

A Book Offers Guidance for Those Seeking a Career in Lay Leadership



BY BRIAN YANOFCHICK

Mr. Yanofchick is senior director, mission and leadership development, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

Catholic health systems across the country are feeling the urgency of establishing processes to ensure the development of competent lay ministry leaders for the future. Lay leadership in Catholic health care emerged in a new way in the 1970s as vowed religious began to transfer most of their operational roles to lay administrators. As the number of religious continues to diminish, it is clear that a next phase of transition is the significant growth in the number of lay leaders who exercise sponsorship and governance roles.

These leaders must be prepared to act in the stead of vowed religious. They must be committed to Catholic health care as a ministry and understand the difference that membership in a ministry makes in their day-to-day work. "The need for this urgent and many-sided apostolate is shown by the manifest action of the Holy Spirit moving laypeople today to a deeper and deeper awareness of their responsibility and urging them on everywhere to the service of Christ and the Church."¹ This statement from the Second Vatican Council's "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People," published in 1965, seems to have special meaning today in the context of the Catholic health ministry.

A book that could help us to meet this challenge is *Called & Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders*, edited by Zeni Fox and Sr. Regina Bechtle, SC.² The book consists of a series of articles by Catholic leaders and thinkers who represent the variety of church ministries uniquely challenged by the transition from religious to lay leadership. These include parish and diocesan ministries, health care, and education.

Called & Chosen is a helpful resource in that its contributors cover a range of issues—such as cultural transformation and the exercise of authority—common to these various ministries. They offer specific insights concerning the key ministries of education and health care, situating

them in the context of the church's larger ministry.

Throughout the book, the focus is on the challenge of developing a spirituality that gives "vision" to lay leaders, creating a foundation upon which they will build their place within the church's ministry. The editors note that "Lay leaders . . . need competence, passion, and ability to communicate the Christian vision within and beyond their institutions." This positive vision is reflected in the insights of many of the contributors. However, it is balanced by another important insight concerning many current lay leaders. Such leaders seem to believe that their present spirituality will, with little or no ongoing effort to nurture and deepen that spirituality, carry them through the challenges they face as institutional leaders. The book's contributors view this belief as overly optimistic.

This second insight affirms the need for an ongoing process of spiritual development that may find support from many sources, including the parish community and the individual's personal commitment. Educational and formational programs, as well as events now being developed, are a good start. But they may not be enough in the long run if they do not help to develop habits of reflection that are part of the fabric of each leader's life. The reader will draw from this book the clear sense that a new competency in spiritually driven leadership must be defined and developed as a criterion for candidate selection. Current leaders who read the book will be challenged to assess their spiritual base for the work they do.

It is for this reason that *Called & Chosen* has been selected as one of the preparatory readings for those system leaders who participate in CHA's annual Ecclesiology and Spiritual Renewal Program in Rome. The book fits well into the program's design to offer participants the "big picture" of the church's ministry while calling for

a deeper spiritual reflection on and commitment to that ministry. Those who take time with this book will find themselves well-prepared to engage in the program's dialogue concerning the roots of our shared ministry and their own role in nurturing its growth.

It is clear that many of the book's contributors have read each other's work, because they make helpful cross-references to other articles. This cross referral creates a nice matrix of thought that encourages the reader to find and reflect further on the points the writers make.

The footnotes to each of *Called & Chosen's* articles constitute a treasure of additional resources on lay leadership development. Readers who want to learn more about leadership development issues, or who are working to develop programs of their own, will find in this book many recommendations concerning other books and articles on the topics explored here.

Readers who are involved directly in the selection of lay leaders may find the book a very helpful resource for developing a framework with which to evaluate potential candidates. Such readers will certainly realize that they need a set of selection criteria that goes far beyond the usual exploration of operational competencies and leadership styles. Most of us are familiar with the saying "Hire for talent, train for skill." When read with human resources in mind, *Called & Chosen* offers some ways to identify the "talent"—or, better, the "heart"—that a candidate brings to spiritually driven leadership in the health care ministry.

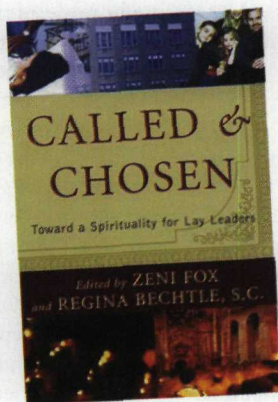
I do offer one word of caution: *Called & Chosen* presumes a level of familiarity with theologi-

cal and ministerial language that may be daunting for people just beginning to explore the challenge of lay leadership spirituality. The book may be best used in the context of a group or mentoring relationship, because dialogue will help readers

benefit more fully from the writers' insights. At the end of each article, the writer offers a short set of reflection questions that constitute a helpful starting point for personal reflection and sharing with others.

Sponsors, mission leaders, human resources directors, pastoral care directors, and leadership development facilitators will find rich challenges in this book as they ponder ways to enhance the "spiritual competency" of their organizations' ministries. Anyone in, or considering, a leadership role in the Catholic health ministry will find *Called & Chosen* a resource that

offers context and guideposts for the journey toward a more spiritually rooted leadership style.



NOTES

1. "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People," in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, St. Paul Editions, Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, 1988, p. 767.
2. Zeni Fox and Regina Bechtle, eds., *Called & Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2005.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, March-April 2007
Copyright © 2007 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
