

“One of the unfortunate, unintended consequences of the professionalization of lay ministry since Vatican II has been the rise of silos separating roles and responsibilities on the parish staff. *Reweaving the Ministries* offers a biblically centered and pastorally relevant model for overcoming this compartmentalization. If every ministerial team in the country read this book, talked about it together, and put it into practice, we would be a better church for it!”

—Edward P. Hahnenberg, PhD, is the Breen Chair in Catholic Theology at John Carroll University and the author of *Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers*

“Ministers of the Christian community—ordained and lay ecclesial—will benefit greatly from this wise and inspiring vision of ministry rooted in Ostdiek’s biblical, liturgical, and prophetic imagination. If there is one book your parish staff reads together this year, make sure it is *Reweaving the Ministries*.”

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Professor of Practical Theology
Saint John’s University School of Theology and Seminary

“Ministers today celebrate the post Vatican II explosion of ministry; they also long for fuller collaboration as our hierarchical history and growing specialization create silos. How can we become truly co-workers? Ostdiek’s meditative reading of the Emmaus story explores the ministries of companioning, Word, table, mystagogy, and mission, and their radical connection in serving the faith journey of disciples. A theological frame, probing questions, practical strategies, and spiritual depth make this an ideal book for ministry leaders to read, ponder, and practice as they work to *Reweave the Ministries*.”

—Zeni Fox, PhD
Professor Emerita, Immaculate Conception Seminary,
Seton Hall University; author, *New Ecclesial Ministry:
Lay Professionals Serving the Church*

“This is a profound, challenging, and comforting book. Readers will delve into and glory in the riches of church teaching on evolving pastoral ministry. Through the paradigm of Emmaus pastoral ministers are challenged to revisit how they companion people on their journeys of faith, listen again to the Good News, break bread, have their hearts set on fire, and re-engage in mission. Readers take comfort that they are engaging in such rich ministries, not as soloists, but as weavers working together.”

—Fr. Robert J. Karris, OFM
St. Bonaventure University

Reweaving the Ministries

The Emmaus Paradigm

Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM



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Preface

The final editing of this manuscript is being done at a difficult time. We are caught in the throes of the coronavirus pandemic. Our accustomed journey through life is completely overshadowed by clouds of deep distress and myriad fears. Life in the world as we have known it has been abruptly shattered and may never return. What lies ahead of us is unknown.

Our experience is not unlike what the two disciples on the way to Emmaus had experienced. The bright hopes they had once harbored were no more; their lives shattered. But wonder of wonders, their hopes for the future were reborn when a stranger approached and walked with them, listening to their story and helping them piece it back together in a way they had never expected.

Many strangers are appearing in our lives now, as for those disciples, to walk with us and help us on the way to what will be. Reports abound of many going out of their way to companion others in need. The outpouring of spontaneous efforts of total strangers to help others in so many ways in these times of need holds a glimmer of hope for the future. What ministry will be like in the future is unknown. Continuing social distance? Virtual presence to others in a more electronic mode? Fewer face-to-face opportunities for extended time for coordination and planning? What does seem quite likely to continue is the great array of ministries now at work in the church and the need to keep them woven together. Can we not hope this will continue?

In light of that hope, it has seemed wise to go ahead with this book and rely on God's ever-present Spirit to bring to new birth the adaptations in ministry that will surely be needed. The Emmaus story offers us a paradigm and assures us that the risen Lord will not abandon us. He promised to send his Spirit to be our advocate and guide on the way.

Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM
Catholic Theological Union
October 4, 2020

Abbreviations

- AA *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Vatican II, November 18, 1965)
- AG *Ad Gentes*: Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Vatican II, December 7, 1965)
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (John Paul II, 1992)
- CL *Christifideles Laici*: Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation (John Paul II, 1988)
- CT *Catechesi Tradendae*: Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time (John Paul II, 1979)
- DV *Dei Verbum*: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Vatican II, November 18, 1965)
- EG *Evangelii Gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Francis, 2013)
- EN *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: Apostolic Exhortation (Paul VI, 1975)
- GDC *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997)
- GIRM *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (ICEL translation, 2010)
- GS *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Vatican II, December 7, 1965)
- LG *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican II, November 21, 1964)

- MR *Missale Romanum: The Roman Missal, 3rd edition*
(ICEL translation, 2010)
- NDC *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB, 2005)
- OM *The Order of Mass, Missale Romanum, 3rd edition*
(ICEL translation, 2010)
- RCIA *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (ICEL translation,
NCCB edition, 1988)
- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium: The Constitution on the
Sacred Liturgy* (Vatican II, December 4, 1963)

Introduction

Books sometimes begin without notice, with the first tentative spinning out of an idea. That simple thread of thought gradually takes on a life of its own, and over time it is woven together with many other ideas, like so many multicolored threads interwoven until they come together into a larger pattern. That is the case with this book.

The first threads of the idea were spun in 1987. I was invited to give an address at the annual conference of the Institute of Liturgical Studies at Valparaiso University.¹ The presentation was to address two questions: how is Eucharist related to religious education, on one hand, and to gospel witness, on the other? As I pondered the assignment, it dawned on me that the Emmaus story in Luke's account (Luke 24:13-35) makes those connections in a very compelling way. As the story unfolds, it moves from catechesis to Eucharist and then from Eucharist to mission. In effect, the moment of recognition of the risen Lord at the supper table binds both catechesis and mission together. From that time on, the Emmaus story has gradually threaded its way into my theology courses, adult education workshops, and articles.² In the process, it has been interwoven with many

1. "What We Have Seen and Heard and Touched," The 1987 Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers, paper 26, 87-103, https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/26/.

2. For example, Gil Ostdiek, "The Eucharist and Pastoral Ministry: The Emmaus Paradigm," *Emanuel* 119 (November/December 2013): 487-96.

related areas of pastoral ministry and became a promising paradigm for interweaving them.

It seems to me now that the Emmaus paradigm has much to offer as we face the current task of coordinating the present array of disparate ministries³ and reweaving them into a more integrated pastoral practice. The ministerial practices under consideration here are not the many one-to-one forms of individual pastoral care but rather those ministries that are offered, whether by an individual minister or by ministerial coworkers, for the community as a whole or for groups within it.

This book reflects on why and how we might envision reweaving those ministries for the future. It has been written primarily as a reflective invitation with three audiences in mind. It is offered first to those now engaged in the ministries or in programs of preparation for them, to invite them to think of their own ministry as part of a larger pastoral tapestry. It is also offered to those in pastoral leadership, together with their staffs, who are charged with the responsibility of envisioning an integrated shape of ministry to a community and coordinating the practice of the ministries, whether on a local parish level or on a higher diocesan level. And finally, it may also serve as a modest conversation starter for those interested in thinking together more broadly about the future shape of pastoral ministry. These pages are written from the limited perspective of a US Roman Catholic liturgist interested in how liturgy relates to the rest of pastoral ministry, in the hope that others may find it useful as well. My fondest hope is that this book may contribute in

3. These ministries include not only ordained ministries and official lay ecclesial ministries, which have leadership responsibilities and are often thought of as “pastoral ministries,” but also the many kinds of ministries that have sprung up recently. “Pastoral ministry” in the singular will also be used to refer to the ministries as a whole.

some small way to pastoral ministers becoming ever more fully, in St. Paul's apt description, coworkers with one another and, indeed, coworkers with God in the care of God's people.⁴

This book unfolds in the following way. Chapter 1 will look at how ministry in the US Roman Catholic Church today is rapidly taking on a great variety of forms, ordained and lay, offering enticing new possibilities for collaboration between coworkers. The image of reweaving these ministries and the need for that will be explained, and the Emmaus story will be put forward as a promising paradigm for that task. The next five chapters will each take up one of the five phases of the risen Lord's ministry to the two disciples on their journey. The pattern for each of these chapters will be: (1) the account of a ministry moment in the Emmaus story, (2) reflection on the paradigm of ministry modeled there, (3) key intersections connecting the ministries, and (4) particular strategies for a reweaving. The final chapter will revisit the Emmaus story to gather it up into a continuous reflection on the paradigm it offers for reweaving pastoral ministry today. It will conclude with some pastoral considerations for the work of reweaving. Appendixes will provide interested readers some technical notes to three of the chapters and a description of how the Emmaus account was actually used in a workshop for reweaving parish ministries.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to so many who have been coworkers in interweaving the ideas in this book. Theology students, workshop participants, and faculty colleagues at Catholic Theological Union have all had a hand in weaving the threads together over the years since the Valparaiso conference. I owe particular thanks to faculty colleagues

4. Paul often uses the word "coworker" (*synergon*) to name his associates and fellow workers in ministry (e.g., Rom 16:3), and in that shared ministry they all are truly coworkers with God (1 Cor 3:9).

C. Vanessa White and Christina Zaker, whose wise advice has immensely improved what is written here. The Franciscan community at St. Peter's Church in the Loop provided warm fraternal hospitality while final editing was being done; for that I am most grateful. Deep thanks are due as well to Liturgical Press for the patient support this project has received and especially to my family from whom I have learned so much about the joy of collaboration. It is my fond hope that these musings may contribute in some small way to current rethinking of what ministry is and how we can weave together the rich array of ministries with which we are blessed.



1

Reweaving the Ministries

Let's begin with a simple admission. Perhaps the title of this book and chapter should end with a question mark. Hidden within this title are several questions. First, about the image of reweaving. Was ministry once woven and then became unwoven? Is it in need of reweaving today? And second, about Emmaus. If we answer yes to those questions, why should we think of using biblical accounts from different historical contexts of a long-ago era and in particular the Emmaus story as an apt model for that reweaving today? What pastoral inspiration and model would it offer us now? Pondering these questions will set the context for the remaining chapters.

Woven to Unwoven

Zeni Fox, well known for her work on lay ministry, offers us a short answer to the first questions about reweaving. She notes that the diverse and changing forms of ministry found in the early church were gradually swallowed up by the ordained ministry and woven into it by the end of the first millennium.¹ Let's unpack that a bit.

1. Zeni Fox, "The Intersection of Present Experience and the Tradition," in *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church*, rev. and exp. ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 299–321, here at 300–304.

Scholars who have studied extensively the pattern of ministry in the early church highlight several features of that ministry.² A wide variety of ministries arose quickly. Paul gives three somewhat different lists (1 Cor 12:8-10; 12:28; Eph 4:11). There were other “forms of assistance” (1 Cor 12:28) as well, like the relief collection for the Jerusalem community (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 9:12-13), which surfaced in response to the rise of particular needs. That outburst of ministries to meet the needs of the moment is not unlike what we are experiencing now in the lay ministries. But scholars also warn us against assuming that those early ministries match exactly how we now name the ministries. There was no single pattern. That would begin to take shape only several decades later, toward the end of the first century.

Despite this lack of a single way of naming and organizing this great variety of ministries, there was a strong unity between them that lay far deeper. They all come from the same trinitarian source: spiritual gifts from the Spirit, forms of service from the Lord, and workings from God (1 Cor 12:4-6). They are all given for a single purpose: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). And they are given to everyone to “equip the saints [the people of God] for the work of ministry [*diakonia*], for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

The early church presents a truly collaborative vision for ministry: (1) a unity of many ministries all tied to one mission; (2) ministries that match the gifts God gives in response to the changing needs of God’s people; and (3) ministers who collaborate as coworkers in carrying out the mission of

2. For fuller biblical and doctrinal discussion of the early shaping of ministry, see, respectively, Daniel J. Harrington, *The Church According to the New Testament: What the Wisdom and Witness of Early Christianity Teach Us Today* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2001), 145–73, and Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. Thomas Hoebel (New York: Bloomsbury, T & T Clark, 2015), 219–46.

God in the world. "Throughout the ages the holy Spirit makes the entire church 'one in communion and ministry; and provides her with different hierarchical and charismatic gifts,' . . . inspiring in the hearts of the faithful that same spirit of mission which impelled Christ himself" (AG 4).³

Skip forward a millennium and note with Zeni Fox that the diverse and changing forms of lay ministry found in the early church were gradually swallowed up by the ordained ministry and woven into it by the end of the first millennium.⁴ Over the centuries before Vatican II ministry had come to be understood "as a singular reality, vested in its fullness in the bishops"⁵ and in priests as "co-workers of the order of bishops."⁶ On the eve of the council there was some limited lay involvement through associations such as the Legion of Mary and Catholic Action, under the rubric of the "apostolate of the laity." It was clear, especially in Catholic Action, that laypersons did not have a ministry that was uniquely and rightfully their own. They were simply seen as lay auxiliaries allowed to assist in the work of the ordained ministers. Lay apostolic activity, carried out under the authorization and guidance of the clergy, was a derivative form of participation in the ordained ministry. Ordination was thus assumed to be the sole foundation of ministry. That close-knit ordination-based pattern was about to become unwoven as the Second Vatican Council opened it up for a new reweaving.

Why a Reweaving Now?

It is no secret that the shape of ministry in the Roman Church has been undergoing a major shift in the decades since Vatican II. Three key factors merit brief consideration.

3. Appendix 3 at the end of the book has more on this.

4. Zeni Fox, *New Ecclesial Ministry*, 304.

5. Zeni Fox, *New Ecclesial Ministry*, 300.

6. The homily in the 2003 Rite of Ordination of Priests, 123.

Proliferation

First, the most dramatic development has been a veritable explosion of lay involvement in ministry since Vatican II. Numerous lay ministers are now increasingly at work alongside ordained ministers.

The story of how the solid foundations laid at the council⁷ opened the way to this accelerating proliferation is fascinating. Only a few milestones can be named here.⁸ The ministries of lector and acolyte, formerly minor orders for clergy, were opened to laity in 1972.⁹ A year later laypersons were allowed to distribute Holy Communion as Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers,¹⁰ and ten years after that laypersons were authorized to exercise ministries in other instances.¹¹ Finally, this growing experience of lay ministry led to a synod in 1987 to reflect on the “Vocation and Mission of the

7. Especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), 1964, full membership of the baptized in the People of God and the universal call to holiness (chapters 2, 4, 5); and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), 1965, a comprehensive understanding of the role of the laity and how it is exercised. Two other documents that same year, the Decree on the Church’s Mission (*Ad Gentes*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), added a broader understanding of the church’s mission to transformation of the world, opening further possibilities for lay involvement.

8. What follows is only a summary of some highlights. For more extensive treatment, see Aurelie A. Hagstrom, *The Emerging Laity: Vocation, Mission, and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010); Dolores R. Leckey, *The Laity and Christian Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006).

9. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam*, 1972.

10. Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Immensae Caritatis*, 1973.

11. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 228–30, 910, revised in 1983. The *Code* allows laypersons “to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of the law” (c. 230.3). Such authorization may be subject to regulations of episcopal conferences and the local diocese.

Laity in the Church and in the World.” The pope’s postsynodal apostolic exhortation¹² summed up and further developed the conciliar teaching on the call and mission of the laity.¹³ The synod and *Christifideles Laici* affirmed and gave further impetus to the growth of lay ministry.

At about that same time, the language of “lay ecclesial ministry” was coming into more frequent use.¹⁴ Within the larger group of lay ministers, this description came to refer to a particular group of those who have received official authorization by the hierarchy to serve publicly in positions of leadership in the local church; who work in mutual collaboration with the bishops, priests, and deacons; and who had undergone appropriate preparation and formation.¹⁵ Those now identified with the official title of lay ecclesial minister (LEM) in a given diocese typically include pastoral associates, directors of catechesis and faith formation, leaders of youth ministry, school principals, and directors of liturgy or pastoral music.

At this point let’s pause and take a quick look at some numbers. In 2018 the number of lay ecclesial ministers

12. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1987. For a helpful summary and analysis of this papal document, see Peter N. V. Hai, “Reflections on John Paul II’s Theology of the Laity: 20th Anniversary of *Christifideles Laici* (1989),” http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

13. Notably, in place of the conciliar definition of the laity by “what they are not” (LG 31), this document proposed a positive definition, i.e., those who through baptism are made one body with Christ, established among the people of God, and made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ and also in the mission of the whole church (CL 9–17).

14. Already in 1980 the USCCB used the language of “lay ecclesial ministry.” See their *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1980), 3–4.

15. See USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), 10–13.

(including vowed religious) in parish ministry, such as the roles just named, had reached 39,651, outnumbering the 36,580 priests.¹⁶ In 2018 and 2019 the number of graduate-level seminarians was 3,526,¹⁷ while lay ecclesial ministry program enrollments numbered 16,585 in 2018,¹⁸ outnumbering the seminarians 4.9 to one. Without doubt a dramatic change in the face of ministry is well underway and ongoing.

This wider involvement of the laity in ministry, however, extends well beyond the LEMs. Many others are involved in ministries within a parish, such as marriage preparation, catechesis, bereavement, and communion for the homebound. In addition, the final document of Vatican II, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), had planted seeds for a vastly expanded vision of the mission of the church. In addition to internal service to the church itself, that mission could now entail service to all facets of life in the world of today, social, economic, and political. Under the theme of evangelization, subsequent pronouncements of the popes, especially Paul VI, John Paul II, and Francis, have forcefully proclaimed that the mission of the church includes the pursuit of justice, peace, care of the earth, and the transformation of the world. It is especially within this expanded vision that so many of the laity, often with the sup-

16. Georgetown Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), <https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/> (accessed 8-2-2020).

17. CARA, "Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollment: Statistical Overview for 2018–2019," 2–3 and 11, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/StatisticalOverview201819.pdf>. The figures given here, which include graduate pre-theology and theology, differ slightly from the total of 3,353 in FAQs.

18. CARA, "Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollment," 27. On the following page, CARA notes wide fluctuations in this category over the years due to variations in the number of programs and the percentages of those reporting (e.g., the ratio fell from 4.9 to 3.6 a year later because 14 of the LEM programs did not report, and three years earlier LEM enrollment had reached a high of 23,681).

port of their parish and under its umbrella, have taken up their role in mission and invested their energies in it.¹⁹

In God's providence and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this proliferation of lay ministries has been a great gift to the church. As the number of priests active in ministry has continued to decline, many laypeople have answered the call to serve in a wide variety of ministries, official and unofficial. Vatican II had laid the foundations for opening up new and wider pathways into ministry.

Two significant changes have resulted. Clearly the face of ministry has changed through this proliferation of lay ministries, official and unofficial, and will likely continue to do so. Second, the understanding of ministry itself has also been transformed. Prior to Vatican II a sharp dividing line had been drawn between clergy and laity. Ministry in the proper sense belonged to the clergy in virtue of their ordination. After Vatican II, ministry opened up to the laity in virtue of their baptism. The top-down "dividing line" model gave way to a circular "community of ministries" model.²⁰ Accordingly, the language of ministry, rooted theologically in baptism and discipleship, has become much broader: "*Christian ministry is any activity, done on behalf of the church community, that proclaims, celebrates, and serves the reign of God.*"²¹ In addition to this proliferation, two more major factors need to be added briefly.

19. One might see this Spirit-led expansion of ministry beyond the internal needs of the church as remarkably similar to the Spirit-inspired outburst of ministries in the early church.

20. For an account of the historical background of this dramatic transformation in the understanding of ministry and the shifts in theology to which it led, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry: Completely Revised Edition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 5–34; Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company / A Herder & Herder Book, 2003), 1–38.

21. Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 109 (emphasis original).

Professionalization

To the proliferation of ministry and the expanded vision it entailed we now need to add a second major factor, the professionalization of these emerging ministries. As the ministries for laypeople have become established and grown, many initiatives have been taken to identify their professional status and guide their professional development. Among these is the formation of professional organizations,²² an umbrella organization for certification of LEMs,²³ and a number of USCCB publications.²⁴ Organizations and documents such as these clearly attest to the growing professionalization of lay ministries in this country.

Specialization

This is the final factor to consider. Proliferation and professionalization of the ministries have resulted in practitioners of these multiple ministries focusing more narrowly on their particular areas of expertise and responsibility. This sense

22. The National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC, 1965); the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL, 1967); the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC, 1969); the National Association for Pastoral Musicians (NPM, 1976); the National Association of Lay Ministries (NALM, 1976); the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM, 1982); and the Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA, 1985).

23. The Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministry (ACLEM). See USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service, *Certification Handbook*, <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/certification/upload/-Certification-Handbook-2016.pdf>; also the *National Certification Standards for Ecclesial Lay Ministers* (Washington, DC: NALM et al., 2006). This official ordering of some lay ministries could be seen as reminiscent of institutionalization of ministries that soon occurred in the early church.

24. Especially *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005).

of ministerial specialization is bolstered by several other factors.²⁵ One is the widespread development of graduate degree programs of preparation for specific ministries. Another is the formation of the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the development of the *Certification Handbook* and the *Official Standards: National Certification Standards for Ecclesial Lay Ministers*, noted above. Still another is the USCCB comprehensive guide for the development of lay ecclesial ministry, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, also cited above. Such specialization can tend to isolate the ministries from each other, leading at times to a reluctance to cross over into other areas of ministry and to a neglect of collaboration and an integrated pastoral approach to ministry. It is especially this risk of an unintended scattering of the ministries into self-contained “siloes” that now calls for paying careful attention to coordination and collaboration, for an intentional and coordinated reweaving of these ministries.

A Biblical Model

In the face of the need for such a fundamental rethinking of current pastoral practice as it is now being reshaped, a typical Christian instinct is to return to the Scriptures for a vision and model. Such biblical resources include the ministry of Jesus himself and in particular the Emmaus story. To those we now turn.

The Ministry of Jesus

At the beginning of this chapter we posed a second question. Can we use biblical accounts from particular historical

25. For a fuller discussion, see Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 126–29.

contexts of a long-ago era as models for ministry today? Can the ministry of Jesus be a model for ministry today? Biblical scholar Seán Kealy and others have wrestled with that very question.²⁶ In the numerous books and articles on this question authors cite aspects of the ministry of Jesus as just such a model for current ministries. After surveying the models prevalent in Judaism at the time of Jesus, Kealy notes that Jesus does not follow any one of them exclusively. Rather he drew on several of them to address various situations. Even so, Kealy accepts that “the basic options and tendencies of the human condition in Jesus’ day were not that different from our own. . . . [A] closer analysis shows that men and women of the Bible are remarkably close to us in their joys, their hopes and fears, their doubts, trouble and anguish.”²⁷ Kealy does not, however, opt for deriving detailed blueprints for current ministries from the ministry of Jesus. Rather, Kealy stresses several characteristics of the mission and ministry of Jesus that became foundational for the early church and that remain decisive for mission and ministry today. Here are some such characteristics.²⁸

- *God’s mission.* Total commitment to doing God’s will is the hallmark of the Jewish spirituality inherited by Jesus. The words Jesus spoke and the deeds he performed were only those given him by the one who sent him (John 12:49; 5:19). Carrying out God’s saving plan, under the guidance and power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14), was the mission of Jesus. The command of love at the heart of that plan was woven throughout his ministry. Reliance on God’s saving plan and unwavering

26. Seán P. Kealy, “Is Jesus a Model for Ministry?,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (December 1989): 253–76. Kealy, professor emeritus at Duquesne University and recognized expert on the gospels and the history of biblical scholarship, died in 2018.

27. Kealy, “Is Jesus a Model,” 258.

28. Inspired by Kealy, “Is Jesus a Model,” 271.

commitment to carrying it out remains the foundation and goal of ministry now.

- *Discernment and boundary crossing.* What God willed, however, had to be discerned concretely in what Jesus experienced in his encounters. For example, his initial working principle was that he was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” but the great faith of the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, led Jesus to cure her daughter (Mark 7:24-30; Matt 15:24, 26-28) and to cross beyond those original boundaries. He learned to read the specific needs of those he encountered. The mission he entrusted to his disciples was to be universal in scope (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47). It also calls for discernment, as it did for Jesus, in responding to the needs of people encountered in specific contexts. This kind of boundary breaking is witnessed now in the lay outreach ministries emerging in response to needs and issues of our own times.²⁹
- *Urgency and collaboration.* Jesus had a great sense of urgency about carrying out his mission. The ripened harvest had to be gathered lest it be lost (John 4:34-37; Matt 9:38; Luke 10:2). That is why Jesus first sent the Twelve out to proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick (Luke 9:1-2), after they had become familiar with his message, followed by another seventy(-two) disciples (Luke 10:1-20) as coworkers to expand his mission. That same sense of urgency to spread God’s love to our world is imperative now. Jesus’ example of sending them in pairs, as coworkers, remains a standard for us today, because the task of transforming the world by witnessing to that healing and forgiving love is so great. It is one’s own encounter with Jesus as the embodiment of that love which feeds that same sense of

29. This Spirit-inspired growth of lay ministries beyond the internal needs of the church is a wonderful complement to the lay ecclesial ministries being drawn into the more structured internal ministries to the church.

urgency in his disciples now, making them all “missionary disciples.”³⁰

- *Inclusivity and hospitality.* Finally, inclusivity, respectful listening, and hospitable acceptance of people are threaded throughout the ministry of Jesus. Think of his meal parables about life in God’s reign and especially his own meal practice. That practice led to the charge his adversaries leveled against him: “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). In times such as ours, can we place limits to God’s invitation when God doesn’t?

Those characteristics so prominently manifested in the ministry of Jesus are subtly interwoven in the Emmaus story. To that story we now turn.

The Emmaus Paradigm

How can we name the integrated vision of pastoral ministry contained in the Emmaus story? One way is to trace the flow of the ministerial actions of the stranger from scene to scene.³¹ He began by joining the two disciples and walking with them on the way (Luke 24:15), listening to them and inviting them to tell once again the story of their experience (v. 19). When their story was finished, when they had told

30. Pope Francis I, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 120, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

31. For other ways of outlining the Emmaus story, see O. Kenneth Walther, “A Solemn One Way Trip Becomes a Joyous Roundtrip! A Study of the Structure of Luke 24:13-35,” *Ashland Theological Journal* (Fall 1981): 60–87, or the literary-critical analysis of “five concentric circles” by Arthur J. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993); or the pastoral approach of Langford, *God Moments: Why Faith Really Matters to a New Generation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 186–94, who names them walking with, listening to, talking with, breaking bread with, and empowering.

all of it, he retold their story and gave it a new ending (v. 26), interpreting it through the lens of the Scriptures so familiar to them (v. 27). Accepting their invitation to join them at table, he became the host and led them in the ritual of the breaking of the bread (v. 30). When they recognized him in that action, he vanished from their sight (v. 31), leaving them enabled to name their experience with the stranger (v. 32) and empowered and eager to go back and tell the others (vv. 33-35). In current terminology of pastoral theology, the story has unfolded through several moments or stages, each with its own need for a particular form of ministering to the two disciples:

walking with and listening to them (vv. 15-24)	– <i>pastoral companionship</i>
opening up the scripture for them (vv. 25-27)	– <i>ministry of the word</i>
breaking bread with them at table (v. 30)	– <i>liturgy</i>
naming the fire burning in their hearts (v. 32)	– <i>mystagogy</i>
going back to tell the others (vv. 33-35)	– <i>mission</i>

The Emmaus story thus provides us with a remarkable paradigm for a larger, more integrated vision of collaborative pastoral ministry in which the particular needs discerned in each stage in the journey of disciples call for weaving the individual ministries of the moment into an integral pastoral care for the whole journey.³²

32. In keeping with the Emmaus narrative, our focus will be on these five ministries. Those in other ministries are invited to find their ministries in the story as well, e.g., the many forms of current mission facing issues in today's world.