

FORMATION FOR NON-ORDAINED MINISTRY

By VIRGINIA SULLIVAN FINN

As I was starting to write this commentary on formation, I shared a three-day holiday in the Berkshires, the hills of Western Massachusetts, with a Weston graduate. Let me call her Jo.

For several hours immediately after Jo arrived, we sat at the round kitchen table gazing at twilight coming over the woods and river, sharing coffee and catch-up conversation that deepened as Jo relayed the darkness fall and winter had been for her, following the death of her sister late in the summer. After a while we sat in silence, then Jo said, 'Only recently have I started to sense resurrection.' Over a late supper Jo inquired about the changes at Weston that had occurred in the three years since her graduation. As we were both tired from our separate trips to the Berkshires that day, we retired early.

The next afternoon, hiking around the woods together, Jo spoke of how fulfilling she was finding her present campus ministry position at a small catholic college near an urban area that offered opportunities to extend her ministry into the diocese and offered resources for spiritual support and personal relationships, away from the campus, that she had not found in her prior rural placement. While we were savouring the March sun and crisp air, my husband had arrived for the weekend. At dinner the three of us reminisced about mutual friends from Jo's class at Weston. Then she and I lingered on at the table sorting out what had seemed relevant when raised during her formation process at Weston and what did not seem relevant at the time but had startled her with its relevancy once she was engaged in the responsibilities of full-time ministry. 'Like the importance of health insurance—and a car! Like the sense of "public" ministry. Like being "on the road" the way the early disciples were. That didn't mean much to me when I was entrenched in studies. Now I know on-the-road is what it's all about—you never know, when you're a minister, who you'll encounter around the next corner or whether the peace you extend will be welcomed or refused. And I'm even learning how to shake the dust off my feet and not brood, if my peace is refused!'

Late in the evening Jo, my husband and I walked down to a waterfall by a nineteenth-century paper mill. We marvelled at the moon-glistening

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rush of spring-swollen waters over the dam. Rejuvenated, we walked home briskly as the night air had a generous touch of lingering winter to it. For the last hour of the evening, Jo and I sat in the dark looking out at a bare-branched tree, stark and solitary in the moonlight. Listening to an instrumental tape Jo used in her ministry, we surrendered to silence for some time, letting our hearts speak directly to God instead of to God through speaking to one another. Then our voices alternated as we shared aloud prayers of thanksgiving and heartfelt petition and read from the book of Isaiah.

In the morning, breakfast extended into brunch which extended into the normative lunch-hour as Jo and I shared for the last time around the round table in front of the windows, trying to discern the relevancy of spirituality to ministry.

'Out there in the world of ministry, my faith has been tested time after time, yet so often it's been the depth of my faith and my prayer life that, in the end, sustains me. Without the spirituality I'm just one more helping professional'. As we inquired of one another, how and why spirituality made the crucial difference to ministry, we shared some of our own more vivid religious experiences. 'This year I've noticed a shift', Jo said. 'Previously my faith sort of generally sustained my ministry. Then, during a particularly fruitful period of prayer, I got a call one night very late to go to a dorm and be with a despondent student. Driving to the dorm, I began to pray. Almost immediately I felt this presence in the car, not just with me but *preparing* me in real and actual ways, to minister to the student. Later, in the midst of our encounter, I felt again that guiding presence. The experience gave ministry not only a fresh but also a much more vibrant meaning for me'.

A bit later Jo noticed the time and cried, 'How did it get so late! I've got to be in Syracuse by two'.

Laughter and gratitude and sadness at parting mingled as we embraced, each of us knowing we had been gifted with a three-day blessing by coming together again.

KEEPING IN TOUCH with graduates keeps me in touch with hope and with reality in my ministries related to formation for other than ordained ministry at the Weston School of Theology. Keeping in touch with ministry graduates may not be a universal phenomenon, however. In the Autumn 1985 issue of *Theological Education*, commenting on the evaluation of candidates for ministry, James A. Corriden, Dean of the Washington Theological Union, points out that, 'Perhaps the weakest link in this evaluative process is analysis of outcomes; effective methods have not been found to discern whether the Church is well served by the graduates of the schools' (p 43). This

would be a disappointing state of affairs were we in a period of stable continuity regarding ministry, but our current circumstance is one which Corriden characterizes as a 'radical reorganization of ministries'.

Articulating the formative dynamics for non-ordained ministry in a *descriptive format*, my intention in this article, may be all that can be expected during this time of flux. Descriptions of what contributes to the growth of a fidelity to ministry cited by graduates of programmes at the Weston School of Theology influences to some extent the formative dynamics offered to current students. For example, last year close to one-half of the nearly one hundred women and laymen who finished studies at Weston in the past decade informed the school about their ministries by returning to Cambridge, or by sending letters or newspaper clippings, or by responding to a questionnaire sent from the student services office. Last year twenty-one former students responded to the questionnaire included in my yearly letter to them. The setting for their placements in professional ministry represents a twelve-state geographical range, one that continually educates us back at Weston about ecclesial life in the United States.

Some Weston graduates direct diocesan offices, others co-ordinate religious education programmes; some minister in hospitals, others in parishes, on campuses, in prisons, at retreat houses and in schools.

How do these Weston alumni/ae engaged in professional ministry without ordination perceive their ministerial identity? The only uniformity respondents to the questionnaire revealed was that four identified themselves as 'pastoral leaders' and three as 'God's minister'. Others named themselves with the following variety: parish minister, commissioned member of a pastoral team, non-ordained minister, collaborative worker, public representative of the Church, religious leader ordained by the Holy Spirit.

How are these ministers perceived by *others*? Seven of the graduates felt that colleagues on staff and the people to whom they minister perceive the non-ordained minister as he or she perceives self. Six, interestingly, did not reply to this question, but other respondents felt that they are perceived in identity differently from the way they perceive themselves, i.e. hired hand, information-giver, teacher with an interest in religion, Father's helper, glorified CCD teacher and resource person.

One graduate remarked on seeing a connection between how she perceived herself and how others perceived her:

Depending on how I value myself in my perception of myself as

God's minister and as God's public presence in our setting directly influences the way others perceive me and to what extent they will trust me and acknowledge me as God's minister.

As graduates perceived themselves to be models of a ministry with its own value and public role, ordination seemed to lessen as an imperative even within some whose desire for ordination has not lessened. The questionnaire asked: 'When you were at Weston, did you want to be ordained? Do you still feel the same way?'. The replies were:

No, I did not want ordination. I still feel the same. (8)

Yes, I did but I do not want ordination now. (4)

Yes, I did as a student and I still do. (5)

Sometimes. (2)

Open to it but no strong desire. (1)

What have graduates found as support systems for ongoing formation?

Nine have spiritual directors and others mentioned the desire for a director but difficulty in finding a skilled trained director; six mentioned staff; seven spouse and/or friends. Other support beyond setting included: parish (4); retreat houses (5); cluster meetings; good area peer network; weekly prayer group; relationships with others in like ministry; supportive diocesan offices; women's support group, etc.

It may be an opportune moment for retreat houses and diocesan offices to work collaboratively in developing channels for outreach to women and men in other than ordained professional ministry in order to provide communal support that contributes to the enhancement of spiritual and ministerial depth and integration.

The *kind* of ministry in which graduates engage did not seem to unite or divide former students. When asked, 'Please describe any particular joys or discouragements you find in your ministry', two significant commonalities did emerge, however. Over and over ministers from Weston linked the joy of ministry with the people they serve, particularly if the ministry they are doing is evoking development within the people: the people being touched by God and their lives changing; seeing college students . . . grow in self-image, ministerial abilities, an understanding of the realities of oppression in the world, and a desire to help; seeing others grow in their spirituality and having this help me to grow; sharing people's journey, struggle and joy in a deep way; discovering that so many church-people are people of prayer, faith, courage, talent, perseverance and vision.

On the other side of the ledger—discouragements—more than half of the ministerial respondents cited clergy or ministering in a clerically dominant Church as their major discouragement: resistance of clergy toward growth, women and laity; the pain the Church has caused so many; dealing with clerical entrenchment; feeling I am a threat to others on staff; authoritarian pastor; the 'climate' in the Church at present and conservative bent; male domination of Church; autocratic pastor, who wants everything 'under control'.

Other 'discouragements' cited include: 'lack of recognition and support for non-ordained ministry'; 'the work and challenge of integrating spirituality and justice'; 'the scope, geographically and physically, of my (national) responsibilities'; 'the shock, after working in the secular realm, of finding how seldom "merit" determines decisions in the Church'; 'my limits of time and energy'; 'isolation'. For lay ministers, as well as an increasing number of women religious, the financial shortcomings and limitations of doing professional ministry are often exceptionally burdensome. For example, one layman with a child and a wife who is expecting another baby, has to ask at the end of each month for food supplies for his family from the food bank the parish maintains for the poor.

Joys and discouragements impinge considerably on the vitality of ongoing formation. If the single consistent factor of one's ministry is that accomplishing it means an uphill battle, then doubts about self, the worth of the enterprise and the viability of Church often infect the spirit of one's ministry. On the other hand, if the professional minister who is not ordained is respected and the ministry itself is relished, then these two factors are significant formative provisions that thrust faith and fidelity forward. Without ongoing spiritual formation and support systems the isolated non-ordained minister senses neither official, external affirmation nor ongoing formative sustenance and may become a fragile vessel to be ministering to and with people of God. Investing in support systems for ministers is a worthy priority for any diocese or institution.

Collaboration with graduates develops an awareness of what future graduates will encounter in ministry. For example, response from graduates indicated a strong correlation between satisfaction with ministry and ministering in a collaborative setting; consequently, a component on discernment of expectations of ministerial staff settings was added to our series of placement workshops.

Ministry is a confessional activity. Ministry is a professional activity. Other than ordained ministers are, at present, role-initiators.

Ministry, particularly ministerial leadership, is a confessional activity in that ministry emerges from a faith stance and a call from God. Within the person preparing for ministry a strong *subjective* faith dynamic is essential. 'Borrowed' faith is not a suitable option for a minister.

Ministry, particularly ministerial leadership, is a professional activity in that ministry is guided and evaluated by norms. Implicit in competencies related to a given culture are criteria. Within the person preparing for ministry a willingness to embrace objectivity is essential.

What this means is that preparation for ministry needs a milieu where one has the freedom to be confessional with all that that implies, e.g., subjectively sharing one's faith, finding means of nourishment and guidance for one's prayer life, etc. It also implies a milieu where one is challenged to be professional with all that flows from that, e.g., studies matched to one's denominational needs, collaboration with others envisioning a future similar to one's own, ministerial supervision within a setting when one can familiarize oneself with the people of one's own tradition.

As sophistication develops in understanding varied ministries, insights about the best locus for the formation described above are emerging. For example, a life-long, stable commitment to professional ministry cannot be well-formed in a local parish for a parish lacks the resources needed for professional objectivity. Conversely, an interdenominational divinity school is so broad that opportunities for confessional dynamics may be limited or repressed.

In every denomination, women and men who are engaged in professional ministry without the status of ordination are role initiators. Unless they are willing to be *pioneers*, acceptance by people and priests will not happen at all. These candidates for ministry learn that they will have to prove themselves, they will have to earn any respect they receive. They learn that to rely on rhetoric is to build a house on sand, yet solidarity with others committed to justice is a significant support. They learn that their strength lies in a thoroughness about knowing themselves spiritually, intellectually, socially and emotionally. They learn that they need a depth of formation to match the depth of the challenge toward which they have set their sights.

Any school of ministry that feels a responsibility toward assisting in that formation is called initially to evaluate what is *already* formative in its setting. For example, at Weston all students are moving toward ministry. Because of this, faith, theology and Church get talked about throughout the proverbial 'morning, noon

and night'. *This is formative.* For example, lay students who may have never experienced a church culture with depth and breadth quickly develop the necessary know-how to hold their own in leadership, within a setting where vowed religious are the majority. Such an intense setting raises ultimate life and God and Church questions, a requisite of formation, for such questions are the catalysts that force candidates to change and grow. By dealing rigorously with personal, spiritual and ecclesial issues existentially while in studies, the future minister is less apt to be victimized or to abandon the ministerial enterprise in the early years of being a role initiator.

One last formative dynamic already in place at Weston is the valuation of formation, especially regarding spirituality, evoked by the ignatian tradition of the Jesuits. Encouragement of spiritual maturity is 'natural to place' at Weston.

What formative dynamics have been added at Weston for those in preparation for ministries? Opportunities have been increased for development geared to spiritual, professional, personal, ecclesial and ministerial identity.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

From the beginning of their studies, most students perceive the value of engaging in sustained dialogue about where they are in relation to God, prayer, Church, mission, and ministry with a supportive and skilled director:

Spiritual direction. Seventeen professionally trained and/or seasoned spiritual directors are available to the students who initially meet with me to discern their particular needs in this regard. Group spiritual direction is also available for students who prefer this mode.

Retreats. Students are encouraged to participate in directed retreats, and the school offers a partial subsidy to individual lay students for this purpose.

Prayer leadership. Liturgy planning, monthly contemplative Fridays, days of recollection are opportunities for student-led prayer planning and leadership.

Spiritual development is perceived as benefiting the individual student and as a needed foundation for future ministry. Spiritual development opportunities encourage the student to trace his or her spiritual, ministerial growth; to learn how to recognize patterns, blocks, significant symbols and images; to ascertain factors that contribute to integration and those that impede integration; to aid

in the remembrance of call, of one's relationship to God and the awareness that ministry is part of the mission of the Church; to exemplify *an approach* that might enable a student to continue to nourish spiritual/ministerial integration and development after leaving Weston.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional formation. To encourage participation in professional associations the school offers assistance to a student wishing to attend a conference or convention. (Twenty-eight faculty and students attended the 1984 convention of the National Association for Lay Ministry). When feasible, the student will offer a forum on the topic to the school community after the event. For example, in February a student attended the National Convention of the Association of Adult Children of Alcoholics. She is now leading discussion focused on the convention.

Leadership formation. Opportunities to participate collaboratively in the governance of the school are open to students. The community life committee, composed primarily of students representing each constituency, has oversight on social functions, forums about school issues, liturgical worship. Each committee of the school, e.g. educational policy committee, has a student member. Several elected students serve on the faculty-administrative body, the Weston Council.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Informal advice and counselling. Students often come with concerns ranging from women religious experiencing midlife crises to married students experiencing tensions with spouse to younger students with interpersonal problems. When appropriate, professional counselling is advised.

Support groups

Weston's women's group. Monthly supper gatherings.

Lay student group. Monthly supper gatherings and a full luncheon meeting to focus on needs. Each of the above plans an annual weekend retreat, partially subsidized by the school. A paid student leader with considerable group-process experience facilitates the groups.

Married student and spouses group. Held monthly for shared reflection

on issues related to integrating ministry and family. Day of recollection.

All-day workshops on formation for ministry. Integration of spiritual, ministerial and personal dimensions.

DISCERNMENT OF FUTURE

Placement process. During the student's last year at Weston, the student meets several times with me to reflect on his or her ministerial goals, integration of ministry with mission, job search, etc.

From fall through spring there are monthly group meetings on discernment and workshops on practical issues such as job descriptions, contracts, interviewing, etc. In the spring students receive updates concerning ministerial openings every other week.

These support systems, which enhance development of personal/spiritual/ministerial integration, have not only passed the test of time but also invite further creative approaches. Students who live in the twenty-four-apartment housing complex initiate advent and lenten gatherings for prayer and reflection. Next year, at the request of students, electing to participate in small group 19th Annotation Retreats will be an option.

From working with students going on to other than ordained ministry, we have *tentatively* identified certain stages that have emerged repeatedly, keeping in mind that these emerged within persons who had made a commitment to full-time ministerial preparation. Call had become their life. Within those who take advantage of our formative resources, call often deepens into a sense of God's companionship and unfolds into a sense of ministry being part of mission. It is a process of naming. By naming I mean that the candidate for ministry verbalizes in some way an indication of having 'arrived' at a particular place, and of having begun to internalize this as part of his or her spiritual/ministerial identity.

(1) *Naming self. Knowing I am called.*

At this stage one hears statements like the following (some intertwined with difficulties in terminating from one's former placement):

Sometimes I wonder what on earth . . . I'm doing in this programme . . . or who I am to say I belong in ministry . . . or what got me into this crazy idea that I would do ministry.

After several months this often evolves into:

No matter how hard it gets, I never think of quitting . . . it was the right decision to come. I feel less guilty about the sacrifice my congregation is making for me to be here.

In the latter stages of dealing with naming self (as one called), one begins to hear concrete affirmation (which may sound indirect but this is appropriate):

I'm not sure why but I really sense God wants me here (or wants me preparing for ministry).

Even when everything's falling apart I don't lose that sense that God is calling me to ministry.

(2) *Naming God*

Struggle characterizes this period, for as surety deepens about call, it lessens concerning who the God is who is doing the calling. As clarity deepens on 'who I am' (the beginning of internalizing self as minister) complacency about the one who calls sometimes plummets. Shifts in the image of God erupt but they are often accompanied by an increase in awareness of how close God is:

God wouldn't do that! I cried it out just as I was beginning to wonder where on earth God was in the hospital and pain.

I kept calling and calling to the man to stop and pay attention to my stalled car when suddenly I sensed that what I was doing is what God is doing to me . . . calling and calling me to pay attention.

(Here we see a shift from the call stage when how self is named predominates to a focus on God and what God is doing).

Studying a gospel passage, I noticed that Jesus was not saying, What do you want me to do for you? to Bartimeus . . . Jesus was saying it to me. And he wanted me to answer him!

I kept staring at the three choices in front of me and worrying about the decisions . . . the choices were like pictures on the wall and suddenly Jesus seemed present. I asked him to show me which one to choose . . . and he turned away from the pictures . . . drawing me away . . . he seemed to be saying, 'Let it be . . .'

In the instances cited there is a sense that the God who broke into history in the stories of the Old Testament and New Testament is breaking into one's life history. The actions of God are sensed—in a relational way.

(3) *Naming the relationship*

At this stage we begin to see that naming the relationship is emerging as a dynamic, particularly with a sense of intimacy in solitude:

In the passage I always fixated on 'Feed my sheep', but instead this time 'Do you love me?' seemed to leap from the page and I heard it echoed over and over and over . . . must have been twenty-five times . . . 'Do you love me?' And I knew suddenly how strong my desire was to be asked that question.

As the relational quality deepens it may liberate in a way that enables anger to be expressed. What is significant at this stage is that there is affective depth, even if it seems as if God is missing or has disappeared as often happens when an image is changing. There can be panic . . . regret . . . sobering intimations . . . followed by a sense of God's ongoing presence day after day.

A steadfastness in sense of self related to call and that movement being named . . . a shift in image of God, a sense of the living God active in one's life and these movements being named . . . a sense of vibrancy in one's relationship with God and that movement being named—these dynamics lead to more reflection on life experience because God is more and more found there. This naming after a time leads to:

(4) *Naming the journey*

There are three ways this may become apparent:

- 1 Sharing . . . naming out loud . . . ministerial encounters evoking a sense of God's presence.
- 2 Sharing . . . naming out loud . . . a growing sense of self as public minister.
- 3 Sharing . . . naming out loud . . . some sense of unity with the people linked with unity with God.

Here, of course, we are at the generativity stage . . . the care beyond self . . . identity beyond self and God . . . identity linked to the people, linked to ministry that is public and for the people. The branch is firmly and fully grafted to the vine, and the welt around the wound that was part of the process has vanished. The minister is beginning to lay down his/her life for God and people.

Often manifested without the symbols that set the minister apart from the people, ministry which is other than ordained ministry evokes an incarnational quality. How then, as Jo asked in the

introduction, is the minister distinguished from the secular helping professional who is so often challenged by 'workaholism' and pelagianism? Sense of mission and depth of spirituality are the striking and key variables.

When the minister's motivational priority is enabling the people to develop their own gifts, talents and spirituality for the sake of the mission of the Church in the world, the techniques and status of ministry do not become an end in themselves. Reaching this level of generativity and sustaining a heart that can love, in spite of the uphill struggle of feeling marginalized without ordination, demands a spirituality that is robust, one that exhibits concrete instances of God's freedom, leadership and love unfolding from *within* one's life experience, fostering the insight that being 'on the road' is being at home with God, as Jo in the initial story is discovering.

In the Church we are only beginning to discern what is fruit-bearing in other than ordained ministerial leadership that is a lifelong commitment lived out in a substantial way without the servile or bureaucratic church worker overtones that have characterized the service of women religious and laymen and women in the past. Discoveries will manifest themselves if we remain alert to the experience of graduates of our programmes. For example, some Weston lay graduates are learning how to sustain a vigorous fidelity to both family and ministry, one as a lay missionary with his family in Venezuela. Other lay students who, when starting studies, declared, 'I'm not sure whether ministry is for me but I know marriage is something I want', less that a decade later are saying:

This year I turned thirty-four and I came to the realization that I will neither marry nor join a religious community. I've fallen so deeply in love with the people, I want nothing to come between us.

Ministry is my way of life. Whoever I marry would have to accept that. If I don't marry, I'll need community life eventually to sustain my call and mission.

The authentic sign of continuing formation as a steady yet gradual unfolding of increasing depth that bears fruit in action is revealed in other ways. For example, one graduate who established a campus ministry centre for Catholics on a methodist college campus moved into a year's preparation for hospital chaplaincy where she sensed a deepening call to hospice ministry. Another laywoman, after eight years as a chaplain on an oncology unit,

sensing a need to move on, did not rush into assessing 'job prospects'. She is proposing to spend two months with a community in the Southwest and three months at a house of prayer in California to ground her discernment in a spiritual process.

The Church of the future will be shaped in remarkable ways by the formation embraced by non-ordained ministers or by the lack of formative dynamics available to them. By the default of the latter, embrace of one cause after another may become a substitute for formation of deep, sustaining convictions lived out in solidarity with others.

In the near future, three scenarios for other than ordained ministry may become apparent. The first is a neo-clericalism emerging from fear and resentment within ordained ministers in regard to those who are professionally equal. The second is the converse—an increase in models of collaborative ministry between ordained and other than ordained, working fruitfully together in mutual support. In the third scenario, the other than ordained minister will stand between a vanishing clergy and the abandonment of the people. For example, in one diocese in the United States there are presently fifty-seven diocesan priests to staff eighty-five parishes. Within the decade the number of priests under the age of sixty-five in this diocese will be reduced to twenty-four. Who will lead the people? Because the United States is a voluntaristic society, a populist Church may emerge if non-ordained professional leadership is not encouraged.

According to Suzanne Elsesser, two hundred programmes have been established centred on preparation for other than ordained ministry, one third of them since 1983. The majority of these programmes are non-degree (twenty-nine are degree only, thirty-seven degree and/or certificate). Formation in many of these programmes has its focus on shared liturgical and prayer experience rather than on reflection of the minister's spiritual journey in solitude and with others.

In the decade to come, as programmes of preparation continue to expand, it will be crucial to discern a balance between formal education, supervised ministry and formative dynamics. In the light of the many centuries it took to establish adequate theological education for candidates to the priesthood (a history evoking problems we must guard against repeating in our day and age), it is also important to insure that both candidates for whom a degree is appropriate and candidates for whom a degree is not appropriate are treated justly and given opportunity.

Cardinal Bernadin in his pastoral letter on ministry, *In service to one another*, suggests three other issues that will continue to challenge

the 'mix' of ministry emerging in the Church; affirmation of the common foundation of all ministry, the reality of differentiations of ministries, and the disharmony 'ranking' can evoke.

In speaking of formation, Mgr. Paul Cordes of the Pontifical Council for the laity, points out that 'knowledge (of the contents of faith) must be inspired by personal relationship'. He suggests that Jesus founded 'a kind of institute of formation for adults' and from Jesus's 'method of teaching one can undoubtedly deduce principles which still remain valid today . . .'

One of my favourites from what I call the 'school of ministry in the New Testament', one particularly appropriate to formative dynamics in our day and age, is the series of questions with which Jesus confronts the disciples when they give superficial meaning to his warning about the yeast of the Pharisees. As related by Mark, two events happen that day, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes and the confrontation of the Pharisees 'seeking from him a sign from heaven' (Mk 8). Hearing the disciples remonstrate among themselves about their lack of more than one loaf of bread on board the boat, Jesus reacts to the limited and literal interpretation the disciples give to his warning. Jesus then directs their attention to what the day has revealed by levelling at them stinging questions. Jesus urges them to probe their interiorities: 'Are your hearts hardened? Are your minds closed? Do you not remember?' He encourages them to be aware of their senses: 'Having eyes do you not see?' He asks them to consider their actions: 'Why are you arguing? How many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' Finally he demands a reflection on their own life experience: their witnessing of the breaking of five loaves for five thousand people, seven loaves for four thousand, scraps left over.

Handicap through the power of Jesus had become hundredfold—but Jesus does not tell them that. With the last of Jesus's questions the passage comes to an abrupt end; answers from him that they can find within themselves would be to treat them like children not adults. What Jesus models in Mark 8—invited attention to interior movements and reflection on life for intimations of the presence and power of God—has become a model utilized in ministerial preparation and spiritual formation in some schools of ministry in our day and age.

Since the time eleven years ago when I started to study at Weston, changes in the perception of ministerial identity have been profound. Early on, for many, the priest represented the only possible model for ministry; consequently, many facets of formation for those who would not be ordained were perceived through the handicap of denial. Perhaps because it has been my privilege

repeatedly to have witnessed handicap being transformed into hundredfold, I hear Jesus levelling those challenging questions found in Mark 8 at those of us who are his disciples today (whether we be called lay or vowed religious, priest or bishop), but addressed particularly to those of us who sit in our boat remonstrating about the lack of more than one loaf of the bread of vocations, giving limited and literal interpretations to call and ministry, demanding a sign from heaven.

‘Are your hearts hardened? Are your minds closed? Why are you arguing? Having eyes do you not see?’ It has happened this day! Five loaves broken for five thousand people! Scraps left over! That which was perceived insufficient, inferior, inadequate has become hundredfold!