

## **Toward a Ministry For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panel Outcomes**

Saturday, January 27, 2018

### **Reading “the signs of the times”--- context for the panel**

There is no hope of transformation without recognition of a crisis. We are at that point in the institutional church where we have to face up to reality. Why?

1. Seminaries are increasingly empty
2. Multiple parishes once served by one or two priests are now amalgamated and have no sense of community. Anonymous parishioners result.
3. Shortages of priests everywhere
4. Foreign clergy are used with poor results: they are out of touch with American culture and language. We are recruiting clergy from countries already short of clergy (Africa, India, Latin America) --- mission territories! How do you preach the Good News under these conditions?
5. Multiple parishes are served by one priest especially in Midwest and western dioceses. Burnout and lack of availability result for the few priests left.
6. Spiritually and theologically prepared women are not allowed to serve when the community is starving for The Word and Sacrament!
7. Gay members of the clergy and hierarchy, open or not, are forced to play games with their identity. Hypocrisy rules the day!
8. Perfectly qualified married men are not allowed to serve because we prize celibacy above service to the People of God. Human laws take precedence over Jesus’ charge to his disciples to “feed my Lambs---feed by sheep.”

### **Hopes and Dreams for the Future of Ministry**

1. Before any meaningful change with inclusion of candidates now excluded, a change of heart (conversion) must take place in the hierarchy and people, as well as a re-examination of dogmas and practices. Outmoded teachings on contraception, remarriage, Eucharist, priesthood and homosexuality must be revisited with respect for the lived experience of the People of God. Our understandings have evolved with new insights in quantum physics, theology, psychology and cosmology. What is meant by priesthood? What is meant by the ontological character of priest, and by sacrificial emphasis in the liturgy of Eucharist, etc. These later teachings only came into usage in the 12th Century after the Gregorian Reforms.
2. Consensus seemed to be that married men and women—gay and straight-- should be included in candidates for ministry---not because of “holes” in staffing but because of the inherent value and gifts possessed by these candidates.

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3. Candidates for ministry, be they for bishop or ministers, should be chosen by the community. (12<sup>th</sup> Century brought connection of language of sacrifice and ontological nature of priesthood which has held sway since then.) Therefore, priests ordained absolutely, that is, without the choice of the parish community, could be moved from parish to parish—diocese to diocese. This was something unheard of before the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Bishops were considered wed to their people for life!
4. Martin Luther saw this connection between language of “sacrifice” and “Real Presence” which led to “absolute ordination” and a closed system. The People of God are left out of the process. Luther called for the right of the People to choose their ministers. This was a tradition of the early Church.
5. Parish Councils, as called for by Vat. II (Lumen Gentium #36 and Document On the Laity), with real meaning, not just advisory status, might be a channel through which this selection could take place. All must work together organically not at odds with each other. An engaged laity is essential.
6. Major re-examination of seminary training must be implemented.
7. Major dialogue is needed on formation for pastoral service.
8. A destructive effect on women’s equality by insistence on “complementarity of the sexes “ was cited.
9. Unity is not uniformity. We need a Church of Peter AND Paul, married AND optionally chosen celibate ministers. Freely chosen celibacy is a gift to the Church. Marriage, too, is a gift to the whole Church. We have presently a married ministry in the Church with the Pope’s approval: the Eastern Rite has 19 different churches—17 of these have a married clergy. Why must only the Roman rite have mandatory celibacy? We should demand a restoration of a married clergy---it is our heritage. This will not solve all our problems. Divorce, separation and sexual problems will still exist. Life happens! But if the other rites, as well as Protestant and Jewish communities, create impressive clergy, so can the Catholic Church.

Evolution requires us to change with the signs of the times. The development of dogma is an accepted theological principle articulated by John Henry Cardinal Newman, when he said, “To live is to change, to be perfect is to change often.” So we should move forward with faith in the Holy Spirit who was promised to us. We should examine our understandings of dogmas and disciplines so as to better preach the Good News in our day. Even Jesus foresaw this need for development and change when he said, “There are many things I have yet to tell you, but you are not yet ready to receive them.” (John 16:12)