A Symposium:

The Parish Ministry

The parish ministry finds its center in the pastor of the local congregation and those who serve with him. Though many today discount the importance of his person and his work, he does hold a very honorable and responsible position. He is the gift of the risen and ascended Christ who “gave some to be . . . pastors.” He is an ambassador of Christ, and represents the King of kings in the community in which he has been called to serve.

In our country the parish has no well defined geographical boundaries, as is the case in many countries in the old world. These boundaries are therefore to a large extent to be determined by the conscience and abilities of the pastor and those who stand by to assist him.

The ministry to the parish is comprehensive in its scope. It involves a large number of varied responsibilities such as the communication, the interpretation, and the application of the message of the Word of God to the members of the Christian community, the administration of the sacraments, and intercession. This ministry must be carried out with respect to those of every age group, the “lambs” of the flock, those of more mature years, and those approaching the sunset years of life. It must also be carried out with respect to those in various situations and conditions, the sick, the suffering, and those who sorrow; the disturbed, the distressed, and those who are perplexed; those who are tempted and those who have gone astray, as well as those who find themselves in more favorable circumstances. This ministry also includes the discovery and development of talents for service with which the members of the congregation have been endowed thus to provide present and future leadership for the church and the kingdom. Those engaged in carrying out the various parts of this ministry must be motivated by, and their labors saturated with, the love of Christ. The efforts put forth must be undertaken in order that the living Christ may exert his redemptive influence in the lives of one and all, that sinners may be converted and become saints, that the lives of the saints may be strengthened and enriched “so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good works of every kind,” and attain “to mature manhood measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ.” The purpose of all this is that the kingdom may be strengthened and extended and the Lord glorified.

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The responsibilities of the parish ministry do not end with the members of the organized church but reach out into the community. Those engaged in this great task must be filled with compassion for those who are still strangers to God and his grace and must seek to bring them under the redemptive influence of Jesus Christ. They must put forth the necessary efforts to "christianize," as far as possible, the educational and other institutions in the community and to make the economic, the social, and the civil practices conform to the requirements of Christian principles. And surely they must do all in their power to arouse, cultivate, and promote truly Christian relations between the leaders and the members of the various Christian churches and other organizations which are present in the community. This important part of this ministry has too often been neglected in the past.

It is evident that the parish ministry is a most comprehensive and challenging task which affords opportunity to utilize and develop every conceivable ability and grace present in the life of the most highly endowed. If energetically and courageously carried out, it has a determining and vitalizing influence upon the whole of the life and practice of the community. Since the local congregation is one of the basic units in the structure of the church, it makes a vital contribution to the whole cause of Jesus Christ in the world.

PETER A. DE JONG

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pings of cultural, racial, and economic superficialities and lays bare the truth of oneness in Christ. Social change is no longer the "automatic bad" but something that puts me in touch with Abraham, who lived in tents and who "looked for a city." Subtle forms of ecclesiastical, educational, racial, and cultural imperialism have been revealed to me. An evangelical faith committed to social change and concern seems logical to me. In fact, I believe I am more theologically conservative with the social involvement influence. I know now that every part of His body is glorious and that I deprive myself when I am closed to the gift being offered me by any part of that body. I see the inner-city ministry as struggling with the same basic problems, hopes and realities as any other ministry. However, the inner-city ministry does have the additional challenge of making her life and witness not only known to the world but also to the church. If some of this makes little sense to you then I suggest you have not met a group of Christians who called forth from your soul the refreshing experience of liberation. Or, perhaps, you are not listening to your own need. The inner-city ministry is in a position to liberate a good many captives of fear and ignorance within the church. The gospel is more wonderful to me now than ever.

DONALD H. DE YOUNG