



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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Remarks by Bishop Dale J. Melczek**Chairman of the Committee on the Laity
Requesting Vote for Approval of
*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*****November 15, 2005**

The Laity Committee and its Subcommittee on Lay Ministry are pleased to present for your approval *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord is meant to be a Conference document that will faithfully guide the long-standing practice of lay involvement in leadership responsibilities within every one of our dioceses.

After more than forty years of developing practice and after several previous documents by our Conference about this reality, it is timely and opportune for us to make another statement that affirms this reality as a gift and blessing, describes it in more detail, offers some theological grounding from established Church teaching and provides some formation benchmarks to assist bishops in preparing those who direct catechesis, youth ministry, and other parish ministries.

It is not meant to be a final word or to establish particular law or to set down required norms. However, its influence and value come in providing bishops with language to describe what they find happening in their dioceses, providing some best practices maturing in dioceses for forming, authorizing, and guiding lay involvement in public roles in the Church.

Finally, the document is important in providing reflections on matters by which bishops can assure that what happens in their dioceses is faithful to what the Church teaches.

In acknowledging the value and importance of lay ecclesial ministry in our local dioceses, the document assesses how this ministry differs from and complements the sacred ministry of the ordained. The document emphasizes the primary role of the laity in the secular arena and the responsibility of lay ecclesial ministers and the ordained to encourage and foster that involvement. And finally the document emphasizes the role of the Bishop or his delegate in authorizing the ministry of laity who seek to serve in public leadership roles within the church.

You have assisted us in the past several weeks by suggesting various modifications to the text and, yesterday, by submitting amendments.

In addition to the 80 modifications the Committee accepted prior to this meeting, we were able to accept 35 of the 46 amendments you offered us yesterday.

As a result, we are bringing to a vote now a better, more supportable, more useful document which, though it is far from our final word, is nonetheless a responsible step to take in service of the Church's evangelizing mission and ministry.

Thank you.