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Co-Workers or Laborers?: Hermeneutical Considerations of the 2005 USCCB Statement on Lay Ministry with Some Implications for Pastoral Practice

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The USCCB statement resourcing lay ecclesial ministry relies on two biblical images; a mixed metaphor pairing an historical reality of the Pauline ecclesial co-worker and a Matthean parabolic narrative of day laborers. Examining this combined metaphor discloses how their tensions mirror the statement's theological and pastoral divergences on the scope and authority of lay ministry leadership. The metaphor's meaning and the statement's text reinforce one another's ambiguities enough that they can both highlight the vital ecclesial importance of lay ministry, or allow it to be interpreted in a clericalized way which undermines lay ministers' value. This analysis is contextualized by pandemic-era stresses on lay ministers, even as there are new recognitions of their importance and value by Pope Francis and the synodal process. The status of these important ministers as true co-workers in the Pauline sense remains largely unrealized, highlighting the need for renewed theological and pastoral efforts to encourage their proper agency in the life of the Church.

Keywords: laity, lay ministry, ministry, lay ecclesial ministry, co-workers, vineyard, metaphor, theology of ministry, pastoral theology, pastoral practice

Introduction

The 2005 statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) resourcing the development of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States and entitled *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* is one that most lay US Catholics have never heard of but

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has had a significant impact on their experience of ministry.[1] Though not a lengthy text, it marked the first time that the national bishops' conference as an entire body focused an entire statement on lay ecclesial ministry, that is, that form of lay ministry in which baptized persons have taken on leadership roles in the church related to parish or diocesan direction or administration, music, catechetical, youth ministries, pastoral care, chaplaincy, and a wide range of other ministries.[2] In a church that, in the last several hundred years and more, placed an overwrought importance on the role of the ordained priest, for the US body of bishops to recognize formally and to name the already burgeoning reality of lay ministry in general, and these specific leadership roles, was a true watershed. It was made possible through a steady development of theological and ministerial resourcing around lay ministry by theologians, lay ministers themselves, and the USCCB itself over multiple decades.

The title of the document relies on the biblically based image of "co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord." It is not a single scriptural reference, however. Rather, it is at least two such references joined together.[3] First, there

[1] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Subsequent references to this document will use "*Co-Workers*" and the relevant page number. The document can be accessed at https://www.usccb.org/upload/co-workers-vineyard-lay-ecclesial-ministry-2005.pdf.

[2] Prior to the approval of *Co-Workers* in 2005, there had been some documents that had been issued that referenced either "lay ministers" or "ecclesial ministry." Of these, two were approved by the full body of bishops, namely, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1980) and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1995). The others were released by committees of the US bishops conference but were not voted on by the full body of bishops. They include National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on The Laity, *Together in God's Service: Toward a Theology of Lay Ecclesial Ministry, Papers from a Colloquium* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998) and *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1999). As noted in the following presentation, the earlier statements were focused on the laity in general, whereas the latter two were more specifically focused on lay ecclesial ministry. *Co-Workers* is worth significant focus in that it was the first statement specifically on lay ecclesial ministry that was approved by the entire body of bishops.

[3] It is argued that "co-workers" and "workers in the vineyard" are the two key images here. The case could be made that the related image of "vineyard of the Lord" (Isaiah 5:1-7) is a variant third image in its own right. However, the tensions between "co-workers" and the "workers in the vineyard" image as presented here would have the same impact on the mediation of meaning of the 2005 USCCB statement regardless. Indeed, the frequent theological elision of the "vineyard of the Lord" with the historically existent Catholic Church—usually understood primarily through a highly clericalized view of its institutional leadership—would likely enhance the tensions discussed here.

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is the term "co-worker" (Greek *sunergos*), which is used by Paul to indicate specific collaborators in his own ministerial work. The second part of the combined metaphor—the "workers/laborers in the vineyard"—is taken from a parable of Jesus (Matt 20:1-16).[4] In this article, I present this titular image as a guiding metaphor that serves as a cipher for explaining how the bishops envisioned lay ecclesial ministry operating pastorally in the life of the church according to the 2005 statement. I also argue that the combination of these two contextually quite different scriptural images into a single metaphor to describe the reality of lay ministry creates a tension in the metaphor itself—a "mixed metaphor." This mixed metaphor highlights a collaborative, creative, and more charismatic framework on one hand, and a maintenance-based, delimited, and somewhat performative egalitarian framework on the other. Further, precisely as the titular metaphor for the statement, it is possible to see within the statement's circumscribed presentation about lay ministry—and about the specific nature and pastoral roles of lay ecclesial ministry leaders—aspects of these precise tensions. In essence, the statement does a great deal to articulate a theological and pastoral framework for a baptismally rooted and Spirit-empowered lay ministry in the church, even as it expresses that alongside language that imposes a much more restricted purview.

In analyzing the USCCB statement hermeneutically through the lens of this biblically based mixed metaphor, I consider how some institutional ecclesiastical considerations regarding lay ecclesial ministry have aligned more with the more circumscribed perspective, further influenced by the lived reality of clericalism in the church. The future practice of lay ministry, perhaps its very viability, may lie in ensuring that the more creative and charismatic aspects highlighted in *Co-Workers* are given equal or greater weight in the years to come.

The Two Root Metaphors: A Scriptural Contextualization

The USCCB statement's title links a lived early ecclesial reality—the role of Paul's *sunergoi*—and a parabolic image—the vineyard workers/laborers—in an evocative way. It is an image with staying power as well. Over the past

[4] Though similar, the laborers in the vineyard image is distinct from a harvest image presented earlier in the Gospel of Matthew (9:37-38). That earlier text refers to a saying of Jesus after he witnesses that the large crowds seem like sheep without a shepherd, and he tells his disciples to pray to the "Lord of the harvest" to "send out laborers into his harvest." In popular imagination, it is common that the harvest metaphor of Jesus, and that of the workers in the vineyard, are elided. The harvest image itself, however, is not used in *Co-Workers*, though what is said of that metaphor could apply to the harvest laborers' metaphor as well.

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twenty years since *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* was approved by the USCCB, the image, or parts of it, have been found in the titles and content of an array of papers, videos, events, and more reflecting on lay ministry, to the point where it is often an image that is automatically at the top of the mind of those who present or speak on the topic of lay ministry.[5] As a result, the image has had a lasting imprint on understanding lay ministry and is a common reference point. The ubiquity of this combined biblical metaphor, however, presents challenges as well. Although it seeks to mediate meaning and context for understanding the theology and pastoral practice of lay ministry, it has had the effect of being a mixed metaphor—one where two images are combined, creating an incongruous, incompatible, or even ludicrous meaning.[6] Although it is certainly not the case that the elided metaphor "co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord" is incomprehensible or ludicrous, it is possible to see incompatibilities in the meanings of the originating metaphors that can cause a type of "mixed metaphor."

It has been argued that, in general, metaphors can serve an epistemological role in conceptualizing reality and in mediating meaning. For example, conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), as established by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, makes a case for this role of metaphors.[7] CMT recognizes that the ubiquity of metaphors makes them, potentially, ciphers of greater meaning and important in epistemology in general, not just in literary works. CMT describes this epistemic role of metaphors as "mapping correspondences between [at least] two conceptual domains," a "source domain," which tends to be more concrete, and a "target domain," which is more abstract. For example, in the conceptual metaphor "Life is a journey," the "journey" term is the source domain and a more concrete image, whereas "life" is the target because it is more abstract. The fundamental idea of CMT is that metaphors can and do mediate real meaning and form epistemological bridges from concrete ideas to more abstract ones.

[5] This author recently extended the metaphor to wine in a 2020 virtual presentation with Harry J. Dudley, entitled "God's Own Vintage: Lay Ecclesial Ministry After 15 Years of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*." Regular symposia held on the topic of lay ministry at the University of St. John in Collegeville, MN, over the past two decades have also used variations on the images of co-workers or the vineyard.

[6] Examples of such mixed metaphors that can be found online include genuine metaphorical *nonsequiturs* including "We were flying through a sea of success"; "He seemed scary, but he was all bark with no place to go"; and "When the going gets tough, the early bird gets the worm."

[7] See Zoltán Kövecses, "Conceptual Metaphor Theory," *Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 13–27.

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As such, CMT can be closely aligned to hermeneutical approaches. In the context of the current article, I maintain that the title of the USCCB statement *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* is a combined, mixed biblical metaphor that frames the more abstract discussion of lay ministry in the text, and the metaphor, as much as the text itself, plays a role in the understanding and implementing of lay ministry. Further, by using the metaphor as a title—and one combined from two distinct scriptural sources at that—the authors of the statement intend, in some sense, for it to be interpreted by that title. By examining the roots of the titular metaphor and the tensions involved in combining them, it is possible to gain some significant insight into the statement itself. What follows, then, though not an exhaustive exegesis of the scriptural metaphors involved, nevertheless provides a hermeneutical context for the discussion of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard* that follows.

The first element of the titular metaphor to be considered is the use of the term *sunergoi* derived, primarily, from the Pauline letters. Biblical scholars such as Christoph W. Stenschke recognize that Paul's activities, as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles, include building sustainable Christian communities through his efforts with other key leaders to establish local churches, encouraging their growth through a network of mutual support, and ensuring sustainability through various means. This sustainability included Paul's regular cooperation with existing leaders or those established by him in the process of setting up the communities.[8] Stenschke, however, notes that this portrayal in Acts may be somewhat hagiographical, especially given evidence in the Pauline letters of significant difficulties and tensions between Paul and the churches to which he is writing and other leaders.[9] Thus, it is necessary to examine the Pauline corpus as well for additional context for understanding his *sunergoi*.

Paul uses the specific term *sunergos(-oi)* when referencing other Christian leaders, their work or experiences within the churches, and how he views their relationship to him.[10] He also uses related terms: *apostolos* (apostle), *adelphos* (brother), *sundulos* (servant or slave), *sustratiotes* (soldiers), and *sunaichmalotos* (prisoner).[11]

[8] See Christoph W. Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last: Paul as a Sustainable Leader according to the Book of Acts," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023): 3–5, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2717.

[9] See Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last," 8–9.

[10] See Rom 16:3,9,21; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 1:24, 8:23; Phil 2:25, 4:3; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 3:2; Phlm 1, 24.

[11] For one example of each respectively, see Rom 16:7, 1 Cor 16:12, Col 4:7, Phil 2:25, Phlm 23.

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Raymond Brown has commented that the letters we attribute to Paul (his genuine compositions and the secondary Pauline letters probably written by others) evidence the influence of Paul's *sunergoi* in their very production.[12] That influence is but one example of the significant role of *sunergoi* in the missionary work of Paul and of the early church. In general, the term *sunergoi* or one of the other terms just listed appears connected to a sense of creative cooperation and collaboration. Significantly, several of those engaging in this creative collaboration are women. Those who are named in his letters include Phoebe (Rom 16:1), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2), Apphia (Phlm 2), Priscilla (e.g., Acts 18:1-3; Rom 16:3-4, and other attestations in Acts and the Pauline letters), and Junia (Rom 16:7). In an era of patriarchal domination of leadership and other roles in society, that these women were likely in Christian leadership among the churches should be more widely recognized and appreciated.[13]

But what is the nature of this collaboration among the *sunergoi*? John Kloppenborg recognized in early Christian groups adaptation of practices from Greek and Roman civic associations. This included using the term *ekklesia* and its notions of autonomy and self-determination, along with its civic practices of dispute resolution, among others. The nature of *ekklesia* also includes leaders selected by the association, so Kloppenborg recognizes parallels with how Christians elected or appointed leaders. Terminology that was typically used of the civic *ekklesia* is used by Paul in reference to Christian communities—including "scrutiny" and the notion that Christians functioned as "ambassadors" for Christ or their communities.[14] Paul's letters acknowledging leaders in these communities, and his efforts to appoint them in some cases, indicates his awareness of their recognition by the communities they led, as well as their engagement with him in collaborative efforts on behalf of the mission of the gospel across multiple churches.

A. Katherine Grieb further highlights aspects of what this collaboration concretely meant, at least as spelled out in Paul's letters. Grieb recognizes, particularly in the Philippian and Corinthian correspondences, specific contrasts Paul is making with classical Cynic understandings of leadership by highlighting the self-emptying *kenosis* of Christ (Phil 2) and applying that pattern

[12] See Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 411. See also Rom 16:22.

[13] See the strong case for this in Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad 1993), 82–85.

[14] John S. Kloppenborg, "Associations, Christ Groups, and Their Place in the *Polis*," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 108, no. 1 (February 2017): 36–40.

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to himself and his co-workers.[15] Instead of proclaiming a regime of severity with respect to governing one's passions, Paul's approach is more focused on human freedom, a pastoral aspect of care for the person and the community, and of leaders within the community as "slaves, so that the community might be free" (see 2 Cor 4:5).[16] Grieb notes that Paul's presentation is not just heightened rhetoric to express Christian humility. Instead, "Paul is arguing that the service of the leader functions to create freedom for the community as a whole," literally like ancient slavery provided freedom and leisure for the slave owner.[17]

Further, Paul, in both letters to the Corinthians, frequently highlights his own suffering for the gospel and commends others who have been with him enduring trials for the sake of Christ (see 1 Cor 4:9, 2 Cor 2:14, 2 Cor 11:23-33).[18] From this analysis, Grieb comments:

> Paul describes the alternative leadership style he is both recommending and embodying by lifting up the ministries of his co-workers as examples of the Christ-pattern of downward mobility. It is important to see that Paul, himself commissioned (put under obligation) by Jesus Christ, sees himself as an apostle among other apostles. Part of his ministry is to recognize and name the work of others so commissioned, to demonstrate how their service conforms to the Christ-pattern of humiliation and obedience and to the exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father.[19]

Grieb further notes how Paul praises Timothy (Phil 2:20-22) for not following his own interests but those of the gospel, and also cites Epaphroditus, who nearly died in his Christian service (Phil 2:29-30). Paul commends Prisca and Aquila in Romans 16:3-4 for similarly risking their lives. Grieb concludes, "In each case, Paul's co-workers are held up as exemplars of the Christ-pattern of faithful obedience to God, unto death if necessary, for the life and freedom of the community they serve."[20]

Grieb also highlights Paul's emphasis on the paschal reality of Christian life and communities, highlighting his strong rejection of leadership rivalries that harm or even destroy the churches:

[15] See A. Katherine Grieb, "The One Who Called You …": Vocation and Leadership in the Pauline Literature," *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (April 2005): 158–59.
[16] See Grieb, "The One Who Called You …,"159.
[17] Grieb, "The One Who Called You …,"159–60.
[18] See Grieb, "The One Who Called You …,"160.
[19] Grieb, "The One Who Called You …," 160–61.
[20] Grieb, "The One Who Called You …," 161.

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> They are not to waste their time exalting rival leaders, setting up competitive factions, or indulging in those gifts of the Spirit that build up the individual at the expense of the community. Instead, following the crucified Lord, they are to renounce such church-destroying behaviors and to focus instead on the needs of their less powerful members, on the gifts of the Spirit that are likely to be ignored (because they are less glamorous), and to the practices that strengthen community over the long haul—such as truth-telling, generosity, forgiveness, and constancy in prayer.[21]

Additionally, as a people formed through the resurrection of Christ—the ultimate act of God's re-creation of all things—Paul frequently admonishes these communities:

> To expect the unexpected and to prepare for whatever astonishing new thing God will be doing next.... The resurrection of the dead, of which Jesus Christ is the first fruits, means, among other things, that all bets based on the status quo or the way things have always been done in the past are off. New creation means that the old structures must be reformed to reflect the resurrection life in Christ.[22]

Understanding the perspectives of these various scholars with regard to Paul's co-workers enables some modest conclusions to be drawn. First, many of the references in Paul's letters to co-workers in the broad sense refer to engaged leaders in the church in their own right, with particular gifts and capabilities that advanced both the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the particular missionary work of Paul. Put another way, and per Stenschke, co-workers were the vitally important "connective tissue" between his work among the various local Christian communities. They served a purpose as significant representatives of their communities, as Kloppenborg indicated. Further, co-workers existed to function creatively within the community so that its deepest needs might be met, while also serving as exemplars of the life of Christ in concrete ways, as Grieb describes. Given this awareness of "co-workers" in the Pauline sense, this first part of the combined metaphorical image "co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord" used in the USCCB statement brings to bear an extremely potent biblically based reality to frame an understanding of lay ministry.

The second part of the titular image, "workers in the vineyard," is a parabolic image from the teachings of Jesus presented in Matthew 20:1-16. It is part of a set of collected parables and teachings of Jesus (chapters 18–20 in Matthew) that together highlight the gospel writer's emphasis on living a life

[21] Grieb, "The One Who Called You ...," 163.

[22] Grieb, "The One Who Called You ...," 162–63.

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that follows the teachings and example of Jesus. Due to its nature as a parable, a textual and narrative analysis can be helpful here.[23]

Jesus states that the parable is a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven (Matt 20:1), and its purpose is to elucidate how the reality of that kingdom is different in its values, purpose, and life from the kingdoms of the world. The immediately preceding pericope is about the rich young man who went away sad because Jesus told him to sell his possessions and follow him, and the related teachings about eschewing wealth, relationships, and other work for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. That set of teachings concludes with Jesus noting that "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matt 19:30). The notion that the kingdom of God subverts worldly expectations is carried into the parable of the workers in the vineyard, as is the notion of reversal of priority, as the same phrase from Matthew 19:30 is used at the conclusion of this parable, in 20:16.

The workers in the parable are day laborers. There is no indication that their work in the vineyard extends longer than the day for which they were hired. Indeed, the parable's structure of the regular effort of the owner going out at different times of the same day and finding those to hire available, and the payment at the end of the same day, reinforces this point.

Further, when the workers in the parable have not yet been hired by the owner, these day laborers are described by Jesus using the Greek term *argos*, which literally means "without work." In addition to "idle," it can also be translated as "useless," and, in the context of agriculture, as "untilled" or "fallow." The layers of agricultural meanings of *argos* in the context of a parable about a vineyard may also be a verbal irony, with Jesus perhaps suggesting that those who are not about the work of the kingdom of heaven are simply useless, idle persons, or like fallow, unproductive land.

For purposes of this article, it is important to attend to the key dynamics within the parable around the hiring of the laborers, the work undertaken, the wages agreed to, and the impact of the egalitarian stance of the owner in presenting the wages. In the early morning, the owner hires workers and makes an agreement with them that they will be paid a "*denarius* for the day," which the NRSV translates as "the usual daily wage" (Matt 20:1-2). At the third hour (9:00 am), when the owner finds idle workers, he calls them to work and says he will "give to them whatever is right" (Matt 20:3-4). The owner repeats this process three more times, at noon, 3:00 pm, and 5:00 pm, but in each of these

[23] The textual considerations that follow are based on the author's own use of the Greek text and available definitions of specific words and a narrative analysis of the text and surrounding passages, with some assistance from an interlinear English/Greek New Testament.

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instances, no mention of the wage is given. The text says that either the owner "did the same" (Matt 20:5), implying he made the explicit offer of the same wage or, in the case of the last hires at 5:00 pm, simply tells them to go work in the vineyard (Matt 20:6-7), and, in that instance, the owner does not specify a wage.

Of course, the unexpected twist is that the owner tells the foreman to call in each set of laborers beginning with the last and ending with the first and that each group is to receive the "*denarius* for the day." When those who have been toiling and working in the full heat of the day see this, they complain, but, interestingly, they complain about the fact that the owner's actions "made equal to us" those who only worked one hour (Matt 20:12). It is clear from the text that the laborers who worked the full day do not see the laborers who worked only one hour as equal to them, and they made assumptions about their pay as a result, namely, they expected they would receive more than was agreed (Matt 20:10).

The result is that the owner reminds them of their agreement (Matt 20:13) and that they have received the appropriate wage. He further diminishes their standing by asking rhetorically "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" (Matt 20:15), highlighting the fact that the owner has control over how he distributes his own funds. The owner concludes with another rhetorical question that the NRSV translates as "Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt 20:15). The term translated as "generous," however, is ἀγαθός, which is generally translated as "good" or "righteous" or "honest." Thus, a more apt translation might be "Are you envious because I was honest or fair with you?" the implication being that, in fact, they are not envious because of the owner's wage offer, but because they felt as though they were entitled to more. Jesus, stepping out of the narrative, concludes with the aphorism noted previously: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matt 20:16). In the context of this being a parable that serves as a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven, it highlights the point that worldly expectations are subverted in the ways and activities of God, but the pericope also notes the egalitarianism of participation in the promised kingdom. In short, it doesn't matter when you enter the kingdom of heaven, everyone will experience the fullness of its goodness.

For purposes of this article, however, the overall dynamics of the resolution of this parable further highlight a number of differences between the laborers in the vineyard and the Pauline *sunergoi*. Consider the following contrasts:

- There is a substantial power imbalance at play in the parable. The owner has full control of the situation. He owns the vineyard. He determines whom he hires, for how long, when he hires them, and, although

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the wage is what is considered normal, he has the power to set the wage as he wishes. He also hired them for a day. Tomorrow, he may—and likely will—hire others for the same work. These workers are laborers. Unlike the situation with Paul's co-workers, there is no sense of creative cooperation, representation of, or commitment to a greater community or a commitment to long-term collaboration as "servants" to a wider community or cause.

- The laborers in the parable are not engaged in activities of creative collaboration with the owner of the vineyard. They are hired to do a specific job or set of jobs. There is no consideration of varieties of needs for jobs in the vineyard, as the needs of the vineyard are implicitly defined. There is also no indication that the workers in the vineyard even need to engage one another in the work other than on a very basic level. The owner has a foreman who directs the work of the laborers to specific outcomes that are predetermined. In contrast, the co-workers who engage with Paul in the early Christian communities are noted for their leadership, collaboration, and for addressing a variety of needs that are often unique enough to require both guidance and conversation. Although desired outcomes for their efforts are sometimes stated in Paul's letters or in Acts, they are not guaranteed.
- The financial value of the work of the laborers in the vineyard is determined to be a specific amount that is fixed for all the workers. In the case of Paul's co-workers, the context is not nearly as clear in placing a financial value on their work relative to one another.

What considerations can be highlighted based on this analysis? Certainly, apart from the previous analysis, the Matthean parable of the workers in the vineyard has been interpreted as a commentary on the subversive values of the kingdom of heaven and of living out the Christian life—an extremely important kerygmatic teaching. It is a reminder of the egalitarian aspect of grace and God's free gift in our ability to experience it. The previous analysis, however, indicates that when the metaphor of "workers in the vineyard" is viewed with an eye to the power and functional dynamics of the laborers, other considerations can come to the fore. When the "workers in the vineyard" image is paired with the very different concrete realities of co-workers found in the Pauline texts, it generates a tension. The co-workers and laborers are not the same type of worker at all. Prompted by CMT, it can be said that "co-workers" and "laborers" as epistemic source concepts map very differently and are very much in tension with one another when paired.

It is precisely this pairing and therefore these tensions that are in the title of the USCCB's 2005 statement on lay ecclesial ministry. The title's tensions,

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based on the mixed metaphor it creates, can illustrate tensions in the actual text of the statement and the statement's interpretation within the lived experience of lay ministry over the last two decades in the US church. Mapping the metaphors onto the statement's presentation on lay ministry will elucidate those tensions. Before proceeding to those considerations, however, it will be helpful to briefly examine how some of the language and phrasing around lay ministry came to exist in *Co-Workers*.

Prior Influences on the 2005 USCCB Statement

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord is properly credited with an advancement in the understanding of the baptismal origins of the call to lay ministry and the overall theological and pastoral importance of lay ministers in the life of the church. Even though *Co-Workers* was the first document on lay ecclesial ministry approved by the entire body of bishops, it did not emerge in a vacuum. The statement represented a unique application of the Second Vatican Council's magisterium on ecclesiology of the people of God, and about the apostolate of the laity in the US context, while also affirming the organic developments in lay ministry and the theology of ministry in the United States over the intervening forty years.[24] Although it is not possible to provide a complete history of this development here, there are some brief significant points that can help contexualize the significance of *Co-Workers* and the emerging of its particular vocabulary with respect to lay ministry.

An origin of some of the vocabulary that would develop into "lay ecclesial ministry" is found in the 1980s bishops statement *Called and Gifted*, a statement on the laity considered more broadly. In that text, the link to the Second Vatican Council's magisterium was highlighted by noting how laypeople contribute to a "Christian service or ministry" in the world, emphasizing the role of the laity more broadly in civil society—for the achievement of peace and justice, economic justice and care for the poor.[25] With respect to ministry in the church, *Called and Gifted* used the term "ecclesial ministers" to refer to those laity who develop professional skills for such work, highlighting this development as a "gift to the Church" and noting that the bishops have a responsibility to address "practical difficulties" regarding positions, identifying qualified persons for roles, hiring processes, and just wages.[26] In its brief presentation on

[24] See footnote 2.

[25] The American Catholic Laity, "Christian Service Ministry in the World," *Called and Gifted*, https://www.usccb.org/resources/called_and_gifted.pdf.

[26] See The American Catholic Laity, "Ministry in the Church," *Called and Gifted*.

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the topic, *Called and Gifted* sees these two forms of ministry by laypeople as complementary.

In the 1995 anniversary statement *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, the body of bishops again highlighted the work of laity in the ministry of the church using the terms "lay ministers" and "ecclesial lay ministers" somewhat interchangeably. In this text, the bishops recognize the growth in lay ministry in the church since 1980, in parish and diocesan contexts, as well as in other church institutions. They see the mission of the church being carried forward in important ways by lay ministers and reference that "ecclesial lay ministers speak of their work, their service, as a calling, not merely a job."[27] They reaffirm unique issues that have arisen due to the rise of ecclesial lay ministers, highlighting the need to develop better financial support and better opportunities for these ministers, especially from minority communities, to engage in "ecclesial leadership." They also commit to "further study and dialogue concerning lay ministry in order to understand better the critical issues, and [to] find effective ways to address them."[28]

This desire for further study led to the subsequent documents issued, not by the full body of bishops, but by the bishops' Committee on the Laity, based on the work of their Subcommittee on Lay Ministry. One was *Together in God's Service: Toward a Theology of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, approved by the committee in 1998, and another was *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions*, in 1999. The latter, in particular, provided important foundations for understanding how the term "lay ecclesial ministry" was used in *Co-Workers* and in many of the points ultimately presented in that 2005 text. Much of what is discussed following indicates influence from this text.[29]

These prior texts, in the way they develop a theological and pastoral understanding of lay ministry, help elucidate the particular points and framing of issues discussed *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* and indicate that *Co-Workers* is the fruitful outcome of a great deal of sustained consideration by the bishops and other experts over at least twenty-five years. Due to this prior work, *Co-Workers* was able to have the impact that it had at the time of its approval and subsequently.

[27] "Lay Ministry in the Church," *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, https://www.usccb.org/committees/laity-marriage-family-life-youth/called-and-gifted-third-millennium-1995.

[28] "Challenges for the Future," *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*.

[29] Each of the chapters in this volume found some expression within the final text of *Co-Workers*. Detailed exposition is beyond the scope of this article, but a comparison of chapter titles in *Called and Gifted* with headings and subheadings in *Co-Workers* readily shows the important topical connections.

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Titular Metaphor as Cipher for Key Tensions in the 2005 USCCB Statement

In undertaking a CMT-based examination of tensions in the statement *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* based on the prior analysis of the inherent tensions between the title's two root metaphors, it is recognized at the outset that such an examination approaches the text of the statement from a particular viewpoint. Additionally, as a hermeneutical examination, it is necessarily more constrained than a complete textual analysis. The focus here will be on key tensions in the texts regarding the nature of lay ministry and on the application of the title's metaphor to those particular parts of the statement. This analysis will focus on the statement's foundational presentation of the nature of lay ecclesial ministers, as well as the relationship of them to ordained ministers. Through that process, critical considerations will be raised through the application of "co-workers in the vineyard" as a conceptual metaphor applied to the text.

In some places, the *Co-Workers* statement strongly elevates lay ministry and, in others, it circumscribes its importance vis-à-vis ordained ministry. The consideration that follows indicates that the epistemic map of the titular metaphor upon the understanding of lay ministry present in the text is ambiguous. The metaphor can both positively reinforce the theological synthesis of the statement on the unique baptismal foundation and importance of lay ministry simultaneously allow such ministry to be interpreted in a clericalized way that undermines the very theological foundations upon which it is presented. Indeed, one's framework of understanding for lay ministry may relate to which "part" of the mixed metaphor one favors—the image of "co-workers" or that of the "worker/laborer in the vineyard." It is also the case that lived experiences in the church, such as clericalism, tend to foster a conceptual map of lay ministry that is rooted in the "laborer" understanding.

First it should be noted that due to the significant important insights about lay ministry brought forward by prior texts, as noted previously, the *Co-Workers* statement served to positively frame the development and implementation of standards and competencies for ministry education and preparation by national Catholic ministry support organizations, graduate academic programs in theology and ministry, and diocesan ministry formation programs. These developments have not always occurred in the way the statement's text anticipated, but such standards and competencies have been viewed as essential for the growth of the field and for preparation of these ministers.[30]

[30] For excellent historical perspective on these developments, see William H. Johnston, "Serving Lay Ecclesial Ministry Past and Present: Thirty Years of Preparing Workers

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Subtitled "A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry," the statement noted that it did not wish to impose particular requirements on lay ministry formation and recognition across the country.[31] Its purpose was to be descriptive of resources and approaches for formation and to make recommendations, but not to be prescriptive of particular practices. The following analyses, however, suggest that the stated purpose of being descriptive rather than prescriptive was itself a tension in the text, as the body of the text moves back and forth between concepts of lay ecclesial ministry in the abstract and very particular desired requirements for actual lay ecclesial ministers.

The statement provides a substantive theological background and a framework that recognizes the call to lay ecclesial ministry as a particular enacting of a layperson's baptism.[32] It establishes suggested models for bishops, pastors, and deacons to relate to these lay ministry leadership roles in a collaborative way.[33] The statement indicates the importance of comprehensive formation for lay ministers serving in these roles[34] and offers what the bishops see as helpful frameworks at the national and diocesan levels to allow for competencies to be measured and recognized in lay ecclesial ministers.[35] A stated goal of such substantive recognition is to assist bishops in authorizing them in a public and formal way to specific ministry leadership roles.[36]

In part 1, which is focused on foundations in theology and pastoral practice for lay ministry, the bishops note, from a pastoral perspective, that the phrase they use to designate laity involved in professional ministry roles—"lay ecclesial ministers"—is a "generic" phrase and not meant to apply to particular ministerial roles.[37] Immediately after defining this phrase, however, they note that although it is generic, the expectations of actual ministers who are part of this group have very specific markers that they share in common, namely that their ecclesial service is characterized by:

for the Vineyard," 11–12, 15, and Marti R. Jewell, "An Unexpected Confluence: AGPIM and the Development of Accreditation and Ministry Standards," 41–46, in *Transforming Ministry Formation*, ed. Edward P. Hahnenberg, Marti R. Jewell, and Theodore James Whapham (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2021).

31 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 6.

32 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 12.

33 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 21–26.

34 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 33–35.

35 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 36–53, 56.

36 See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 55–56.

37 US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 5.

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- *Authorization* of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church
- *Leadership* in a particular area of ministry
- *Close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons
- *Preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them[38]

The bishops further specify that the terminology "lay ecclesial minister" is used by them in the text as "an adjective"[39] not as a specific position title or a "new rank or order among the laity."[40] Their adjectival use of the phrase is so that the term can serve to "identify a growing reality, to describe it more fully, and to seek a deeper understanding of it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[41] Immediately moving from a generic phrase to very specific markers for those ministers and back to a generic view in the space of a few sentences creates some ambiguities around the nature of lay ecclesial ministers that persist in other parts of the text, but the overall thrust of these statements serves to emphasize a view of lay ministers as creative collaborators in the practice of servant leadership, which aligns with the metaphor of the Pauline co-workers.

Part 2 of the 2005 statement dedicates almost the entire section to specific modalities of call, discernment, recognition, and, especially, formational preparation for "lay ecclesial *ministry*." In using this term, the text switches in the second section from the personal noun "minister," used often in part 1, to the more abstract "ministry." The characteristics and processes described in part 2, however, have very specific theological, canonical, and ministerial implications, particularly with regard to designation as leaders and professionals in ministry in the church.[42] The particular characteristics noted suggest, contrary to the claim that the term is generic, "lay ecclesial ministers" as a whole do, in fact, share significant and important qualities across the field that highlight substantive leadership work in the church, in addition to the particular specializations in ministry roles that they individually may pursue.

So, there is a tension between different parts of the 2005 statement with regard to the generic nature but specific qualities that apply to the phrase "lay ecclesial ministry," or "lay ecclesial ministers." That is, to say, there is a tension

[38] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 10. The bullet point format and emphases are in the original text.

[39] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 11. The point being made is that the term "lay ecclesial" is an adjective phrase, modifying "minister," which is the personal noun.

[40] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*.

[41] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*.

[42] See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 54–60.

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in the defining of the term "lay ecclesial ministers" as generalized, and the specific and substantive roles and impacts that the bishops claim these ministers are having in the church.[43] Mapping this to the titular metaphor, it can be said that this back and forth regarding the generic phrase and the specific purpose for lay ecclesial ministers is correlated to the tension between Paul's co-workers, with their specific gifts and leadership within the early Christian communities, and the vineyard laborers' more generalized and nonspecific work and status. Using the combined image as a hermeneutical cipher here, it can be said that the bishops' statement that defines "lay ecclesial ministers" in this multivalent way indicates that lay ministers in the church are conceptualized in two different ways in the statement, even simultaneously. They can be viewed as "co-workers" in the Pauline sense of creative, collaborative servant leaders and as more generalized "workers in the vineyard" in the parabolic sense.

Also, in part 1 of the 2005 text the bishops clarify further their use of the adjectival phrase of "lay ecclesial ministry" in a theological sense. They note that the term "lay" refers, obviously, to the fact that laypersons are doing the ministry. "Ecclesial" references a connection to the community of the church, and, more formally, to the submission of the layperson's ministerial activity to "the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy."[44] The bishops, however, also add qualifiers to the noun "ministry," itself—here again used in the abstract noun form rather than the personal noun "minister."[45] The bishops recognize that ministry done by lay ecclesial ministers is "a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ who is priest, prophet and King"[46]—a phrasing that aligns well with the view of Paul's co-workers.

The bishops, however, specifically reference the Latin word *servitum* as "the original sense of the term *ministry*" in which the church's members

[43] See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 13, for 2005 data on the impact of lay ministers in the church. A more recent sampling can be found in the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *Research Review: Lay Ecclesial Ministers in the United States* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2015).

[44] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 11. Note, too, that the terms "discernment" and "supervision" are introduced here to circumscribe the relationship of the lay ecclesial minister to the hierarchy, whereas the characteristics (see previous bulleted list on page 17) emphasized "authorization" by the hierarchy and "close mutual collaboration" with bishops, priests and deacons.

[45] There is an inconsistency in the text in moving between the two types of nouns—"minister" and "ministry," which in itself is a tension between recognition of the person(s) in the church doing the ministry and the desire to abstract, theologize, and develop pastoral plans with respect to the ministry work being done in a broader sense.

[46] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 11.

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continue the mission and ministry of Christ within the church and in the world.[47] The bishops are clear in stating that they see a significant difference between the ministry of the laity, as alluded to previously, and the ministry of the ordained:

> The application of "ministry" to the laity is not something to be confused with ordained ministry nor in any way construed to compromise the specific nature of ordained ministry. The lay ecclesial minister is called to service in the Church and not necessarily to a lifelong commitment as happens in Ordination. Lay ecclesial ministry is exercised in accordance with the specific lay vocation.[48]

Thus, there is a distinction being made between the aspect of lay ministry as *servitum* and a different understanding of "ministry" as applied to ordained priests and deacons.[49] Yet, some implications of this statement are ambiguous. One form of ministry, namely, lay ecclesial ministry, is not perceived as a "lifelong commitment," whereas ordained ministry is viewed as such. The text indicated previously, however, that the ministry of the lay ecclesial minister is rooted in a particular expression of one's baptismal call of living according to the model of Christ.

Living according to one's baptismal call is, in fact, presumed to be a "lifelong commitment" to Christ and to the church. It is *prior* to any lifelong commitment that an ordained person makes because baptismal commitment is required prior to ordination. Nevertheless, here the practice of lay ministry, though tied to the baptismal lay vocation, is not seen as even possibly a lifelong commitment. Might it be said here the (day) laborers image from the title predominates?

Later in the same part 1, in the theological section discussing ministry and the reality of the church as an ordered communion, the bishops note that although both lay ecclesial ministry and ordained ministry are rooted in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—the initiation sacraments—they state that ordained ministry is a "special apostolic calling" and that the essence of this apostolic ministry is "the work of teaching,

[47] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*.

[48] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 12.

[49] See the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy, *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), Practical Provisions, article 1, paragraphs 1–2, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html.

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sanctifying, and governing the faithful."[50] While indicating this understandable unique role for the ordained minister, the bishops further note that this role is not based "on merit or rank" but rather on:

> The sacramental character given by the Holy Spirit that configures the recipient [i.e., the ordinand] to Christ the Head and on the particular relationship of service that Holy Orders brings about between ecclesiastical ministry and the community. The ordained ministry is uniquely constitutive of the Church in a given place. All other ministries function in relation to it.[51]

The distinctive character of ordained ministry is thus identified as being both on the ontological level, through a character given by the Holy Spirit through Holy Orders, and through the dogmatic teaching on apostolic succession and governance. It seems quite possible to read this passage as a theological statement of the priority of ordained ministry over lay ministry.

At the same time, the bishops also affirm the diverse relational nature of all ministry—lay and ordained—in the church because all of it is rooted in the divine relationship of the triune God and the communion of the church. They refer to the reality of the church as a "network of relationships" and not just as an ordered communion.[52] As the bishops note later in part 2, lay ministry is also a specific, discerned call within the broader call of the laity in the life of the church and the world. This discernment involves the person who is responding to the call, the community of the church in supporting the person's discernment, and the ordained leadership of the church in affirming the call formally, evaluating capabilities, and, in the case of the bishop, authorizing the form of ministry.[53] This specific and descriptive language related to lay ministry provides a substantive theological and pastoral foundation for the importance of such ministry in the church, even mirroring elements of the preparation for ordained ministers who similarly respond to a call, receiving support from the church, being taught and evaluated, and being authorized by

[50] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 21. See again the document from the Congregation for the Clergy in the same place where an even stronger ontological priority for ordained ministry is stated: "In this original sense the term ministry (*servitium*) expresses only the work by which the church's members continue the mission and ministry of Christ within her and the whole world. However, when the term is distinguished from and compared with the various *munera* and *officia*, then it should be clearly noted that only in virtue of sacred ordination does the work obtain that full, univocal meaning that tradition has attributed to it."

[51] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 21.

[52] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 22.

[53] See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 29–30.

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a bishop for a particular role. Yet, the implications seem to be that lay ministry is somehow secondary to ordained ministry in the aforementioned statement.

Although it is possible to read the distinctions being made between ordained and lay ecclesial ministry here as simply denoting different calls and ordered functions and roles within the church, it is equally possible to see these distinctions through the tensions disclosed in the mixed metaphor of the statement's title. In that context, this analysis of the qualifications placed upon the terms "ministry" and "lay ecclesial ministry" by the US bishops in the 2005 statement can be seen as diminishing the value of lay ministry at the expense of ordained ministry within the very text designed to elevate lay ecclesial ministry. In this development, the metaphorical map of "co-workers in the vineyard" makes a decided emphasis toward the vineyard laborers of the Matthean parable, especially since, from a reading of the ambiguities in this section of text, it is possible to conceive of these statements as claiming that lay ministry is ontologically "secondary" or, worse, derivative.

Further, in light of these ambiguities, the phrase "lay ecclesial ministry," presented elsewhere in the text as a phrase that is meant—by the use of "ecclesial"—to clarify the relationship of the lay minister to the existential reality of the church, becomes a further source of ambiguity and tension.

The bishops stated in *Co-Workers* that they were seeking to offer an overview of lay ministry as part of the "new realities" around the engagement of the laity in the life of the church and to articulate new responses to those realities.[54] They not only wanted to clarify terms and meanings for the benefit of this description and response, but also to describe this new expression of ministry. In describing leadership roles in lay ministry, they used the adjective "ecclesial" with the stated purpose being that the use of the phrase would link lay ministry to the existential reality of the baptismally rooted theological communion of the church. With this end in mind, it can be said that, using the images in the guiding mixed metaphor "co-workers in the vineyard," naming lay ministry as "ecclesial," in the aforementioned theological sense, places those who do this ministry within the Pauline "co-workers" side of the metaphor. In this Pauline sense, lay ministers are understood as fully ecclesial and fully ministers in their own right by virtue of a particular calling and charism of the Holy Spirit within their larger baptismal call. At the same time, the adjective "ecclesial" serves the purpose of clarifying lay ministry with respect to other laity and clergy in the church and with respect to lay ministers in general.

While the desire for clarity is understandable and the theological value of this development is laudable, nevertheless, from a different viewpoint, the

[54] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 5.

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need for the adjectival term "ecclesial" in "lay ecclesial ministry" can be problematic. Both of the other terms in the phrase—"lay" and "ministry"—are already descriptive of *ecclesial* realities in and of themselves. One is not a fully initiated member of the laity or the lay faithful without entering the church through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.[55] In the modern US context, "ministry" is also almost always used with reference to church activity (as opposed to government operations or general service to society or to others, as is found in other countries). So, it would be hard to argue in the US context that the terms "lay" or "ministry" are not already ecclesial.

Even the 2005 bishops' statement indicates that "in its broadest sense, ministry is to be understood as service (*diakonia*)[56] and is the means for accomplishing mission in the communion of the church. It is a participation in and expression of Christ's ministry."[57] In this broad sense, then, all ministry is ecclesial. It thus can seem redundant for the specification "ecclesial" to exist between "lay" and "ministry." Further, although there is a theological reason to add the adjective "ecclesial," it is not the only reason to do so. There is also a pastoral and canonical reason. It is stated that "ecclesial" is also being applied specifically as a reference to the authorization provided by the bishop for ministry the layperson is to perform in a leadership role in the church.

Even granted the need to provide theological, pastoral, and canonical specificity with respect to the role and status of lay ecclesial ministers, was there a need to do so while also voicing an, at best, ambiguous statement that seems to subordinate lay ministry to ordained ministry? And was it necessary to do so in a way that makes ambiguous everything previously presented in *Co-Workers* regarding the trinitarian and baptismal origins and roots, as well as the pastoral significance of lay ministry? Indeed, in such a context, the adjective "ecclesial" can be seen as sharpening the distinction being presented between lay and ordained ministry. If ordained ministry is "uniquely constitutive" of the church, these other ministries are, by logic, given a secondary status.

This implication is further demonstrated by how those in Holy Orders—priests and deacons—are referred to simply as "ordained ministers" or as being in "ordained ministry." There has never been a need to claim, via an additional adjective, that the ministry of the ordained is "ecclesial." There has been no need to use the phrase "ordained *ecclesial* ministry"; the simple phrase "ordained ministry" suffices to denote the ecclesial reality. In the case of the ministry of priests and deacons, the "ecclesial" dimension

[55] See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 7.

[56] The Greek precursor word to the Latin *servitum*, mentioned previously.

[57] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers*, 20.

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has always been presumed. It certainly raises questions as to whether lay ministry, in this text and, more broadly in the life of the church, is perceived properly as "ecclesial" in the sense of "related to the church," or if the adjective serves as a theological consolation prize given the ministry that is uniquely constitutive of the church is ordained ministry. To again return to the title metaphor, it may be fair to ask: Are lay *ecclesial* ministers genuine co-workers, or are they laborers who get an ecclesial *denarius*?

Many of these observed tensions regarding the distinction between ordained and lay ministry might be less prominent, and indeed less problematic, if it were not for the fact that the bishops take care in the text not only to demonstrate a distinction between ordained ministers and lay ecclesial ministers, but also to claim an ontological priority for ordained ministry in the church. By logic, lay ecclesial ministry is thereby derivative and able to be exercised only by those authorized to do so by the bishops. When seen in this light, and whether intended or not, the text serves to highlight the separation of the two types of ministry and their unequal nature in the life of the church. This inequality places those who are ordained in a primary position, both theologically and in the realm of governance, oversight, and authorization of lay ministers for particular roles. Such a view tends toward presenting the reality of lay ministers in the church as "laborers in the vineyard," like those found in the Matthean parable—only able to do work in the vineyard once the owner has approved, and then, only for a limited time and with a limited—and derived—purpose.

This ontological priority for ordained ministry, though rooted in Catholic teaching, has come under scrutiny in recent years, particularly due to the issue of clericalism, that is, elevating the status of clergy over all others in the church. Such elevation can often be used—consciously or not—for the purpose of preserving a privileged, elite, and powerful status among clergy. This trend has been recognized to be an evil in the church by many, including Pope Francis:

> Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a *power* to be exercised rather than as a free and generous *service* to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen. *Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church.*[58]

[58] Francis, "Address by His Holiness Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment," October 3, 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html; emphasis in original.

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In view of the reality of clericalism, and the specific differences presented between lay ministry and ordained ministry in the 2005 USCCB statement, a new dimension to the meanings mediated through the mixed metaphor "co-workers in the vineyard" appears. A clericalist reading of the ontological priority of the ordained ministry vis-à-vis lay ministry found in *Co-Workers* can readily have the effect of reducing the full impact of the charismatic reality of lay ministry described elsewhere in the statement. Further, the phrase "lay ecclesial ministry" was defined by the bishops in such a way that engagement in such a role must be determined by a bishop or priest through a formal process of authorization—a methodology that, though perhaps theologically and canonically appropriate, is ripe for clericalist misuse.

Though the particulars of *Co-Workers* regarding the theological and pastoral realities of lay ministry need not be read in this way, the impact of clericalism as a lived reality means that the statement *can* be read in that way, whether intended or not. Considering the distorting but real impact of clericalism on the understanding of the distinctions between lay and ordained ministry, it is possible to see, in the process of a bishop officially designating a lay ecclesial minister and authorizing the minister to exercise the role in a specific ministry, a form of viewing lay ecclesial ministry as ultimately tied to the determination of an authority who also has the ability to define the specifics of the work, its duration, and the appropriate compensation for the labor, either with or without creative or direct engagement with the lay ministers themselves. This clericalist view of lay ministry mirrors very closely the social dynamics at play in the Matthean parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

So, yes, it is true that the theological foundations of lay ministry in the 2005 statement highlight the reality of laypeople claiming, from within their baptismal call, a Spirit-given call to ministry in the church. It is also true that, given the genuine ecclesial nature of lay ministry, both the community of the church as a whole, as well as bishops and pastors, have important roles of affirmation and oversight of those in these ministries. Both of these points favor the Pauline "co-workers" side of the metaphor and the view that lay ministers are creative and collaborative servant leaders in the ministry of the whole church.

Yet, when the processes of episcopal oversight and authorization of lay ministers are influenced by the social reality of clericalism in the church, and in light of the lived ecclesial reality of unequal power dynamics, which is to say, the *practical implementation* of the reality of lay ministry, the "workers in the vineyard" metaphor can easily predominate as a hermeneutical cipher. In such a clericalist view, the tensions in the metaphor tend to resolve within

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official ecclesial structures and understandings of lay ministry on the laborer side of the metaphor. This in turn perpetuates both a viewpoint and also a way of acting that tends to view lay ministers less as creative co-workers and more as modestly compensated, temporary, subservient, and frequently interchangeable laborers in a vineyard that is not their own.

Although there are other examples of tensions in the 2005 statement that could be mentioned and aligned to the mixed metaphor, the ones addressed here serve to show that the implications regarding interpretations of the metaphor and of the text of *Co-Workers* are not mere conceptual matters. It is precisely at this intersection of the lived experience of lay minsters in the church over the past decades where the reality of the title's mixed metaphor and the tensions regarding the nature of lay ministry have produced an ambiguous outcome when it comes to the reality and experience of lay ministry in the US church. To employ another metaphor, it is "where the rubber hits the road." How the understanding of lay ministers and lay ministry is *implemented*, particularly under the influence of clericalism, continues to have significant concrete pastoral implications, and so, the ways in which the conceptual "map" of the titular metaphor mediates the meaning of textual ambiguities related to lay ministry in such a significant text is very much more than an epistemological issue.

Some Concrete Implications and Remapping the Mixed Metaphor

A clericalist influence in understanding lay ministry can lead to favoring the "workers in the vineyard" side of the mixed metaphor at the expense of the servant-leadership "co-workers" aspect. Two examples will be offered to show how these lived dynamics have been present in ecclesiastical determinations related to lay ministry both prior to and since the 2005 USCCB statement.

One example includes the canonical declaration that lay ministers who serve as professional chaplains in hospitals or other venues are not allowed to use that term in its canonical sense. The term "chaplain" is restricted in an ecclesial context to apply only to ordained ministers, together with other terms such as "pastor" or "moderator."[59] This prohibition remains in effect even though the profession of chaplaincy, which is well established and broadly ecumenical throughout the United States, requires the use of the term for those

[59] See Congregation on the Clergy, *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*, article 1, paragraph 3.

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hired for such roles as an expression of that profession. The ranks of chaplains include many laypeople.

A convoluted work-around was developed by Bishop Melczek and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains in the 2000s to address this dichotomy and to maintain the canonical distinction.[60] The very act of canonically restricting the term "chaplain" to the ordained, however, deprives many lay ministers in the health-care field, who are professionally titled "chaplains" by that field, the opportunity to use that title in ecclesial contexts. This remains the case even as the number of ordained clergy in hospital chaplaincy roles has declined and laypeople have increasingly taken up these roles. It might also be added that such roles are often outside of parish and diocesan structures and within either Catholic or independent hospital structures, making such a distinction even more confusing in non-ecclesial and ecclesial-adjacent contexts.

Another concrete example of how the impact of a clericalist view of lay ministry has played out is in diocesan budgetary decisions related to the professional development and financial support of lay ministers—the very items frequently cited in multiple documents of the bishops as important areas for more significant attention. Especially in the wake of the economic and other impacts of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, and bankruptcies of many dioceses driven by legal and settlement costs related to the clergy sexual abuse crisis,[61] professional lay ministry positions in parishes and dioceses have followed a disturbing trend. Diminishing budgets have also severely diminished the prospects of employment for many lay ministers in leadership roles. Limited opportunities for those entering the field, combined with restricted advancement opportunities to those who have been in the field for many years, have taken their toll, especially for those lay ministers who pursued the type of high level of ministerial competency that *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* encouraged. These developments were already in place

[60] See letter of Bishop Dale J. Melczek, May 7, 2004, in USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service, "Certification Approval Handbook," (2022), 69–70, https://www.usccb.org/resources/2021%20Certification%20Approval%20Handbook.pdf.

[61] See US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018 Annual Report: Findings and Recommendations—June 2019 Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019). On page 47 the report indicates that the US Catholic dioceses together spent more than $300 million related to child protection and abuse allegation responses and payouts over twelve months from 2016 to 2017.

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prior to the pandemic and have only accelerated during and after it, exacerbating trends that diminish lay ecclesial ministry and place dioceses and parishes in the position of relying on increasing numbers of unpaid and undertrained volunteers in a variety of roles previously held by professionals.[62]

To put these concrete examples into the language of the mixed metaphor "co-workers in the vineyard," it seems there is very modest institutional value being placed on lay ministers as creative, collaborative co-workers in the servant-leader Pauline tradition. Instead, the "laborers in the vineyard" image has predominated. To extend the metaphor, it is as if the owner in the parable has no additional resources to hire workers as needed and so tries to make do with the limited workers he already has, risking a portion of the vintage by understaffing. Even worse, it is as if the owner asks those who have not been able to be hired due to lack of resources to go work in the vineyard—with very limited instruction—as volunteers for free. Further, for those workers who have been hired and actually remain in the vineyard to do the work, they see that even though they have demonstrated skilled leadership, those in authority do not demonstrate a value for such leadership, often seemingly treating them as day laborers who deserve only a "*denarius* for a day," or an arbitrary value for their endeavors. Although more detailed study of these trends is needed than can be done here, these points denote a concerning trend as the US church arrives at the twentieth anniversary of the 2005 statement designed to support lay ministers, even as both at the national and diocesan level, efforts and concrete supports for these ministers wane.

Significant developments during the papacy of Pope Francis, however, seem to be a possible source of rejuvenation and possible "remapping" of the collaborative and creative Pauline sense of co-workers to lay ministry. The pope's changes to canon law in recent years to open to laywomen and laymen the installed ministries of acolyte, lector, and catechist have served to enhance the stature of lay ministry leadership both in the US church and globally.[63] It

[62] See Brian Fraga, "Two Years into Pandemic, Some Catholic Parishes Stretching Their Dollars," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 11, 2022, https://www.ncronline.org/news/coronavirus/two-years-pandemic-some-catholic-parishes-stretching-their-dollars.

[63] See Francis, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte," *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 15, 2021, English edition, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210110_lettera-donne-lettorato-accolitato.html; and Francis, "*Antiquum Ministerium*: Apostolic Letter Issued 'Motu Proprio' Instituting the Ministry of Catechist," (May 10, 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html.

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has generated new attention within the 2022–2024 global synod to what the pope and other leaders in the church are calling "baptismal ministries."[64]

The US church has, for decades, admitted laypeople to roles of altar server and lector but has not called these roles installed ministries. The pope's effort to install laypeople in these ministries in a permanent way, when those ministries have previously been reserved only for men on the path to Holy Orders, is significant. This significance lies in the fact that the ritual of installation into a ministry is akin to, and one might argue, even identical with the episcopal authorization mentioned for lay ministers in leadership roles noted in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. Both approaches especially highlight aspects of "permanence" in ministry in a theological sense, perhaps undoing some of the residue of subordination that has endured between ordained ministry and lay ecclesial ministry.

Particularly for the new role of installed catechist, which the pope created on his own authority in 2020, and which different episcopal conferences are now seeking to implement, the opportunity to see such a role as another form of lay ministerial leadership, not only in evangelization and catechesis but in parishes and dioceses and other ecclesial contexts, is encouraging. Much will depend on the specific implementation of the installed catechist role here in the United States and the impact of installations to the roles of lector and acolyte as well. These developments may set the stage for other "installed" lay ministries. At the very least, it is to be hoped that interest in these installed ministries, and the pope's presentation of them, will invite renewed consideration of the impact of lay ministers as a whole in the life of the church, and encourage renewed thinking of the ways in which such ministers might be more thoughtfully considered and supported, and which invite attention to their creative and collaborative status as true co-workers and servant leaders in the Pauline sense.

Conclusion

How lay ministers are perceived and understood in the life of the church is enormously consequential. Given that metaphors help to conceptualize and mediate reality, the metaphors used to mediate the perception of lay ministers

[64] See Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, (June 20, 2023), https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/06/20/230620e.html. This *Instrumentum Laboris* of the synod's first session in October 2023 references "ordained ministries" and "baptismal ministries." See also Cindy Wooden, "Laity Share Baptismal Call to Ministry, Service, Pope Says," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 24, 2023, https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/vatican-news/laity-share-baptismal-call-ministry-service-pope-says.

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is equally significant. This article has demonstrated the value of considering elements of the text of the USCCB's 2005 statement on lay ecclesial ministry through the combined mixed biblical metaphor that comprises its title. Such a reading has invited consideration of the ambiguities found in the mixed metaphor "co-workers in the vineyard" and the way in which the metaphor discloses the tensions in the statement around the significance, importance, and status of lay ministry and lay ministers in the church. It also discloses how the ambiguities of the text, combined with the ecclesial reality of clericalism has over time, eroded the sense of lay ministers as creative and collaborative co-workers with clergy and others, in favor of a view of these ministers as more limited and even derivative—all standards consistent with the Matthean parable's day laborers.

Laypeople continue to seek to respond to a divine call to ministry and ministry leadership in many areas of parish and diocesan need, as well as in colleges and universities, hospitals, health-care settings, prisons, and more. Their own agency in claiming a theological and pastoral space for their ministries, and their own articulation of their understanding of their work in the church and their lived experiences, should be considered essential points of departure in efforts by bishops, theologians, and others to express an ecclesiological and comprehensive pastoral framework of understanding for their work. Only by doing so will that framework truly reflect an awareness of how lay ministers are collaborative and creative co-workers in the Pauline sense, as is their due.

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