

Pastoral Leadership: Moving into the Future

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A Remarkable and Historic Event

This National Ministry Summit has truly been a remarkable event. Over three years ago, six national Catholic organizations involved in ministry came together to respond to the U.S. Bishops' invitation in "Co-Workers in the Field of the Lord" to consult on the future of pastoral leadership in this country. They mapped out a plan of research, symposia, and consultations, known as the Emerging Models Project, that would involve at all levels of the U.S. Church. Their sustained partnering over these years is in itself an achievement. What they have convened us here to do is not just a random airing of opinions regarding pastoral leadership in this country, but rather a carefully planned sustained conversation about the results of this Project to make recommendations about next steps that might be taken. The opportunity to be part of this remarkable conversation has drawn some 1300 participants to this place, not only from the United States but also from six other countries as well.

This National Ministry Summit is also historic. If one looks back over the history of our Church in this country, important impulses into the future have come from such events. I think of the Black Catholic Congresses at the turn of the twentieth century, the Liturgical Congresses and the Summer Institutes for Sisters in mid-century, and the *Encuentros* that culminated in our celebration of the new millennium. This National Ministry Summit now joins that distinguished list, and raises our hopes that it too will

give a significant and substantial impulse toward strengthening pastoral leadership in the coming years.

My task in this concluding address is to try to bring together the results of the Summit—the deliberations that have gone on here and the recommendations that have been presented by the participants—and point us toward the future, taking what has been done in the Project and placed here in the context of the U.S. and the global Church. It is not an enviable task, nor is it one that any individual can fully execute. So I ask your forbearance as we move ahead together in faith to examine the pastoral leadership that we hope will bring us to deeper discipleship in Christ.

This presentation will be in three parts. The first part will sketch the contexts in which we must think about current and future pastoral leadership in this country. In doing so, I will examine both our national context and the global context in which the world Church finds itself. That having been done, a second part will examine each of the six project areas that were part of this process, dealing with issues of changing parish structures, changing leadership roles, the increasing cultural diversity of our Church, and the human resources that will be needed to meet the challenges ahead. This part will review the principal recommendations that have emerged in the intense discussions that have occurred here at the Summit, and try to place them in our current and anticipated context. The third and final part will venture some next steps—not just next steps internal to the framework of the Emerging Models Project, but also look at how these might engage our context and carry with them deep resonance with our faith. As was the clear statement of intent in the Project itself, any suggestions about ministry in the future are made within the parameters of the current legislation and discipline of the Church.

The National Context of the Catholic Church: Challenges for Pastoral Leadership

The Roman Catholic Church in the United States consists of nearly 70 million people who identify themselves as Catholic—roughly 25% of the nation’s population. It is far and away the largest religious body in this country; the Southern Baptist Convention, with about 15 million members, is the next largest in size. Although it long carried the image of being largely a Church of poor immigrants, by the 1980s the Catholic Church’s members had the highest mean level of education and nearly the highest mean level of income of any of the Christian bodies in this country. Even despite the sexual abuse scandals that rocked the Church in the past years, Catholics in the U.S. show a higher level of loyalty and participation than any other wealthy country in the world. That there are some 31,000 lay ministers and 16,000 deacons ministering here in the United States is yet another testimony of the commitment of Catholics to their Church.

At the same time, the Church faces significant challenges, both from the larger environment within this country, and from issues internal to the life of the Church itself. Space permits mentioning only three of the most salient factors in the Church’s context that are providing a challenge. One of the wide-ranging ones is the material success of Catholics in this country. A once largely immigrant Church is now assimilated to a great extent into the U.S. mainstream. While there is certainly relief that the worst of anti-Catholic sentiment has disappeared from the public life of this country (although not entirely so), it has meant that Catholics must find other ways to define, sustain, and transmit their identities. The oppositional identity Catholics developed vis-à-vis a Protestant culture must now find other ways to define and develop itself. The decline in Catholic schools has meant a lessening of an important means of socializing young

Catholic into their faith. The struggle of all Catholic institutions to rediscover and redefine what is Catholic about them has prompted a great deal of creativity in the last several decades, but it also highlights the costs of assimilation into the larger culture. The place accorded to young adults in the Project underscores the issue of how a Catholic identity is being transmitted to the next generation in this country.

In the midst of struggling with the consequences of assimilation, the Church is challenged by a new wave of immigration; this constitutes the second major external challenge. This is a phenomenon that has been growing since 1965, when the restrictive policies that had been in place the previous forty years were lifted. Earlier migration had been principally from Europe; this new wave is from Latin America and Asia. Latino/as now make up 15% of the U.S. population, and likely at least a third of the membership of the Catholic Church; this number is expected to grow in the next few decades to at least half of the Catholic population. Asian immigrants, who represent a smaller number, are disproportionately Christian, are growing at the fastest percentage rate of all immigrants. The face of the Catholic Church is changing quickly, and pastoral leadership is having to react more quickly than may be possible for such a large institution. Dealing with a culturally diverse Church remains perhaps the single greatest challenge that is before the Catholic Church in this country today.

A third challenge coming from the U.S. context is the precipitous decline of the number of diocesan priests and vowed religious. This is of course an internal challenge to the Church as well, and is one of the reasons for needing to face major changes in pastoral leadership. It is given here as an external challenge because internal changes within the Church will likely not, in themselves, be able to reverse this decline in the near

future. Nearly all the mainline Protestant denominations in this country are facing the same challenge. Part of this is caused by the decreasing esteem in which the clergy are held. Another is the economic challenge Protestant ministers face because of lower salaries in proportion to others with similar levels of education: they cannot adequately provide for their families. Were it not for the ordination of women in those denominations, many would be in profound pastoral shortage. Over half of all the students in Protestant seminaries are women.

For Catholics, the precipitous decline in active diocesan clergy means fewer priests to staff parishes and a nationwide Church that continues to grow. This fact has been a major preoccupation of the research that has gone into this Summit and the deliberations that have been held here. Vowed religious men have, in part, been parish priests as well, so the decline of their numbers adds to the challenge. Religious orders in this country, especially religious sisters and brothers, made an educational system possible that was a major means of socialization of succeeding generations of Catholics into their faith and, as has already been noted, contributed greatly to the high loyalty of Catholics to their Church. The impact of fewer numbers has already changed primary and secondary education in our schools. But fewer numbers, and the gradual withdrawal of personnel and financial resources of the religious orders, have also affected healthcare and an array of social services as well. Creative responses and a renewed sense of Catholic identity have arisen out of the challenge, but one wonders how long such institutions will be able to maintain a robust Catholic identity when religious orders have to withdraw their sponsorship altogether.

Any institution as large as the Catholic Church in the United States faces internal challenges as well. As was just noted, the drastic reduction in numbers of priests and religious is both an external and internal factor, and has already been discussed. Permit me to suggest three others that are at play. One is the polarization that is evident in so many of the parishes and dioceses across the country. The polarization that Catholics are experiencing is not something specific to us; the polarization within the Church is fed by polarization in the larger society, evident in electoral politics of the past decade. Other Christian bodies are experiencing polarization as well. Nonetheless, polarization within the Catholic Church has its specific issues and qualities. It is not just between clergy and laity; rather, it cuts through every level and sector of the Church, including the bishops. The Church (as well as the larger U.S. society) has yet to find a way to engage these tensions creatively, that is, without simply deepening divides and creating two, irreconcilable camps. With few exceptions, it is not about good versus bad, but about Catholics on all sides who love the Church deeply, and are passionately committed to fidelity to the Gospel. Effective pastoral leadership will be key to bringing people together.

Second, the Church has yet to address fully the consequences of the sexual abuse scandal. Steps to prevent future abuse have been taken. Many feel that more steps need to be taken for the sake of transparency and accountability, especially as these are understood in U.S. society. The recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI to this country, and his multiple references to it in his speeches, as well as his meeting with a group of victims, underscore the seriousness with which he takes this issue. One of the problems with an event that has been this traumatic—first for the victims and their families, but

also for the wider Church—is that the consequences of those deeds will continue to reveal themselves over at least another decade. As many have already said, this is a special time to re-examine and recommit ourselves as a Church to a deeper fidelity to our faith, and to live out the institutional consequences thereof.

A third issue challenging the Church is perhaps just beginning to show itself, but it cuts across many of the other challenges already mentioned. In the larger arena, in this country and elsewhere, philosophers and sociologists such as Charles Taylor and Robert Bellah are noting some fundamental shifts taking place in secularized societies. The effects of 9/11 and the fear of terrorism, the bumpy ride on the globalization juggernaut that is now being felt also acutely in this country, and the renewed interest in religion are causing some to rethink the secularization paradigm in which modern societies are living. Confidence in the secular project is diminished in some quarters (part of which is no doubt prompting the loud declamations of the so-called “new atheists” such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens). The battle is not so much any more between belief versus unbelief, but rather both believers and nonbelievers struggling with shifts taking place in modernity. Some are calling it “a second modernity” or “another modernity”—at any rate, something beyond the fragmenting “postmodernity” that has dominated discussion in the past twenty years. This is particularly evident among young adults. But it is modifying what U.S. culture defines as “success”, it is partially fuelling the polarizations we are experiencing both within the Church and beyond it, and it is affecting how we transmit Catholic faith and identity. Some of the realizations going into this new kind of modernity is the need to critically engage the pluralism of our environment, to rethink limits of all kinds in light of climate change and potential

ecological collapse, and the importance of some kind of belief system by which one can anchor and navigate one's life. I note this as something now taking shape on the horizon, but as something that may quickly be upon us in a way that will affect significantly what pastoral leadership will mean in a variety of Church settings. Inasmuch as the Catholic Church has never conformed itself completely to modernity (as compared to those Christian bodies that took their initial form during modernity), it may have some advantage in engaging this second or new modernity. Only time will tell if that will be the case.

The Catholic Church in the U.S. in Its Global Context

The Catholic Church in the United States may perceive itself as a large body of believers, but within the context of the worldwide Catholic Church, it is only 6% of the Church's global membership. To be sure, the Catholic Church in the United States is outsized in its power, thanks to its wealth, its location in the most politically powerful country on the planet, and present in many countries through some of its institutions as such Catholic Relief Services, one of the largest non-government relief and development agencies in the world. The country's cultural influence through the globalization of its own culture in consumption and entertainment colors the meaning of all U.S. institutions in the eyes of those in other countries. Its multicultural population mirrors too what is happening in other countries around the world as migration continues. According to the United Nations' statistics, one out of every thirty-five people in the world today is in migration.

As we ponder the future forms of pastoral leadership for our own country, it is worthwhile to note something of conditions in other parts of the world where there are significant numbers of Catholics. This helps put our own situation in perspective.

In the United States, it is estimated that there are now about 3000 Catholics for every active priest. In Latin America, the ratio is about 7000 to 1. Latin America has always had a shortage of sufficient priests to meet the pastoral needs of its Catholic population; at times in some areas, there have been no priests at all for a long period of time. Before lay ecclesial ministry was taking shape in the United States, most Latin American countries had networks of catechists, and “delegates of the Word.” The Small Christian Community movement, begun in Latin America, has had worldwide influence as another way that Catholics might come together in faith. At the same time, Pentecostal forms of Christianity have made significant inroads in Latin America—so much so that in Brazil, for example, the percentage of the country’s Christians who are Catholics has dropped from 85% to 65% in a little over two decades.

Africa has seen explosive growth of Christianity, from about 10 million Christians in 1900 to 350 million in 2000. The Catholic Church there has a network of catechists as well, and Small Christian Communities well developed in some countries. More recently, there has been a steep increase in the number of priests and religious—not yet enough to provide pastoral leadership at the ratios North America once enjoyed, but sufficient to export parish priests and missionaries to many countries, including the United States.

Europe, the heartland for Western Christianity, has been the hardest hit by secularization. Church attendance is below 15% in most countries, and the number of those seeking ordination or taking religious vows is at a lower level than even North America in most countries. Even Ireland, once the source of priests for so many other countries, ordained fewer than ten priests in the entire country in 2007. Poland, until

quite recently with a surplus of clergy, now has 50% fewer young men in their seminaries than they did in 1989. Parts of Europe such as Germany and Austria have highly developed networks of lay ministry, but the drastic cutting of state funding (through decline of revenues in the church tax) threatens the continuance of these ministries.

This brief glance at three parts of the world that have large Catholic populations helps situate the current state of affairs in the United States. It is now time to turn to the results of the six areas of study in the Emerging Models Project. In each instance, I will recall some of the significant statistics that these studies yielded, present some of the leading recommendations that emerged, and add a few comments about what these might mean for next steps in studying pastoral leadership.

Pastoring Multiple Parishes

Today, between 35% and 40% of all Catholic parishes in the United States share their pastor with at least one other parish. This may require “twinning” two parishes, or clustering as many as five parishes. It has led also to the merging and closing of parishes, a stressful situation for parishioners and pastors combined. This situation is having a significant impact on how ministry is carried out in parishes, as well as how parish councils and other bodies function. It has a profound impact on the priests who are serving as parish pastors, since they must spend more time in travel (especially in rural areas), and find themselves more involved with the administration of their parishes than in building bonds with their parishioners. It is a potentially negative factor for recruiting candidates for the diocesan priesthood.

Two-thirds of the dioceses in the United States have more parishes than priests. At the same time, the situation is happening now so rapidly that adequate preparation for the

transition to pastoring multiple parishes is not possible. Studies show that only 4% of dioceses have training programs for this; and only 13% have written policies to give these transitions.

Four recurring recommendations came out of the deliberations at the Summit from the many that were made. These were:

- More attention has to be given to planning for twinning, clustering, merging and closing of parishes.
- More resources must be devoted to preparing parishes for and assisting parishes through these transitions.
- Better training programs need to be developed for parish leaders—not only priests by parish councils and other parish leaders—to help guide parishes through these transitions.
- Research needs to begin into what all these changes mean for what constitutes a “parish” in this country.

There are at this point no common patterns developing across the country for a phenomenon that will be touching almost every diocese, so the intent of these recommendations is clear. A word might be said about rethinking “parish.” The parish system did not become universal in the Catholic Church until it was mandated by the Council of Trent as a means of reform. Prior to that, religious and pastoral needs were met in a number of ways, through the monasteries and by the mendicant orders and lay associations that arose with the rebirth of the cities in Europe in the twelfth century. Today, in urban areas of the country, Catholics already will often visit different parishes until they find one that most suits their tastes and needs. What “parish” will mean in the

future will affect how Catholics gain the primary identification that shapes their sense of being Catholic. This will have an impact on the quality and level of loyalty of Catholics to their Church.

Parish Life Coordinators and Sacramental Ministers

This second study of the Project investigated how dioceses are implementing the provisions of Canon 517.2, which permits installing Parish Life Coordinators who, along with a sacramental minister, see to the day-to-day parish life and pastoral needs of the People of God. As of 2004, 616 parishes in 110 dioceses had Parish Life Coordinators. The implementation of this Canon has been in effect now for twenty years in this country. Six in ten of these Coordinators are women. In its initial stages, 42% were religious women, 25% were deacons, and the remaining 33% were lay. The number of religious women in this position as declines as fewer have been available. Culturally diverse parishes are more likely to be served in this way than culturally homogeneous ones.

Three recommendations were especially salient among the many proposed:

- There needs to be a greater agreement on what these Coordinators are called (currently 36 different titles are in use across the country), and clearer definition of their roles.
- There needs to be more adequate formation for all involved: Coordinators, sacramental ministers, pastors, other lay ecclesial ministers, and the people served.
- There should be better communication and circulation of what people are finding as best practices in this area.

The findings of this study need to be linked with the study on Pastoring Multiple Parishes and the Best Practices Study (discussed below). The plethora of different designations and role descriptions is clearly something that should be more common across the country. As an example of the latter, at this point in two-thirds of the parishes operating under this Canon, it is the task of the Coordinator to find a sacramental minister. Here is one of the areas where gender issues need to be attended to at the neuralgic intersection of gender and leadership in our Church. There is also a cultural and racial issue involved, inasmuch as culturally diverse parishes are more likely to have pastoral leadership guided by this Canon, and 90% of all lay ecclesial ministers in the Church today are of European descent. An important point raised in the study but not articulated so clearly in the recommendations is what is happening to the vocation of the deacon as more and more deacons are called to be Parish Life Coordinators. This bears further reflection.

Young Adults: The Next Generation of Parish Leadership

Key to emerging pastoral leadership is the generation coming of age as the next pastoral leaders. There appears to be a higher interest in Church service among this age cohort than among the previous two generations. The question often is how to reach them, and how to get them involved. Larger questions about transmitting the faith to succeeding generations, mentioned earlier, figure largely here as well. Three of the most agreed upon recommendations were:

- Better tools are needed for communication and outreach to a generation that has grown up with information technology.
- Recruitment of young adults for lay ministry must be part of the “Vocation Plan” of every diocese.

- Systems of personal and financial support are needed for education, formation, and internships.

These recommendations may appear more technical than of a foundational nature to rethinking young adults in the Church's ministry. No doubt some attention will need to be paid to providing a vision that can be presented to young adults that is attractive, but also true to the realities of pastoral ministry. Besides personal and financial support, thought needs to be given to mentoring young adults into this ministry, since there will not be large cohorts going through formation for this together.

Implications of the Emerging Models Studies for Human Resources

The shifts in who will be involved in pastoral leadership have already raised large questions about the networks of support needs for those who are ministering. The language, policies, and practices of "Human Resources" is now as much part of the Church as it is of the rest of society. Three recommendations gained a strong consensus in the deliberations during the Summit:

- Better formation and pastoral support must be given to all personnel involved in parish leadership.
- There needs to be integral and integrated Human Resource management systems diocesan-wide.
- There needs to be greater recruitment efforts so that personnel reflect the cultural diversity of our Church

Human Resources management and support within the Church intersects with the same systems in the larger civil society. Not only must the demands of justice and conformity with Catholic Social Teaching be part of management policy and practice, policies must

conform to civil society as well. In a Church where for so long lay involvement meant volunteering and working without pay, attitudes have to change as well as the policies that protect and support personnel. At the same time, working in the parish is more than a job; we need to develop a theology and a spirituality of vocation for all the personnel involved, whether that be for those who are performing identifiably “pastoral” work, or for those who are providing the technical and administrative support that makes pastoral activity possible.

Implications of the Emerging Multicultural Diversity for Pastoral Leadership

That the Church is becoming an increasingly multicultural body has become a commonplace that falls easily from our lips. Engaging the implications of this reality, however, has been slower in coming. Three of perhaps the most urgent recommendations that arose from the many at the Summit were:

- Foreign priests being imported into dioceses must not only be acculturated into the dominant or mainstream culture, but must be prepared to deal with the diversity of the entire Catholic population.
- Formation in diversity is urgent for all people in pastoral leadership.
- Formation in diversity should become a constituent part of all programs of faith formation.

“Dealing with diversity” has meant up to now assuring representation of cultural diversity in groups and bodies of pastoral leadership, and finding ways to recognize the gifts people bring in their diversity. While this is a good start, it needs to go further, as students of multicultural living in this country and in other parts of the world are saying: there must be genuine and sustained engagement for recognition of diversity to be more

than rhetoric. At the first level of going further is more adequate training in intercultural communication, so that people learn the skills of communicating and acting together across cultural boundaries. And then there must be a willingness of both the dominant group and the various other groups to accommodate ways of living and acting into a common pattern. An example might be this very Project: what are the implicit concepts of leadership that underpin the studies, and what are the cultural assumptions of the decision-making processes they imply? Many of the groups entering this country and our Church at this time have significantly different cultural assumptions about how leadership is exercised, how community is understood, how or even whether rational, abstract planning is undertaken. We are in areas here that our Church is aware of in some fashion but has still yet to act upon. Some of these pathways are new for everyone in our society, even if it historically has been one of immigration.

Best Practices of Parish Leadership

In an evolving situation such as is pastoral leadership in our Church, it becomes important to identify scenarios where particularly effective pastoral leadership is being carried out, as well as the supporting structures that enable that to happen. Seeking out “best practices” is a technique that is used in a wide range of disciplines and organizations to help chart what will be the most effective ways to meet changing situations. Two recommendations that received strong support in the deliberations were:

- Developing a culture of accountability through regular review of all personnel.
- A stronger program of forming all those involved in pastoral leadership into patterns of collaboration.

Not mentioned in the recommendations—perhaps because it was assumed, given its prominence in the results of the research—was the “best practice” of the parish as a “welcoming Eucharistic Community.” We may take this for granted as the best of our best practices, but what has been presented elsewhere in the research from this Project is that our parishes as Eucharistic communities may be becoming imperiled by the great decline in the number of priests.

Implications and Actions for Next Steps

This Summit has been a remarkable and an historical event. It has yielded valuable reflections and recommendations for the emerging models of pastoral leadership in this country. The natural and necessary question then arises about where to go next. The recommendations just presented offer some very specific tasks and future project that might be undertaken. In this concluding section, I wish to step back a bit from the specific recommendations that have been proposed and ask some bigger questions about the social and theological context in which these recommendations might be carried out. This will come under three, brief headings: an affirmation, a question, and some suggestions for areas to address.

First, an affirmation: *We are a Church marked by commitment, energy, and creativity.*

That 1300 people would come for three days together from all levels of the Church—bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay women and men—to ponder together the future of pastoral leadership; that they committed themselves to reading sometimes lengthy research reports in advance; that they would listen to one another and develop recommendations for the future in such great numbers—all of this bespeaks a level of commitment to and love for the Church that is overwhelming to experience. The energy

that propels so many people to volunteer for Church work, and has led some 31,000 to train as lay ecclesial ministers, and another 16,000 to become deacons shows how much people are willing to give for the sake of a life of faith. And the creativity reported in the pastoral leadership solutions people are finding across the country to these new situations is nothing short of amazing. To be sure, many of these solutions are reactive to the problems, but they show nonetheless emerging “best practices” that can be of great benefit to others elsewhere.

What we have in all of this, I would submit, is a clear will to address the challenges ahead and the commitment to do so.

Second, a question: *How will the Church sustain this commitment and creativity?*

The question of sustainability of all this energy needs to be raised if we are to meet the challenges ahead. First of importance will be our capacity to deepen our faith and to transmit that faith to the next generation. There are already some troubling signs coming from studies of young Catholics that need to be addressed. At the same time, there is an unusually high level of interest among young adults in becoming pastoral leaders.

A certain level of institutionalization of this energy will be necessary if it is to be carried on beyond those who felt the first excitement. Institutionalization does not necessarily entail bureaucratization, but rather protecting and channeling those energies so that they are not dissipated along the way. Some of this will involve change that is more than reactive to the moment but genuinely adaptive (as Theresa Monroe, citing Ronald Heifetz reminded us yesterday). Adaptive change is fundamental change that is more than a different technique; it will involve risk, but also loss as well as gain. It requires a certain discipline to make these shifts.

Third, some suggested responses. I have three of these.

First, *greater attention to collaboration and communication.* One thing that will make both collaboration and communication possible is a network of effective intermediate structures in our society and in our Church. Intermediate structures are those groups and associations that stand between national leadership and the grassroots where most people live. They become mediators through which national or nation-wide policies may be implemented, but also a channel through which the grassroots can speak its concerns to those on top. In the history of the Church, religious orders and lay associations have performed this intermediate role between the hierarchy and the lay faithful.

The Internet and a continuing individualization of our society have made it hard for intermediate structures to survive. One first gets the impression that they are no longer needed because there is direct access. As a result, many voluntary associations and national organizations have found it difficult to survive, as the nation increasingly goes “bowling alone,” to borrow Robert Putnam’s description of U.S. society a few years back.

What the six national organizations that collaborated in the Emerging Models Project have been able to do in researching the current state of pastoral leadership in this country, and bringing all of that together into this Ministry Summit, is to show how important well-coordinated intermediate structures can be for the sake of the common good. In the volatile and uncertain future of pastoral leadership in this country, because of all the external and internal pressures upon it, I urge these organizations to continue to work together to make the collaboration and communication we will need to see our way through changes needed for effective leadership in our Church in the coming years. This

collaboration can be a kind of paradigm of how to address common problems that have so many different and difficult angles to be addressed.

Second, *we need a deeper theology and spirituality of communion*. As people of faith, we do not believe that the solutions we seek are to be found only at the technical level. We need to be grounded in a common theology and spirituality that both motivates us into action and gives us a place to return to recommit and to reinvigorate ourselves.

The theology of the Church that has been proposed by the Holy Father and the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops as authentically interpreting the teaching on the nature of the Church at the Second Vatican Council is a theology of communion. It finds its source in the communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and in Christ's love for the Church. As a vision of the Church, it is extremely rich and has aspects still waiting to be plumbed. It is supremely suited for the challenge of emerging forms of pastoral leadership.

There is a danger, however, in using our commitment to communion as a way of stopping difficult conversations, and sidestepping potentially divisive issues. Invoking communion should not create a culture of silence when we need to speak, in however halting and exploratory a manner. In a Church that embraces its cultural diversity, in a Church that must help its members live in a pluralistic society, it becomes important to find a way that allows difference of opinion and even constructive disagreement to take place without thinking that will immediately break our communion. Our failure so far to deal with the polarizations we experience in our Church is indicative that we have not yet been able to give voice to a theology of communion that provides a safe and respectful space for such disagreement. The late Pope John Paul II alluded to this, I believe, in *Novo millennio ineunte* (no. 43) in his emphasis on a spirituality of communion, perhaps

anticipating that this will necessarily be part of living out communion in the twenty-first century.

Our formation in communion must carry with it a spirituality of communion—a spirituality and set of disciplined practices broad enough to permit us to rejoice in the communion that was experienced in Pentecost, but also to take us through difficult times, as alluded to in Paul’s admonition in Second Corinthians (4:7-12): we carry these treasures of faith in earthen vessels: that we may feel troubled on every side, even persecuted and pressed down, but we do not give up hope. We bear in our bodies in a mysterious way the death of the Lord, so that His life might be more manifest to all.

This leads to my second and final suggestion. It might be called the technical face of a theology and spirituality of communion. This involves building an institutional culture of collaboration and communication that involves spiritual and technical formation for collaboration, growing in processes of accountability, recognizing the necessity of planning as part of our stewardship, continuing to build relationships, and increasing our capacity to be honest and ask the hard questions when they are needed. Only when anchored in a full sense of communion as I have just tried to sketch can such a culture of collaboration and communication be an integral part of our experience of Church. And we will need such a culture as a framework and support to face the important challenges that lie ahead of us in pastoral leadership in faith and hope and, above all, love for Christ and His Church.