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forward well into this new millennium. We can show our gratitude for the modern insights of social science by using them wisely to build for that future.

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Married in Ministry

Theological and Spiritual Considerations

Kathleen A. Cahalan

The author explores the relationship between marriage and ministry, and proposes ways to improve the theological and spiritual self-understanding of the married lay minister. She suggests that elements of religious life, such as community, charism, vows, and spiritual disciplines, may also have relevance for the life of married ministers.

The United States Roman Catholic community has witnessed a dramatic change among its pastoral leaders since the Second Vatican Council. The scenario is well-rehearsed at this point: over the past thirty years the number of presbyters has steadily declined; the number of women in vowed religious life has also drastically fallen; the number of ordained permanent deacons has slowly risen; and the numbers of lay people joining the ranks of professionally trained ministers has grown by leaps and bounds. It is fair to say that the majority of Catholic ministers in the United States are lay people. According to *The Official Catholic Directory* of 2000, 67.5 percent of professional ministers in parishes are lay persons, 30.1 percent are sisters, and 2.3 percent are brothers.

The category, lay minister, or more recently, lay ecclesial minister, is helpful in acknowledging the fact that there are people who minister, who have a vocation and are trained to be pastoral leaders in communities of faith, yet are not ordained. But the term "lay minister" has many drawbacks. It can be understood in oppositional terms, referring to a person who is lay rather than ordained. It conjures up images of second-class status. It does not have a strong biblical

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basis, and has not always had positive expression in the tradition. And, quite significantly, it is not sacramental, since no person is baptized to be a lay person, but rather to be a disciple of Christ. In fact, many lay ministers in the Catholic community have chosen a vowed life of marriage to live out their baptismal call.

The National Pastoral Life Center study of parish lay ministry in 1991 states that 65.4 percent of lay ministers are married, 22.4 percent are single and never married, 2.5 percent widowed, and 9.7 percent divorced or separated (Murnion and Delambo, 26). Comparing these figures with The National Catholic Directory we can conclude that the majority of ministers currently are married, and there is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. It is certainly the case if we include those ministers serving beyond the parish in hospitals, schools, colleges and universities, dioceses, and social service agencies.

Theologians and church leaders have given a great deal of attention over the past twenty years to defining the role and status of the lay minister; yet very little attention has been given to the issue of their married state. Pastoral theology faces a peculiar problem: we have neither a theology of ministry that exists in relationship to marriage, nor do we have a theology of marriage that exists in relationship to ministry. The focus of my essay is on the relationship between marriage and ministry, but it is important to note that attention also needs to be given to the life commitment of the single minister.

My first task is to explore elements of a theology of marriage and a theology of ministry that can inform a theological understanding of the married minister. In order to do this, I will draw out elements of a theology of marriage that can be articulated in a theology of ministry, and, likewise, elements of a theology of ministry that can enrich a theology of marriage. I will also consider the married minister's spiritual life from the perspective of the spiritual traditions of vowed religious life. Vowed religious women and men have served in a variety of church ministries, and have been formed and sustained in ministry by their rule, vows, and spiritual practices. Married ministers can learn much from the experience, spiritual paths, and community life that have supported members of religious communities.

Marriage as Covenant in Community

What elements of a theology of marriage can be identified and drawn upon to support the married minister? It must first be acknowledged that marriage is a sacrament, but it does not confer the power to engage in ministry, at least not in the sense that ordained ministers receive a sacrament designating their role and identity as a minister. Baptism is the sacramental source for ministry, and it is to baptism that both marriage and ministry must look for sacramental expression and identity. Traditionally, there has been a weak link between baptism and

marriage, and theologies of marriage have focused primarily on issues of consent and consummation between two partners. The marriage rite makes little explicit reference to baptism; in fact, according to canon law, two Christians must be baptized in order to be married, but they do not need to be actively faithful, to be living out of their baptismal promises, in order to be married.

The marriage commitment cannot be considered separate from baptism. Marriage, in fact, is a promise made *out of* one's baptismal promises, the promise to live out one's Christian discipleship in love and fidelity with the partner. Marriage entails an "intimate partnership of marital life and love," a partnership based on God's covenant with God's people and the promises made by the two people to fidelity and love (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47-48). The hallmark of Christian marriage, then, is a covenant in communion built upon baptismal identity and promises of faith to God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

While many theologies of marriage emphasize the communion between the two partners, it is important to emphasize that the marriage commitment is a commitment *in* community to community: the children possibly borne of the marriage, each spouse's immediate family and extended family, the neighborhood that reared each spouse, the friends and workmates that each spouse has developed over time, and the ecclesial community, both local and universal. In other words, a person never simply marries another person: each marries *into* the other's communities. Each spouse stands in relationship to the other's communities, and will be called to fidelity, love, and service *within* that community.

What most married persons do not know at their wedding is that their commitment to their spouse will entail a journey of discipleship to a wide variety of people: mentoring nieces and nephews; reaching out to siblings; supporting parents when they become ill and grow old; opening their home to the spouse's friends and companions. It is within the context of the multiple communities to which the spouses belong that the life of married baptismal discipleship is lived. In much the same way, a call to ministry requires a commitment *in* and *to* community. Though there is no formal sacramental celebration, lay ministry, also rooted in baptism, is a further expression of and commitment to one's baptismal identity and promises. Ministers, as well as the community, need a covenant to bind them together in faithfulness.

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In addition to baptism and covenantal community, a theology of marriage provides two important elements that can be part of a theology of ministry: fidelity as public witness and the paschal character of marital conversion. Marital commitment demands fidelity; most of the tradition has associated fidelity with sexual monogamy. While sexual fidelity is an important aspect of marriage, it is an *outcome* of a much deeper fidelity that forms the basis of marriage. Marital fidelity grows out of the life of discipleship and forms bonds of intimate friendship between the spouses over time. Sexual intimacy is certainly one expression of this unique friendship, but so is the intimacy of daily life: home-making, child-rearing, and table fellowship. This intimate friendship is truly Christian when it bears fruit through compassionate concern, generative care, and prophetic witness for others in the world. It becomes a truly public form of discipleship.

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Married discipleship and fidelity will be quite public for the married minister. All Christian marriages are to be "public" signs of faithfulness and love, but married ministers, precisely because of their leadership within the community, will "stand out" precisely because of their leadership. In their case, marriage will be seen as both a symbol and a reality of a Christian married life and a Christian ministry. There will be expectations of the minister's marriage, and some expectations may be unfair and unrealistic. Some married ministers and their families may resent the pressure to be "perfect" Christians and desire to retreat into privacy. However, married ministers may be precisely the symbol and reality that the Christian community needs at the present time: not a sign and witness of perfect married love, or idyllic family life, but a sign of marital commitment and ministerial vocation, a life of balanced service, humble self-giving, and wise self-care, modeled after Christ.

Richard Gaillardetz notes that marriage, like all sacraments, is "paschal to the core." Marriage entails a variety of "tests, obstacles, and challenges," and "the inevitable experience of loneliness that misunderstanding, disagreement, or conflict brings" (Gaillardetz, 65). Most married people will admit that marriage is tough: there are interpersonal struggles, emotional adjustments, physical realities, and sexual intimacies to be negotiated, understood, and at times healed. The disappointments and hurts can be so exhausting that couples give up. Marriage, in our culture, has certainly not been able to withstand easily the deaths that are a recognizable part of any Christian journey.

Of course, the paschal character of marriage is a dynamic interplay between the dying and rising of two life experiences. Marriage invites two disciples to a

life of paschal conversion. This is a life lived in daily anticipation of the paschal mystery's formative influence: the rhythms of brokenness and healing, sin and grace, pain and reconciliation, and dying and rising. The paschal conversion becomes the heart and center of love that embraces the two partners in faithful discipleship. This is the witness married ministers can make in the community and world: a holiness forged in dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ.

The paschal character of marriage also exists at the heart of ministry. Ministry is fundamentally a service to the human condition: an embrace of the interpersonal, emotional, physical, and social pain and suffering that is part of every life. Ministers, by their teaching, preaching, pastoral care, presiding, and prophetic witness, guide the community of faith into a deeper understanding of the paschal character of their lives. They not only help people make sense of all the "deaths" they experience, but they provide good news about life that emerges beyond suffering and sin. Married ministers are not called to be *more* Christian than other members of the community, but they are called to vigilant attention to the paschal character of their own lives, and the life of the community, in order to be an ongoing sign and witness to the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

Ministry as Diaconal Charism and Service

What elements of a theology of ministry can be drawn out and identified to support the position of married ministers? Thomas O'Meara's well-known definition of ministry provides several helpful clues: "Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to proclaim, serve, and realize the kingdom of God" (150). O'Meara understands ministry as public acts of service. What distinguishes ministry from Christian discipleship, for him, are the explicit acts of teaching, preaching, and caring, *in the name of* Jesus Christ, about God's Kingdom. Christian ministry, then, is more than a sign. It makes real, tangible, and concrete the mysterious ways of God made known through Christ. The minister's capacities for such public acts come through the Holy Spirit, as charisms for ministry that provide leadership within the ministerial community of faith.

O'Meara highlights St. Paul's understanding of charisms as both individual and communal (53). They are individual in the sense that each person embodies particular gifts and capacities, but they are also social and communal. Ministers cannot be true to their charisms by hiding them or keeping them to themselves. Charisms are to be expressed *in* the community *for the sake of* the community. They are gifts received from the Holy Spirit to be freely given to the community. Charisms are meant to serve God and respond to God's call *in and through* the life of discipleship and service.

Lay people speak of experiencing a vocation or call to ministry. Vocation, like charism, is best understood dialogically: it is the gracious recognition of one's charisms for service in the community, and a response to a community's invitation to share one's gifts in service on behalf of the community. It is only recently that the Church has begun to grapple with the notion of a lay vocation to ministry. Likewise, the Catholic community has only recently embraced marriage as a vocation. The vocation to marriage and family, as described in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 11, entails the nurturing of faith within the household, and witnessing to Christ in the world. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, no. 11, highlights marriage as fundamental to the church's mission. Marriage and the domestic church become signs and witness to Christ in the world. Though this focus on marriage as vocation in the world does not include a careful examination of the charisms for marriage, it is not difficult to imagine that the Holy Spirit grants gifts such as love, public fidelity, intimate friendship, and missionary witness to those who feel called as disciples to married life.

Toward a Theology of Married Ministry

Drawing these two discussions together, then, what does a theology of marriage require to support the notion of married *ministers* serving within the Church? And what does a theology of ministry need to support *married* ministers? A theology of marriage can benefit from ministry's focus on baptism, charism, vocation, and public service; a theology of ministry can benefit from the focus in marriage on covenant in communion, fidelity as a public witness, and paschal conversion. By enlarging both ministry and marriage, we find several common themes to support a theological understanding of married ministers.

Is There a Spiritual Way of Life Unique to Married Ministers?

Ministers throughout the Catholic tradition have developed particular spiritual paths to support their work in ministry. The great spiritual traditions developed out of the particular contexts and demands of ministry. Apostolic orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, created a spiritual way of life to support a communal charism and service in the church and world. Even monastic communities developed rules of spiritual and material disciplines to foster deeper awareness of the presence of God in order to serve the neighbor and stranger in need.

Until the twentieth century, ministry in the Catholic community was primarily conducted by ordained men, who were either diocesan priests or members of religious orders, and vowed religious women and men, who committed themselves to a particular community's way of life that supported ministries such as teach-

ing, health care, and social service. In the United States religious women, until quite recently, made up the majority of Catholic ministers serving in parishes, schools, and hospitals. The religious community provided spiritual and theological formation that gave content, structure, and pattern to a spiritual life in community. Though the forms of the spiritual life vary among different religious communities, there is an important commonality: the community's spiritual way of life is the basis, the source, and the foundation for each member's ministry.

Married ministers do not have a religious community to join, or a spiritual tradition that is particular to their commitment as married people and to their charism and vocation in ministry. They are not Jesuits, or Franciscans, or Benedictines. Even as oblates or associates of one of these communities, they have yet to forge a spiritual way of life particular to their context as married ministers in the church. But lay ministers have much in common with religious women and men, and it is in the practices of religious life that some of the key elements for a spiritual way of life for married ministers might be found. Several dimensions of religious community life seem important for married ministers to consider. There is a sacramental character to the call of ministry, which is embodied in the way of life embraced by the community. The demands of ministry can only be sustained within a fellowship of other ministers. Ministers require an intentional, committed spiritual life in order to enter into the paschal mystery in the fullest possible way so that they can bear witness to this reality among the people they serve.

There are elements from the great traditions that can no doubt be included in the married minister's spiritual path, but the spiritual way of life of married ministers will be distinct, just as these traditions defined distinct ways according to their own context. In other words, married ministers will not replicate the institutional patterns of religious communities, but will find a way true to their life commitment as married people. I am not claiming to know precisely what this way of life for married ministers will be. They will discern that for themselves, but religious communities can provide some of the markers to consider in shaping a spiritual way of life needed to sustain married ministers.

Traditionally, religious communities have lived according to a rule; they have made vows and promises; and they have practices of prayer and spiritual discipline. The unique character of each religious community comes from its charism, its gift for service, and its narrative or story of how it came to serve particular

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needs in a particular community in a particular time and place. Will married ministers develop communities with a particular charism and form of ministry, bound together by a rule, vows, and spiritual disciplines?

A rule of life for a community of married ministers might consist of vows to both a common life and to the ministry. Obviously, couples have made public vows in marriage, but there is little, at this point, that asks them to make vows to their vocation as ministers. There is encouragement at the diocesan and parish level to commission lay ministers, and that is an important public sign and witness for the local community. But perhaps there is something more needed, both a public sign and commitment to a particular way of life that will sustain ministry.

What kind of vows might married ministers make? They already have their baptismal vows and their married vows—what would define their common life as ministers? Traditionally, religious communities have made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Married ministers might find corollaries to the traditional religious vows. Poverty has been a sign of giving all to Christ, particularly in the renunciation of material goods. Certainly the Christian community needs witnesses of intentional radical poverty today, but this may not be the way for all married ministers, given the fact that they have families, will continue to live their faith out “in the world,” and seek to be a public sign within the local community. Rather than radical material poverty, perhaps married ministers will take a vow of simplicity and stewardship, and adopt a set of practices that witness to the moderate use of material goods, right relation-

ship to the earth, respectful consumption of food and water. Perhaps the radical sign they will be is one of simple living, embracing the goods of the earth and the society without abusing, overusing, and consuming with no limits.

Chastity is a vow that has often focused on celibacy, or sexual abstinence; married ministers, rather than vowing chastity, might take a vow of intimate friendship. This commitment would be rooted in baptism and marital promises of sexual fidelity, but it would also point beyond the minimum requirement of sexual fidelity. It points to the promise of making sexual intimacy a way of Christian love, a life-giving and life-bearing act that participates in the creative power and grace of the Holy Spirit and reaches out to the world. Intimate friendship would call for a chaste, or pure heart, and place God at the center of married

life, with Christ, the friend, as the way to life. Promises of intimate friendship would stress that there are no idols before God, neither one's married partner, nor children, nor ministry, nor the community.

Obedience is the third vow of most Catholic religious communities, and it may be that obedience is a vow that married ministers would retain. Obedience is listening, listening to the call of God and the call of neighbor. It is another form of commitment to faithful service. In the case of the married minister, it entails obedience to baptismal identity and faith, to married vows, and, in this case, to a common form of life joined together for the purpose of sustaining ministry.

Religious communities have also defined practices of prayer and ritual. These prayer practices have formed the foundation of the spiritual traditions of all religious communities. Prayers such as liturgy of the hours, *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, fasting, the Jesus Prayer, vigils, and ceaseless prayer, have arisen from within the spiritual practices of religious communities. Today, in the spiritual marketplace, many Christians, and likewise many lay ministers, try these prayer forms on to see what might “fit” them. But rarely in the spiritual tradition have we had individual spiritual practices, practices that were performed and sustained solely by the individual. The great spiritual traditions are *communal* traditions that involve *intentionality*: people practiced together and they promised each other they would practice together and sustain each other in a pattern of prayer. Because faithfulness to prayer practice is quite difficult and demanding, religious communities formed novitiates to “train” new members in the practice. What religious communities seem to know is that discipline in the spiritual life is both an ecclesial reality and an anthropological necessity.

A spiritual way of life for married ministers demands no less. Married ministers need a community of intentional spiritual formation and discipline. Such a community can teach them a discipline of prayer, hold them accountable to their promises, shape their daily habits and practices in a direction of discipleship, offer prophetic denunciations toward that which harms their way of life, and offer healing and support when difficulties arise along the journey. These are the hallmarks of the great spiritual traditions of the past, and can inform a spiritual way of life for married ministers in the future.

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There are dangers to be aware of if married ministers adopt any of the elements of the spiritual life of religious communities. There is the danger of institutionalization, a rigid conformity, and unbending obedience to a rule. There is the holiness danger, namely, those who choose the spiritual path in married ministerial community may be seen to be holier than other Christians and may come to believe that about themselves. There is the danger of separation and segregation as married ministers in community may live apart from the local community. There is the danger of clericalization if married ministers come to believe that they are ministering *to* the laity who have a primary mission in the world, but a marginal mission in the Church. In other words, married ministers in community run the danger of perpetuating much that has been unhealthy in ministry, religious life, and the way the Church understands the laity. But married ministers in community might be able to forge a way of being faithful disciples in marriage and ministry that leads beyond the old divisions and categories.

There are, of course, many practicalities and challenges for the way of life I am suggesting for married ministers. Is it realistic given the demands of modern marriage and of ministry to expect that people can sustain commitments to both? What does it mean to have ministers making life-long commitments in community? What will such commitments look like when only one spouse is a minister? Does married ministry look different for marriages where both spouses are ministers? Will a "religious community" of married ministers be made up of both? Might such a community include single ministers? What does such a way of life mean for children and extended family members? Is there a spiritual way of life for the pastoral family that has not yet been considered?

Conclusion

We live in a time when most ministers in the Catholic community are married. While we continue to debate whether ordained ministers can be married, the reality is that the largest number of ministers in our midst are married, and their reality demands theological, pastoral, and spiritual consideration. Are there ways of forging a theology of married ministry out of our current theologies of marriage and ministry? And is there a spiritual way of life, modeled after religious communities, which can sustain married ministers in prayer, service, and commitment? Since we have little empirical data about married ministers, we might begin by inquiring *about* married ministers: How many are there? Where do they serve? What training do they have in ministry and did it address issues of being married in ministry? And we could continue by inquiring *of* our married ministers: How do you make sense of your commitment to marriage and your call to ministry? And what are the spiritual resources you are discovering and creating that sustain you in this way of life?

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