

The History, Context and Vision for the Symposium: Reflection on Change

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July 31, 2007

Good Evening. Welcome to Saint John's, to the abbey, to the School of Theology, to the university and to our sister monastery and College of St. Benedict. The title of this reflection is "The History, Context and Vision for the Symposium. Reflection on Change."

How fast is the world changing? How fast are you changing? How fast is the Church changing? Is it changing for better or worse? How have you changed since you first responded to Christ's call to follow and serve the Church? Is it possible for the symposium to influence positive change for the Church and the world? As I reflect on the history, context and vision of the symposium, I would like to do so in relationship to this concept of change.

Tomorrow in your program, you may have noticed that we're sharing a personal map called pathways to ministry. The map was something you were asked to create about your journey into ministry. So I'd like, in discussing the history of the symposium, to share a little bit of my history of my journey in ministry. If you look at my picture on the screens,



30 years ago, I graduated from here in 1977 with a BA in English and secondary education. Notice the stunningly handsome well-groomed beard.

I became an English teacher in a Catholic school for about a year and then, from 1978 until 1985; I was a youth minister at St Anthony's Parish in St Cloud. My pastor called me. I was a teacher in the school, and he said, "Would you be interested in being the youth minister?" I had been volunteering for three years on the leadership team for youth ministry in the parish, and I liked youth ministry, but I also liked teaching. I said, "I don't think I'm equipped to be a minister. I've only had two college theology courses." And my pastor said, "We'll help pay for a master's degree in theology. He called me into ecclesial ministry and he supported me in becoming equipped for ministry. I responded.

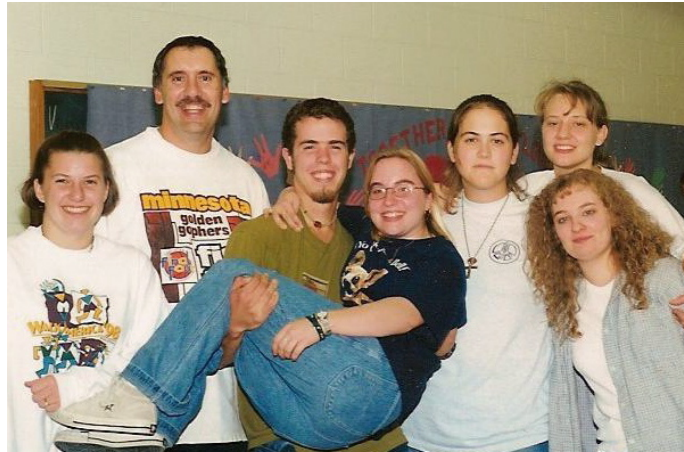
Here I am in 1979 as a parish youth minister. The beard is a little less full. But notice the dapper bib overalls.



Now we jump ten years in my ministry history to 1988.



Now I'm the director of the Fr. Pierz School of Religion, a four-parish rural cooperative program in catechesis, evangelization, and youth ministry. Notice that this is definitely the '80's. The sports sweatshirt with the racing stripe down the sleeve. Notice the beard is a little better groomed too. But what happened to the hair? That's what I want to know.



In this picture we jump ten years to 1998. Now I'm the St Cloud Diocesan Youth Consultant through the entire decade. Here I am with a group of college students from St John's and St Ben's. I'm training them to give retreats throughout the diocese. Please notice the beard is completely gone now, but there's still a mustache. Also notice that the hairline has changed a bit too.



This is a picture of my daughter and me; here I'm in my current position as the director of the Youth in Theology and Ministry program at Saint John's School of Theology. You might notice that now there's a little more gray hair. So this has been my career in ministry.

In my ministry journey I've taken different roles. We're talking about change. And I'm just left with one question for all of you from this 30 year map of my ministry: What change?

When one asks “what change?” one can say it in a way that means “I don’t see any change.” It’s denial. Right? It’s hard for me to be in denial when I look at these pictures though. The other side of the spectrum of change is, “Oh, what an amazing amount of change!” “What change” can also mean that incredible things have happened! So as I look back on my personal history in ministry, I can say both, “What change? I’m still that twenty-two year old long-haired bearded guy.” And I can also say, “Absolutely. I’m not that guy anymore at all. What change.” I share this personal ministry map of thirty years of change because I believe this pace of change has also occurred in the Church and here at Saint John’s.

One way to see the change in lay ecclesial ministry is a review of documents. My introduction to the certification of lay ecclesial ministers came in 1989 when my mentor and dear friend, Jeff Johnson asked me to respond to a draft of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry document *NFCYM Competency-Based Standards for the Coordinator of Youth Ministry*. This document was the first attempt to describe what a competent youth ministry coordinator should know and be able to do in ministry. And as I reviewed this draft, I remember what I wrote to the committee: “I am not sure that Jesus Christ himself could meet the certification standards that have been put forth in this document.” I was not thinking that this was going to be a well-received document. Perhaps this harsh reaction was because I had been in youth ministry for ten years and had a master’s degree. I pretty much thought I knew everything,

In 1995 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Called and the Gifted for the Third Millennium*. This document followed fifteen years after the U.S. bishop’s *Called and Gifted* and thirty years after Vatican II’s *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. This document highlights the explosion of lay ecclesial ministry between 1980 and 1995. It states, “Half of the parishes in the United States now have lay people or vowed religious in pastoral staff positions. Indeed, the pastoral needs of this moment are being ably and generously served by many kinds of ecclesial lay ministers.” Notice the language. In 1995 documents from the USCCB start using this language of “ecclesial lay ministers.” Also notice the change. In 1980 professionally trained laymen and women were a new phenomenon in the Church. By 1995, nearly half the parishes have lay people serving in parish ministry positions.

Change also happened here at Saint John’s connected to the growing movement towards certification of lay ecclesial ministers. Between 1995 and 1998 NALM and NCCL join the NFCYM in publishing competency based standards for their lay ministry constituents. These documents raised questions among the faculty of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University Department of Theology: “Does our curriculum for theology majors meet the standards and competencies identified? And “should we consider certifying our graduates?” A faculty committee looked at these questions. These documents encouraged us to review our curriculum for ministry students. We also concluded that it was not a university’s role to certify

lay ecclesial ministers, but we also wanted to foster this new certification movement so we approached the Minnesota Catholic Education Association (MCEA) and asked, “Could we work together to explore certification for lay ecclesial ministers?” For the past ten years we have been working with the MCEA on the certification of lay ecclesial ministers. Change was happening in Minnesota.

In 1999 the bishops of Minnesota give their approval for the MCEA to develop a common certification process for the six diocese of Minnesota. In 2002, the six dioceses open a file with the USCCB commission of certification to start certifying lay ecclesial ministers.

Within this timeframe an important piece of the puzzle should be noted. The School of Theology received a request for proposal from the Lilly Endowment, within their program of sustaining pastoral excellence. Lilly wanted schools of theology and seminaries across the country to develop innovative proposals to help support pastoral excellence among pastors.

Bill Cahoy, Kathleen Cahalan, Vic Klimoski and I met in Bill’s office to develop a grant proposal from Saint John’s. We discussed, “Should we invest money in the certification movement in Minnesota? Would this support pastoral excellence?” And to tell you the truth, we weren’t sure. But through discussion, discernment and prayer we decided together that a way to support pastoral excellence for pastors is to have lay people that are well equipped theologically and pastorally for ministry. We allocated \$200,000 dollars of the two million dollar grant proposal towards the development of a certification process for lay ecclesial ministers in Minnesota. \$170,000 went toward hiring a certification consultant for the six dioceses of Minnesota and \$30,000 was reserved for a national symposium on certification. Because we thought that after a few years of working on this, we might have insights we could share with others.

I do want to highlight this one point. I know that I am standing here and we are gathered together at this symposium because four people decided together that lay ecclesial ministry was important. I think this can be a wonderful reminder to all of us as we begin this symposium. Amazing things can happen as we enter into dialogue together.

The next document I want to highlight is *The National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*. God has a sense of humor, so he put me on the writing committee for this document, and we worked on it for three years. Unlike the previous certification documents by NFCYM, NALM, and NCCL, I think this document was well received because three national ministry organizations agreed on what a competent lay minister look like.” And I know there are people here, Irene and Charlotte, who were on the writing committee. How I also know it has been received is that I have been talking to other faculty members at schools of theology and

seminaries across the country. I frequently hear that they're utilizing this text to review their curriculum for pastoral ministry. I believe this says, okay, people are taking this seriously.

In 2005, forty-nine lay ecclesial ministers were certified in Minnesota by five of the six bishops. This is a picture of those directly affiliated with the School of Theology. Forty-nine lay ecclesial ministers certified. And notice that the language we used in 2005 is "certified," not authorized. If you look at *Co-workers*, the language of certification is used minimally compared to that of authorization. I'm not sure that in 2005 the Minnesota bishops were clear about the distinction between certification and authorization. That's how quickly things are changing.

Also in 2005 the bishops approved *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. It provided a theology for lay ecclesial ministry. Communion and mission provide the foundation for understanding and carrying on lay ecclesial ministry. Communion for mission. Isn't that beautiful?

The development and publication of *Co-workers* caused us at Saint John's to reconsider sponsoring a symposium focused solely on the certification of lay ecclesial ministers. We recognized that it would not be wise to have such a narrow focus for the symposium. We decided to shift the focus to the issues that *Co-Workers* lays out in its application for pastoral ministry: pathways to ministry; formation; authorization and workplace issues.

So we go to the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth and we say, "Would you be interested in working with us on this?" And Bishop Kicanas writes us back and says, "Yes, we would be interested." And that was the start of this transition from a certification symposium to a symposium on lay ecclesial ministry.

And then, for the last two years, we together invited national ministry organizations, as Bill suggested before, to come and join us in sponsoring this symposium. The planning committee met in August in Collegetown last year, and in September in Denver to say, "Let's figure out how we could have conversation together to advance the work of the Church in lay ecclesial ministry."

So back to the framework of the talk, "What Change?" Is it "well, there hasn't been any change. What change?" Or is it "What incredible change has happened"? There are many perspectives on this, aren't there? What's your perspective?

As we move to explore the context for this symposium, I think communion and mission provide a good basis for our understanding of lay ecclesial ministry. The context question is this: "How well are we as church leaders in communion with each other?" Are we doing great? Are we not doing so well? The next context question is: "how well are we fostering and fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ?" How well are we doing? If we really want to get to context, that's our

context. And from the reaction of audience, as you all just fell silent for a bit, its clear we could be doing better as Church leaders.

All of you know the problems of the Catholic Church in the United States. Raise your hand if you have a list of problems. We all know the problems. I'm not going to explore these problems except specifically about the state of leadership in the Church today. Because this symposium is about leadership in the Church. But before I share some statistics on this, I have to ask you: Do you consider yourself a leader in the Catholic Church? Raise your hand if you do. Okay, look around. Just about everyone has his or her hand up. We're leaders in the Catholic Church.

So, how are we doing as leaders? A Gallup poll recently revealed that thirty-nine percent of Catholics have confidence in church leaders. If we put that in perspective, President George W. Bush's approval rating right now is at thirty-two percent. So think about how well you think President Bush is leading this country and compare that to how Catholics in the United States are thinking about how we are leading this church.

Now, when I was thinking about the context, I thought there's another reality that has to be named. I think that's anger. There are a lot of different ways to phrase this, but I was at a talk by Donald Cousins last Monday, and there were about a hundred people present for two hours. Typically one doesn't attend a talk by Donald Cousins unless you're pretty involved in the Church. And, you know what I heard after the talk, during the forty minutes of questions. I heard anger underneath half of the questions raised by the audience. Does that resonate with what you're seeing too? Is there a lot of anger out there? Generally I see anger over non-inclusion, anger over job loss, anger over loss of trust for church leaders, anger over the distribution of power, anger over what Peter Steinfelds called "A people adrift."

I want to take it one step further. I think the anger has also turned to cynicism. A friend of mine once told me "A cynic is a dreamer whose heart has been broken". Isn't that beautiful? A cynic is a dreamer whose heart has been broken. Maybe our hearts have been broken because the ideal vision of the church is always so much better and greater than the reality of the church. I believe a key question for this symposium is: "How do we navigate the context of anger and cynicism in order to bring about positive change in the Church today?"

But lest you think we be all doom and gloom here at St John's, we are not. There's also much to be optimistic about. In fifteen years, from 1990 to 2005, there was a forty-two percent increase in the number of lay ecclesial ministers according to David Delambo's study. Both Hispanic and African-American lay ecclesial ministers have been on the increase, composing eleven percent of lay ecclesiastical ministers. Perhaps the greatest positive context is the community gathered here tonight. Anger and cynicism are a reality, but I don't think we've given up. And why haven't we given up? Why are we here? That was a rhetorical question, but some of your hands went up pretty quickly. Perhaps it's like what Peter says Jesus, "Lord, where

to whom shall we go?" I believe we can be optimistic because we have this vision of communion. A Trinitarian communion of love. And we've experienced that. And we want to share that. And we want to figure out how to do that better. And we want to participate in this mission of revealing God.

So what's our vision for this symposium? There are four goals. And I think these are important for me to state before we conclude here. The first goal is to amplify the national will to advance lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. When we met with our co-sponsors in the beginning, we asked the question: "What do you dream about?" And in the Washington office, S. Amy Hoey said, "You know what I dream about? That we could advance the national will for lay ecclesiastical ministry." Advance the national will. Isn't that beautiful? She said it's a matter of will. Can we increase that?

The second goal is to foster theological and pastoral insights into authorizing, certifying, forming and sustaining lay ecclesiastical ministries. Our vision is to come to new learning, Are you open to new learning? Could having dialogue with folks from the academy, from lay minister organizations, from parishes, from diocese from pastoral institutions – could we come to new learning here? Are we open to that? That's our goal.

Our third goal for the symposium is to create national recommendations for formation, authorization, pathways and workplace issues, as seeks to foster excellence in lay ecclesial ministries. We will leave this symposium saying, "This is what we think the Church should do and what we should do to foster lay ecclesiastical ministry. This is the direction that we as leaders think we should go."

When the planning committee met in Denver last year, we discussed these goals. You know that many symposiums create recommendations. During the conversation Rick McCord suggested that we not only make recommendations, but also commitments towards advancing the recommendations. That was an Ah-ha! moment for us. We agreed to move beyond just making recommendations. Our vision was that we as academic institutions, dioceses, and lay ministry organizations could make commitments towards these recommendations. We thought we would publicly announce them and publish them. Our vision was to be the change we've been waiting for. That's the vision for this symposium.

In conclusion, I recently was talking to a friend of mine about this talk and she asked me, "Can I be honest at the symposium?" I realized she was really asking me if she could express her anger. I think it's a great question before all of us. Can we be honest? Can we, like the prophets before us name our reality? My internal response was "What is the purpose of sharing this anger?" If the purpose of honesty is blaming, venting or hurting, then I suggest that this honesty will not at all be helpful here. Do you agree?

However, if the purpose of our honesty is to make progress on our toughest problems, in other words, to name our reality so we can go from where we're at in reality to someplace better, then I believe it will not only be helpful, but an essential source of new learning. Perhaps even a source of creative solutions for change. What do you think? Ronald Heifetz from Harvard suggests to us that leadership is like entering a swamp. We need to muck around our toughest problems. But he argues that new learning can emerge from this swamp journey.

Perhaps a fitting close to this initial reflection is to gaze at the illumination from the St John's Bible that we've put on the cover of the program folders. If you have it, you might want to take a look at this. I just want to point out this image. What do you see? What type of change is the patron saint of this abbey pointing to? Perhaps we can hear St. John the Baptist asking us "What Change?"