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Think Globally, Act Locally

Responding to Lay Ecclesial Ministry

Edward P. Hahnenberg

A survey of ministerial developments around the world sheds light on key aspects of lay ecclesial ministry in the U.S.: response to reality, vocational commitment, re-positioning within the community, and commissioning.

A subcommittee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is currently at work preparing a foundational document on lay ecclesial ministry. Their hope is to present the text to the full body of bishops before the end of 2005. "Lay ecclesial ministry" has, over the past several years, gradually entered the vocabulary of the Catholic Church in the United States. The term has come to refer to those laypersons who have committed to a career in church ministry—as distinct from more voluntary or occasional forms of church service. The reality of lay ecclesial ministry is not new. Its roots lie in the years following the Second Vatican Council, when women religious seeking new opportunities for direct ministry and other individuals wanting to serve the church were hired to coordinate emerging programs in parish religious education. Since then, Catholics throughout the United States have grown accustomed to lay women and men serving as directors of religious education, liturgical coordinators, youth ministers, pastoral associates, and in many other roles on the parish staff. While the reality is not new, what is new is the attention now focused on this particular group of ministers. And this attention is well deserved. The over thirty thousand lay ecclesial ministers at work in U.S. parishes now outnumber diocesan priests. And with thousands of lay men and women in over three hundred formation programs, the growth of this new group of ministers shows no sign of slowing. They are reshaping the Catholic experience of ministry in this country.

In light of this growing reality, the U.S. bishops have decided it is time to say something substantive about lay ecclesial ministry, to offer some guiding theological principles and some practical guidelines for the formation, training, and coordination of lay ecclesial ministers. What will they say? The subcommittee preparing the document will no doubt be supportive. They will recognize the many ways lay ecclesial ministers contribute to the life and mission of the church and affirm this call to ministry. They will present Vatican II's theology of baptism and the council's statements on the laity as theological cornerstones for understanding lay ecclesial ministry. On the practical side, they will suggest areas for formation and general competency expectations. They will encourage a greater role for individual bishops in preparing, commissioning, and supporting lay ecclesial ministers within their dioceses. Overall, the document itself and the suggestions it makes will take the form of a response to a pastoral reality already present.

But the document in preparation is not the first response by church leaders in the United States and beyond to the post-conciliar growth of lay ministries. As a doctoral student, I had the opportunity, thanks to grants from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies and the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, to talk about ministry with church leaders in Europe and to eavesdrop on conversations U.S. bishops were having with their peers in other countries. Those experiences allowed me to catch a glimpse of the ministerial terrain outside the United States. What follows are reflections on those conversations—a short and unscientific overview of the ways in which other bishops are responding to lay ministry in their churches. This global view offers some context for the proposed document and invites a few conclusions about responding to lay ecclesial ministry in the United States.

Europe

In Europe, the contrast between two countries illuminates the diversity elsewhere on the continent. Similar to the United States, the development of lay ministries in France did not follow from episcopal directives, but emerged from the ground up. French parishes began to see something new in the decades following Vatican II: laypersons volunteering to offer their services in direct ministries within the church. But due to a lack of institutional and financial resources, lay ministries in France have not followed the path of professionalization seen in the United States, where parishes and dioceses employ laypersons in full-time staff positions. Rather, there has been a proliferation of part-time and volunteer ministries. Laity serve as community coordinators, family ministers, chaplains in prisons and hospitals, assistants to pastors, and in roles on bishops' councils.

The French bishops have been largely supportive of these roles, as they have for new ministries undertaken by permanent deacons, but the bishops' conference has in recent years shifted its attention from the internal questions of ministerial structures. After addressing the role and formation of priests in the 1990s, the French bishops' conference has increasingly focused on the problems facing the church vis-a-vis contemporary society and on the need for evangelization in a culture described by some as "post-Christian." This focus has led to an emphasis on the secular calling of the layperson, as the apostolate of the laity is discussed more in the context of lay groups and associations active in society (Bishops' Conference of France, 2000; Don. 2001).

In contrast, the German bishops have been among the most thorough in addressing and organizing the rise of professional lay ministries. Following a nationwide synod, the German episcopal conference published in 1977 "On Ordering Pastoral Ministries." This document established distinctions and roles that have guided the exercise of lay parish ministries in Germany for over twenty-five years. Admitting that the shortage of priests was a catalyst for many lay ministries, the 1977 document did not view these new ministries as a short-term reality. Instead it proposed a positive reception of these ministers and a long-term plan for their incorporation into the church's mission and structures. The German bishops first recognized that most lay services in the church are undertaken on a voluntary, unpaid basis. But then they went on to address those laity who take on full-time, long-term work in the church: "Others place themselves at the disposition of the community as lay people within the context of the ecclesiastical services on the basis of a special training and in a permanent employment, therefore in a pastoral vocation" (Bishops' Conference of Germany, 1981, 507). Three groups of laity in "pastoral vocations" were identified then. (1) "Pastoral Assistants" are lay ministers who have completed theological studies at the university level and who often take leadership responsibility for specific areas of ministry, either in parishes or at the level of regional clusters or organizations. (2) "Parish Assistants" are lay ministers who have been educated in ministry at a professional school, whether at a university or in a diocesan program, and who provide general support to the pastor in a parish. (3) "Parish Helpers" are lay men and women who, based on experience or short courses, work in parish offices providing administrative support. Unlike the United States, where a lack of uniform national (or even diocesan) structures has led to a diversity of specialized ministries and job titles,

the German church has recognized a few ministries that each exercise a wide variety of tasks.

Pastoral Assistants and Parish Assistants have continued to play important roles in the German church. The large number of laypeople studying theology in German universities (combined with the German taxation structure in which public funds help to support dioceses) have fed a growing group of professional, paid church ministers who are not ordained. These numbers have declined somewhat in recent years as church attendance has fallen off, making it more difficult to justify new positions. Still, in the Diocese of Munich-Freising, for example, over one hundred lay students studying theology at the university also take a series of practicum courses in preparation for becoming Pastoral Assistants. Five years of academic study are followed by a two-year pastoral internship, an official commissioning by the bishop, and employment as a parish minister, prison or hospital chaplain, or Catholic social service agent.

The German bishops have reiterated the importance of these new roles, evidenced by a steady stream of conference-wide documents on the topic. In 1987, the bishops issued practical guidelines for Pastoral and Parish Assistants. And in 1995, they located these lay ministries within a comprehensive theological statement on "Pastoral Ministry in the Parish." This document grounded all service in the priesthood of Christ and recognized that the goal of the official priesthood is to help the whole Church exercise its common priesthood in Christ. In the context of the renewed self-understanding of the Church following Vatican II, the document presented concentric circles of parish ministers, moving from volunteers and occasional ministers to full-time Parish Assistants and Pastoral Assistants to permanent deacons, priests, and pastors. For those laity in full-time pastoral work, their ministries of word, worship, and service flow from baptism and confirmation, ability and education. These lay ministers are sent by the bishop to their ministerial assignments. Parish Assistants, at the level of the parish, aid and coordinate volunteers, parish groups, and catechetical work—particularly sacramental preparation and school-based religious education. Pastoral Assistants, at and beyond the level of the parish, coordinate whole areas of ministry—offering formation and education for volunteer ministers or working in ministry in schools, hospitals, jails, and social service agencies. Responding to concerns from the Vatican, a 1999 document sought to clarify the role of lay ministers in the liturgy. Regulations are laid out for the proper tasks open to laity in Word services, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, ministry to the sick and dying, adoration, penance services, blessings, initiation services, and the rite of Christian burial.

Latin America

In Latin America, base Christian communities have been a central feature in the changing shape of the Catholic Church. Base communities are small, sub-parish gatherings of believers formed to

read and reflect on the scriptures, exchange experiences, and encourage members in responding to the social, political, and economic challenges faced by the poor. Usually associated with Brazil, where base communities first attracted widespread notice, this form of being church has spread throughout Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Within the context of base communities, new lay ministries emerged in Latin America. Often forming in remote rural communities or among neglected segments of the cities, base communities function without any regular presence of an ordained minister. Services within these communities are often provided by delegated laypersons.

The representative body for all of the Latin American bishops' conferences, CELAM, has recently responded formally to the growth of non-ordained ministries in the continent. Two CELAM offices, the Department of the Laity and the Department of Vocations and Ministries, cosponsored a 1995 conference titled "Reality in the Continent: Lay Ministries." The goals of this meeting were to analyze the reality of lay ministries in each country, identify relevant doctrinal issues, encourage communication among member episcopal conferences, and suggest lines of action to promote ministries and assist in their formation. Recognizing the enormous diversity of ministries in the continent, the conference underscored the need to structure these ministries, that is, to address the issues of role definition, formation requirements, rites for institution, evaluation procedures, and organization of lay ministries.

The bishops suggested a consolidation of ministries, highlighting three basic lay ministries. (1) Ministers of the word take on a variety of tasks, including gathering and forming communities, preaching, promoting bible study, and various evangelizing activities. (2) Ministers of the eucharist work in collaboration with a priest to provide eucharistic services and devotions as well as to promote a communal spirit within the church. (3) Ministers of the sick serve the sick and elderly and often lead other efforts of charitable service. This three-fold framework attempts to systematize a variety of services already offered in various churches. Reports from the bishops in various countries reveal a rich and diverse practice: Argentina counts over forty diocesan ministry schools; Bolivia formally "institutes" ministers of the word, extraordinary ministers of the eucharist, and ministers of charity; Cuba reports eighty ministers of the word and two hundred catechists; Honduras recalls its thirty-year history with "Delegates of the Word"; the Dominican Republic names these lay community leaders "Presidents of the Assembly"; Venezuela describes its promotion of small Christian communities; and Brazil calls for "Official Delegates of the Church" in the areas of charity and social justice. A follow-up conference in 1996 gave special attention to the need for appropriate training and formation of lay ministers. This latter

meeting affirmed the three-fold grouping into ministers of charity, ministers of the word, and ministers of the liturgy-at the same time recognizing their diverse structure and other possible ministries. In calling for terminological precision, the 1996 conference distinguished between laypersons volunteering as pastoral agents and instituted lay ministers. Instituted lay ministers have made a commitment, are trained for a specific service, and are officially and publicly commissioned by the bishop. This latter group is the focus of the conference's deliberations.

These CELAM meetings identify lay ministry as an important issue and call for theological reflection on and structural responses to these ministries by its member episcopal conferences. In April of 1998 the bishops of Brazil devoted their general assembly to the theme "Mission and Ministries of Lay People." The conference's concluding document offers a theological framework for addressing the many lay ministries to have emerged in Brazil. The Brazilian bishops begin by describing the situation of the church in Brazil, outlining the major economic, political, and cultural challenges facing its people. The document's theological section places lay ministry within the context of a theology of mission (understood as the *whole* church's participation in God's work of realizing the kingdom) and an ecclesiology (the church is the people of God and all share in the one priesthood of Christ). It describes "ministry" as including charism, a response to the permanent needs of the community, stability in service, and recognition by the ecclesial community. Within this framework, the Brazilian bishops offer the following typology:

When reflecting theologically and pastorally, the following groups of ministries

are highlighted: (a) ministries are simply "recognized" (sometimes improperly called ministries "de facto") when they are linked to a significant service for the community, but are not very permanent and could disappear according to circumstances; (b) ministries are "entrusted" when they are conferred to the bearer through some simple liturgical gesture or canonical form; (c) ministries are "instituted" when the charism is not linked to a sacramental consecration but is guided to a particular service, with real responsibilities that are permanently demanded by the community, and is conferred by the Church through a liturgical rite called "institution"; (d) ministries are "ordained ministries" (also called apostolic or pastoral) when the charism is, at the same time, recognized and conferred to its bearer through a specific sacrament, through the sacrament of holy orders (Bishops' Conference of Brazil, 76-77).

Thus the Brazilian bishops affirm the multiple services provided by laity: participation in the pastoral care of parishes, the ministry of the word, catechesis, involvement in parish councils, the ministry to the sick, administering baptism, presiding at marriages and funerals, and

Asia

As in Latin America, representatives from the various episcopal conferences of both Asia and Africa regularly gather in continent-wide forums to address issues of common concern. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), each in their own way, have taken up the challenges facing their churches. The statements and projects of these representative bodies reveal keen sensitivity to and full engagement with what *Gaudium et Spes* called the "joys and hopes, the grief and anguish" of people today, especially those who are poor and afflicted. The FABC has grappled with the experience of foreignness in a continent where less than three percent of the population is Catholic. They have emphasized the necessity of dialogue in a pluralistic cultural world and the imperative of responding to the massive poverty characterizing much of South and East Asia. In Africa, the documents of SECAM have focused on the pressing issues of war, poverty, inculturation, evangelization, and the broad responsibility of the church in promoting the dignity of the human person. And yet, even among all of these difficult issues (or perhaps because of them), the bishops of Asia and Africa have also responded to new experiences of lay ministry in their communities.

As early as 1977, the FABC published the results of a special colloquium on ministries in Asia. Beginning with a description of the present situation in Asia and the claim that the church must pay attention to the "signs of the times," the document called for the fostering of new ministries to respond to this situation. The whole church is ministerial, yet within the church "services" (which are spontaneous and occasional ways of sharing in the church's mission) can be distinguished from "ministries" (which are services undertaken with a certain stability and formality). The colloquium report spoke positively of "installation" as distinct from ordination and suggested that lay ministries exercised with stability, continuity, and responsibility be formally instituted in order to support the life and growth of the churches. While recognizing that new ministries ought to emerge from the needs of particular communities, the bishops nevertheless offered several examples of possible future ministries for laypersons in Asia: evangelists, catechists, ministers of liturgy, family, healing, youth, and dialogue, social concerns ministers, educators, and community builders.

Since the 1970s, the Asian bishops have placed their emphasis on ministerial formation. Regional catechetical centers-established by bishops in order to pool the resources of several dioceses-have

played an increasingly important role in training local lay leaders ("catechists"). Programs lasting up to two years have prepared many lay men and women to work closely with their priest to provide religious education, prayer, and organization within their communities.

The fourth plenary assembly of the FABC (1986) focused on the "Vocation and Mission of the Laity." The bishops' final statement admitted the presence of laity in "stable ecclesial service" and reiterated the need for appropriate formation. However, the document noted the failures of a broader lay apostolate: "Though our needs have become more challenging, some lay structures and their orientation remain unchanged and consequently unproductive. . . . The lay apostolate of our Churches still remains basically parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed." Promotion of the lay apostolate, and thus lay ministries, must encourage "more vigorous, world-oriented forms" (Rosales and Arevalo, 193-94). This language reflects a shift that occurred during the 1980s. The shift is from an emphasis on building up the local church to an emphasis on working toward the reign of God. During this time, the documents and projects of the FABC reveal a change in focus from internal church issues to issues of mission, inculturation, dialogue, and service in the world. The discussion and debate surrounding the 1998 Special Synod on Asia introduced many Catholics around the world to the distinctive and exciting shape of Asian Catholicism flowing from this shift.

The seventh plenary assembly of the FABC (2000) returned to the need for collaborative ministry. A working paper prepared for discussion at the assembly spoke of the challenges of promoting lay ministry in Asia. A truly participatory church is threatened by inactivity and apathy; and any encouragement of new ministries must have as its goal a reawakening to the ministerial nature of the entire Church. The essay called for a theology of multiple ministries, development of participative structures, and more formal commissionings of lay ministers. Such commissionings are not a clericalization, but an act of the community taking responsibility for its mission: "A community, which feels responsible for its missionary mandate within the life situations in which it is placed, identifies its ministries, trains and commissions its ministers" (Vijay, 30). In the final report of the assembly, the Asian bishops spoke of a church renewal that demands empowering the laity and collaborative ministry: "Our churches are coming to the renewed conviction that the agents of service and ministry cannot be isolated any more in specialized groups. . . . No real service takes place that is not collaborative" (Eilers, 2002, 12). Adequate formation is necessary not only for future priests and religious but also for "competent lay persons." This 2000 document notes the presence and need to promote the ministry of "the many lay persons who offer important years of their life to missionary or other volunteer work." (Eilers, 2002, 15).

Africa

It has been primarily individual bishops who have articulated ways of responding to the important ministries offered by lay Catholics in Africa. At the 1987 World Synod on the Laity, Joseph Cardinal Malula of Kinshasa drew attention to the role of the *mokambi* in the churches of Zaire. According to Cardinal Malula, the parish *mokambi* "is a true lay minister, officially instituted by the bishop. He is not named reverend, and he is not part of the church hierarchy. A lay minister, he assumes a commitment of great importance. The bishop entrusts to him the work of residing in the parish and assuring the administration of the parish and the organization of pastoral activities" (Malula, 400). Not seen as a temporary solution, the *bokambi* (plural of *mokambz*) have since the mid-1970s played a growing role in Zaire—promoting a truly African form of ministry. Central to the development of the *bokambi* in Zaire, and similar leadership ministries for laity in other parts of Africa, has been the emergence and promotion of small Christian communities.

The special synod on Africa, held in Rome in 1994 in preparation for the Jubilee Year, gave another opportunity for individual bishops to articulate their vision of lay ministry. In the months before the synod, the bishop of Eldoret, Kenya, stated:

It would be helpful that this Synod names certain instituted ministries particularly suited to the needs of the Church in Africa, for example, the ministry of catechists, healing the sick, counseling, evangelizing, promoting Christian marriage, justice and peace, helping the poor, extraordinary ministry for the Eucharist, leadership in the small Christian communities. The ministry of the lay people responsible of parishes in Kinshasa, Zaire, called *Bakambi*, should be a source of inspiration for other African countries [*sic*].

The Synod should also commission the preparation of suitable rites of institution or commissioning for the churches in Africa that are meaningful and well founded theologically and liturgically. In this way lay ministries will not be seen as just *casual jobs* but will be officially recognized by the pastors in the community (Arap Korir, 242-43).

The synod did not in fact carry through on these suggestions. But over the course of the synod's deliberations, the traditional ministry of the catechist emerged as an important ministry. Here, as in Asia, "catechist" means much more than a volunteer in a parish religious education program. In the church's missionary work, a catechist historically has been a native layperson who leads and teaches a local community, which exists without the regular presence of a foreign missionary or priest. The synod of African bishops concluded that catechists should receive not only sound doctrinal formation and moral support. They are also to be guaranteed suitable living and working conditions, and their responsibility is to be acknowledged and respected. The thirteenth

plenary session of AMECEA (the association of bishops' conferences in East Africa) followed up on this synod by stressing the need for formation for laity engaged in evangelization. The East African bishops resolved: "The concerned local community shall be involved in identifying, training, supporting and justly remunerating the catechist." And they pledged to continue to encourage and train catechists within their region (AMECEA, 299).

Think Globally, Act Locally

The changing shape of ministry in various cultures and continents defies easy generalization. If anything can be said, it is that things are different in different places. Diversity and variety characterize the landscape. The preceding survey hardly begins to describe this diversity. Instead, I have simply tried to introduce some of the ways in which different groups of bishops have responded to developments in their churches. That having been said, these responses are nevertheless instructive. At least four interrelated observations can be made that bear on the U.S. scene. These observations apply to the document being prepared by the U.S. bishops, but also extend beyond it. They are principles to keep in mind as the whole church community continues to receive and struggles to respond to what we in the United States now call lay ecclesial ministry.

Reality. Any response by church leaders ought to be firmly grounded in the concrete pastoral situation. This reality is in fact a multitude of different "realities." A kind of theological tunnel vision can be avoided if we admit that various external factors (social, political, economic, and so on) often shape ministry at the local level. For example, the fact that charitable contributions to French churches have declined in recent decades has led to various volunteer (rather than paid) forms of lay ministry. Meanwhile, the fact that public tax dollars go directly to Catholic dioceses in Germany (as well as Protestant churches and other social service agencies) has fed a growing corps of well-educated, certified and paid lay ministers. The financial reality has also meant that the relationships between lay ministers in Germany and their bishops have been formalized from early on (for dioceses, rather than parishes, have the money).

Local diversity gives us permission to focus on the particularities of ministry in the United States, without detriment to the Catholic appreciation for universality. An American penchant for professionalization and specialization, our emphasis on religious education and focus on the parish community—these factors have given distinctive shape to lay ministries in this country. We do not have a single role, like that of missionary catechist or Pastoral Assistant, but a variety of specializations: religious education coordinator, youth minister, campus minister, hospital chaplain, liturgical coordinator, and so on. "Lay ecclesial minister" is not a specific job title.

Nevertheless, the phrase "lay ecclesial minister" does attempt to recognize a feature common to these different roles: a new type of *vocational commitment* to a significant public ministry for and on behalf of the community. Usually this involves a responsibility of leadership over an area of ministry. As leader, the lay ecclesial minister provides continuity and a center for particular ministries- and so, lay ecclesial ministers do ministry for a living (even if they do not live off their ministry). This vocational commitment to ministry on the part of laity is an important aspect of the new reality to which the church in the United States must respond.

Re-positioning Bishops in different parts of the world acknowledge that laity whose lives are dedicated to ministry take up a new place within their communities. The position of the *bokam!ji* is respected in Zaire. The Asian bishops speak of lay "ministries" involving stability and formality. The vocational commitment made by lay ecclesial ministers in the United States, their role as public ministers in the church, and their positions of leadership on parish staffs or within organizations suggest a new way of being-in-ministry. All believers exist within a network of relationships that make up the church. In taking up significant and stable ministries, lay ecclesial ministers' relationships within the community are transformed. Richard Gaillardetz calls this transformation "ecclesial re-positioning."

Clearly there are certain ministries in the Church which, because of their public nature bring about a certain "ecclesial re-positioning" or re-configuration. In other words, the person who takes on such a ministry finds themselves in a new relationship within the Church and the assumption is that they will be empowered by the Spirit in a manner commensurate with their new ministerial relationship. These ministers are public persons who in some sense are both called by the community and accountable to the community (Gaillardetz, 135).

The lay ecclesial minister's position, or "place," as a minister in the church depends on the level of the minister's commitment, the kind and significance of the ministry involved, and the recognition granted by the community and its leaders. These factors apply not only to the tasks undertaken (function) or to the minister's status (ontology), but to both. They are relational categories. Attention to the relationships (both interpersonal and structural) of lay ecclesial ministers might be one way of naming more precisely this new reality.

Recognition. Ecclesial recognition is important in confirming and affirming the re-positioning of important ministers within the community. All of the responses by bishops and groups of bishops surveyed above share a concern to support and promote lay ministries, even as they differ with regard to how these growing roles are to be formally recognized. In the United States, those who fall under the rubric of lay ecclesial ministry-pastoral associates, DREs, chaplains, liturgical coordinators, and so on-are, for the most part, recognized in their ministry by being hired. Some are certified, a few

commissioned. But by and large, there are few structures or practices linking the lay ecclesial minister to the larger church beyond the parish. Surely there are advantages to the grass-roots growth of parish ministries in this country and the freedom and flexibility it has allowed. But a Catholic ecclesiology suggests that the bishop plays a role in the recognition and coordination of ministries within his diocese, for the bishop serves as the link between local communities and the universal church. Here we need not overhaul the ways in which parishes seek out, hire, and organize their ministerial staffs. But we might encourage all bishops to be more vocal in their support of lay ecclesial ministry, to resist the temptation to control, and choose, instead, to serve as catalyst and coordinator. More resources could be dedicated to training and continuing formation. Serious discussions on such practical matters as portable pension plans or appeal procedures for lay ecclesial ministers who are fired need to continue. The emerging language of a diocesan *ministerium-a* group inclusive of ordained priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers-suggests what could be a structure of support, one that recognizes the level of commitment and contribution demonstrated by many lay ecclesial ministers.

Rite. Within a sacramental community, the recognition of ministry takes place in liturgy. There are well-developed rites of commissioning Pastoral Assistants and Parish Assistants in the German church. Bishops in Latin America and Africa have called for more formal liturgies of installation. In the United States, rites of blessing and commissioning to lay ministries have sprung up in parishes and formation programs. There was some fear following the Second Vatican Council that special rites of commissioning for laity would detract from the newly-recovered emphasis on the baptismal source of ministry. But this early hesitancy has today been displaced by the spontaneous response of a sacramental people, who choose to celebrate the significant life transition (re-positioning) that follows a new commitment to ministry. Baptism grounds all ministry by initiating one into a community that is fundamentally ministerial. However, baptism does not designate an individual to a particular ministerial role. Thus we should encourage liturgies of initiation to ministry for those who are beginning or recommitting to a form of lay ecclesial ministry. If the U.S. bishops were to suggest a rite for use by local communities or dioceses, this might lead to the same kind of existential engagement and communal reflection that has redefined the church's experience of baptism since the revision of the rites of Christian initiation.

Conclusions

Attending to the ways in which church leaders from other parts of the world have responded to new forms of ministry reveals both diverse experiences and common themes. These observations remind us that the recent history of changing ministerial patterns in the U.S. church is not unique, although it has taken distinctive form in the various roles now described as "lay ecclesial ministry." As American Catholics and their bishops continue to respond to the many professionally-prepared laypersons making a

significant commitment to important ministries within the community, we can benefit from time spent "thinking globally," even as we take deliberate steps to act locally to support, encourage, and celebrate this reality.

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