

BOOK REVIEW

Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Pathways Toward the Future. Edited by Zeni Fox. Lanham: Sheed & Ward Book, 2010. 225 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-4422-0185-9.

In 2005, the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* published a landmark statement on lay ministry in the Catholic Church in the United States titled, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. Ten years in the making, this brief document built upon two previous documents, *Called and Gifted: The American Laity*, published in 1980, and *Called and Gifted for the New Millennium* published in 1995. The Introduction to *Co-Workers* states that the document was intended to:

be a common frame of reference for ensuring that the development of lay ecclesial ministry continues in ways that are faithful to the Church's theological and doctrinal tradition and that respond to contemporary pastoral needs and situations. (6)

Five years after *Co-Workers*, Zeni Fox compiled this wide-ranging collection of essays from fourteen experts in the areas of systematics, pastoral theology, scripture, canon law, liturgy, and spirituality, as well as those involved in human resources and church management. A number of these contributors have worked extensively with the United States bishops in developing *Co-Workers*. Fox, herself an advisor to the Bishops Subcommittee on Lay Ministry which issued the document, has been in the forefront of research in the area of lay ministry. *Lay Ecclesial Ministry* is the first in depth written examination of *Co-Workers* and the state of lay ministry that I am aware of since the Bishops issued the document. With five years of water under the bridge when the book was published, the contributors offer their understanding of the key points in *Co-Workers*, expanding on the concepts and offering both praise and criticism with regard to how well the guidelines in the document are being accepted in dioceses throughout the United States and "responding to contemporary pastoral needs and situations." As the sub-title suggests, they offer their thoughts on the future of lay ministry and possibilities for further development and needs.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I is a response to *Co-Workers* and contains pastoral and theological examinations delving into the history and development of the document. The two essays in this part also look at the reality of lay ministry as a vocational choice, a response to a baptismal call.

Part II looks at the history of lay ministry and the state of lay ministry in the Church today. I found the five essays in Part II which focus on the scriptural and theological basis of lay ministry as well as canonical and liturgical issues, to be most helpful for those seeking a fuller theological understanding of lay

ministry as practiced here in the United States. Thomas O'Meara, in his essay "Being a Ministering Church: Insights from History," briefly looks at lay ministry as it developed throughout the centuries. I did find that much of his essay is a repeat of what he wrote in 1999 in his revised edition of *Theology of Ministry*. Yet his concept of "circles of ministry," which he introduced in his book and repeats in his essay, is important, especially in today's parishes where lay ecclesial ministers and the ordained may feel in competition with each other.

Part III focuses on the importance of looking to the lives of the saints and to communities of religious men and women as a model for those of us in lay ecclesial ministry. This is a definite expansion of the section on spiritual formation found in *Co-Workers*. The two essays in this part offer the reader a means of exploring the spirituality and charisms of saints and religious communities that could be beneficial in the initial and ongoing formation of lay ministers.

Part IV looks at pastoral practice. Of increasing importance, as written in William Johnston's essay, "Cultural Diversity in Lay Ecclesial Ministry" (159-177), is the necessity of study on cultural diversity. The Church in the United States has become very multi-cultural, which is reflected in the number of languages in which that the liturgy is celebrated in cities and towns throughout the country. Johnston asks some important questions for both personal assessment and for those responsible for formation programs, as to how well lay ecclesial ministers are being prepared to work in culturally diverse parishes and other ministry situations.

One point that comes across throughout the book is that lay ecclesial ministers are not seen as a replacement for the lack of or dwindling numbers of clergy. Richard R. Gailardetz in "Theological Reception of Co-Workers" (17-30), speaks of a "complementary relationship" between the ordained and the laity, while affirming the hierarchical ordering of ministry in the Church (25-26). I felt that there could have been greater discussion on the problems concerning collaboration and the acceptance of lay ministers by some of the clergy in our parishes.

The text is written for a wide audience. It is certainly an important resource for those responsible for the formation of lay ecclesial ministers in dioceses throughout the United States, and could assist those in other Episcopal conferences as they develop guidelines for lay ministry in their own countries. It would be of great interest to lay men and women already engaged in parish ministry and especially those who may be discerning entering into ministry.

In conclusion I believe it is significant to state that throughout the book it clearly comes across that lay ecclesial ministers are answering their own unique call by the Spirit, that it is a true vocation and not just a job. Edward

Hahnenberg, in his essay "Theology of Lay Ecclesial Ministry" (67-83), expresses this beautifully, succinctly and in words that I believe are important for all involved in ministry, lay and ordained alike. He writes, "Lay ecclesial ministry represents a call to a new way of *doing ministry*, but it also represents a new way of *being a minister*"(75).

Jo-Ann Metzdorff, D.Min.
Pastoral Associate
Church of St. Mary
Manhasset, NY.