

MINISTERING TOGETHER

Collaboration Is Vital in Building the Church as a Communion

BY BISHOP JOSEPH
M. SULLIVAN

This article is a progress report on Phase IV of *New Covenant's* "Ministering Together." The *New Covenant* Steering Committee, which is developing Phase IV, is composed of leaders recruited from major ministries of the Catholic Church in health care, social services, education, dioceses, and parishes. The 18 committee members come from the ranks of religious congregations, diocesan clergy, parish laity, national organizations, the episcopal conference, and diocesan staffs.

One of the unique blessings in the Catholic Church is the experience of convening people, many of whom have never met before, and seeing how quickly they bond. There is implicit trust, a respect for one another, a generosity in sharing, and a willingness to listen and understand the variety of experiences and different points of view. This is the experience of the Steering Committee for Phase IV. The Steering Committee is charged with the task of broadening the collaborative efforts of the church's ministries beyond health and social services to include education and parochial ministry. The health and social service ministries have collaborated at the national level through the efforts of the Catholic Health Association (CHA) and Catholic Charities USA. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has worked closely with both these organizations on public policy issues. The National Coalition on

Catholic Health Care Ministry has been an effective forum for dialogue among the Leadership Conference of Women Religious,

the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, CHA, and Catholic Charities. It is to this coalition of ministry leaders that the *New Covenant* Steering Committee will report and make recommendations.

The Steering Committee met in New Orleans in October 2001, realized the daunting challenge of its charge, and set about discussing the essential nature of the challenge. We realized that Phase IV was to incarnate the vision of *New Covenant*, which would give expression to ministerial collaboration at the local level of the church, the diocese, and the parish. We recognized the great diversity of the church across the country—its demographic differences, varieties of institutional presence, regional geographics, material resources, clerical and religious personnel, lay participation, organizational structures, and episcopal leadership. We instinctively knew that we could jump-start only a limited number of local initiatives in the 12- to 18-month time frame we had to work in. Our energies would have to be focused on communication of the vision. We needed to choose a strategic direction that would focus our efforts—"leverage the gifts and talents of all leaders in ministry."

We concluded that Phase IV would embrace the other *New Covenant* strategic directions: transforming existing structures, uniting in a common message on public policies, and connecting church collaborative ministries with other community organizations of good will. It was necessary for us

Phase IV

Jane Stenson, director of community services of Catholic Charities USA, describes *New Covenant: Phase IV*, on p. 49.

Bishop Sullivan is auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, NY.



to identify people with leadership capacity and interest who would undertake the role of initiating collaboration at the diocesan level. We committed ourselves to assume local leadership in our own local dioceses or organizations. We would try to model for others what we expected of them. We organized ourselves into four subgroups:

- **Communications** This group will develop a comprehensive media/communications plan, including a multimedia presentation, to explain the *New Covenant* vision and invite participation.

- **Best Practices** This group is collecting and will share illustrative stories about local collaboration.

- **Leaders/Champions** This group will identify, recognize, and connect current "champions" of collaborative ministry.

- **Technical Assistance** This group will compile and develop selected technical resources to assist in developing new or strengthening existing *New Covenant* efforts.

Representing the Steering Committee, I will report on our work to the historic joint meeting of CHA and Catholic Charities in Chicago. Toward this end, Catholic Charities and CHA have commissioned a study of existing collaborative ministerial efforts across the country. Stories of collaboration will provide encouragement for others to launch local collaborative initiatives enabling them to discover the elements of successful efforts as well as to learn from the errors of failed undertakings. These stories of collaboration across traditional ministerial boundaries have the potential for creating networks within states and regions and across the nation. Ecclesial collaboration is more the work of risk-takers, people willing to take the initiative, who have faith in God, and whose hope sustains them as they hurdle inevitable barriers. Collaboration, however, should not be solely dependent on entrepreneurs who are primarily interested in outcomes and results. It is the work of design, of pastoral planning, of an understanding of the church as a community. It rests on the foundation of the human person as a social being—a member of an assembly, a church that sees itself as a mystical body in which all the parts have a role to play, in which each is essential to the health of the whole. No one is left out. The church is inclusive and seeks active participation of all.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as a vision for humankind. It would be a Kingdom

that gives priority to the poor, the sick, the disabled, and the oppressed. Jesus came especially for those who needed a physician, but his will was that *all* would be saved. He revealed a God who loved us, a God who—far from being removed from us—identified with us by becoming one with us. The church is the herald of this Kingdom. It seeks by the integrity of its life to be a sign and credible witness to the reign of God.

The *New Covenant* emphasizes one aspect of the church's mystery, the Church as a healing community. As healer, the church is a reconciling community: It reaches out to touch the whole person to restore the individual to a healthy relationship with God and with the community of family, society, and the faithful. The church's mission goes beyond the individual to embrace the broader community, to influence the social order, to bring about right relationships between individuals and the structures of society. It does not dichotomize individual well-being, on one hand, and societal welfare, on the other. These are inter-related and can influence each other positively or negatively. The church cannot focus solely on individual need or condition, as if one's health or sickness was due only to one's own behavior. The church realizes that it has a responsibility to address the fundamental arrangement in society, the public laws and regulations, corporate policies and practices. The church cannot be content with addressing solely the individual's health; it must also analyze society's health. This is the reason that personal care and service, although essential, must not be separated from social action. The church must be a provider of direct service to the person but must also advocate change in social structures that are unjust and contribute to the oppression of individuals. Personal care and

Building & Supporting Strong Communities

Catholic Charities served 902,489 people in 2000

- Summer camps for children, elderly, and disabled
- Sports programs
- Health and employment fairs
- Services to immigrants (legal status, citizenship)
- Vouchers for housing
- Home repair
- Home loan assistance
- Housing search
- Subsidized home purchase
- Building material banks
- Rental assistance
- Refugee resettlement
- ESL classes
- Job development and training
- Life skills and cultural adaptation education
- Non-treatment-related permanent housing sites for individuals and families



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service ground the church in the reality of individual lives, deepening its compassion for people and making passionate its advocacy to bring about social change where it is needed.

THE CHURCH'S ROLE

The church has a unique and special role in constructing a healthy society. The church is a *communio*. A communion is more than a mere community. It cannot be understood in merely sociological or psychological terms. Its bonds are spiritual because they arise from the Holy Spirit, who is poured forth in all the members. The church may, therefore, be described as a community in which the members are brought together into supernatural relationships by their reciprocal membership in the Body of Christ.

Our Holy Father, John Paul II, understands the church in personalist terms. He favors the *communio* model of the church that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. It is a living reality constituted by persons who come to themselves by discovering and affirming their own identity. It is a communion of persons, a community of disciples. The community is not merely human fellowship. It is humanity brought into a higher and more consciously experienced union with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, or rather through the inhabitation of the three divine persons. The reality of the church as communion is the integrating aspect, indeed the content of the mystery, or rather the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. The supreme model for the church is the divine Trinity, a *communio personarum*.

John Paul II, in speaking of the church as a people, a family, or a household, intends to accent the personal relationship by which it is constituted. The church is a special kind of family because the members are bound together by a supernatural love that is poured into the hearts of the members by God. They love one another with a love that originates in the Holy Trinity.

In his remarkable letter, *Novo Millennio Inuente* (The Beginning of the New Millennium), the pope states that we enter a new stage in the church's journey. It is a time to look to the future, to put into practice resolutions and guidelines for action. He invites all the individual churches to undertake an assessment of their fervor and find fresh enthusiasm for their pastoral and spiritual responsibilities. Holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task. "Holiness," the pope says, "is a message that convinces without the need for

words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ." It is the foundation of pastoral planning.

This letter is amazing for its emphasis on the need for pastoral planning. In my experience, pastoral planning has been suspect in the church, perhaps because planners, being rationalists, are reluctant to rely on the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father says pastoral planning is not possible alone, but must allow grace to take us by the hand. Placing pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. To ask, "Do you wish to receive baptism?" means "Do you wish to become holy?" The pope instructs us to make Christian communities genuine schools of prayer. Education in prayer, especially liturgical prayer, is a key point of all pastoral planning. To nourish ourselves on the word of God in order to be servants of the Word is the work of evangelization. This is a priority of the church at the dawn of the new millennium.

There has to be planning on the part of both the universal church and the particular churches. Communion embodies and reveals the very essence and mystery of the church. It is in building this communion of love that the church appears as sacrament, as a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and the unity of the human race.

The Holy Father emphasizes the need to promote a spirituality of communion before making practical plans. This requires formation and training. A spirituality of communion indicates, above all, the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body. This makes us able to share their joys and their sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, and to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God, and also as a gift for us. It means knowing how to make room for brothers and sisters, bearing each other's burdens, and resisting those selfish temptations that constantly beset us and provoke competition, coercion, distrust, and jealousy.

I believe that *Novo Millennio Inuente* provides a marvelous ecclesiology for the work of the *New Covenant*. It promotes a concept of the church as a communion, reflective of the life of the Triune God, a body of believers energized by the power

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of the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. It proclaims a vision of who we are and what we are to become. It confirms the need for pastoral planning, but planning open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It calls for a spirituality of community, which demands education and training. It is a life-giving spirituality that binds the church's members in a deep and intimate union, willing to bear each other's burdens in imitation of Christ. It is a spirituality that is able to stand up to opposition, to be patient in adversity, to be forgiving of adversaries.

New Covenant's "Ministering Together" is a wonderful companion piece to *Novo Millennio Inuente*. Its collaborative process finds a theological base for its strategic pastoral directions. *Novo Millennio Inuente* provides profound insights into the mystery of the church as a communion of disciples. It shapes our vision of what we are trying to achieve and where the source of energy is to help us. We discover from these two documents that the particular churches are in union with the mind of the universal church. As the Steering Committee of Phase IV of *New Covenant*, we look forward with hope and trust in the Triune God that we can assist the church in becoming a sacrament of healing for all of God's people. We look forward to discovering local leaders, bishops, pastors, religious, and laity who are interested in integrating the ministries of the church so that it will become a vital communion of disciples in creating communities of compassion and justice. □

THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

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hospitals? Do Catholic hospitals remain a place in which nurses, physicians, and staff care about the spiritual welfare of patients as well as their physical welfare? Or is this only the responsibility of the hospital chaplain? Do the lay men and women who have replaced women religious as administrators in many Catholic hospitals bring to their work the same sense of mission that most sisters did? There is no reason why they should not. If they do not, can they still claim to be working on behalf of a Catholic hospital?

Today we hear much talk of strategic planning, efficiency, and other business matters. The corporate model has taken over conversation in the hospital boardroom. This is necessary to some degree, of course, but such a model cannot define the Catholic hospital. Having adapted themselves to the emergence of modern medicine, advances in the training of nurses, and new technologies, Catholic hospitals now have to adapt to "bottom line" management. But the Gospel values I have mentioned here—charity and justice—must continue to shape the hospital's mission.

These values give the Catholic hospital an identity that sets it apart from other health care institutions.

Our tradition as Catholics, indeed as Christians, encourages us to build a society rooted in charity and justice. In many respects, this has been the major contribution of Catholics to the shaping of American society. By promoting and living the virtues of charity and justice, Catholics have helped to make this nation a more decent society, one in which the needs and rights of all people are respected. But we must not cease our work. We must continue to join together the two streams of charity and justice. Once we achieve this in our institutions and in our lives, then we will unleash a powerful force for change in our society. We will be able

to transform a great society into a good society. □

NOTES

1. Robert N. Bellah, et al., *The Good Society*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York City, 1991.
2. Quoted in Maureen Fitzgerald, "Irish Catholic Nuns and the Development of New York City's Welfare System, 1840," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1992), p. 314.
3. Quoted in Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and Catholic Germans, 1815-1865*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1975, p. 33.
4. Quoted in Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, Oxford University Press, New York City, 1992, p. 266.
5. See Anna L. Specht, "Community and Care: The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and Their Hospitals, 1868-1930," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2001), p. 46.
6. Quoted in Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*, Doubleday and Co., New York City, 1985, p. 328.
7. Charles B. Spahr, *An Essay on the Present Distribution of Wealth in the U.S.*, Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1896, pp. 128-129; Benjamin Schwarz, "American Inequality: Its History and Scary Future," *New York Times*, December 19, 1995, op-ed.
8. Quoted in Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, p. 341.
9. Quoted in Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, p. 344.
10. Quoted in Robert Brooke Clements, "The Commonwealth, 1924-38: The Williams-Shuster Years," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1972), p. 3.
11. *Justice in the World*, Synod of Bishops 1971, in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Renewing the Earth: Catholic Documents on Peace, Justice and Liberation*, Doubleday and Co., 1977, New York City, p. 398.
12. Keith Bradsher, "Gap in Wealth in U.S. Called Widest in West," *New York Times*, April 17, 1995, p. A1.
13. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1986.
14. Quoted in Bellah, et al., p. 13.