

Reproduced by permission, from the April issue of the NAES Journal, house organ for the National Association of Ecumenical Staff, U.S.A.

MINISTRY OF THE LAITY AS AGENTS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

by

Rev. Robert A. Gallagher, Metropolitan Christian Council
of Philadelphia, and the staff of MAP

The Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia established a Lay Ministry Task Force last June with the goal of exploring the concept of "lay ministry as agents within institutions for Justice and Reconciliation."

We were interested in the conceptual framework behind such a proposal and Bob Gallagher kindly consented to let us print the revised draft of his paper. The material provided the basic input for the Northeastern NAES regional meeting last January.

There has been an awareness for some time that one of the most important arenas of lay ministry is within the institutions which employ us. This paper will present what appears to be a growing thrust within the Church for a lay ministry as institutional change agent. In looking at this development: 1) the present situation will be examined; 2) the possibilities for a lay ministry system noted; and 3) an emphasis given to the potential role of the local congregation in such a lay ministry.

Why a Focus on Institutional Change?

In *The Age of Discontinuity*, Peter Drucker, world famous management consultant and organizational theorist, says "Historians two hundred years hence may see as central to the twentieth century what we ourselves have been paying almost no attention to: the emergence of a society of organizations in which every single social task of importance is entrusted to a large institution." "Sixty years ago, before World War I, the social scene everywhere looked much like the Kansas prairie: the largest thing on the horizon was the individual. Most social tasks were accomplished in and through family-sized units. The government of Imperial Germany looked like a colossus to its contemporaries; but an officer in the middle ranks could still know personally everyone of importance in every single ministry and department"... "In the days before World War I, the one "large" organization

around was business. But the "big business" of 1910 would strike us today as a veritable minnow. The "octopus" that gave our grandparents nightmares, John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust, was cut into fourteen pieces by the Supreme Court in 1911. Less than thirty years later, by 1940, every one of these successor companies was larger than Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust had been — by every measurement: employees, sales, capital invested, and so on."

Drucker goes on to emphasize that the real difference from the past is not primarily in the growth of the size and budget of the organization but that all our major social functions are discharged in and through these large institutions.

Two related features of our present institutional situation are: 1) our institutions were created in a period of slower paced change: today given the rapid increase in the rate of change these structures are not effectively coping with the demands placed upon them and 2) many institutions seem to have lost their purpose either because the society no longer has that need or because the institution has become so self-serving that it has subverted its original purpose.

Institutional structures shape our existence. They have been created to meet our needs and to solve our problems. Within them we give most of our working hours. We are caught up in them. In them we seem to "live, move and have our being." They are a major part of our lives, and as such, are involved in the creation of our human community and identity. They are a source of our self-image and give us much of our sense of self worth. The effects of institutional policies in regard to the society are felt by all of us. They largely determine our health care, educational possibilities, sanitation service, police protection, possibilities for creative expression, and employment opportunities.

Yet, many of us have experienced frustration at our seeming inability to have any effect on those institutional policies which are not meeting our needs

Ministry of the Laity Continued

or solving the problems they were created to solve.

Only recently in Philadelphia we have experienced a widespread crisis in health care, a shutting down of our educational institutions, too few police in some places and too many in others, and increasingly high rates of unemployment. In each case, those most affected seemed to have no ability to call the institution to account. Worse yet, the situation is accepted out of our sense of powerlessness or a naive belief that our institutional managers know what they are doing and have enough power themselves to make a real difference.

At the same time, *we live within these institutions.* They take our time and give us our daily bread. All too often we take our identity from them. When we accept a job we also accept a role. Our understanding of the institution's purpose and history as well as the expectations of our co-workers move us toward our proper niche in the organization; we have our place and we fill it.

When we work within an institution we become its representative to those outside. It doesn't really matter if we accept this role or if we personally agree with the institution's policies . . . we are part of it and those outside will not let us forget that. The effect the institution has on our friends and neighbors is fed back to us again and again. Feelings are confused, of course, because those who are critical of the policies of the institutions with which we are related are also "representatives" of other institutions and are also being called to account. We all loudly proclaim powerlessness.

Perhaps the major shaping forces acting on us within an institution are its internal policies — spoken and unspoken. We live within a certain framework of decision-making, authority, reward, and task orientation. If our ideas, questions, and behaviors do not fit the expected patterns, we cannot reap the rewards of approval and advancement which the system offers. The "web" of an institution's inner life is often difficult to see . . . and so, all the more difficult to avoid or escape. We are caught up in institutions.

People are affected then in two basic ways by the institutional structures of society. We are workers within them and we are part of the general society which is affected by their practices.

While many institutions have broken down or become destructive, they are, on the whole, ordered ways of serving God's people by meeting needs and solving problems. We do need them. *But*, what we often fail to realize is that their present pattern of existence is only one way of giving order to our use of the resources of God's world. In that they have been structured in such a way that they do not serve all of God's people, but primarily those who are wealthy,

white, male and western, they must be changed. In that they are structured in a way which keeps us isolated, alienated and frustrated, they must be restructured. They must be made more human-oriented: they must be humanized. This may mean taking action toward changing internal policies (e.g., the method of participation in decision-making) or in terms of external impact (e.g., policies which tend to act against minority groups and women). Whenever we discover that the practices of the institution humiliate, enslave, and decrease options for people, we must move to change them.

The Content of the "Human"

Those of us within the Church claim to see in God's acts in history, especially in Jesus, clues which point toward an understanding of what it is to be a person in the fullest sense. In light of that understanding we also have some notion as to what the structures of society are called to be and serve!

The staff of Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia (MAP), an agency which researches institutional change and develops resources for institutional change agents, has suggested some of the values which offer us a criteria for our change movement.

"Human" institutions should:

1. Insure the provision of basic material needs for all people.
2. Support and facilitate a concern for wholeness in persons as well as in society.
3. Enable the creative development and expression of human resources.
4. Enable the maximum participation of all people in the decisions which affect them.
5. Foster cooperative interdependence.
6. Encourage a pluralism of cultural forms and life styles.
7. Foster an openness to the future which allows for the growth and change of people as well as institutions, themselves.

For the staff of MAP these criteria have shown themselves to be helpful guidelines which make sense in terms of their movement to humanize institutions.

Current Efforts at Institutional Change

Most attempts at change have come by way of outside groups putting pressure on institutional leadership. We can see this in the radical movements among minority peoples and the young. It is the style of the Alinsky and Nader operations; it is the way the new consumer groups are moving. This movement is necessary and should be supported by Christians. The focus of this paper, however, will be on another route

Ministry of the Laity Continued

for institutional change which would supplement the present action of outside pressure groups. The concern here is to equip lay men and women to move for change inside the institutions in which they participate as employees or members.

The Laity As Agents of Institutional Change

A Definition:

He is acutely aware of the injustices that pervade contemporary society and the way in which institutions and organizations, through their structures and values, profit from, foster and unwittingly reinforce these injustices. He knows that he is shaped by that situation but is also aware of his ability to change that situation.

She is personally committed to using her expertise and power in existing institutions and organizations to bring about an open, humane order.

He is compelled toward a new consciousness, for himself and society, expressed in new life styles, new ways of thinking and new means of organizing.

She is fixed upon pursuit of creative change as a most significant way of bearing the "Good News."

An Assumption:

If the laity are to become effective agents of institutional change, we believe they will need a variety of resources to facilitate and support their efforts. This suggests that the Church will need to think in terms of a lay ministry system which can help the change agent develop a critical awareness of current institutional incoherence, long term commitment, long range planning skills, a vision of new possibilities, authority reference points outside the employing organization, a belief that problems are solvable challenges, an open view of the future, and a support community.

Resources of a Lay Ministry System

An effective lay ministry system will need to provide resources in three major areas: 1) Support communities and trained enablers, 2) consciousness change, and 3) group and personal change skills. *In the past others have had the understanding of lay ministry as presented in this paper; what they apparently did not have was a clear understanding of the resources needed to carry out that ministry and access to such resources.*

1. Support Community and Trained Enablers

a. The Support Community

People who are active as change agents need small supportive communities willing to listen, help explore possible solutions to problems, and serve as reference points of critical perspective. The community can be a

place where we celebrate, assume responsibility for each other, and accept each other in all our uncertainty. We have become convinced that the members of a support community need to share the same basic understanding of reality. They need a common faith. There is no other alternative if we are to remain Christ's people in the midst of this struggle.

The support community is not primarily task-oriented. Its reason for being lies in the needs of its members for a place in which they can be accepted regardless of how "successful" they are as change agents. This is not to say that the support community is unconcerned with the task aspects of being a change agent. Part of the group's purpose is to help its members in planning and acting for change. The task function is a part of the community's existence; but there is a more basic function, the building up of a supportive, caring community. Without that caring community few will be able to be effective and human at the task of institutional change.

The support community will be better able to play its role if each change agent is part of another group which is primarily task-oriented. Such a group or task force does not require a common faith commitment; it only requires a common task commitment. In fact, it is crucial that these task contexts exist in which Christians can collaborate with others on the basis of a common concern for reshaping institutions.

b. Trained Enablers

Each community of change agents should be related to a trained enabler. The enabler is a person skilled in group process techniques with an accountability for facilitating the task and supportive aspects of the support community. The facilitation will contain both task and group support elements. The enabler can help the group to move on its objectives by using problem solving, planning and team building resources. Part of the enabler's job would be to pass on skills to group members so as to increase their competence level and decrease their reliance on the enabler. The enabler would need training in task force management techniques, listening, leading a group in action planning and problem solving, and the use of awareness-creating tools such as simulation and role play.

(Further on in this article a strategy will be presented in which the parish clergy are proposed as an obvious resource which could serve the enabler function within a lay ministry system. It is important to note however, that this function is not necessarily limited to that particular strategy.)

2. Consciousness Change Resources

The process of consciousness change involves a number of interrelated factors, such as: memories of

Ministry of the Laity Continued

change which have occurred in the past, a vision of what is desired in the future, an awareness of that present state of societal drift and incoherence, and a clarity about the options presently open for change. In getting at these factors a person will need tools for social analysis, creativity, model building, and awareness creation. *The intention here is to enable people as active, self-determining persons to achieve a deepening awareness of both the cultural reality which shapes them and of their ability to affect that reality.* An example of what this new consciousness for the present might look like grows out of the institutionalization of society which was noted earlier. Given that our life as persons is now totally bound up with the structures of society, it seems that to minister to persons in this age means to act on the structures which affect persons. No longer is it satisfactory to care for people as though they are somehow apart from and uninfluenced by institutional society. Christians are today called to a ministry to structures for the sake of persons. To act in such a way is to have a new consciousness.

Consciousness change is not only basic to the laity as institutional change agent but is important to the clergy if they are to be effective enablers. Instead of recruiting lay people for service in the Church the clergy/enabler now recruits lay people for special services to the institutional structures in which they work. This involves a role shift. If the focus is now on the institutionalized world, it means that the key actor is the person who spends his or her life working in that world. The relationship between clergy and lay is not one of a professional advising an amateur.

They are both professionals, called to work in an interdisciplinary manner for the sake of the institution in which the lay person works. The pastor is no longer the leader and director but is now the enabler and helper. The "front line" Christian is the lay person. Any pastor who has suffered with the sense of being expected to play "number one Christian" on behalf of the congregation will understand what a shift in consciousness this is.

3. Group and Personal Change Skills

There are people in the congregations of this metropolitan area who desire justice in our society but feel frustrated and impotent in their attempts to do anything about the present patterns of institutional injustice. Part of this powerlessness is rooted in their lack of skills for institutional change. To give people skills and tools is to empower them. The institutional change agent needs skills in planning for a change, organizing people to act for change, institutional analysis, problem solving, working in an action-research style, task force management and team building.

Three Possibilities for Implementation of a Lay Ministry System

It is our conviction that a strategy for a lay ministry of institutional change would best be carried out within the structure of the Church. Our reasons for this are: the laity of the Church are already located in the secular institutions of society; the Church has a prophetic heritage and an expressed concern for social justice; the Christian Faith is rooted in a vision of the future; many of the Church's ordained clergy already see themselves as enablers of the laity, this strategy may offer them a clearer role; the Church has served as a support base for many who are currently carrying out this ministry; and the Church has a national and international network of training, research and organizing resources which could be focused on implementing this strategy on a large scale.

Providing the context for a lay ministry as institutional change agent on a large scale will require, of course, the institutionalization of the necessary support resources within the structures of the Church. Three possibilities come to mind: 1) vocational congregations; 2) "new public congregations" and 3) the existing local congregations restructured for lay ministry.

1. The Vocational Congregation

Given our concern for a lay ministry as institutional change agent the vocational congregation offers itself as one possibility. Such a congregation would start out with a focus on the places of employment. Its members would all come from the same vocational field and possibly from the same institution. These congregations would probably be small, requiring little overhead. Ordained clergy who have taken up secular work could serve as enablers and ministers of Word and Sacrament.

2. "New Public Congregations"

Congregations could be formed which focus all their attention on the secular arena. The life of the congregation would center on public affairs and its members' work situations. Members would be drawn from all the sectors of secular society. Support would be given in terms of one's public life as opposed to one's private life. People might also belong to a local congregation which has its primary concern defined in terms of residential and family affairs. New public congregations might be large or small, with or without full time staff.

3. The Local Congregation

In the arena of institutional change, the local congregation can be the backbone of the operation. In a loose manner, it is already the supportive element for many Christians who see themselves as change agents. Though most congregations are not currently struc-

Ministry of the Laity Continued

tured or equipped to do the job as it needs to be done, they could be the place where people are made aware of their calling as agents for institutional change and provided with the basic support resources needed to act on that calling.

In a time when our lives seem so fractured, it may prove important to provide a setting in which all of one's life is seen as a whole. The parish church may be able to serve that purpose if it can rise to the call to take people's institutional involvements seriously.

A Wager on the Local Congregation

The existing local congregation appears at the present time to be the most sensible starting point in the development of a lay ministry system. The local congregation is still "grass roots", containing "all sorts and conditions" of people from every sector of public life. These people are, most often, concerned about the implications of their faith commitment for their daily lives. The local congregation has financial resources available. It has educated professional leadership who have some ability to be selective and flexible in their allotment of time. In our judgement the local congregation does have the basic elements necessary for lay ministry. What is required is a major redirecting of those resources.

This is not a call to cease our ministry of visiting the sick, nurturing family life, and educating the young. These and other traditional parish ministries are necessary for our wholeness as persons. This is a call, however, to give our attention to a part of our life which we have dealt with inadequately in all too many cases. The laity of the Church have a right to expect and receive support in their calling as witnesses within secular institutions.

For the local congregation to be an enabling base for a lay ministry of institutional change, a major shift will have to take place in consciousness and use of resources. This will mean a different approach to worship, educational programs, the decision making and priority setting process, the pattern of relationships between clergy and laity, and the support provided by the congregation. For example: (The following is intended to be only suggestive.)

1. Worship in the Congregation

Worship is a celebration of what God has done in our history, especially in his son, Jesus Christ; and an offering of our life and work. In worship, especially in the "breaking of bread" we know Christ, and through him, we know who we are and who we are called to be. This shapes our stance and direction for our work and life and the world. It is an opportunity to offer to God and each other our successes, failures and concerns. It is a calling on God and each other for support and forgiveness. It is a proclamation of the good news that

God has acted to save, liberate, heal, and restore us so that we may serve Him and each other in all of life. The exact structuring of the worship life of the congregation will vary from church to church, each body having to develop a structure out of its own tradition which makes real the relationship between liturgy and our daily work.

2. Christian Education

Christian Education programs must be designed which can take people through a process of transformation and allow them to grow in new directions. This must be integrated with a supportive network which gives people a base to operate from as awareness and commitment grow. This suggests that Christian Education programs need to relate directly to those areas in which people live out their lives. Sessions on biblical history and theology along with studies of current social problems are necessary, but they do not do the full job. If Christian witness is to have any significant impact, our education programs have got to help people develop a sense of what all this new awareness means in the particular situations of their lives. How does it apply to me as a lawyer, a student, a doctor, a union official? What does it mean in terms of the institution I work in every day? How could that institution be more just?

3. Decision Making and Priority Setting

Every organization, today, is increasingly concerned about using its resources more effectively to achieve its objectives. Responsible Christian stewardship demands that the local congregation be especially concerned that it is not squandering its resources of money, plant and people. In MAP's work to date with a local Baptist congregation it has become evident that a voluntary organization, such as the local congregation, does need a decision making process that enables the congregation to set priorities and allocate resources if its mission is to be realized.

A congregational focus on lay ministry as institutional change agent dramatizes the fact that the Church's wealth really resides in its laity. Their commitment, power, expertise, and insight in the organizations which employ them is an invaluable resource for the Church's mission toward institutional accountability and justice.

A major task for the congregation is to re-think the way in which it utilizes this resource so that the requests it makes of its lay people are compatible with its stated mission. A planning and decision making process that enables the congregation to set some long range objectives and then marshal its resources to achieve those objectives would seem to be basic to the development of a significant lay ministry thrust by the local parish.

Ministry of the Laity Continued

4. Clergy-Lay Relationship

The clergy will have to become enablers rather than "leaders" and directors in all aspects of congregational life. The role of the pastor is the enabling of a community in their growing awareness of who they are in Christ and an understanding of their vocation as Christians in the secular world. The focus is on mission in the secular world. Laity and clergy meet as an interdisciplinary team, professional to professional, developing specific strategies in terms of the lay person's secular involvements. This calls for a consciousness change on the part of each party. The clergy are no longer the producers and the laity the consumer. The laity are not recruited for work within the Church but are enabled for work in the world. The ministry is not to persons as isolated beings, but to persons as a part of an institutionalized society. The lay person is called to a conscious identity as a change agent.

5. Congregational Support for Change Agents

Christians have had a long history of standing over-against the society in which they live. In the early church a Christian wrote a letter to his friend Diognetus which expressed the position of Christ's followers in that age.

"Though they live in Greek and barbarian cities, as each man's lot is cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and the rest of their living, their own way of life which they display is wonderful and admittedly strange. They live in their native lands, but like foreigners. They take part in everything like aliens. Every foreign country is their native land, and every native land a foreign country. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven."

Our calling is the same today, to live in obedience to Christ and therefore in tension with the passing age. A support community seeing its "reference point" in Jesus Christ has both an understanding of what is really human and a loyalty which provides a critical perspective of the present social order. In a sense, the congregation is required to be a "counter culture", a tight supportive community taking its directions from what it perceives as obedience to Christ and shaping itself so that the truth of the Gospel is alive in that community. The congregation is gathered in order to grow in a "new consciousness" based in Jesus Christ. In such a community we may be better equipped to cope with the danger of becoming trapped in an institutional role or in the old or new ideologies claiming to know the only institutional approach to justice. Living within such a community of faith and celebration can be a continual reminder of our calling and mission. It can be the context for our movement as agents of institutional change, existing in our remembering of Jesus Christ and strategizing to carry out our witness in the world.

In the late eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth century there was a support community of Christians active in England which might serve as a partial example of the strategy we are suggesting. A community of evangelical Anglicans formed itself around the parish church at Clapham and strategized for social justice in England. "The Clapham Sect", as it now is called, drew its members from the laity with the exception of John Venn, the parish rector. Its members included William Wilberforce, a Member of Parliament; Hannah More, a writer; The Countess of Huntingdon; Henry Thornton, a banker and politician; James Stephen, a lawyer; and Lord Teignmouth, an ex-Governor General of India.

Among the causes which the "Clapham Sect" took on was that of abolishing the slave trade. As is too often the case in our own society, many people in England had turned a blind eye to the evils of the slave system, comforting themselves with the prosperity which resulted from that system. For over two decades those who had gathered around the church of the Holy Trinity, Clapham, struggled against and finally ended the slave trade.

The community at Clapham served as a base for support and strategy. In the case of the slave trade, its main actor was William Wilberforce, who was working through "task groups" in the House of Commons, who were not related to the Clapham group.

The strategy we are suggesting follows the same lines as that taken by the "Clapham Sect". The local congregation can serve as a base for small support communities carrying out a ministry of change within the institutions which employ them. The support community celebrates and plans together.

The Support System for the Congregation

Whether the congregation is based on the existing parish model, the vocational model, or the "new public" model, it will need a network of supporting institutions which develop, coordinate, and channel resources to the congregation; undertake research on organizational change; provide training for clergy and laity; and engage in environmental trend analysis.

Such a system of supporting institutions needs to make some long-range commitments if it is to offer this form of lay ministry as a real option to people and have any significant impact on the institutions of society. "Staying power" is basic to any serious attempt to bring about institutional change.

A lay ministry support system would likely include some of the following institutions:

1. Seminaries

Seminaries could train students for a "ministry to structures", providing the necessary theological base

Ministry of the Laity Continued

and the skills needed for action. Some students may decide to enter directly into secular institutions and carry out a ministry as a change agent; others may become pastors in congregations providing a supportive and enabling ministry.

2. Judicatories

In a lay ministry system the judicatory could play several roles: provide for the necessary initiating and coordinating of congregational efforts; provide training for clergy as enablers; develop new congregational models; bring financial, physical, and emotional support to the enablers; provide educational resources for congregational use; financially support other parts of the system; and reshape the institution of the judicatory, itself, to serve as a model.

3. Council of Churches

Where a Council of Churches or its ecumenical counterpart exists, it can be an invaluable agency for coordinating and implementing a lay ministry system at the regional or metropolitan level. Several of the tasks listed under the judicatory could more effectively be performed by the Council on behalf of several judicatories, thus demonstrating the ecumenical character of lay ministry as well as making possible more effective collaborative action.

4. Resource Development and Research Centers

The situations in which change agents find themselves and the state of drift which characterizes our society's institutions suggests a need for continual research focused on the development of resources for institutional change. New tools for change will have to be constructed to meet the current needs of those acting for change. This is a continuing process of updating and revising. What serves us now may be of little use in two years. MAP is one such research center which is already acting on the need to develop change skills and tools.

5. Continuing Education and Training Institutes

In order to maintain their skills clergy and laity will need ongoing contact with centers of theological reflection and skill training. Such centers can provide an essential link between the development of resources and dissemination of resources to members of the congregation.

In the beginning of such a lay ministry system action-training centers may be the basic source of re-training for clergy and laity, given these centers' existing commitment to training persons for more effective action.

6. Centers for Spiritual Renewal

The tension of acting as an institutional change agent will require for some, places of retreat and

renewal. Monastic communities, retreat houses, and conference centers may all provide places in which people can focus intensively on essentials of their life and faith. It is all too easy to lose perspective and sense of purpose without periods in which we re-examine our priorities.

7. National Agencies

Since most institutions are national in character, if not in fact, the national church agency has a unique role to play in making a lay ministry system a reality. It can serve to:

- develop and coordinate national strategies for enablement at regional and local levels.
- initiate and support national institutional task forces focused on change within one institution or institutional system (such as the insurance industry.)
- channel resources from the Resource Development Centers to regional judicatories and local congregations.
- do research on new forms of congregational life.
- channel financing to other institutions in the system who do not have direct access to church funds.
- train regional and local staffs of judicatories to serve as lay ministry consultants.
- develop educational and curriculum resources for the enabler and the change agent.
- conduct national conferences on key institutional problems.

This list is far from exhaustive but only serves to indicate the important function of the national agency (whether it be a denominational Board of Christian Education or an ecumenical organization like the National Council of Churches) in enabling a lay ministry system to be operational.

The Church is called to live out of its remembering of Jesus Christ, to become incarnate within successive cultures and point them in each age to God and their own true destiny. This task calls us to understand the world, prophesy within it and facilitate it in terms of our understanding of who we are and who we are to be in Jesus Christ. The particular shape this task takes will vary from age to age depending on the setting in which we find ourselves. What has been suggested in this paper is that the present age requires of us a witness to Jesus Christ in terms of the institutional life of the society; and more particularly, for many, a witness as a change agent in the organizations within which one works and participates.