real ministers are not dictatorial. They share decision-making with all the stakeholders in a parish or worshipping community. As we move into the future, the very model of parish must incorporate that “citizen” ethic: shared decision-making and shared responsibility. (Women’s religious communities have been operating this way for quite a while; they can be very helpful with ideas for parish structures that embody an ethic of shared governance).

Of course, sacramental ministry remains central in Catholic life. Here, the image of my old friend, Andrea Johnson, comes to mind. She is married, a mother, and one of the founders of the Roman Catholic Women Priests’ movement. In fact, she is now a “bishop” in that movement (where bishops are coordinators, not dictators). Hers is another face of the Catholic future. Sacramental ministers will be female as well as male, married and celibate, full time and part time.

And of course, when it comes to women priests, it’s a question of “when,” not “if.” When will the Vatican decide to embrace the ideals of Jesus and the teaching of Vatican II: “...every type of discrimination based on sex is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent”? (Gaudium et Spes, #29). By the way, try as they might, there is no “escape clause” here.

But when I think of sacramental ministry, I also think about the “intentional Eucharistic communities” that have proliferated across the United States (and other countries). Many of these communities invite ordained priests to lead their celebrations. But the same priest shortage that afflicts parishes afflicts these communities. So, some invite married male priests, or Roman Catholic women priests. Others conduct lay-led celebrations, or Eucharists that have a...
Expanding Expressions of Catholic Ministry

While growing up, I always felt a calling to be a Catholic priest. At the age of 7, I was recreating elements of the mass using our kitchen table as an altar and an upright vacuum cleaner as a microphone. The pews consisted of my sister and her stuffed animals seated in the neatly repositioned kitchen chairs and for that moment, our kitchen was a magnificent cathedral. I raised a piece of wonder bread and a glass grape juice and recited the words that already had deep spiritual meaning to me. My parents thought it was a cute phase and my sister wanted to know if “it counted” for our Sunday obligation.

But it was not just a phrase. It was an innocent beginning to a long journey.

By age 21, I was sharing with a vocation director my love for the church and my calling to be a priest. While in love with the church, I was also in love with a very special person. This created a heart wrenching discernment that revealed that while I am not meant to be a priest in the institutional church, I indeed had a calling to ministry that is just as sacred. Ministry comes in many holy forms.

Through our baptism, we are initiated into a life of Christ, into a community of love that serves as the foundation for everything we do. By our baptism, we are called to minister to one another. As we look to the future, what does that ministry look like?

This edition of CTA News will focus on exploring the various ways people are living out their baptismal call to minister to other people in their lives. This newsletter will also report on Call To Action’s transformational work including our engagement with the Catholic Tipping Point coalition that sponsored Helmut Schüller’s 15 city tour throughout the United States and our young adult pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as part of the Equally Blessed coalition.

Whether it is one person speaking around the United States about justice or a group traveling to Brazil witnessing for inclusion, we are called by our God to be present and minister to each other, to be siblings. Our ministries take many different forms and are often challenging experiences that move us, and those whom we serve out of our familiar comfort zones. It is then we realize that our ministry work is indeed, holy work.

Sincerely,

Jim FitzGerald,
Executive Director
Call To Action

Letter from Director

Call To Action welcomes Ryan Hoffmann as Call To Action’s new Director of Communications. Ryan comes to Call To Action with years of nonprofit communications, marketing, and social media experience as well as a deep commitment to Call To Action’s mission.

The staff and board of directors are very excited to have Ryan join the team. Call To Action members from around the country will have the opportunity to welcome Ryan at the national conference, November 1-3 in Milwaukee, WI.

I am thrilled to be joining the staff at Call To Action. Having been a member of CTA for some time, and having served on the CTA 20/30 Team, I’ve witnessed the incredible power of people coming together to create change and transformation.

Ryan Hoffmann
Director of Communications

Want to share your thoughts on more than paper? Share comments at www.facebook.com/CallToAction
In Memoriam

Dr. Bernard J. Cooke: A Testimony

Starting with the words at the end of his last work illustrates a snapshot of the life and legacy of a great friend and colleague of Call To Action, Dr. Bernard Cooke. His life might well be summed up with the following: "Let the risen Christ shine through you. For those so blessed, every breath is a sacrament."

Bernard Cooke demonstrated how his every breath was a sacrament. As an internationally recognized theologian, an author of some 20 books, many articles, conference presentations and lectures, Dr. Cooke, was a sign of hope, vision, challenge, and grace for so many of the People of God. As a Board member of Call To Action and recipient of the Leadership Award granted by CTA, he put into action what the words in his books proclaimed. His love for the Church drove him and energized him to challenge the Church he so loved. Yes he earned an A.B and M.A., S.T.L. and an S.T.D and other honorary doctoral degrees from other universities. But, he was so proud of his work at Marquette University where he inaugurated the first Ph.D. program in the nation training Catholic laypersons for careers in theological scholarship and teaching – challenging them to know and change an evolving Church. His impact on the church, his belief in the equality of roles of women and men in the church, his profound theology of Eucharist and Baptism are testaments to his insight into a future Church. It is said that Dr. Cooke’s crowning testimony of Marriage as a Sacrament of Friendship showed his love for his wife, family, the Lord and the Church. Yes, he was given 91 years to be and live as a sacrament of the Risen Christ who did shine through him. Now he lives in the timelessness of the Creator’s Eternal Sacrament of Love.

Robert L. Funaro Ed.D
Board Member. CTA

Goodbye to a friend: Jim McShane

Last month Call To Action Nebraska lost a dear friend, Jim McShane. Jim worked for over thirty years on church reform. Jim was also a founding member of Call To Action Nebraska. He led the effort with integrity and grace to appeal Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz’s extra-synodal legislation excommunicating members of CTA Nebraska.

To remember Jim, I will share with you some of his own words. What follows are just a few excerpts from the interview I did with him in 2001:

The longer I have lived with [the excommunication] the more anxious I have become about the calculated cruelty of it. And if I had not known a great deal about church history and the capacity of mother church to survive the instrumentalities of its own authorities, I’d have been much more seriously tempted to throw it all over. But if my belief in the church is going to fail because it has one clumsy Bishop, then it wasn’t really very strong to begin with now was it? We all know about the hopeless inadequacy of the German Bishops’ response to Hitler, we have known about the unseemly grubbing for power among the Bishops of the Renaissance, Middle Ages, 18th century, and the Popes. And it seems to me unseemly to say something like, “Well, that’s alright when it affects somebody else, but when it affects me it means the church obviously has no foundation.” No, the church has one foundation and it’s Jesus Christ our Lord. And it survived a Pope who was dragged through the streets of Rome at the behest of the Council because he was a heretic. It will survive the Bishop of Lincoln.

This quotation reminded me of these words by Joan Chittister in her book “Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope”:

“Endurance is not about being too stubborn to give up on the impossible. Endurance is about having heart enough to keep on trying to do the possible, even if it is unattainable.”

Jim had that heart, and our church is better for it.

—Rachel Pokora,
Call To Action Nebraska

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“priest-presider” next to a “lay presider.” And when a priest can’t be found? The lay presider leads a shared celebration: another face of the future.

When it comes to “ministry” in a broader sense, new trends are also appearing. Increasingly, “lay” people are involved in full-time and part-time ministries that express a faith-filled commitment to the service of others. Some do this as members of parishes or other groups. Some have chosen to be co-members of a religious community (as we call them in Loretto) or “auxiliary” members (as others usually call them).

And among the latter, some are even developing new “vows” which express their sense of ministry. For example, one woman co-member in Loretto pronounced her own three vows that are distinctly ministerial: a vow to practice the non-violence of Jesus, a vow of solidarity with all those not privileged in society, and a vow of ecological sanity in the quest to save our planet. That is quite a statement of ministry!

Finally, many Catholics engage in ministries that bring them together with those of other faith traditions. Their ministry is not distinctly “Catholic” in thrust or inspiration. So dare I say it? Another hallmark of “Catholic” ministry in the future: it will be as much “interfaith” as Catholic. In a world where interfaith dialogue and work are essential, this is the future. Ministry to those in need, is, after all, a hallmark of all major faith traditions.

And so, when it comes to Christian faiths that share our celebration of the Eucharist, future Catholic ministers will likely concelebrate many “shared” Eucharists... a “breaking of the bread” that is truly universal. And isn’t that what “catholic” means in the broadest sense of the term?

Want to know more?

I am moderating a plenary panel at the CTA national conference in November on the “Future of Catholic Ministry” with: Garry Wills, Diana Hayes, Jamie Manson, and Roy Bourgeois. Register if you haven’t already and join me in the conversation!
How am I expressing my baptismal call in ministering to others?

Be of service to others and a light for the world… words I hear often at baptisms. They ring deep in me every time I hear them. They sustain me and give me hope for the journey I travel when working for justice.

I express my baptismal call through my work with two groups seeking justice and equality. I am passionate about the work I do with New York State farmworkers, and for Roman Catholic women seeking to fulfill their call to the priesthood. I try to be a light for the world by helping to create awareness, educate and enlighten others. For both causes I work to mobilize others at the grassroots level, and demonstrate with groups, or solo, believing strongly that even one person can make a difference.

My work with a women’s ordination committee taught me about the Church’s discrimination against women seeking the priesthood. In protest, I began demonstrating in front of the Cathedral. Later others began to join me. The thumbs-up I received the blessed call.

My faith community has taught me much about listening to the voices of the oppressed and standing up for justice and about the need to challenge institutions to bring about change and to not be afraid to do it. After all, Jesus was about radical change. I encourage others to connect with reform and justice minded Catholics and organizations to learn about important issues, stay informed and be moved to action.

Our call is to live inclusive love and accept all without exception. We find ways to be part of NETWORK and other social justice organizations and initiatives. For many years, we have been associated with the local Catholic Worker community as friends and volunteers at their Skid Row kitchen. Each year, we join thousands in the SOAW pilgrimage to Fort Benning to be with our good friend Fr. Roy Bourgeois in an effort to close down the “School of Assassins”. We try to remind ourselves always to be attentive to the Holy Spirit working in and through us—to be prayerful and not to get too caught up in being busy. Above all, we try to see more clearly the face of God in one another and, in doing so, discover the opportunity to love God better as we love one another more deeply. We are convinced that our story is typical and similar to very many others of our generation who have received the blessed call.
Throughout my four years of college, I struggled with what to do next and with whether I should go to Divinity School. I considered possibly working in a progressive Catholic community or teaching religion in a Catholic high school. I wanted to be what my religion teacher had been to me in high school. However, as a liberal, feminist, lesbian, I realized that my job prospects would be slim. In the end I passed on Divinity School and chose Library School instead. While I believe I made a good choice, I still wonder whether it was the correct one. Writing this is difficult because sometimes I’m not sure I am in fact living out my baptismal call. Fortunately I found my way to Call To Action a few years ago and feel blessed to have done so. The work of Call To Action is super important, especially now, and I feel honored to be involved in creating a Catholic community where people like me are welcome.

Recently I was speaking with a friend about what I had been up to. She said, “I am struck by your desire to serve.” This surprised me because I had never thought about this. I reflected on what my friend said and came to realize that in some ways I do feel called to serve. I work in Government and feel strongly that we must create a structure that is open and inclusive. Call To Action — www.cta-usa.org – is an incredible organization.

As a Catholic, how do I live my Baptismal Call? Well, I try to do so by first defining for myself the meaning of Baptism. I do not have a fundamentalist view of the first sacrament. For me, it is not the required ticket to get into Heaven. Instead, it is an invitation into our Catholic community. But more than that; it is an invitation from the Lord to do good.

Always remember Jesus is a Jew. Therefore, we must look at baptism through this perspective. In Judaism there is no such concept as original sin, an inherited stain that must be erased before one can see the face of God. Instead, each soul starts out with the capacity to do good or evil. Baptism, I believe, has its roots in the Mikveh. This is the Jewish ritual of immersion in water used for bodily purification or conversion to Judaism. Much like the ancient Jewish rite, the sacrament is a means of initiating new members to a religious community. And perhaps more importantly, the purifying water is a holy symbol constantly guiding us back to our capacity to do good instead of evil; constantly cleansing our desire to act sinfully.

Since we are part of a larger community, human as well as Catholic, refining our capacity to do good is paramount. We often fail to realize when we act with excessive self-interest we wind up hurting those with whom we share our community. So, for me trying to act upon my capacity to do good is how I live my Baptismal Call.
Looking for an easy way to support church justice? Become a monthly donor at www.cta-usa.org/donate

World Youth Day

“Go and make disciples of all nations!” proclaimed the official slogan of World Youth Day, urging all to proclaim the Gospel as living witnesses — and so they did. Our six brave pilgrims traveled to Brazil with the Good News that we are all created in God’s image and called to love one another. At the worldwide event celebrating the diversity and unity of the worldwide church, our pilgrims spread the message that LGBT Catholics and their allies are valued members of all levels of the church and that their voices, experiences and gifts should be welcomed and celebrated.

They interacted with thousands of young Catholics from around the world and were overwhelmed by the support and positive response they received. Many thanked them for the bravery of their witness, saying that the conversation about welcoming LGBT individuals and their allies was the one they were yearning to have in Catholic spaces. The pilgrims, sponsored by the Equally Blessed Coalition (of which CTA is a member), were energized and challenged by the stories and questions of the people they met and by the encouragement and interest of Catholics at home who followed on the blog. After an exhausting and affirming week, the pilgrims returned thankful for your amazing support and in awe of the beauty and energy of our worldwide church.

To see pictures, videos and written reflections of the Equally Blessed pilgrims, check out www.equally-blessed.org/blog or www.facebook.com/EquallyBlessed

Church Justice Updates

This summer, thousands of Catholics got the chance to hear and talk with Fr. Helmut Schüller, founder of the famous Austrian Priests Initiative, which authored the “Call to Disobedience” in 2011. Fr. Schüller spoke of the need for more lay leadership and creative solutions in the face of the priest shortage. The over 5000 people who attended his speaking tour, and the many who watched online, were inspired by his call to open the priesthood to women and married priests and his emphasis on the need for lay participation at all levels of decision making in the church.

The Catholic Tipping Point Tour, as his 15 city, three week tour was known, was coordinated and sponsored by 10 Catholic Church reform groups. Stops on the tour were organized with the help of the local CTA chapters and their allies. Thousands attended the events, even as Bishops in some cities banned him from speaking at diocesan churches, and the media covered the tour extensively, helping the message of lay participation reach many more Catholics across the country. “Fr. Schüller is a gift to the Church - to us all who are the Church,” said an attendee in CA, “His incredible and demanding tour leaves us all richer for having had the opportunity to hear him.”

In each city, Fr. Schüller also met privately with priests to talk about the movement for reform from within. His message that the priests and laity must work together to address the challenges in the Church resonated with people across the country. Red ribbons, reminding us of the power and responsibility given to all believers at Pentecost, were worn and collected in each city. At the conclusion of the tour, Fr. Schüller and local organizers delivered the ribbons to Archbishop Cardinal Dolan, president of the USCCB, as a reminder of the need for lay participation in decision making.

We are thankful for Fr. Schüller’s leadership and example and excited to see what transformative work will emerge from the wonderful conversations his visit inspired!

Video is available at www.catholictippingpoint.org if you want to hear him again!

“I hope that Fr. Helmut Schüller’s speaking tour will help to wake up the American hierarchy to the need for more participation of the People of God in decision-making in the Church” — A supporter in MI
### Calendar of Upcoming Events

**Albany, NY**  
**September 13, 2013, 7:00 p.m.**  
A Conversation with Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, RCWP  
Bethany Reformed Church, 760 New Scotland Ave., Albany NY  
Contact: Steve Powers (518)370-1615 or www.CTA-NYS.org

**Albany, NY**  
**September 15, 2013, 2:30 p.m.**  
Ordination to Priesthood of Mary Theresa Streck  
First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, 405 Washington Ave., Albany, NY  
Contact: Steve Powers, Upstate NY CTA (518)370-1615 or www.CTA-NYS.org

**DeKalb, IL**  
**September 21, 2013, 1:00-4:00 p.m.**  
We Are the Church, To Whom Shall We Go? An Inaugural Gathering of Call To Action Rockford Chapter  
Northern Illinois University, 501 E. Lincoln Highway, Montgomery Auditorium, DeKalb, IL  
Contact: Mary Fox, CTA Rockford (815)455-1610 or foxpax@sbcglobal.net

**Minneapolis MN**  
**September 28, 2013, 8:00 a.m. – 3 p.m.**  
Co-Creating the Living Church - Synod of the Baptized 2013 with Sr. Gail Worcelo, SGM, co-founder of Green Mountain Monastery  
Location: Ramada MOA Hotel, 2300 E American Blvd, Bloomington, MN  
Sponsored by Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, cccrmn.org (CTA-MN is a member organization)  
Contact: Mary Sutherland (612) 729-9209 mfsuther@aol.com

**Dallas, TX**  
**September 28, 2013, 8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**  
Parables of Jesus for a Modern World with Francis Vandezwaal, Ph.D  
Northway Christian Church, 7202 W. Northwest Highway, Dallas, TX  
Contact: Mary Jane Stevenson, The Open Window (CTA chapter) (972)247-3466 or jstevens530k@gmail.com

**Portland, OR**  
**October 12, 2013, noon-3:00 p.m.**  
A Catholic Call for a More Inclusive Church: A Feminist Perspective with Dr. Aimee Upjohn Light  
Central Lutheran Church, 1820 NE 21st Ave., Portland, OR  
Contact: Nancy Barrett-Dennenhy, CTA Western Washington (503)238-1942 or ndbdpxs@comcast.net

**South Bend, IN**  
**October 17, 2013; 7:00 p.m.**  
St. Florence Deacon OSF talk and discussion on LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious)  
Room 122 Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame. Sponsored by CTA Michiana.  
Contact: Steve Nani 574/233-7057, nanis@centerforhospice.org

**Minneapolis, MN**  
**October 19, 2013, 9:30 a.m.-noon**  
The Vatican Diaries: Behind the Curtain with journalist John Thavis, specialist in Vatican matters  
St. Frances Cabrini Church, 1500 Franklin Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN  
Contact: Art Stoeberl, CTA Minnesota (612) 278-6630 or artstoeberl@yahoo.com

**Dallas, TX**  
**October 26, 2013, 1:00-4:00 p.m.**  
An Afternoon of Spiritual Growth and Nurturing with John Chuchman, author, poet, bereavement educator and companion  
Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, 617 Talma Street, Aurora, IL  
Contact: Mary Fox, CTA Rockford (815)455-1610 or foxpax@sbcglobal.net

**Columbus, OH**  
**November 13, 2013, 7 p.m.**  
“Can the Natural World Afford a ‘Just War?’” with Sr Dianne Bergant, prominent biblical scholar, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago  
Maple Grove United Methodist Church, 7 West Henderson Rd.  
CONTACT is Pete Anderson, CTA-Columbus Chapter Co-Leader (614) 538-0172, pete082240@gmail.com or Ann Brown, CTA-Columbus Chapter Co-Leader, abrown@columbus.rr.com.

**Milwaukee, WI**  
**October 22 – 26, 2013**  
Call To Action National Conference, Living Our Baptismal Call  
Contact: www.cta-usa.org/conference or (815)299-7158.

**Sacramento, CA**  
**May 2-4, 2014**  
CTA West Coast Conference, Empowering the People of God: A Prophetic Call to Justice. Speakers include Jamie Manson, Matthew Fox, Simone Campbell, Brian Swimme, Edwina Gateley, Ched Myers and more  
Double Tree Hotel, Sacramento  
Contact: Caryl Callsen, Sacramento CTA (209) 295-2151 or graycall@volcano.net.
Call To Action National Conference: Living Our Baptismal Call
Garry Wills, Miriam Therese Winter, Diana Hayes, and more! Register at www.cta-usa.org/conference

Living Our Baptismal Call
November 1-3, 2013
Milwaukee, WI

Join the largest annual gathering of progressive Catholics for a weekend of inspiration and action!
Come for prayer and worship, networking, workshops for children and youth, arts, music performances and more!

Featured presenters include:
Lisbeth Melendez Rivera, A La Familia: LGBTQ Family Acceptance in the Latino Community
Paul Lakeland, Called to Prophecy: The Apostolic Role of the Laity
Kate Ott, Sex + Faith: Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence
Nancy Sylvester, IHM, Compassionate Conversing in a Crazy World

Register Today!

Questions? Call us at 815.299.7158
Visit cta-usa.org/conference for details
Delta Convention Center, Milwaukee
Sign up early for discount registration

Fall 2011/Winter 2012