

LAY MINISTRY—IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT

We are all Lay Ministers

To us, lay ministry is not primarily what we do at church, but what we do in the world. The lay ministry which all of us do in the world may be one of two kinds: *explicit and implicit*. That is, our ministry in the world may be that of witnessing to Christ's love explicitly, such as serving on the staff of a Christian organization, or teaching at a Christian institution. Or it may be a ministry of witnessing to Christ's love through a secular occupation. One way or the other, we are all lay ministers, just as we are also "a royal priesthood." (1 Peter 2:9)

Our Story

Ever since we have called ourselves Christians, we have been engaged in explicit lay ministry. For Eunice, prior to her marriage, it was a 17-year stint in a Christian girls' club organization called Pioneer Girls. After our marriage in 1969, we found a core group of kindred spirits in Chicago eager to put their energies to work on urban issues—especially racial equality and poverty. Don brought to the group a special concern for the place of the arts in Christian experience and witness. The result was the formation of the Urban Life Center, a program that provided a "semester in the city" experience for students from Christian colleges in the Midwest.

We prided ourselves on being fairly tough about our radical politics at the time, a view that left little room for the Church, an institution we perceived to have abandoned the city, and to be out of touch with issues of race, class, and gender.

After ten years, we grew tired of the very demanding nature of our responsibilities, and began to feel ready for a change in our life and work. After a sabbatical trip East, we moved to Boston in March of 1979. Right away, we began looking for a way to work together again in some form of ministry. But we both knew it had to be different from the fast-paced, hard-edged work we had left in Chicago.

We "fell in with" an ecumenical group being formed on the edge of Boston Common, who dreamed of beginning a ministry which involved the arts and Christianity. It was to be called "Many Mansions". Richard Valantasis was one of its founders, and encouraged us to join with them. Eunice left her job in providing and teaching career planning in Framingham and Boston.

It soon became apparent that this little venture in downtown Boston was not going to survive. Out of this development appeared both the necessity and opportunity to provide life/work planning workshops for the group gathered who had been expecting to work in Many Mansions, which was now folding. It was not long before these workshops became the seeds of a new ministry we named Life/Work Direction and which has continued since 1981, first in a Dorchester storefront, and since 1990, in Jamaica Plain. We now work from our home, counseling individuals who are at a crossroads in their life and work, and who want to discern their vocation in new ways.

In the process of starting Life/Work Direction, an Episcopal priest with whom we were working, Richard Faxon (now retired), discovered that Don and I were not “churched.” He came into the office one morning and said to us with the authority of someone who has listened to the Divine voice, “I think you should go to St. John’s on Beacon Hill.”

We were too startled to object, and we were also hungry for a spiritual home. “We came, we saw, and were conquered,” and have been here since 1981. We drank deeply of the living water that flowed through the liturgy here, unabashedly grateful recipients of the “handouts” of grace in this place.

Our Vision

For us, all of life is lay ministry. Neither of us was raised in a strong clerical tradition. Eunice’s father was a Baptist pastor, though not a highly sectarian one. Don was raised in a Reformed Jewish community where religion was reserved for the high holidays. It was something of a surprise to us to become part of the Episcopal Church that historically has made a stronger distinction between priest and congregation than we are used to. To see ourselves as part of the “royal priesthood” Peter talks about, priests who serve daily at the altar of our calling in the world, is natural to us.

Although it might be seen as “convenient” when the work we do for pay is also explicitly a spiritual ministry, we do not see it as essential. Moreover, we have deep respect and admiration for the persons coming to us week by week at Life/Work Direction who live out their faith in a secular environment—an *implicit* form of lay ministry. If we can serve them by encouraging their decisions toward a life and work more finely tuned to their God-given talents, and more closely aligned to their spiritual vision of the way life on this planet ought to be, we are grateful.

Our view of the Church is that it ought to be a place of refreshment and refilling for all the Body of Christ as we go forth from the liturgy to love the serve the Lord in the world.