

Future Church

Presentation by Ed Hahnenberg

[01:03:24]

Ed Hahnenberg

Thank you very much, Gerry. And Deb, I appreciate the invitation. I was really delighted to be asked, and I want to thank you. I want to thank everyone for calling in tonight.

Deb asked me to speak for about twenty, twenty-five minutes, which I'll do, and then hopefully we'll have some time for questions, comments. You can share your own insights and thoughts. I was asked to talk about emerging models of ministry, and I decided to focus on one dimension of changing models or new models of parish life. It's an important dimension, but it's only one dimension. And that's the phenomenon of lay people doing ministry for a living. If you've been in a Catholic parish any time in the last few decades, this is not a new thing, but I want to argue it's a significant thing, and in the grand sweep of Church history, it IS a new thing.

So our focus will be those lay women and men who serve more or less full time, more or less long term, in positions of ministerial leadership in parishes, schools, dioceses, Catholic organizations. It's what the U.S. bishops have come to call lay ecclesial ministers. And over twelve years ago, almost—in 2005—the U.S. Bishops Conference issued a major document on this particular phenomenon—lay people who do ministry for a living. And that document is titled *Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesia Ministry* ("COWORKERS").

COWORKERS is essentially an affirmation of lay ecclesial ministry. It tries to ground this reality in our theological tradition and offers some pastoral encouragement, especially with regard to formation of lay ecclesial ministers. Like most episcopal statements, it was not leading the way, but following behind. It was very much a response to a reality that had already taken shape.

The roots of COWORKERS, at least at the level of the Bishops Conference, go back to the late 1980s, when the bishops—and here, I'm really talking about this phenomenon of professional forms of lay ministry as they have taken shape in the United States. And I'm glad to hear folks from other parts of the world in on the call. I think we all have our unique local context and lay ministry has evolved in different ways in different places. So I'm going to speak out of my own experience in the U.S. church.

So in the U.S. Bishops Conference, it was in the late '80s that the bishops decided to examine this rapidly expanding practice of hiring lay people and women religious for pastoral positions in parishes. And one of the first things they did was commission a study, which was done by the late Monsignor Phil Murnion out of the National Pastoral Life Center, and it was published in 1992 as *New Parish Ministers*.

And that study, I think, really got everyone's attention, because what Murnion discovered was that there were over 21,000 lay ecclesial ministers working in parishes in the United States, that over half of parishes employed them. And that study put numbers to what most Catholic parishioners knew, I think what most of the folks on this call new—namely, that lay women and lay men, and particularly women, had entered into new forms of ministerial leadership. One of the things that Murnion pointed out in 1992 is that 85% of these new ministers were women, and 42% were women religious.

So, first, this transformation was very much a grass roots phenomenon. There was no Vatican directive mandating these new ministerial forms; there was no national pastoral plan. Zeni Fox, who has written a lot on this topic, has said it's a lot like Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "It 'just grew.'" And you can trace the growth of lay ecclesial ministry. So, again, this is talking about that sliver of the laity in the U.S. Catholic Church, those ministers who work, again, more or less full time, more or less long term.

Murnion's definition was at least twenty hours a week on parish staff. So it doesn't include the tens of thousands of more lay volunteers who are active in their parishes; it's focusing on this particular, almost new vocational calling within the Church. You can trace the growth of this reality back to the late 1960s to a new position that started to appear in Catholic parishes—namely, the 'coordinator,' or the director of religious education, the DRE.

The many lay ecclesial ministers who are now working in the United States are the pastoral legacy of those first few parish volunteers, those first few women religious, who were hired by their pastors to bring some order to new and growing CCD programs in their parishes. And as religious education programs grew, the parishes themselves were changing.

In the late '60s into the early '70s, obviously there's a lot going on. Liturgical reforms were being implemented; they needed to be explained. Adult parishioners sought out new opportunities for faith sharing, for study, for direct service. Newly emerging questions about civil rights, about war, poverty, these were recognized as concerns that parishes needed to address.

And the DRE soon served as a kind of model for other roles on the parish staff. So you started to see the appearance of general assistants, who were called pastoral ministers or pastoral associates. You saw youth ministers, liturgical coordinators, outreach directors. You saw colleges and universities start to offer courses and programs in theology for lay people. National organizations for lay ministers emerged, promoting professionalism, competency standards and networking beyond the parish.

So after about thirty years of this grass roots growth, the bishops said, we've got to take this seriously, and that was what led to COWORKERS. And to their credit, the bishops did not take credit for it. In that document, COWORKERS, when they faced the question, where did this all come from, they make an unambiguous claim that "lay ecclesial ministry—and I'm quoting from the document here—"has emerged and taken shape in our country through the working of the Holy Spirit." So at least we've got the bishops on record that they acknowledged that this movement of lay ministry is of God. It seems that the Spirit is at work here.

For several years now, I've been arguing that the fifty years since Vatican II have been one of the most important periods of ministerial transformation in the history of the Church. And I say that, very much aware that we human beings are always in danger of overstating the significance of our own time. It is a temptation that is only dwarfed by the temptation among academics like myself to overstate the importance of our own particular area of research.

Still, I think when we think about what has been going on in the Catholic Church over the last fifty years, it's hard to escape the conclusion that we are living in one of the most significant periods of ministerial transformation in the history of the Church, that the emergence of lay ministry stands out as one of the top three or four ministerial shifts of the past 2,000 years—historical on par with the changes to the Church brought about by the rise of communal forms of monasticism in the 5th century, the birth of Mendicant Orders in the 13th century, and the explosion of women's religious communities in the 19th century.

And I use that parallel to religious orders—I'm intentional there. And it's an insight that came to me a few years ago as I was reflecting on the work of the Jesuit historian, John O'Malley, who has written a lot on

early history of Vatican II Catholicism. He has written a lot, very helpful stuff, on Vatican II. He has also written about the history of religious life—He's a Jesuit himself. And in some of that writing, O'Malley has argued that when you look at the history of religious life and you look back on that story, he says there are at least two different ways to tell that story—two perspectives, or two different lenses that shape the way you see the past.

On the one hand, if you look at the history of religious life through the lens of the evangelical councils, the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, that structure, a particular way of life, if that's your lens, what comes through is the continuity across time and across different religious communities.

But if you look at that same history, not through the lens of the vows, but through the lens of ministry—in other words, the active service that these religious communities provided—what comes through is the diversity, the novelty, the originality. And O'Malley is great—he takes the task—David Knowles, British historian, has this classic history of religious life titled, *From Pachomius to Ignatius*. He's talking about Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th century founder of the Jesuits. Pachomius is a kind of proto monk. He's sort of like the forefather, before Saint Benedict, of Western monasticism.

So O'Malley's point is that if you start your story of religious life with Pachomius, you'll tend to see all new religious orders as variations on the monastic life. You set yourself up to tell a story of sameness. O'Malley asked, what if the title were not *From Pachomius to Ignatius*, but *From Paul to Ignatius*? In other words, what if you started not with the first monk, but with the first minister, the first missionary? Then the story is not one of sameness, but of constant innovation in ministry.

Who could have imagined, prior to Saint Francis or Saint Dominic, these kinds of mobile monks, the Mendicants, free from the monasteries, exempt from the bishops' supervision, living in the cities and begging for a living, preaching the Gospel wherever folks were at? Not even the ever-adaptable Ignatius of Loyola, not even he could have anticipated the plethora of ministries his companions would invent. Or perhaps, most dramatically, there were communities of religious women founding hospitals, running schools, publishing, advocating, working in the streets among the poor.

Each of these ministerial transformations provided a new way of doing ministry that was on the one hand deeply rooted in the Gospel, and thus in the Church's tradition, and at the same time unprecedented. Each major wave of ministerial change brought a richness, but it also brought a challenge to the current ministerial order, a challenge to the way things had, quote, "always been done." These new forms didn't fit.

How could you have religious community without being cloistered? It was a big problem for the Jesuits—not for them, but for the Church's acceptance of them. Don't all priests in the diocese have to answer directly to a bishop? Huge fights in the Middle Ages, the Mendicants who wanted more freedom to move around and minister without the same territorial commitment. What do you mean, nuns outside the convent helping six soldiers or teaching algebra? This was crazy in the world in which these came.

And in each case, it took time for the Church to adjust to this new way of serving. And I often have to remind myself that if I ever get discouraged with the reticence of the Church in our own day to ministerial change, we just have to keep in mind that the Church's response to ministerial innovation throughout history has always been, "No, don't do that." It's only later, after the ministry takes off and becomes successful that the Church says, "See? I told you it was a good idea."

In broad historical sweep, I think that the rise of lay ministry brings a similar newness that, to put it simply, ministry just hasn't been done in this way on this scale before. Now, obviously it's not the first time that lay people have been actively engaged in serving the Church. But in our context today, lay

ministry has taken on a new shape, a new form of leadership, a new kind of life commitment that poses a challenge to the way things have always been done, a challenge to the ministerial order of the Church just as radical as that brought by the Mendicant friars or the active sisters.

And it has not been easy, obviously. Particularly when we look around at the state of lay ministry today in 2017, how different it is than when I first started working on these questions fifteen or so years ago. The early enthusiasm of the post-conciliar period has long past. On the national scene, the bishops issued *Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord* in 2005, and it seems, quickly forgot about it. That committee on the laity quickly redirected all of its energies to the defense of marriage.

In recent years, associations of lay ministers have struggled to draw enough people to conferences to make them financially viable. Dioceses have reduced funding for lay ministry formation. Indeed, I think one of the many, many, many casualties of the sex abuse crisis and the huge settlements that have come out of it is support for lay ministry formation. The money just isn't there, or it's not prioritized.

The Baby Boomer generation—the Vatican II generation, of lay ministers, as they retire, I think, wonder who will replace them as DREs and pastoral associates. And yet, even amidst all those challenges, in the United States today there are almost 40,000 professionally prepared lay women and men working in Catholic parishes in direct roles of ministerial leadership, a number that far exceeds the number of Diocesan priests active in ministry. In my count, it's about 25,000.

And the 40,000 is just lay ecclesial ministers; that's just lay women and men who have been trained for their ministry, who serve at least twenty hours a week on a parish staff, usually paid, not always, and who exercise leadership. This would include the DRE, the youth minister, pastoral associates, outreach coordinators. But it would not include the Eucharistic minister, the Lector, the catechist—all those volunteer ministers, of course, which are vital to the life of our parishes. That adds tens of thousands more lay ministers.

But just focusing on the small group, the lay ecclesial ministers, the professional, full-time, we should also note that that number, about 40,000, is a 2016 number. It reflects an increase of 83% since 1990, which is when we first began tracking the data. So over roughly the last two and a half decades, the number of lay ecclesial ministers has grown from about 21,000 to almost 40,000. During that same period, the number of Diocesan priests has gone down from almost 33,000, to 25,000. So we've lost in this period—two and a half decades—roughly 8,000 Diocesan priests and gained roughly 18,000 full-time lay ministers.

Moreover, at present, there are over 23,000 men and women in formation programs preparing for lay ministry in the United States. That's a number that has held steady for about the last decade—23,000. Compare that to 3,520 seminarians, and you get a sense of where things are trending. And that number has held fairly consistent for twenty years. Twenty-three thousand lay ministry students; 3,500 seminarians.

Lay ecclesial ministry ain't goin' away. Our parishes would not be functioning today without lay ecclesial ministers and they will not function in the future without lay ecclesial ministers. They are essential to the vitality of our Catholic communities, and that's going to be true for some time to come.

So that's a significant change. And so for the first part I just wanted to underscore and to make that point. This is not a history that's new to probably anyone who is on this call. You have, after all, lived through this transformation of our parish lives. But I want to underscore that in the grand scheme, the 2,000-year history has been significant.

So the fact of change is real. The question is, what do we make of this change? What do we do with it? And so, in the few minutes I've got left, I just want to make a couple of observations there, and then we can open it up for Q&A.

One of the things that I love about John O'Malley's historical account is the way in which it brings to light our Catholic history, long history, of ministerial innovation. And in one of his articles, he concludes by essentially encouraging Catholics today to join into this great Catholic tradition of ministerial experimentation. And here I'll quote a line:

Do we not need, therefore, especially to recover the pragmatic approach to ministry that current historiography is showing, happily characterized our past? But that seems to be evermore effectively smothered by the normative, or by some idealized model. The abstract ideal can deliver death as well as life. It is not our fidelity that today needs testing, but our creativity.

Amen. It seems to me, as I gloss on O'Malley's words, that today the danger is not the danger of new ideas; it's the danger of no ideas. And one of the great sources of new ideas are new realities, particularly those that don't fit into the abstract ideal. And let me just give a little bit of personal background here.

When I was working on my first book, *Ministries: A Relational Approach*—I'm a systematic theologian—and I was trying to construct a systematic theology of ministry. And I was reading all this literature that came out after Vatican II and it seemed to me that there were basically two conversations going on that were not intersecting with one another.

On the one hand, there was a conversation surrounding lay ministry and focused on the doing of ministry. It was an approach, I would say, from below, because it emphasized kind of the charisms rooted in Baptism that rise up and lead to lay people to ministry. And that's a conversation that was going on in universities, ministry formation programs, and so on.

On the other hand, there was a whole other conversation going on in seminaries, Diocesan offices, Vatican offices and so on that surrounded the priesthood. Instead of focusing on the doing of ministry, that conversation has focused on the "be" of ministry—what does it mean to be a ministry. It was ontological as opposed to functional. It wasn't from below and charismatic; it was from above and crystal logical. In other words, it emphasized the power that comes to the ordained through ordination from Christ, the apostles, and so on.

And what I wanted to do, as a systematic theologian, was to bring those two conversations together in a single, comprehensive theology. And so I was obsessed with making things fit. And I think I did a pretty good job bringing those together, making it all fit. However, I will say that in the years since, I've grown a lot more interested in what doesn't fit, those things that escape or transcend the norm, the anomalies, the exceptions. Because I think that's what sparks our theological imagination.

And I'll just give one example. I invite you to offer your own. And the one example is this. Pastoral life coordinator—the lay person, avowed religious, or deacon—who is entrusted with the overall pastoral care of a parish in the absence of a resident priest parish. That is stipulated by Canon 517.2. Canon law makes a provision that in the face of a dearth of ordained priests, that overall pastoral care of a parish can be entrusted to a lay person, religious, or deacon.

It's important to recognize—this is why I bring it up as an example—that the role of pastoral life coordinator does not fit into the dominant ecclesiological paradigm of Roman Catholicism. Very early on in our tradition, we came to affirm that the person who presides over the community ought to preside over

the Eucharist. Thus, according to our theology, a pastor should be an ordained priest, because only the ordained priest can preside over the Eucharist. So he should be the one to preside over the community.

Thus, the pastoral life coordinator is an anomaly. It's an exception to this normative model. The pastoral life coordinator presides over the community but can't preside over the Eucharist, because she or he is not ordained a priest. So that creates a tension for that role. And there is always pressure to resolve the tension, to remove the anomaly. Pastoral life coordinators don't fit our model—I'm talking about this great, dominant ecclesiological paradigm—they don't fit our model of what the parish should be, so we need to get rid of it.

And that's what we have seen in recent years. I think what we've seen in the last couple of decades is the slow death by attrition of the role of pastoral life coordinator. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), in 1985, there were just 93 parishes in the United States operating under Canon 517.2. Five years later, in 1990, that number, 93, jumped to 249, and it more than doubled again over the next fifteen years, reaching a high of 553 parishes, but essentially led by lay people and [proud? 00:25:27] religious—deacons—in the year 2005. So I guess, overall, that's thirty years—thirty years it went from 93 to 553.

So, never was this a huge number. In 2005, there were just under 19,000 parishes in the United States. So we're talking about three percent of parishes. Nevertheless, it was a realistic pastoral response to pressing needs. But ever since 2005, the numbers have been declining. Last year, according to CARA, it was down to 379. And the reason for that is that many bishops have been shifting away—those who were experimenting with this, either they've been replaced...usually, that's what's happened—and their successors have shifted away from a pastoral life coordinator to a multiple parish pastoring model.

And I'm disappointed I wasn't on your last call to hear from the Association of Catholic Priests about their views on things. But based on my research, that seems to be the number one strategy for dealing with the so-called clergy shortage. It's multiple parish pastoring. Put one priest in charge of multiple parishes. The driving force, I think, there is theological. It's the power of the [patristic? 00:27:03] norm—namely, that the one who presides over the community presides over the Eucharist.

Now, I want to be clear—the irony of it all—that the pressure to remove the anomaly to resolve the tension, to get rid of the problem, that pressure comes not just from the conservative spectrum; it also comes from the progressive side of the spectrum. Progressive Catholics also want to eliminate the role of the pastoral life coordinator. And their solution for removing the ministerial anomaly is not to fire them, but to ordain them. If we would just ordain the women and married men who are already presiding over the community, then they would be able to preside over the Eucharist. Tension resolved, problem solved.

That's an argument I made in my first book, which I articulated with great prophetic zeal in the middle of footnote 91 on Page 240, rabble rouser that I am. But in the headnote, at that place I noted, or I appealed to a distinction by Edward Schillebeeckx. He had distinguished between an authentic multiplicity of ministries which arise out of new needs in the community, and differentiated that from an inauthentic multiplicity, which arises simply because access to certain ministries, like the ordained priesthood or the diaconate because that was blocked to certain groups in the Church.

And I wrote, "From some future vantage point, the non-ordained role of pastoral coordinator may appear as an inauthentic multiplication of the ministry of community leader." Wow, that was really mounting the barricades there. In other words, I didn't like the fact that lay pastoral life coordinators didn't fit, and so, to make them fit, you've got to ordain them.

More recently, though, what I found myself asking is this: When I see the same thing about the Mendicants, the hundreds of communities of active women religious...after all, those ministerial forms didn't really neatly fit in the patristic model. Would I call them an inauthentic multiplication of ministry simply because they didn't fit the standard paradigm of their time?

So my solution—ordain these women and married men. My solution was very different from what the bishops have done in recent years. However, both came out of the same place: discomfort with what doesn't fit; an ability to take seriously genuinely new kinds of ministry; the inability to allow the anomaly to genuinely challenge my expectations, my preconceived notions of what Church and community should be.

So we look back to the Mendicants in the 13th century—six or seven hundred years in our past. What if we look ahead six or seven hundred years into the future? From that future vantage point, what will Catholic Christians make of pastoral life coordinators? Will they say that pastoral life coordinators were an inauthentic multiplication of ministry? Or will they see pastoral life coordinators as an authentic multiplication, emerging in response to new needs in the Church, helping to bring into being new ways of ministering that earlier models new anticipated?

And that's just one example. Surely we can think of other examples of ministerial anomalies, or ministerial forms, Christian practices, forms of community that do not fit some preconceived norm. I think of all of my students, so many of these young people who dedicate a year or more to service after graduation, who, in a way, are kind of creating—they don't call it this, but it looks to me like it's temporary avowed life. They're taking a year, they're living in community, they're dedicating all their working hours to helping people.

Or I think about my non-Catholic colleagues at John [Carroll] who see themselves taking up and serving the Jesuit mission of our university. That doesn't fit. But that's what's happening. Or intentional Eucharistic communities that are operating outside the boundaries of a parish, or intentional communities, like this one right here on this phone—virtual communities, online communities. there are all kinds of different things. And are we genuinely letting these anomalies to challenge our thinking? These don't always fit nicely. They won't all have a lasting effect. But it seems to me that what's true today is what has always been true—that the Spirit spills out in surprising ways.

So those are a few of my thoughts, and I'd really be interested in hearing yours. So thank you for the opportunity.

Q & A

Deb-Rose Milavec

Thanks so much, Ed. Wow, that was fantastic. I learned so much in a short period of time. So I'm going to turn on the Q&A mode here so that people can ask questions. But I want to start with one question that has been triggered for me. So I, too, have been looking at these numbers. What I see is the rise in lay ministers, those who are being professionally trained. And I don't know if you saw that article about six days ago—Zeni Fox talked about a 16% decrease in lay ministry training programs over the past year. So what does that mean in terms of what's happening?

I was a little surprised by Fox's numbers because the CARA numbers seemed to be trending up. But here's my question. If bishops are changing their minds about using the canon 517.2—those numbers are going down—and if we see a shrinking number of priests—we know that by 2019, half of Diocesan

priests are going to be at retirement age, and we haven't even talked about active priests yet—and this whole management or strategy of merging parishes is, again, very, very short-term in the sense that if you are dealing with a shrinking number of ministers—ordained, male, celibate ministers—and you're not using lay pastoral ministers, what does that mean for us going forward into the future?

We have to solve a theological problem here, and I don't necessarily think expanding ordination alone that will solve it. I think lay ministers have a real, viable, and expanding role in the Church. Can you comment on that a little bit?

Ed: That's a great set of observations. I hadn't seen Zeni's article. Do you remember where it appeared?

Deb-Rose Milavec

It's in NCR. Peter Fuererherd had written it. He uses Zeni's numbers there.

Ed Hahenberg

Obviously I'm sympathetic to the cause of embracing these gifts that baptized Catholic Christians are bringing and their genuine experience of call to ministry. I'm trying to sound hopeful here, but the trends are not encouraging in terms of the way in which we're managing the challenges.

And we haven't even begun to talk about the real challenge, which is the huge drop-off in institutional affiliation. People are just not—particularly young people—they're not identifying with institutional religion. So there are huge challenges to face, and we're in a mode of downsizing, as much as Pope Francis is really calling us to more of a mode of missionary discipleship, which is a whole other theme of a series of lectures. And we're responding to sort of managing decline.

Here's what I think. I don't know what will happen. I have some guesses. But where I see it's troubling—often, I think that more progressive Catholics like myself, we tend to think like, oh, gosh, the Church hierarchy are sacrificing Eucharist on the altar of mandatory celibacy. And when I look around, I see something different happening. I think, actually, that a number of bishops are going to extraordinary lengths to provide Eucharist.

I think what they've been sacrificing, or willing to sacrifice, is community. So you merge parishes, you shut down parishes, you consolidate parishes, you go to mega-parishes. That piece, I think, needs to be lifted up, particularly in the broader cultural context. People need local community-embodied experiences of church ways in their community to help—that we need parishes in communities. If that means keeping parishes open that can't have regular Sunday Eucharist, that may be what we need to do in order to continue a life of the Church.

The Eucharist is very important. I think—all my synapses are firing at once here. I should slow down and let somebody else ask a question. But I think we have to be more deliberate and intentional as a church about fostering community. And [*inaudible* 00:38:50] the parish is the only way that we can do that. It may be there have got to be other ways. But the parish is surely an institution that is ingrained in our experience of church in the United States.

Brenda: Hello, this is Brenda from Walnut Creek. Thank you very much, by the way. I thought what you said was very, very important. However, in listening to all of this, my concern is, I'm all for community, but I'm thinking in terms of, if we want community, we have to have right relationships. And I think, what kind of relationships are we fostering now in the Church today? And in so doing, how can we even begin to have right relationships, with women, who are certainly not the women of fifty years ago, while we maintain the paradigm of male dominance?

And no one seems to be talking about this issue. But when you look at the sex and the raping of children that was to be swept under the rug—you know, words are used to cover up the reality... I've worked with sex trafficking and this sort of thing a lot. And I feel that the issue of control seems to be the most important thing to these bishops, the need for control and male dominance. And how can we expect the present situation, which, looking at the "me too" women who are out there right now, which is just amazing, that's going to fly. I mean, in the last week—this is just incredible.

How can we, as a Church, address women who are rather important to the community of the Church—they do the cookies and [*inaudible* 00:41:18] and all that—how do we encourage these women, when we keep upholding this male dominance paradigm?

Ed: Thank you. So very important to name that, raise that. And I think pointing to what has been going on in the conversation that has been sparked in the last couple of weeks by Harvey Weinstein and others, clearly we've got deep cultural, societal problems. And how can the Church be an effective moral voice in that context, when it...? Even before you get the ordination issue, as an institution, the Church maintains so many structures of inequality—

Brenda: It's a part of the problem.

Ed: Exactly. Right.

Brenda: But what do we do?

Ed: Right, what do you do? I'm trying to draw a parallel between—even if you're not Catholic and you're living in the United States of America in October of 2017, you can feel just as helpless, even more helpless, in trying to figure out, well, what do I do about the incredible, seemingly pervasive sexism and sexual violence and harassment that is present. Now that we've got someone famous involved, we're all talking about it, but it's not new.

This is a problem I constantly encounter with my students. You feel a certain responsibility to raise consciousness about injustice, about patriarchy, about androcentrism, and a number of other things. And it can feel so overwhelming that you are just paralyzed. So, first, I think you have to recognize that consciousness-raising is important, awareness is important, and then, what can I do in my corner of the earth. Is there some concrete, practical action that I can take?

Brenda: Well, and from my perspective, too, the Church often is very good at pointing the finger at the injustice outside the Church, but what about the injustice within the Church relative to this very issue?

Ed: Yes. In 1971, our bishops spoke on justice in the world, the proclamation Justice in the World is a constituent dimension of the Gospel, and, if the Church is going to speak about injustice outside of the Church, it must be just within its own Church. And you know well the counter-arguments: that the issue of women's ordination is not an issue of justice and so on and so forth.

But like I was saying earlier, before you even get to that issue, you can talk about very clear practices, structures, habits that have kept women from positions of authority and decision-making that are already open to them. So all those kinds of actions that we can take in our parishes to support women who are involved in ministry. Because the lay ecclesial ministers, the 40,000, still, a vast majority of these are women. And they amaze me, humble me, with their sense of call, the work that they do for so little reward in the face of so much crap. That's one thing.

Kate: This is Kate. I'm involved in a civil law case where a principal of a Catholic school was fired as a result of a false accusation by the pastor of certain supposed behavior. And the cardinal of the diocese will not allow her to bring this case to civil court concerning discrimination, claiming that she's a minister—because she's a principal of a Catholic school. And his civil lawyers had thrown every whip-stitch document, paper, article that has the word 'ministerial,' 'ministerial life,' 'ministry,' etc., and saying that all of those words make her a minister, whereas in civil law, a minister is someone who is a part of the governance of a religion.

And the cardinal is lying. I've sent his name to the Vatican claiming heresy so that maybe they can tell him to back off on this. Unfortunately, the civil courts believe him and we've lost three times now—three different courts. I think we're still going to pursue it. But it's that kind of mess where, again, the bishops want this control, and they want to make the laity equal to the priest, who cannot take any recourse against a bishop who is unjust to them except in Church court—the Vatican—which, I'll be honest with you, is a piece of work. Nobody over there fundamentally takes a side against a bishop.

So I think that's another issue of awareness and of advocacy that even our civil courts will protect the men and women who are not priests, who do not meet the criteria of a government person in the Church to be called a minister so that we don't have all of our lay ministers having no civil rights and our abuse through the civil law system.

Ed: Great. Thank you, Kate. I appreciate your comment on that, and just for the benefit of the others on the call, Kate raises a very important—it has been one of my greatest sadnesses as a theologian to have watched this history unfold over the past fifteen, twenty years as a theologian writing on the theology of ministry, to have such resistance from certain members of a hierarchy towards even acknowledging that lay people are ministers. You know the 1997 inter-dicastery instruction, saying that the term 'ministry' is really reserved to the ordained.

And just how crazy, the hullabaloo of resistance among some bishops to the document, *Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, because it was calling lay people ministers, which is a word for the priests. So that resistance seems to have completely evaporated when it serves as a convenient—Sorry, let me back up a little bit—that some of the same people who resisted calling lay people working in the Church ministers have now embraced it because it allows these lay ministers to call under the ministerial exemption in civil law, and makes them exempt from anti-discrimination laws.

So whether it's a principal who has been fired or whether it's a Catholic school teacher who gets married in a same-sex ceremony, that they are exempt from the protections of anti-discrimination laws because of the ministerial exemption. To me, it's so sad. And I think that the argument that is being made is that... I mean, obviously, I can't comment on the particular case you're involved in. I don't know the legal issues very much. But theologically, the claim is made that these individuals who are being fired are a scandal. And I would argue that it's a greater scandal the way in which their newfound ministerial status is being used to deny them their civil rights.

I wish you well. I hope that you have success. I think the track you're taking in terms of trying to help our legal system, our system of civil law, understand the different ways in which the word 'minister' is being used here and the difference between those who have governing authority or jurisdiction and those who don't, that's important. However, it just seems that our legal system is really tries to stay away from those claims.

Kate: And that is true. And if we ultimately lose this case, every lay person in whatever religion, not just Catholic, will have no protection in civil law against unjust, discriminatory bishops or pastors or hierarchy of whatever religion it is. And that cannot happen. That cannot be right, especially now as we want the lay ministers, we want this to happen. It's doubling-down. It's a power thing.

Mod: We'll take one more question and then we're going to close it up for tonight.

Natalie: Hi. This is Natalie. And Ed, I'm an alum of John Carroll. I've got a question. I'm really conflicted about how do we exist as a minister in what the previous person asked a question about, this just happened in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Everybody from the gym teacher to the principal to myself as a lay minister at a parish are all considered ministers now. So we've got that going on.

The Archdiocese is moving into this one pastor for three, four parishes. They're moving into a five-year process to make that happen. I work in not a great work environment, very honestly, and have great support, like you mentioned, from lay people and other sympathetic clergy who are like, "I support you. Just stay and keep pushing." And frankly, I've gotten to a point, after being in a parish environment for a few years, where I'm just not sure, A, me, personally—and I'm wondering about this for their lay ministers, and I think it's an important question to address—whether it's healthy to stay in a work environment like this.

And so my question for you is about whether you think that change is going to happen structurally within this system and the organization that we have right now, or if the answer is more in grass roots, new communities? I think of things like the Movement for New Monasticism and things like the Catholic worker. Is that where change is going to happen and how the Church is going to look moving forward? Or is there going to be a system-wide reset? God, hopefully sooner than later. Because like Deb said, I'm called to ordination, but I'm still not convinced that pressing that button is the answer, because it's walking into a corrupted system.

So, anyway, is it within the system or is it outside the system that change is going to happen?

Ed: Thanks so much, Natalie. I'm sorry for the situation that you're in, and I sympathize with that. And you've got to do what's—it's your own sense of call and health. I'm conflicted too, and I wish it were as easy as saying either/or, because on the one hand, institutions have power, and parishes are institutions and there's a lot of power in communities in terms of sustaining

change. On the other hand, I really think that the energy, the new life, is going to be something new apart from that.

If you look at the long history of the Church, it's those peripheral... This crazy guy, St. Francis, really on the fringe of the things, but was a compelling way of life that had profound structural change. But that takes time, and I would not expect a system-wide reset to come from within the system. I never would have guessed that I would like the successor to Pope Benedict so much. I think Pope Francis really has a vision. But institutions have power, and he's not perfect. And he's trying to encourage a kind of reset.

But I have to think of the short term—if we're ever going to get to the long term. It's going to be through that energy that comes out of groups like this, that comes out of new monasticism, that comes out of these young people looking for ways to serve, but not entering into traditional forms of religious life. Those are the anomalies that I think are going to spark newness.

Natalie: And as a follow-up to that, what do you think about the possibility of women becoming deacons? How does that play into this? Could that be part of a reset happening?

Ed: Well, that, to me, is an incremental change that I'm sure will happen. I think I'll see that in my lifetime. I'm a hopeful person. I think a lot of people had hoped, after Vatican II, that a married diaconate would transform that role, and that has a mixed record. So it can't just be that. But I don't see any historical, theological, doctrinal reason for why we shouldn't be ordaining women as deacons. And maybe that does help the Church adjust.

I kind of think that what Pope Francis is trying to do, he's so clearly trying to de-center decision-making in the Church, and trying to reclaim the direction of Vatican II in terms of giving local churches more freedom to respond to realities in their own context.

So a system-wide reset—the way to think about it is, I think, is going to be regional resets and slowly getting used to doing things differently in one part of the world than we do in other parts of the world.

Deb-Rose Milavec

I want to just thank you, Ed, for a powerful presentation, and thank everyone who asked questions -- such important questions.

This series is about innovative ideas and models for the church going forward. It is good to be reminded about the Mendicant friars and the religious sisters, those who really created the next generation of what was needed in the church and world. If we listen to that call, we will be leading the way in the creation of new ways of being church.