

CHURCH/ECUMENISM

Topic: New Forms of Ministry in the Local Church: A Global Perspective
Conveners: Richard Gaillardetz, University of Toledo
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Presenters: Fritz Lobinger, Bishop Emeritus of Aliwal, South Africa
Francisco Claver, Bishop Emeritus of the Apostolic Vicariate
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Bishop Fritz Lobinger, in "From Viri Probati to Teams of Elders," explored a model for supplying teams of elders to minister to faith communities. He emphasized that these are not substitutes for priests. In the Viri Probati approach, the starting point was the need to find a provider. Requests to the Vatican for Viri Probati never succeeded because they were seen as dangerous for the existing priests.

This new model begins from a different starting point, the existence of self-ministering communities. The community wants to rely on its own charism and trained leaders, which its members have already accepted. The animator-priests exercise the new role of formator. These Animator-Priests accompany 10-80 communities and conduct unending formation. The ordination of teams of Elders, a non-clerical form of priesthood, is the logical completion of community building. Only teams are ordained, never only one person, and they rotate within the community and work as a team. The optimum ration of elders to priests is 20 to 1. Elders do not replace the priests, but work in combination with them.

The preconditions for this model of ministry are: the existence of self-ministering communities, animator-priests, unending formation, and diocesan ownership. This is a diocesan project, not a global or national one. Thus requests for Teams of Elders should only be made by an individual diocese. Bishops Lobinger noted that since the situation is different in countries of the North and those of the South, this model may be more applicable to the situation in the South.

Bishop Francisco Claver, in "The Ministry of a Bishop in the Boondocks," related how, when appointed bishop of the new diocese of Malaybalay in 1969, he developed that particular church through the principles of dialogue, participation, and coresponsibility. He learned that when these three principles are taken seriously and made operative in the life of a community, the emergence and growth of a genuine local churches results, not only of a church in a place, but, more crucially, a church of a place, e.g., a church with an Asian face. Second, where the membership is supposed to be dialogic, participatory, and coresponsible, the leadership must be too, a challenge in an authoritarian culture and church. With patience and persistence, a heavy emphasis on Church as Institution yields to a Church as Communion. Third, the process of change has to be a learning experience for everyone. Everyone has to listen to everyone else and thus learn what a Church as a Community of Disciples means. The common theme within dialogue, participation and coresponsibility is sharing. Ideas are shared in dialogue, acts in participation, and accountability in coresponsibility. This sharing is a concretization and living communally of the one gospel mandate: the charity of Christ.

The methodology of change that develops through three ideas is what is called in America the Pastoral Cycle or Spiral, and in Asia the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach. The members of the community dialogue, participate in the decision-making, acting and evaluating, and share in the responsibility for whatever is done for the good of the community. The community tries to see and decide things from a faith perspective so that it is a community of genuine spiritual discernment and truly a pneumatic community.

Bishop Claver then illustrated how this cycle works in the Base Ecclesial Communities, the smallest units of the parishes. The two basic activities in these groups are bible-sharing and pastoral planning. Through these activities the laity realize that they are not mere objects of the Church's preaching, but real subjects and worthy participants in the church's work of evangelization.

Bishop Claver concluded: (1) To be truly a dialogic church, a two-way system of communication must be established at every level of the church. (2) Some powers in the church don't have to be delegated since they already belong by right to the lower reaches of the church. We probably should not talk about subsidiarity, but about restoring powers that were already possessed at the bottom but taken away or usurped. (3) Clericalism is an evil that has to be corrected by clerics themselves, but lay people should also have a hand in this as this is a denial of their *laïcité*. (4) Change occurs from the bottom. The ministry of the bishop at this time in our history as church is the empowerment of the laity by *enabling* them for *their* ministry so that they are subjects of ministry, not mere objects of hierarchical/clerical ministry.

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