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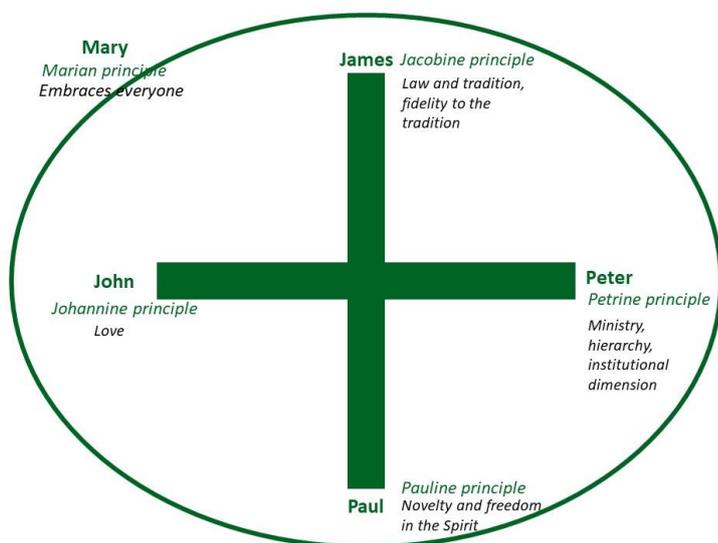
Introduction and Context

During the 2016 Synod held in the Diocese of Limerick the role of women in leadership in the church was discussed and a proposal was put forward to explore the matter in more detail. Core Strategic Action Five within the New Models of Leadership theme in the Diocesan Pastoral Plan arising from the Synod stated: *We will as a matter of urgency establish the proposed working group on a leadership role for women in the life of the diocese.*¹

Bishop Brendan Leahy established the ‘Women in Leadership’ working group in 2017. Membership of the working group was comprised of both lay and religious women and men from a variety of professional backgrounds and experience. The working group had the following terms of reference:

- 1) *Explore and scope out positive experiences that already exist;*
- 2) *Research current church teaching on the theme of the role of women in the church;*
- 3) *Offer proposals and suggestions on how and where women can play a greater leadership role in the institutions of the church at Diocesan and local levels.*

At the outset the working group took the decision to focus its work within the realms of what is possible within Church teaching and Canon Law. The group began by looking at the Marian principle drawing on Bishop Brendan Leahy’s reflection on the work of von Balthasar². Mary is seen as an embracing force holding the other 4 principles (Jacobine, Petrine, Pauline and Johannine) in balance. There is a dynamic tension between all dimensions; each principle shares in the whole and thereby shares in each other. The Marian principle is an ellipse surrounding all; it becomes skewed if one dimension has a greater emphasis than others.



The question was raised as to what leadership would look like if it was rebalanced along the Marian principle? The Marian principle offers a model of Church that is about being as opposed to doing, about community as opposed to institution. A male led, institutional church is skewed towards the Petrine and Jacobine dimensions; to balance this, new leadership would have to lean towards Pauline and Johannine dimensions of love and spirit.

¹ (Limerick Diocese Pastoral Plan arising from the April 2016 Synod: <http://www.synod2016.com/sy/assets/File/2016/LimerickDiocesePastoralPlan2016.pdf>)

² Leahy, B., 2000. *The Marian Profile; in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.* pp.136-139. New York: New City Press

The Marian principle is not only devotional to Mary but is about seeing in her a way of being Church; her open receptiveness to God, with contemplation leading to fruitful action. A Church which is receptive, reflective, nurturing and spirit filled.

Towards the end of the work, the group's reflection on a biblical perspective of women in leadership with Jessie Rogers highlighted the precedent of women playing a leadership role in the early Church. The ecclesiological metaphor of the Church being the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 brought home the necessity of recognising and valuing the giftedness of each baptised person and the importance of facilitating people to share and exercise their giftedness.

The group has come full circle; it started with the need for rebalancing leadership in the Church and we ended with the vision of a Church that is open to, encourages and visibly acknowledges the participation of all the baptised through the sharing of their diversity of gifts. Ruth Patterson talks about us being able to see the face of God in one another, especially in those who are different to us, how we need to allow ourselves to be stretched and changed³. In an opening address to the Synod process Paul Philibert OP gave us the challenge:

"How can we foster a movement from passive, client congregations to active, mutually ministering congregations? How can an entire parish community of apostolic members understand themselves as and choose to be evangelizers? How do we move from church as Christendom to church as charismatic communion?"⁴

During its work the working group's focus evolved beyond looking at the role of women to consider the centrality of the Church as the People of God and the Priesthood of the Faithful.

For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God,(88) not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit,(89) are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people . . . who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God".(90).

Lumen Gentium, Ch. 2, 9-10

³ Patterson, R., 2016. *The Gaze of Love*. pp.27-38. Dublin: Veritas.

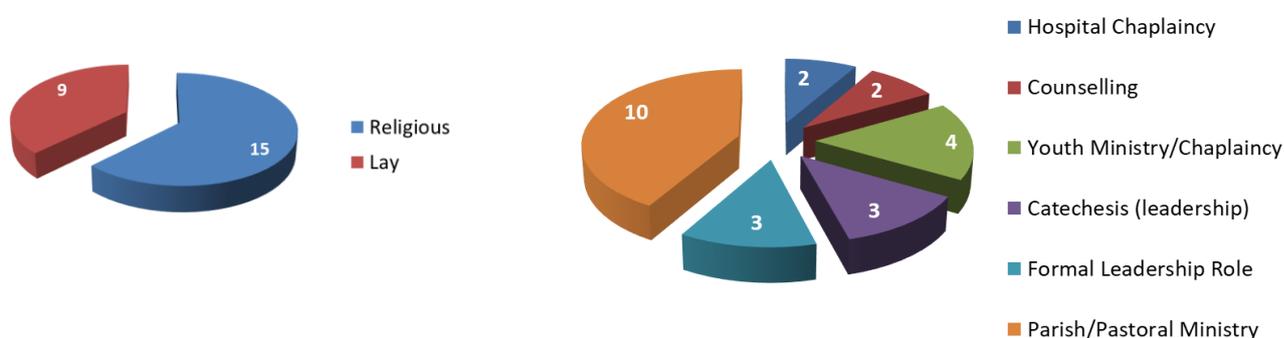
⁴ Philibert, O.P., Paul, 2014, 'A Diocesan Synod: Prospects and Responsibilities' keynote address for the opening assembly of delegates to the Limerick Diocesan Synod.

Hearing Women's Voices

In order to address the first term of reference and to get some insight into the experience of women the group invited a range of women in ministry within and outside of the Diocese to submit a short reflection based on two questions:

- a) *How do you experience your role within the church?*
- b) *What gifts or qualities do you bring to your ministry?*

Twenty-four women responded to the invitation providing invaluable insights to their experience. The anonymity of all contributors is maintained. The following figures give an overview of the profile of the twenty-four women:



Following a reading and analysis of the twenty-three reflections received from 24 women (*two women submitted a joint response*) the working group identified five key themes from what the women named in their reflections. The themes are:

- i. Vision of Church
- ii. Personal Faith
- iii. Collaboration
- iv. Being Seen as Leaders
- v. Leadership

The following five sections summarise the key points emerging under each of these themes.

i. Vision of Church

It was striking that in many of the reflections the women described a vision of church as the people of God who are all called by virtue of their baptism to participate actively in the church. Eleven women described this directly and eight referred to this vision of church indirectly. They see church as a community, with leaders who are part of a collaborative team, whose role is service of all the people.

"I see my role as a member of the Pobal Dé."

"...aren't we all called by virtue of our baptism to be bearers of Christ to others?"

“The model of church I operate out of is that the church is the people of God. In this vision of Vatican II, I see how all the baptised are called to love God, by actively participating in the life of the church and serving God’s people”.

“I see my role in leadership as being a service to the community, praying for them, trying to bring healing and growth to those wounded by life, trying to bring unity and a clear vision of who we are through dialogue. “

They find God in everyday life, expressing their faith by the way they live their lives. There is a desire to empower people, to make the connections between faith and life, leading to healing, renewal, change and growth.

“I see my role as one of empowering people and enabling them to have experiences that hopefully will lead them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.”

“I am clear that I am called by God to be delighted with people and to empower them to live full lives as local faith communities.”

“...love exploring how faith and life intersect in people’s lives which in turn enhances participation.”

These women work from a model of church envisioned by Vatican II, as part of a collaborative team, with all members using their gifts. Those who were in well-defined roles, at an official level, described positive experiences. Their place within the team was recognised and their gifts were valued. Women who have moved into official roles previously held only by men are well capable of these roles.

More frustration and anger was expressed among women in parish settings where roles may not be well defined and vary depending on the attitude of the priest. Tensions are created by the lack of clarity of roles.

“I have a sense of working out of these gifts and being part of a team that is full of great people working out of their gifts too.”

“...many women in the parishes I have ministered in are relegated to long suffering ‘Father’s helpers’!”

ii. Personal Faith

In thirteen of the reflections the women mentioned their own faith directly. The strength of their personal faith is a key factor in their ability and willingness to work in leadership roles within the church.

“The Eucharist is at the heart of my life and my daily prayer is central to living out my vocation within the church.”

“My faith, which I consider such a great gift from God, and the hope that comes with that faith are gifts that I treasure and don’t take for granted.”

Women who are in a religious community greatly value the support they get from their community.

The impression given by these reflections is that those who lead have a strong faith. This provides an important perspective on the necessity of faith development for young people and adults within the church. The strength of their faith will build a cohort of future leaders within the Church.

iii. Collaboration

“The spiritual leadership of women depends on the witness, verity of courageous women. It depends as well on the honesty of conscientious men who will call on their own systems of Gospel truth”.

The above quotation, submitted by one of the participants, synopses very clearly what is needed if true collaboration is to thrive. We have been honoured to read the many different experiences of women in ministry, while recognizing that much work needs to be done to advance collaborative models of ministry in the church.

It was interesting that the women who hold positions of official responsibility, in particular those whose roles are clearly defined, have no issues working within the institutional church. For this great gift, which respects their dignity and giftedness and both honours and realizes their potential, they are grateful.

A clear distinction emerges between the experience of women religious ministering in various capacities in the church and other women in leadership roles, particularly in contexts where their ministry is not always acknowledged or welcomed. The work of women religious is enabled, supported and celebrated by their religious congregations. While the reality in the local parish might be very difficult, backed by their religious communities, individual members can advance their Christian vision, supported by the charism of their founders, realized so powerfully over the centuries. Sadly, however, this is not the case for many women in ministry who do not have the backing of a congregation. They stand alone, without a comparable support network to enable the flourishing of their ministry. This is a serious challenge for individual women in ministry, for new models of collaborative ministry and for the church as a whole.

The changing model of parish that we are invited to is very challenging as reflected in the contributions of participants. While in some ministry situations there is great respect and trust, in others there is very little two-way communication. For some there is the dichotomy and unreality between church as *Pobal Dé* (people of God) - as outlined in the Vatican documents - and the reality of lived clericalism. For many, decision making resides with and

is the preserve of the priest and there is little redress if things go awry. As one participant said:

"I have been blatantly ignored at times, despite having a leadership role because there was a priest present and people (women especially) seem to be culturally inclined to respect the priest's authority over a lay woman's".

Where is there a place for appeal to be honestly heard so that women's voices are honoured? Where is there a place of appeal for injustices against Christian women? Whereas structures can be a blessing they can also hinder progress and inclusion. This is particularly the case for women: being a woman within the church structure can be difficult. One participant said:

"I have decided that my role was to always name the truth for women in our church so that no one could feel silenced by me or around me again".

There are multiple challenges that need to be addressed in the collaborative ministry if it is to be authentic, true and wholesome and if the Christian community is to fully benefit from the creative energy and giftedness of its women ministers.

iv. Being seen as leaders

The women interviewed had a variety of experiences in terms of leadership in the church. One person remarked that *"women have been the back bone of the church"*. The women who had an official role in the church seem to be in a stronger position to exercise their leadership roles. One person said:

"I have some small influence in terms of the work I do and that the gifts I've brought to bear in the role have been appreciated."

Another person who had an official role commented that her experience of ministry:

"...depended on the parish priest and his willingness to engage in collaborative style ministry. Some are delighted to share ministry and 'appreciate a woman's perspective', while others are relegated to long-suffering 'Father's helpers'.

Another said that her experience was largely positive but that at times when some priests are *"dismissive or patronising towards me."* Another said that in her official role that she *"has always been treated with respect"*. Another person said that while she had an official role in the church she felt very involved and was part of a very vibrant team but since she left the role she has *"little connection with the Diocese"*.

"In spite of the 'listening', 'talking', 'creating open spaces', 'women speaking their truth'... nothing changes."

Another person said that her official role gives her ‘ample scope and opportunity’ to fulfil her role within the church structure.

Some women who were exercising leadership roles in the church did not see themselves as leaders. One person who belongs to a religious congregation and who is very involved in various key ministries in a Diocese said that she has very little sense of parish or Diocese. She said that *“if I want to get involved with the poor, homeless, I can do that myself”*. She indicated she has:

“... grown disillusioned with the clericalism that is so ingrained that even well-meaning priests and committed parishioners do not recognise it.”

Some feel they have gifts that could be used in the church and could exercise them but are not afforded the opportunity. One person said that she finds it *“extremely challenging to make a contribution”* in the church setting.

Another participant stated that she shared time and energy in the past in the animation of liturgies particularly in the area of music and she was involved in the preparation of the sacraments in schools. However, she sees herself as a member of *Pobal Dé* and her experience is *“certainly not one of leadership in the church”*.

v. Leadership

There is general consensus that women play a significant role in the church. One contributor named it clearly:

“Women in particular have been the back-bone of the church. They have contributed large amounts of time and energy in supporting the church in various ways.”

As leaders women bring their own perspective and giftedness. They focus on unifying and healing and have a natural intuitiveness when working with groups. Good listening, empathy, compassion and collaboration were qualities that were cited over and over again by contributors.

Team working is a natural way of working for women; religious congregations have been modelling team work and being a team player for many, many years. Empowering others to take initiative and leadership is an approach that many of our contributors highlighted. One contributor described it in this way:

“I have a capacity to bring people together and to work collaboratively. I believe as Christians, we’re called to share our gifts and I’m good at asking people for help... I have a sense of working out of these gifts and being part of a team that is full of great people working out of their gifts too. This is how I get ‘job satisfaction’.”

For many women being grounded in the realities of day to day life and communicating in a meaningful way is essential to them enabling people to connect their faith with their life in a way that is enriching and life-giving:

“I am creative and innovative and love exploring how faith and life intersect in people’s lives which in turn enhances participation.”

“I have a gift for translating Scripture into down-to-earth language that connects with people’s lived experience.”

Being open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit is important for women and is central to a well-grounded ministry:

“I desire to have a mind-set that is open to prompting of the Holy Spirit in what Patrick Kavanagh called, ‘the bits and pieces of every day.’”

“I bring academic and professional expertise, but also an intuitive approach and a willingness to be led by the Spirit and to step out into the unknown.”

Many women have a desire and energy to engage in ministry and work with people to nurture their faith. One woman described it like this:

“At this stage of my life I wish to enable others, especially women to discover their ‘inner Divine spark’ and use their gifts of leadership for the service of others in ministry. Thus the ‘companionship of empowerment’ which Jesus embodied becomes a means of transformation and cosmic healing.”

Another named it as a fundamental element of our being Christian:

“We as Christians have a duty to pass on the message but in order to do so we need to approach it in a way that encourages a sense of community and togetherness.”

In the midst of women’s ongoing commitment to the church and willingness and desire to minister in a grounded and life-giving way there is however a strong feeling of frustration with leadership structures and the way in which ministry is organised and managed. One contributor articulated the challenge very clearly:

“Many women continue to be involved in local church. They make things happen. They serve. They prepare liturgies but have no liturgical leadership. Are women in positions of influence? Are they at the heart of decision making? They are not!”

vi. Other Experience

As part of the remit to scope out existing experience of women in leadership in the church the working group read *Called: Women in Ministry in Ireland 2017* by Anne Francis which is an initial report from a study of women in ministry in Ireland. Her report contains the experience of women in ministry across Christian denominations in Ireland and therefore

also includes the experience of women in ordained ministry. Despite this difference the conclusions correlate strongly with the findings in the reflections collected by the working group. In particular the following extracts from the conclusion of Ann Francis' report echo what was heard in the reflections sent to the working group.

“Women in ministry in Ireland are dedicated to their service to God’s people and their churches. Their call is an overarching presence in everything they do and is the source of their motivation and nourishment. They are hardworking, good humoured and prayerful. They say that they are doing their best and, while not perfect, feel they do a good job. They frame their commentary in terms of their faith and their sense of mission and Church.

Participants wish to promote diverse gifts in ministry and to play an equal part in this. They wish to be treated with respect and to be acknowledged according to merit. They observe that they are working in environments which have largely evolved to serve a system with men at its centre and which does not always serve women’s participation. They would like to see new models for ministry which replace the traditional ‘male-only’ model of ministry.

Most of those who are not admitted to orders, in the Catholic Church, do not wish to be ordained. Instead they wish to see changes in the system which they deem to be impoverished and outmoded for clergy and laity alike. They most need to be acknowledged and recognised as ministers and to have fair and life-giving foundations for their ministries including ongoing formation and fair remuneration and conditions. They wish to reach their full potential and calling in appropriate ministerial contexts.”⁵

⁵ Francis, Anne, 2017, ‘Called: Women in Ministry in Ireland’ pp 67-68. Orcid 0000-0003-0120-4673 <https://www.irishchurches.org/cmsfiles/REPORT-Women-in-Ministry-in-Ireland-Final.pdf>

Biblical Perspectives - Women in Church Leadership Roles

In addressing the second term of reference, the working group invited Dr Jessie Rogers, a lecturer in Sacred Scripture in St Patrick's College Maynooth, to share a Scripture perspective on the role of women in leadership in the Church. Jessie's paper is presented in full in this chapter. This paper has since been published in the Furrow July/August 2018, 407-413.

Women in Church Leadership Roles - Biblical Perspectives⁶

Jessie Rogers, St Patrick's College, Maynooth

There are a few ways to approach the question of what light Scripture sheds on women in leadership in the Church. Perhaps the most obvious and straightforward is to look for precedent in the early Church, as reflected in the earliest extant Christian documents, the letters of St Paul. The assumption behind this is that biblical precedent should inform current practice. This is undoubtedly true, but it is not enough. If there is precedent, that would undermine any current argument against women's leadership, particularly since today's world is less patriarchal than that of the first century - in patches anyway. But lack of precedent would not rule against including women in church leadership today, since the Church's application of the Gospel grows and develops through time, as the Holy Spirit guides her into all truth.⁷ An ordained Christian priesthood is one example of such innovation. A second, richer, and ultimately more valid approach is to reflect on the ecclesiology implicit in the New Testament. Here I intend to reflect on a core metaphor for the Church and the roles of her members, the Body of Christ. Biblical images such as this allow us to grasp the truth that is embodied in different ways in the Church's history. And finally, a third approach is to feed the Christian imagination through prayerful reflection on biblical stories. I will take each of these approaches in turn, concluding with the Old Testament story of Miriam as a powerful but nuanced example of a woman leader.

i. Precedent: Romans 16

The Pauline epistles actually point to a rich precedent for women in leadership roles in the earliest Christian communities. The concluding greetings appended to the letter to the Romans (Rom 16:1-16) are instructive. Although there is debate around whether this list of greetings was originally part of the letter, there is consensus that it is an early letter of recommendation that goes back to St Paul.⁸ In it we find a list of various co-workers and fellow believers known to Paul. Of the list of twenty-six names, nine are female.⁹ Sixteen of those named are further specified in terms of role or relationship. This list, which is not an apologia for female leadership but an exhortation to greet and welcome real people who

⁶ This is a summary of a presentation made to a Limerick diocesan working group on the role of women in leadership in the Church, 9 May 2018.

⁷ See *Amoris Laetitia* #3.

⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans 2004), 376.

⁹ While some of these are easily recognised as masculine or feminine, it is also easier to distinguish male and female names in the Greek because the associated verbs and adjectives are gendered.

played roles in the early Christian communities, opens a window onto the actual practice of the Church in the middle of the first century.

First mentioned is Phoebe, called a deacon, whom the recipients are told to welcome and to give any help she requests (Rom 16:1-2). The translation 'deaconess' in some versions is disingenuous, because the masculine form of the word is used here. That she is authorised by Paul to claim whatever assistance she needs points to a ministry that Paul envisions for her among the Roman Christians. She has acted as a patron or benefactor, and is praised for already exercising her ministry in a way that had benefited many people, including Paul.

We know something of the married couple Prisca and Aquila, who host a house church and are called Paul's co-workers, from the Acts of the Apostles where we read that they instructed in the faith Apollos, a great preacher (Acts 18:26). The designation 'co-worker' is not used by Paul for all Christians, as 'saint' is, but is reserved for those who ministered alongside him, and indicates a leadership position.¹⁰ That Prisca is named before her husband, both here and in Acts, points to her prominence.

The next couple that Paul names, Andronicus and Junia, are called outstanding apostles (Rom 16:7). In the history of interpretation, the feminine Junia morphed into a masculine form in some later translations, but it is in fact a woman's name.¹¹ Others have called into doubt the designation 'apostle', preferring to read the Greek as suggesting that this couple are noteworthy "in the eyes of" and not "among" the apostles.¹² But history is on the side of the latter interpretation, with the Fathers, including John Chrysostom, in no doubt that Junia was a female apostle.¹³ That she was 'in Christ' before Paul means she was part of the earliest Christian movement. Her work for Christ had attracted the attention of the authorities since she had been imprisoned for her faith.

Mary is named as someone who has worked hard for the Roman Christians (Rom 16:6). It is notable that the verb translated 'to work hard' is only used of women in this passage! The same thing is said of Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom 16:11). These women bear slave names.¹⁴ Those whom Paul holds up for recognition are not limited to people of high social status. Persis is another hard worker in the Lord (Rom 16:12). Paul makes it clear that women have given him great support in his ministry. He counts Persis as a friend and describes Rufus' mother as like a mother to him too (Rom 16:13). It is not only as fellow-workers, but also in terms of human relationships that the women in Paul's circle make a

¹⁰ Witherington, *Romans*, 385.

¹¹ See John Thorley, "Junia, a woman apostle," *Novum Testamentum* 38/1 (1996), 18-29 for historical and linguistic proof.

¹² See Burer and Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle?" *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76-91.

¹³ "And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even among these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! How great is the devotion (φιλοσοφία) of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!" John Chrysostom, "Homily 32 on Romans." Translated by J. Walker, J. Sheppard and H. Browne, and revised by George B. Stevens. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 11*. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2102.htm>>.

¹⁴ Witherington. *Romans*, 394.

powerful contribution. The other women mentioned in this chapter - Julia and Nereus's sister (Rom 16:15), and also the unnamed members of households - are not designated further, but are testament to the easy way in which the contribution of both men and women to the life of the early Church are acknowledged by Paul.

We could go elsewhere in Paul's letters to find further mention of women in leadership: Apphia (Philemon 1), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3). But this snapshot of the early Church in Romans 16 is enough to see women as apostles and deacons, as co-workers, teachers, missionaries, proclaimers of the Gospel, benefactors and hard workers, exercising authority and deserving of recognition.

ii. Ecclesiology: 1 Corinthians 12

We turn now to an ecclesiological metaphor: the Church as the Body of Christ. Writing to a fractured community in Corinth to encourage unity in diversity, St Paul images the mystical body of Christ / the Church as a single human body made up of diverse limbs and organs. He begins with a strong theological assertion:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor 12:5-7).¹⁵

This 'manifestation of the Spirit' is illustrated with two lists of gifts / activities / service, the second of which includes leadership (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30). The principle is clear: God equips different people in different ways, and these gifts are to be used for the good of the whole. Paul stresses that it is not a matter of people choosing their own calling or avenues of service, nor about those in authority assigning roles to the members, for "all these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses." (1 Cor 12:11). The Spirit gifts and enables the members of the Body, according to God's own calling (1 Cor 12:18). The task of the community, then, is to recognise these gifts and to facilitate their effective use for the common good.

By playing with the image of a body with its hands and feet, ears and eyes, Paul critiques unhealthy ways of understanding the role that individuals or groups play in the Church. He highlights the importance of diversity and the essential role that each part has to contribute to the whole. If I may draw contemporary applications from the analogy: for the laity to say "I am not a part of the church because I am not ordained" is as absurd as the foot saying "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand" (1 Cor 12:15-16). To define the Church in terms of its clerical hierarchy alone would be like wanting the whole body to be an eye; what would become of the body's ability to hear and to smell? If any part is missing, the function of the body is impaired. Paul stresses mutual cooperation and interdependence. Writing to a community that was caught up in honour and status games, he stresses the value of those members which are considered less honourable; the body's private parts are treated with the most respect and care (1 Cor 12:22-24). In God's upside-down Kingdom, it is the least who are the greatest. No part of the body can claim independence from the others, and the body thrives or suffers as a whole (1 Cor 12:25-26).

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

If we look at the topic of women in leadership in the Church through the lens of this fertile metaphor, the question is not: “What are women allowed to do?” Instead we need to ask: “Do women - and men and children - have the spaces and opportunities in the Church to exercise their gifts and calling in service of the common good?” If we approach the issue from the conviction that people are variously called and gifted by God, that this is God’s choice and not ours, and that this diversity is to be celebrated and facilitated, then we can begin to think creatively about how to stop standing in the way of the Body benefiting from the full cooperation of all its members. To prevent women from exercising their God-given callings is to oppose the work of the Spirit.

iii. An Example: Miriam

Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, is one example of a woman exercising leadership in Scripture. Recalling the Exodus, the prophet Micah declares on God’s behalf: “I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Micah 6:4). We are first introduced to her as an unnamed slave, a child beside the Nile standing watch over the basket containing her baby brother (Exod 2:4-9). Thrice marginalised, she uses her wits to collude with the oppressor’s daughter to save Moses, the future deliverer of God’s people. Typical of those devoid of power, she has to think quickly, seize opportunities and find unlikely allies to act to bring life and hope in a perilous situation.

When we come across Miriam again, it is beside another body of water, after Moses has brought God’s people to safety through the Red Sea¹⁶ and the oppressor’s pursuing army has been drowned. Moses leads the people in a song of victory to celebrate the Exodus. It is a long song that begins “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (Exodus 15:1-18). Miriam then takes up a tambourine and leads the dancing (Exodus 15:20-21). She simplifies Moses’ song to a single celebratory chorus: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” This vignette of Miriam on the shore encapsulates so much of what feminine genius can bring to leadership: it is participatory, inclusive (“I will sing” becomes the hortatory “(let us) sing”) and embodied. The long hymn is stripped down to its essentials and the women dance to it, celebrating and inscribing the memory of God’s saving deeds in their bodies through movement so that it lives on in more than the mind.

The next time we meet Miriam she and Aaron are complaining against Moses (Numbers 12). There are actually two complaints here. Firstly they speak out against him because he had married an Ethiopian (“Cushite,” Num 12:1). In the Old Testament, Ethiopians were the ultimate exotic outsiders. The second complaint is expressed this way: “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” (Num 12:2). They resent Moses’ pre-eminence. Miriam is also susceptible to the temptations of leadership; she has let power go to her head and become hungry for more. The Lord responds to these accusations in reverse order. God reaffirms Moses and checks their ambition (Num 12:5-8). God then deals with the first complaint in a surprisingly harsh way: Miriam is struck with leprosy for seven days. Those with leprosy were excluded from the community; she has to remain outside the camp for the week until she is healed (Num 12:9-15). Miriam, who as a child had depended on the kindness of an outsider to save her brother, had become

¹⁶ In the Hebrew Yom Suph, Sea of Reeds.

intolerant and wanted to exclude that brother's foreign wife. So the Lord makes her experience the shame of exclusion from the community in return. What appears as cruelty against Miriam here is the God of the Exodus coming to the aid of the marginalised Ethiopian woman. In this story of Miriam's pride, where power has made her resent someone 'above' her on the ladder and to turn against someone 'below' her, is a salutary reminder of the dangers of leadership which tempt men and women alike.¹⁷ But even here, the tremendous loyalty of the community to Miriam is highlighted: they refuse to move on until she rejoins them (Num 12: 15).

Immediately after Miriam's death notice in Numbers 20:1 we are told: "Now there was no water for the congregation." Jewish tradition associates Miriam, the child keeping watch on the banks of the Nile and the woman celebrating on the far shore of the sea, with the water which God provided for the people in the desert, a Well that accompanied them on their journey.¹⁸ It is a poignant reminder that, without their women leaders, the people of God are deprived of a refreshing and life-sustaining gift.

iv. Conclusion

Much more can be written about women in church leadership from a biblical perspective. There are a surprising number of influential women who grace the pages of Scripture. In this short investigation I limited myself to two passages from the Pauline Epistles and one example from the Old Testament. The question of women in leadership in the Church is part of a wider issue of recognising the manifold ways in which God gifts the baptised in order to build up the body of Christ and finding ways to facilitate and empower individuals to exercise their vocation for the common good. In the first century Church, women played roles as apostles and deacons, benefactors, missionaries and evangelists, working hard to spread the Gospel and support and build up the community. Women leaders like Miriam bring something distinctive to their role. They are not perfect, but neither are the men! They are called, chosen and gifted by God - that much should not be in dispute. The question then becomes: Will the official and de facto structures within which they operate facilitate or frustrate the exercise of their ministry?

¹⁷ I see here a particularly strong echo of the tendency of white feminism to focus on patriarchy while overlooking the discrimination faced by people of colour, male and female.

¹⁸ These Talmudic traditions are reflected in Ruth Fainlight, "Miriam's Well," *European Judaism* 45/2 (2012), 164.

Canon Law Perspective - Lay People in Church Leadership Roles

The working group invited Canon Gerard Garrett, a canon lawyer, to share a canon law perspective on the role of women in leadership in the Church.

Some key underlying principles were outlined:

- We all share baptism in common; baptism is about participation in Jesus' ministry and mission; our own individual call to mission. Vatican II spoke of 'the priesthood of the faithful'. The 'priesthood of the faithful' is saying that we all have a share in Christ's own ministry. It is about what we all have in common, whatever our particular 'vocation', by virtue of baptism. Fr Paul Philibert in the lead up to the Synod spoke about laity being active participants and not just consumers when it comes to practice of and living the faith.

"The faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world." (LG 31)

- The principal distinction, for the purposes of our discussion on the role of women in leadership, is that between clergy (ordained) and laity, not that between men and women. In so far as an office or function is available to a lay person, it is equally available to men and women. This section therefore focuses on lay leadership roles in general rather than specific roles for women.
- Guidance received from the Vatican on the question of collaboration of lay people in pastoral ministry highlights the extensive opportunities for active involvement:

"In effect, a collaboration of all the faithful exists in both orders of the Church's mission; whether it is in the spiritual order, bringing the message of Christ and his grace to men, or, in the temporal one, permeating and perfecting secular reality with the evangelical spirit.(5) This is especially true in the primary areas of evangelization and sanctification — "It is in this sphere most of all that the lay apostolate and the pastoral ministry complete each other".(6) In these areas, the lay faithful of both sexes, have innumerable opportunities to be actively involved... In particular, Pastors are exhorted to "...acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony". (8)¹⁹

¹⁹ The full text of the Instruction can be accessed here:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html

Governance, Power of Orders, Power of Jurisdiction

The following sections cite the canons that address governance and powers orders and jurisdiction as they relate to the potential role(s) for laity:

Power of Governance

Can. 129 § 1 Those who are in sacred orders are, in accordance with the provisions of law, capable of the power of governance, which belongs to the Church by divine institution. This power is also called the power of jurisdiction.

§ 2 Lay members of Christ's faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power in accordance with the law.

Kinds of Power

Can. 131 §1 **Ordinary power** of governance is that which by virtue of the law itself is attached to a given office; **delegated power** is that which is granted to a person other than through an office.

§2 Ordinary power of governance may be **proper** or **vicarious**.

§3 One who claims to have been delegated has the onus of proving the delegation.

Legislative, Executive and Judicial Power

Can. 135 §1 The power of governance is divided into legislative, executive and judicial power.

§2 Legislative power is to be exercised in the manner prescribed by law; that which in the Church a legislator lower than the supreme authority has cannot be delegated, unless the law explicitly provides otherwise. A lower legislator cannot validly make a law which is contrary to that of a higher legislator.

§3 Judicial power, which is possessed by judges and judicial colleges, is to be exercised in the manner prescribed by law, and it cannot be delegated except for the performance of acts preparatory to some decree or judgement.

§4 As far as the exercise of executive power is concerned, the provisions of the following canons are to be observed.

Orders required by the nature of the office

Can. 274 § 1 Only clerics can obtain offices the exercise of which requires the power of order or the power of ecclesiastical governance. (Meaning of the latter part - governance proper to those in orders e.g. Bishop, Vicar General etc.)

Chancellor and Notaries

Can. 482 § 1 In each curia a chancellor is to be appointed, whose principal office, unless particular law states otherwise, is to ensure that the acts of the curia are drawn up and dispatched, and that they are kept safe in the archive of the curia.

§ 2 If it is considered necessary, the chancellor may be given an assistant, who is to be called the vice-chancellor.

§ 3 The chancellor and vice-chancellor are automatically notaries and secretaries of the curia.

Can. 483 § 1 Besides the chancellor, other notaries may be appointed, whose writing or signature authenticates public documents. These notaries may be appointed for all acts, or for judicial acts alone, or only for acts concerning a particular issue or business.

§ 2 The chancellor and notaries must be of unblemished reputation and above suspicion. In cases which could involve the reputation of a priest, the notary must be a priest.

Diocesan Pastoral Council

Can. 511 In each diocese, in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest, a pastoral council is to be established. Its function, under the authority of the Bishop, is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions concerning them.

Can. 512 §1 A pastoral council is composed of members of Christ's faithful who are in full communion with the catholic Church: clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially lay people. They are designated in the manner determined by the diocesan Bishop.

§2 The members of Christ's faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.

§3 Only those members of Christ's faithful who are outstanding in firm faith, high moral standards and prudence are to be assigned to the pastoral council.

Diocesan Finance Officer

Can. 494 §1 In each diocese a financial administrator is to be appointed by the Bishop, after consulting the college of consultors and the finance committee. The financial administrator is to be expert in financial matters and of truly outstanding integrity.

§2 The financial administrator is to be appointed for five years, but when this period has expired, may be appointed for further terms of five years. While in office he or she is not to be removed except for a grave reason, to be estimated by the Bishop after consulting the college of consultors and the finance committee.

§3 It is the responsibility of the financial administrator, under the authority of the Bishop, to administer the goods of the diocese in accordance with the plan of the finance committee, and to make those payments from diocesan funds which the Bishop or his delegates have lawfully authorised.

§4 At the end of the year the financial administrator must give the finance committee an account of income and expenditure.

Members of the Diocesan Finance Council

Can. 492 §1 In each diocese a finance committee is to be established, presided over by the diocesan Bishop or his delegate. It is to be composed of at least three of the faithful, expert in financial affairs and civil law, of outstanding integrity, and appointed by the Bishop.

§2 The members of the finance committee are appointed for five years but when this period has expired they may be appointed for further terms of five years.

§3 Persons related to the Bishop up to the fourth degree of consanguinity or affinity are excluded from the finance committee.

Lay Persons in charge of a Parish

Can. 517 § 2 If, because of a shortage of priests, the diocesan Bishop has judged that a deacon, or some other person who is not a priest, or a community of persons, should be entrusted with a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, he is to appoint some priest who, with the powers and faculties of a parish priest, will direct the pastoral care.

Administrator of Ecclesiastical Goods

Can. 1279 §1 The administration of ecclesiastical goods pertains to the one with direct power of governance over the person to whom the goods belong, unless particular law or statutes or legitimate custom state otherwise, and without prejudice to the right of the Ordinary to intervene where there is negligence on the part of the administrator.

§2 Where no administrators are appointed for a public juridical person by law or by the documents of foundation or by its own statutes, the Ordinary to which it is subject is to appoint suitable persons as administrators for a three-year term. The same persons can be re-appointed by the Ordinary.

Judges

Can. 1421 § 1 In each diocese the Bishop is to appoint diocesan judges, who are to be clerics.

§ 2 The Episcopal Conference can permit that lay persons also be appointed judges. Where necessity suggests, one of these can be chosen in forming a college of Judges.

§ 3 Judges are to be of good repute, and possess a doctorate, or at least a licentiate, in canon law.

Auditors

Can. 1428 §1 The judge or, in the case of a collegiate tribunal, the presiding judge, can designate an auditor to instruct the case. The auditor may be chosen from the tribunal judges, or from persons approved by the Bishop for this office.

§2 The Bishop can approve clerics or lay persons for the role of auditor. They are to be persons conspicuous for their good conduct, prudence and learning.

Promotor of Justice and DV

Can. 1435 It is the Bishop's responsibility to appoint the promotor of justice and defender of the bond. They are to be clerics or lay persons of good repute, with a doctorate or a licentiate in canon law, and of proven prudence and zeal for justice.

In the Parish

Can. 536 §1 If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a **pastoral council** is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

§2 The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.

Can. 537 In each parish there is to be a **finance committee** to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can. 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

Liturgical Functions

The following sections cite the canons that address the carrying out of liturgical functions:

Baptism

Can. 861 §1 The ordinary minister of baptism is a Bishop, a priest or a deacon, without prejudice to the provision of can. 530, n. 1.

Can. 530 The functions especially entrusted to the parish priest are as follows:

1° the administration of baptism;

§2 If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or some other person deputed to this office by the local Ordinary, may lawfully confer baptism; indeed, in a case of necessity, any person who has the requisite intention may do so. Pastors of souls, especially parish priests, are to be diligent in ensuring that Christ's faithful are taught the correct way to baptise.

Can. 862 Except in a case of necessity, it is unlawful for anyone without due permission to confer baptism outside his own territory, not even upon his own subjects.

Can. 863 The baptism of adults, at least of those who have completed their fourteenth year, is to be referred to the Bishop, so that he himself may confer it if he judges this appropriate.

The form of the celebration of marriage

§2 Only that person who, being present, asks the contracting parties to manifest their consent and in the name of the Church receives it, is understood to assist at a marriage.

Can. 1112 §1 Where there are no priests and deacons, the diocesan Bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages, if the Episcopal Conference has given its prior approval and the permission of the Holy See has been obtained.

§2 A suitable lay person is to be selected, capable of giving instruction to those who are getting married, and fitted to conduct the marriage liturgy properly.

Funerals

The Instruction attached to the Order of Christian Funerals provides:

Except for the Mass, a deacon may conduct all the funeral rites. As pastoral needs require, the conference of bishops, with the Apostolic See's permission, may even depute a lay person for this. (Ordo Exsequiarum, 1969, No. 19)

Sacramentals

(e.g. distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday and some blessings):

Can. 1168 The minister of the sacramentals is a cleric who has the requisite power. In accordance with the liturgical books and subject to the judgement of the local Ordinary, certain sacramentals can also be administered by lay people who possess the appropriate qualities.

Existing Liturgical Functions

Readers and Extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

"Lay led" Liturgies.

Conclusions

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, Community Bible NRSV, Jerusalem).

The working group arrived at the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1 - Honouring the contribution of women

There is a need to honour the dignity of Christian women in ministry. We acknowledge, with respect and gratitude the significant contribution of women to the life of the Christian community as illustrated in the reflections received from women and the examples referenced in scripture.

Conclusion 2 - Building trust

The importance of the call to truthfulness is a prerequisite for building trust in the ways in which we minister together as clergy and lay people. There are difficulties and struggles for women, both lay and religious, particularly in a parish environment, which is embedded in a clerical model where so much depends on the priest.

Conclusion 3 - Formal recognition

Whilst women have been working continuously within the Church, their experience is that much of what they do, is in the background and somewhat 'invisible'. Challenges arise from the absence of formal 'official' recognition of their roles. Formal recognition would invest women with the necessary, appropriate authority to take leadership of their roles.

Conclusion 4 - Power of witness

Women come from a place of grounded, lived experience and have a particular perspective to offer the Church. The power of such witness is missing in our liturgies and in Church life. Opportunities for women's voices to be heard in our liturgies, in Church leadership and in Church life need to be created.

Conclusion 5 - Co-responsibility

Good leadership in any context requires collaborative working, Pope Benedict XVI at a pastoral convention of the diocese of Rome in 2009, went further, calling for a fundamental change of perspective:

"...it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognized as "co-responsible", for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity".²⁰

²⁰ http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html

Collaborative working and co-responsibility of the type envisaged by Pope Benedict does not automatically happen; it needs to be facilitated, nurtured and brought to maturity.

Conclusion 6 - Balanced Leadership

This working group began with a brief to look at the role of women in leadership in the Church, the group's deliberations on the inputs received however led to a much broader vision of leadership in the Church that is relevant to both lay women and men. There is a breadth of possibilities open to the Church within the existing provisions of canon law which need to be more widely understood and called upon to facilitate change. More fundamentally, a radical change of mind-set is required to balance leadership within the Church and the entire Christian community.

Conclusion 7 - Team Ministry

The implementation of a team ministry model across the Diocese of Limerick presents a significant opportunity to open leadership possibilities to the lay faithful, both women and men. Bishop Leahy has implemented a move towards servant leadership which can be creatively expanded.²¹

Recommendations

The working group recommends the following:

Recommendation 1 - Many the Gifts

In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 12 and the many gifts needed to make up the Body of Christ, opportunities for greater team ministry and co-responsibility be explored by the Diocese and a policy for opening ministry and leadership roles to the lay faithful be developed.

Recommendation 2 - Voices of Women

Opportunities be explored to hear women's voices and perspectives on scripture and life within liturgical services.

Recommendation 3 - Formation

Develop and offer a formation programme, tailored to the needs of working people, to facilitate lay people and clergy in working towards team ministry and the practicalities of co-ministering and co-responsibility across the Diocese.

²¹ In the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, Core Strategic Action 2 within the New Models of Leadership Theme states: *We accept the current structure no longer meets the needs and the challenges of our time. We commit to working together to ensure the establishment of a Team Ministry structure in each of the pastoral areas in the diocese. We will do this in dialogue with priests and people, building on the principles of co-responsibility and collaboration aware that we all share in the priesthood of the faithful.*

The local Church and its communities need to have a greater understanding of and recourse to the provisions in canon law (1983 Code of Canon Law) for sharing ministry and parish administration. Incorporate this into a formation programme.

Recommendation 4 - Formal Commissioning of Ministers

Any ministry or leadership role taken on by a lay person, woman or man, be formally, officially and publicly commissioned by the Bishop in the presence of the Christian community. An annual Commissioning Liturgy be held to commission new ministers and invite existing ministers to renew their commitment to their ministry.

Recommendation 5 - Lay Ministry

Specific ministry areas that draw on the gifts of lay women and men be encouraged, for example Consolation Ministry for those bereaved including funeral ministry; roll out the pilot training in funeral team ministry throughout the Diocese.

Recommendation 6 - New Roles

The possibility of any new roles being created, as team ministry and other initiatives develop and evolve, be explored with a view to opening them to lay women and men with the requisite skills and experience. Develop these new roles alongside other ministry roles such as the Permanent Diaconate to avoid either one displacing the other.

Recommendation 7 - Young People

There is a sense of urgency in implementing these recommendations as the cohort of lay women and men who would be willing to take on the challenges of being actively involved in Team Ministry is ageing. Explore how the energy and enthusiasm of young people participating in various ministry activities such as the Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage, Anois, and the John Paul II Award could be harnessed towards an ongoing active involvement in their parish as the next generation of the Church.

Pope Francis on Women in Church Leadership

The final word on the role of women in Church leadership is given to Pope Francis.

Pope Francis' prayer intention for October 2020 is that women have greater leadership roles in the Church; in a video message he calls for the promotion of greater integration of the lay faithful, especially women, in areas of responsibility in the Church²².

"We pray that by the virtue of baptism, the laity, especially women, may participate more in areas of responsibility in the Church. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. We have all been baptized as lay people. Lay people are protagonists of the Church.

Today, it is especially necessary to create broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. And we must emphasize the feminine lay presence because women tend to be left aside.

We must promote the integration of women, especially where important decisions are made. We pray that by the virtue of baptism, the laity, especially women, may participate more in areas of responsibility in the Church, without falling into forms of clericalism that diminish the lay charism.

²²<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-10/pope-francis-prayer-intention-october-women-leaders-church.html>

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