

Singing Together in the Vineyard of the Lord

The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. It is also overwhelmingly composed of lay people. In fact, Cardinal Avery Dulles has recently observed that the “future of the Church”—like the fate of the Church in every age—“lies predominantly in [lay] hands.” Lay people are all those who by baptism “are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, [who] are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and [who] have their own part to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 897).

While the chief vocation of lay people is to “illuminate” the social order by their presence and by their work so that it more clearly reflects the “glory of the Creator” and will “grow according to Christ” (*Catechism*, 898), some lay people are called to special ministries within the Church. These people are called “lay ecclesial ministers.” They have the necessary preparation and formation to perform the tasks to which they are assigned; they are authorized by the ordained hierarchy to serve publicly in the Church; they exercise leadership in a particular area of ministry; and they work in close collaboration with the pastoral ministry of ordained bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The sacramental basis of their ministry is initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) and not ordination.

The number and diverse ministries of such lay ecclesial ministers are growing in today’s Church. In 2005, recognizing this growth as the work of the Holy Spirit, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (USCCB Publishing). Building on decades of experience of working with lay leaders in the Church, the bishops recognized that leadership in the Church is a shared responsibility. While ordained ministers have a unique place and role to play in the Church, there is also a “vocation” to lay ecclesial ministry which enriches the life of the Church and makes it more completely a sign of Christ’s redeeming presence among us. “Continually, the Spirit calls forth new ministries and new ministers to serve evolving needs, as the history of the Church shows. In our time lay ecclesial ministers have emerged, men and women working in collaboration with bishops, priests, deacons, and other laity, each responding to the charisms bestowed by the Spirit” (*Co-Workers*, 26).

Leadership in pastoral music is one of the areas identified by the bishops as a form of lay ecclesial ministry. *Co-Workers* challenges pastoral musicians to look beyond planning for the next season or sacramental celebration and to view



liturgical music making in terms of a broader, long-range goal: building unity in local assemblies so that they might take up the lay vocation and spread the Gospel beyond the walls of parish churches. In other words, pastoral musicians share the challenge to help liturgical assemblies be transformed into Christ so that they can promote the reign of God in the secular order.

Perhaps no other liturgical symbol has more power to unite, divide, discourage, or encourage the worshiping assembly than liturgical music. Liturgical music has the power to mediate the unity of the assembly so that they might become more and more the one Body of Christ, dedicated to singing the glory of God and proclaiming and living the salvation brought by Christ (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 2). Music ministers, then, are really agents for promoting the unity of the Body of Christ within and beyond their worshiping assemblies. The musical repertoire that pastoral musicians place on the lips and in the hearts of their assemblies week by week, season by season, year by year, provides a way to discover, embrace, and put into practice the broad gamut of Christian attitudes and affections that, ever since the earliest centuries of the Church, have made people exclaim: “See how these Christians love one another!”

The transformation of all things in Christ is the mission of the Church. All members of the Church are called to this mission. Some—ordained ministers and lay ecclesial ministers—are called especially to support and encourage the other members of the Church to understand and embrace this mission. Pastoral musicians offer such support through the gift of musical worship, putting on the lips and in the hearts of their sisters and brothers words and tunes that will help them embrace the call to witness to the unity and love of God that is being poured out for the life of the world. As singing assemblies grow in unity and in their commitment to live their lives for others, their transformation will witness to the Church’s mission to transform all things in Christ.

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