

Pastoral Internship Integration Paper
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Dr. William Manseau

My Role As Roman Catholic Woman Bishop:
Faithful Disciple, Bold Apostle, Compassionate Shepherd

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Andrea M. Johnson

M.Div. Candidate

Table of Contents

Introduction		Page 3
Chapter 1	Pastor to the Pastors	Page 5
	Evaluation for Pastoral Role	Page 9
Chapter 2	Teacher in the Community	
	Homiletics	Page 13
	Community Discernment	Page 17
	Regional Visitations & Communications	Page 18
	Public Presentations	Page 19
Chapter 3	Collegial Liturgical Leader	
	Ordinations	Page 21
	Community & Regional Liturgies	Page 21
	Leading RCWP National Retreat Liturgy	Page 28
Chapter 4	Collegial Member of Regional Leadership Team	Page 31
Chapter 5	Model of Outreach to Margins	
	Hands-on	Page 35
	Ministry with the Alienated	Page 36
	An Empowerment, Not a Judgmental Model	Page 37

Chapter 6	Model of Ecumenical Outreach	Page 40
	RCWP's Model & Ecumenism	Page 41
	Collaboration with Other RC	
	Bishops in Intra-Ecclesial	
	Reform	Page 41
	Relations with Other Polities	Page 42
Chapter 7	Collegial Member of USA & International	
	Bishops' Circles	Page 42
	Theological Questions	Page 43
	Questions of Collaborative Process	
	As Bishops' Circles	Page 45
	Significance of the International	
	Bishops' Circle	Page 49
Conclusion:		Page 52

Introduction

Historically, the ordained ministry of the Catholic church, and specifically, the role of bishop, has undergone many metamorphoses – changes which have been largely the result of evolving community needs and values over two millenia. Speaking of the call to ordained ministry, New Testament scholar and liturgist, Joseph Martos, in his book, *Doors to the Sacred*, says that, on the one hand, while the ordained person is called like all other Christians to discipleship (a baptismal call to follow Jesus), s/he is also called to leadership in the community of the baptized; and that leadership can represent charismatic gifts such as presiding skills, teaching skills, preaching skills, etc. Martos also points out that the early second century *episkopoi* (bishops) were, with few exceptions, seen as “first among equals.” The monarchical model came later, ostensibly to meet the emergent need to fight heresy. Therefore, the pattern of an evolving ministry to meet emergent needs was established early on, and can presumably be continued today.¹

In his booklet, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, New Testament scholar, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., sees the role of presbyter/bishop as three-fold: as disciple - responding to the radical call of the gospel ministry of service in commitment to other-centeredness; as apostle – a person for others as teacher, preacher, counselor, consoler, compassionate leader, even admonisher – in effect, a wisdom person who carries and shares the tradition; and as pastor - who “resides with the flock,” and ultimately embodies all of the roles above. Brown believes that the historic development of the bishop role as one of authority must struggle with the paradox of the foundational presence of the disciple role at its base, a role which argues for the servant model.²

And so, in light of just such theology of the ordained ministry based on the long and varied development of the tradition of the universal church, as well as in light of the ethical considerations to which I have an obligation to attend as I seek to fulfill my leadership role as bishop in the real world of the twenty-first century church community, I have spent the past year reflecting theologically on my actual experiences as bishop. I have identified seven areas in which I have been serving: as pastor to the pastors (the other priests of my region); as teacher in the larger Catholic community; as a collegial liturgical leader for my region and the larger RCWP community; as a collegial member of my regional leadership team whose responsibility it is to prepare and ordain appropriate women called forth by the community as priests; as a model of outreach to the margins of church and society; as a model of outreach ecumenically representing an inclusive Catholic church; and as a collegial member of our two RCWP bishops’ circles (North American and International). My reflections cover a broad range of experiences to which I have tried to respond honestly. The questions underlying my reflections are: Who am I as a RCWP bishop at this moment? How do I function within the RCWP model of ministry? How is that model developing? How am I growing as a bishop within the model?

¹ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, Revised and Updated Edition, Liguori, MO: Liguori Triumph, 2001, p, 400.

² Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999, p. 39.

What follows is an attempt to shed some light on some of these questions for myself and perhaps for others who are interested in the future of the emerging Catholic church. My hope is that these reflections will be seen as a small contribution to the great dialogue that is going on in this critical moment in the church's history.

Pastor to the Pastors

There has been a lot of discussion over the past few years about what roles are appropriate for a bishop who serves in the new model of priesthood embraced by Roman Catholic Womenpriests. I have been serving as regional bishop for the eastern region of RCWP-USA since April of 2009, having been elected by my sister priests and those in formation for priesthood. Our model is a democratic one. Our constitutional document states that bishops may not fulfill administrative roles. That leadership role is reserved to those elected by the regions as regional administrators. Unlike bishops, regional administrators have term limits. Our document defines the authority of bishops as pertaining to liturgical, sacramental and pastoral matters. It is, of course the bishop's responsibility to ordain new deacons, priests and bishops. Therefore, after ordaining new ministers, it becomes the bishop's responsibility to serve as pastor to the pastors who are ordained.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Roman Catholic Church (Canon 384) speaks to the responsibility of the bishop toward the priests who serve God's people with him (sic).

With special solicitude, a diocesan bishop is to attend to presbyters and listen to them as assistants and counselors...to protect their rights and take care that they correctly fulfill the obligations proper to their state...and (provide) the means and institutions which they need for their spiritual and intellectual life.

I understand this function as serving as pastor to the pastors. My experience over just this past year (fall 2010-spring 2011) has been rich in this regard. While I believe that Canon 384 is important, I have found that drawing on the example of Jesus in working with his group of disciples (e.g., *You are my friends, if you do as I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father.* Jn. 15:14-15); or that of Paul and his co-workers - to be an even more enriching form of guidance. The priests are the bishop's co-workers and friends. I offer below some theological reflections from my recent experience as pastor to the pastors.

I begin with a reflection that speaks to my primary responsibility to ordain, and then to nurture new priests. In June 2011, I ordained four new priests for RCWP-USA, East. Two of the four were ordained to serve communities in which they had been called forth in northern cities. The other two new priests were called forth from my own community which encompasses a wide swath of the state of Maryland, including the city of Baltimore and its environs, as well as the suburbs of Washington, DC. During their discernment period, I had developed a close relationship with each of these candidates, particularly the ones in Maryland, with whom I came in contact on a regular basis. Following the ordinations, I began to reflect on my post-ordination relationships with all of these women, and realized

how easy it would be for me to unwittingly fall into a way of thinking of them as extensions of myself, and of their ministries as extensions of my own ministry. Intellectually, I had become aware of that danger through my MDiv studies in pastoral ethics, but I now had firsthand experience of the emotional piece as well. I am very proud of these women. I recognize that their program directors and I have been significant resources to them, for which they have expressed great gratitude. However, the larger truth is that they themselves are who they are through the grace of God. I feel challenged to keep this fact always before me as I work with them in mission. I need to remind myself that my first responsibility is to do a lot of listening, and to offer input, for the most part, as it is requested. Another challenge, particularly within the local Maryland ministry group, will be to expand and upgrade continually our team's communications methods as we focus on growth and outreach. I need to keep reminding myself that, with the two Maryland priests, I have two different relationships. One is a close collegial relationship of co-responsibility for our local community. The other is a bishop-priest relationship, a relationship of mentoring, albeit still collegial. The example of Paul, who sometimes mentored through letters from afar, but at other times lived and worked alongside leaders of local communities for a length of time (as in Corinth, see II Corinthians 1:23-2:3), serves to remind me that such a role is a complex one to say the least.

As pastor to the pastors, I find it useful to make informal contact by phone periodically with all of the priests, just to see how they are doing. I do not have an agenda when I call. I find that, if there is something on their minds, they will share it with me. Sometimes, I will get an e-mail asking if we can have a conversation around a pastoral issue. Here is an example. A priest who shares responsibility for a worship community with another priest contacted me regarding a difference of opinion with her colleague about acceptable wording for parts of the Eucharistic prayer. Here is an excerpt from what I wrote back to her.

I know that this question of atonement theology has come up in many places. I certainly see the need to de-emphasize the atonement mentality when teaching the cross. That theology comes to us from St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 11th century and some other medieval theologians. Knowing what we know today from psychology, we must avoid at all costs the idea that God, the Creator, exacted this bloody and violent death as the cost of reparation for the sinful acts of humanity. This type of understanding of redemption can cause irreparable harm to persons with whom we minister who have suffered from abuse. I think one of the keys to the dialogue is to look at two concepts in their larger meanings. One word is sin (vs.sins); the other is the notion of death on the cross itself. I believe that Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead as a model of how to be human in the presence of God, in other words to free humanity from the environment of evil (or state of sin) which is a reality in the world. He did not remove the reality surrounding us. He simply empowered us to not participate in it, and to seek our security in God rather than in the world of sin. He empowered us to know God's presence in every aspect of our lives, and to know that we will always be in relationship with God, here and in the hereafter. The second concept -- that of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection - in the old atonement model, have been taught as Christ had to suffer and die (one event which atones for our sinful acts in the plural), followed by Christ's resurrection (a second event which confers on us eternal life). This is a skewed understanding in my opinion. I find the death and resurrection of Christ to be one

entity. He is teaching us that we do indeed go through suffering, that God is indeed present in it with us, and that the final result is the full and sure knowledge that we will always live in God's presence.

So, I think we need to look at St. Paul's words carefully, we have to leave his words intact, but we have to dialogue within our communities about the meaning of the words. Here is the New Jerusalem Bible's translation of I Corinthians 11: 24-27:

"On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me." Whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes."

It would not be acceptable, in my opinion, to eliminate the reference to Christ's blood. But clearly St. Paul does not make reference to the sins (plural) of humanity. The reference in John's gospel to the Lamb of God (Jn. 2:29), says "He takes away the sin (singular, i.e. state of sin) of the world." I understand that in the framework I have laid out above. He doesn't remove it from the world; he removes it from its hold on the believer.

I hope this helps! Let's talk soon.

My purpose here was twofold. First, I felt it was important to point out the serious implications of an atonement theology that portrays an angry and vengeful God who demands satisfaction for sin through human sacrifice – certainly not the Abba of Jesus! This type of theology can have the effect of laying unhealthy guilt on vulnerable people. Secondly, I wanted to assist the priest in creating space liturgically for updating the theology in the Eucharistic prayer without throwing out the essential symbol of Christ's blood as the life force which binds us to him and to his Abba. Hopefully, I succeeded in opening up a dialogue among the priests involved. Such ongoing theological dialogue is critical to the process of the forming of consensus as we seek to do this important liturgical work, the purpose of which is always to be life-giving to the people of God.

I have also had priests seek my counsel on personal and professional ethical behavior. I am grateful to be asked to fulfill this role and I take it very seriously. I see it as a sign of health in our communications process.

Here is **another interesting reflection which speaks to the priests' perception of the bishop's role as spokesperson or leader.** This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that many in RCWP do not accept that it is the bishops' role to represent RCWP to other organizations or in public fora, lest we give the impression that bishops "speak for" RCWP, and thereby lend credence to the idea that we are prepared to continue with a hierarchically rather than collaboratively structured model of ministry.

Shortly after the eastern region's June 2011 ordinations, I was urged by two of the new ordinands, along with my sister priest and co-pastor, to participate in a public radio interview. The new priests were anxious to take on the challenge of this interview in order to "cast out fear," and to publicly proclaim what they had done and why they had done it. I was a bit surprised that they asked me to participate, believing that my days for doing this kind of thing were over, that it might be considered inappropriate or seen as me presenting myself as the public face of RCWP. Then I realized that I was avoiding the main issue, which was that the new priests needed me to be present and to help guide the effort to present our case to the listening audience, and to help field the questions and respond to the comments. They desired to be bold, but they wanted an experienced leader to help guide them. Four of us did the hour-long program together.

It turned out to be an excellent example of collegial leadership. It was amazing to watch all of the women grow in confidence as the program progressed. Each was listening intently to the others, watching smiles and body language as questions were tackled – and this only served to encourage one and all. We were an effective team. A great bond was formed in yet a new way among us. We were giving new definition to the collegial model. Each of us, upon returning home after the program, received a stream of e-mails and phone calls congratulating us on a stellar performance, and telling us how empowering it was for so many of our friends, colleagues and community members, to hear us set out so clearly what we are about as Roman Catholic Womenpriests, and to exhibit so well our values and the bedrock of faith in the Spirit's presence that underlies our willingness to act boldly.

A bishop, I realized in a new way, is a pastor to the pastors, who leads by example, and this can be done in any number of ways. Often, it may mean getting out on the hustings with those who need a visible example (and not just a verbalizer) of how to have the courage to act. Peter, the Apostle, in Acts chapter 11, having experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit with the uncircumcised Gentiles, reported this to the leaders in Jerusalem, who criticized him roundly, asking, "Why did you go to the uncircumcised and eat with them?" Peter explained step by step his thought processes in his conversion to a new way of understanding who was to be included in God's people. The leaders were good people, but they needed a leader to help them gain a new perspective. Peter led the leaders to conversion. (Acts 11:18: *When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God saying: 'God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'*)

As pastor to the pastors, I am learning on the job, and that is how it should be. When we stop being learners, we stop being effective leaders in my opinion. Learning includes self-evaluation, and also openness to evaluation by others. Three years ago, when we began to elect bishops for each region of RCWP-USA, we knew that this would greatly impact the functioning of the leadership structures of our regions. We said that we would institute a process of self-evaluation within each region. To date, no formal process has actually been implemented in our region. So, I have decided to offer a sample instrument to my region for such an evaluation of at least the bishop piece. I am appending a copy of what I have written, based on our document's bishop role section, and the characteristics our region used as a voting guide in our 2009 election process. My hope is that this will serve as a catalyst for an overall more comprehensive and more collaborative regional evaluation process.

Evaluation For Pastoral Role of Bishop Andrea M. Johnson

RCWP-USA, Eastern Region

March 26, 2012

The following excerpt is from the proposed update of section 5.3 of the present structures document of RCWP-USA.

Bishops are members of the RCWP community who are called to offer spiritual leadership and caring pastoral support. They are to be articulate and enthusiastic communicators of the RCWP vision, exemplifying in word and deed a renewed model of priestly ministry that is egalitarian and inclusive. They are to speak truth to power and to the community, even when it is not popular. As servant-priests who live in Christ's embrace of all, RCWP bishops are called to prioritize justice for the poor and outcast, and the equality of women in ordination and leadership. RCWP bishops are installed for pastoral, sacramental and liturgical leadership. They are expected to participate fully in the community, giving their gifts and talents whenever possible, but they may not carry administrative leadership responsibilities such as regional administrator or program coordinator. Bishops are to lead a prayerful and Spirit-centered life that is compassionate and non-judgmental –caring for self and others, and supporting community members to do the same. Together with other members of RCWP and their local communities, bishops work for the renewal of the church as a community of equals.

Please evaluate the ministry of Bishop Andrea Johnson in the following areas – giving a rating of 1-5, with 5 being the best performance. Feel free to add comments.

- 1) Working collegially with the Regional Administrator and the Regional Program Coordinators to assure the goals and mission of the region. _____

- 2) Visiting communities within the region by invitation, and being present to the People of God within the region to discuss items of pastoral concern. _____

- 3) Being a resource , encouraging the growth of those communities. _____
- 4) Encouraging outreach to those who live on the margins _____
- 5) Encouraging community among the priests, deacons and candidates of the region, and on a national level. _____
- 6) Getting to know the candidates, ordinands, deacons and priests, providing emotional and prayerful support, encouraging their spiritual growth, the growth of their ministries, and the sharing of their gifts with the region. _____
- 7) Encouraging dialogue with other faith traditions. _____
- 8) Collaborating with relevant others in decisions regarding applicants' readiness for admission to the program, and candidates' readiness for ordination. _____
- 9) Collaborating with Program Coordinators for periodic review and evaluation of the program as it reflects our growing movement. _____
- 10) Collaborating with the Regional Administrator on issues facing the region as it grows. _____
- 11) Being a member of the bishops' circle in mutual support and encouragement. _____
- 12) Presiding regularly at eucharist and administering the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation, anointing, reconciliation, marriages and other rites as asked. _____

- 13) Ordaining deacons, priests and other bishops, and administering or delegating the sacrament of confirmation to priests as needed. _____
- 14) Serving as advisor, consultant and resource person to priests in reference to administering the sacraments. _____
- 15) Carrying out additional sacramental responsibilities in other regions as needed. _____
- 16) Taking responsibility for the correctness of the rite of ordination used at all regional ordinations. _____
- 17) Being the point of liturgical unity within the region and in liaising with other regions. _____
- 18) Being available to other regions to aid or step into the liturgical role of other bishops if the need arises. _____
- 19) Being accountable to the region by informing the membership when asked to speak to groups on behalf of the region or other entities within RCWP, and providing feedback to the region following such presentations. _____
- 20) Providing fiscal accountability regarding any expenses incurred in the exercise of Episcopal duties. _____
- 21) Keeping (together with other members of the regional ordination leadership team) the membership informed and consulted as appropriate regarding ordination planning. _____

Thank you for sharing your evaluation candidly. This is a process that we in RCWP pledged early on to carry out in timely fashion. I hope that this is a good beginning to what I hope will be a regional assessment tool that we use regularly to help us to refine our visioning and operations as RCWP's gradually defining a new and inclusive model of ordained ministry.

Teacher in the Community

Traditionally, bishops have always been considered principal teachers in the Christian community. There is evidence of this role as early as the late New Testament books of Titus and I and II Timothy. While there were a few examples of monarchical style bishops as early as the second century (e.g. , Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Rome), there were also many more examples in the early Christian centuries of sees that were led by multiple bishops or teachers in collegial fashion with other presbyters. A classic example of the collegial attitude is Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage who wrote: "I have made it a rule ever since the beginning of my episcopate to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you (the presbyters and the deacons), and without the approbation of the people" (Letters of Cyprian 14:4). Church history tells us that one reason why the teaching role seemed to move in the direction of monarchical authority over time is that the early church developed a number of doctrinal problems in which "losers" in doctrinal battles were declared heretics, and excluded from the communion of the Catholic Church. It is also important to note that, after Constantine, the church began to imitate and take on the authoritarian structures, as well as the pomp and ceremony, of state rulers.

Roman Catholic Womenpriests, in light of the 20th century documents of Vatican Council II (which open the door to correction of abuses of power that have accrued from the exaltation of the monarchical model over the centuries), chooses to function on a collaborative model. RCWP chooses not to over-emphasize a doctrinal watchdog approach, but to emphasize instead a style of teaching that is based on modeling gospel truths and values, a style that is collaborative and inclusive. Nonetheless, the bishop has a strong leadership role when it comes to serving as teacher in the community of faith.

As a bishop who has vowed to operate in a servant model of ministry which is inclusive and collaborative, which empowers people to fully live into their baptism, I have many ethical questions to consider. These questions center on a variety of issues: Who can minister in the church today and with what preparation? What difference does it make in our ordained ministries that we have an educated laity willing and able to work alongside us? How will these factors impact church governance in the 21st century? What will be necessary for church unity? It is my ethical responsibility to wrestle with these questions. In this section, I will highlight some of the learnings I have experienced during my pastoral internship in the role of bishop as teacher. My reflections fall into four leadership categories: homiletics, community discernment, visitations/communications, and community presentations.

Homiletics

I have found preaching to be very demanding of my time and energy, but at the same time, deeply spiritually nourishing for myself. In order to preach the Word of God, I must first hear the word of God, pray over it, and allow it to challenge me and to change me. The teacher must be first and foremost a learner. I must also be in good touch with the community in order to connect the scriptural word with the substance of their lives. The Catholics we serve as Roman Catholic Womenpriests are

often starving spiritually, and are in mourning over the diminishment of the Vatican II church which gave them such hope. The following reflection demonstrates how I was able to use a given Sunday's readings to remind the community of the great promise of the Vatican II vision, and to exhort them to continue on the path of hope and renewal.

*Last Sunday, I preached at our 1:30PM liturgy at St. John's. The scriptures were from Isaiah 58 on true vs. false worship and fasting; from I Corinthians, chapter 2, on recognizing that all of our power comes from God; and from Matthew 5, on being salt for the earth and light for the world. When I first began to pray over these passages, I saw a continuation of the theme of light from Christmas through Epiphany and on into this ordinary time preceding Lent. Then, I came across an article by a renowned Jesuit who has taught for many years at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, and it just knocked my socks off! The author, John R. Donahue, said that these particular readings used on this day were the inspiration for the theme and title given by the Council Fathers of Vatican II to the **Dogmatic** Constitution on the Church. I had studied all of the documents of Vatican Council II back in the late '60's right after the council closed. I decided to go back and re-read that document entitled *Lumen Gentium* (a light to the peoples/nations). I also discovered that the additional document called *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), written as a **Pastoral (rather than dogmatic)** Constitution on the Church, had not been on the agenda originally, but had been seen as a necessary addition as the work went forward on the first document. It was the second document that would revolutionize the entire conceptualization of the church's apostolic ministry! It was the second document that expanded on the concept of the People of God describing the church in the first document.*

I saw a need to bring this whole panorama alive again in our community exactly because we are in a period of retrenchment being instigated by Rome, in which the Vatican is trying to cover over what was actually said and done about ministry at Vatican II. I saw that it is so easy, even for the most involved of us, to forget exactly what the promise of Vatican II really was, and what was actually written. So, I saw this as a resurrection kind of experience for us all, and an opportunity for us to re-commit our energies to taking practical steps for fulfilling the vision. We had written the vision down in the '60's, but we hadn't yet taken up the challenge to do the hard work necessary to effect real change. Now, it was necessary to renew the vision and the promise to fulfill it.

*As I was preaching, I could see people's faces gradually intensify. Some closed their eyes in remembrance of days past. Others actually gasped when I read a part of *Gaudium et Spes* that actually said that the church should even change its social structures according to its need to meet the modern world where it is. I know that when I read that part, it seemed like news to me! My purpose in preaching this homily was dual. I wanted to remind us all of the promise we as church have yet to fulfill, and I also wanted to encourage us and to challenge us to continue the work needed to do that. A number of people thanked me for bringing alive in their minds what seemed to have been lost. I received the following e-mail from a woman member of our community who is a former teacher at the same seminary where Donahue taught.*

Andrea, I would love to have a copy of the homily you gave yesterday: what a gift--and in ordinary time! There is someone I would like to share it with. Thank you. You are the best bishop I've ever had (and I have had some good ones, including Francis P. Murphy and Bill Newman).

With much gratitude,

Dusty

Naturally, all of this praise and appreciation made me feel good. I was indeed quite flattered to be mentioned in the same company with Frank Murphy and Bill Newman, two of our real heroes here in Baltimore, auxiliary bishops now deceased. Frank especially was a dear friend and mentor of mine. But since then, I have been asking myself, what is really the most important thing about preaching? It certainly isn't to get the audience to admire me. I was struck by the fact that Dusty spoke of me as bishop, and not only preacher. I thought about what added value was there for her by the fact that the bishop was preaching this way. It made me a bit uncomfortable. But, I decided, there is no escaping the fact that Catholic people do look to the bishop as pastoral leader in a somewhat larger way, as a sort of connector to the larger community outside of the local faith community. So, I reflected on that responsibility, and realized that I need to be very clear that, when I preach, it cannot be simply what I want to say personally, although my personal spirituality and insights are certainly acceptable, and important and integral to the message I convey. Since, when I speak or I preach, I am seen as representing the teaching of the whole church, I decided that the message of Paul on this day from I Corinthians was a key one for me to take hold of. That message was a reminder to the Corinthians that God is one, and our call is to be at-one with God, and to acknowledge that it is through God's power that we preach or minister in any way. This ministry is not about me, not about cleverness or headiness in any way. It is purely and simply letting the Word of God, the Light to the Nations, shine through.

Another example of my teaching role as bishop is to provide homiletics training to all of the priests who will preach the word in the region. I was able to arrange a homiletics workshop for our priests in spring of 2011, led by homiletics professor, Bishop Dr. Patricia Fresen. The participants included women with significant training and/or experience with congregational preaching, as well as others with some experience, and even one or two with little or no experience. The participants included one bishop (myself), several priests with varying years of ordained experience, several deacons, and even one aspiring candidate for ordination. Through the considerable skills of Dr. Fresen, the dynamics of such a diverse workshop group lent themselves to a very interesting leveling of the playing field, involving a certain vulnerability for all involved – even the older, more experienced women. The small group sharings were very interesting as they mixed women together in random fashion, allowing for open conversation across a broad spectrum of points of view, meaningful communication, and lots of cross-fertilization, even bonding and building of mutual respect. In this format, all participants served

as teachers as well as learners – something I couldn't help but see as a truly RCWP modeling of Jesus' empowerment style of leadership! Here are some of my reflections:

At this workshop, critiquing took place in a very honest and yet positive way. Subtle lessons were learned (e.g. through the discipline of strictly timed delivery of short homilies) that homily preparation is a very complex process, involving competing albeit worthwhile values coming into play. There was the value of brevity and simplicity for the sake of not losing the audience, and also not appearing to be delivering a lecture of one's own thoughts. This could be described as the value of striving for clarity with an economy of words. On the other hand, there was the value of depth of message and the ability to illustrate or paint a picture for the listener which takes more time. There was the value of speaking at not too rapid a pace, and taking the time to make eye contact and to make use of appropriate body language, all of which takes time as well. The lesson was learned that a balance had to be struck among all of these values, always keeping in mind the needs of the community in which one is preaching.

It is not an exaggeration to say that all were exhilarated at the amount of learning that took place in such a short period of time – a real testimony to Dr. Fresen's skill. One of the most gratifying aspects of the whole process for me as regional bishop was to see my desire fulfilled that this workshop serve to build up even more the sense of community and mutual love and respect among the members of our region. I was also delighted that a member of another RCWP region also felt very welcome and fully accepted within the group. This also seemed true for the aspiring candidate who joined us. It is now just two weeks since the workshop, and she has moved forward to candidacy in our region. It is, of course, still the Easter season, when we hear daily in readings from the Acts of the Apostles of numbers being added to the community of believers, and also of the deepening of faith among those who have come to believe. As I read these passages each day, I reflect on how our movement is growing numerically, and by the deepening of bonds among those who commit themselves to this RCWP way of doing ministry, and I am profoundly grateful for my role in helping to build up the community as bishop.

To sum up, I came away from this experience of the preaching workshop committed to seeing that my preaching was always well prayed over and well thought through with respect to content, and always keeping in mind the root biblical theme which is God's justice or the reign of God. My job as homilist (and as bishop who encourages all other homilists in the region) is, in the words of Bishop Ken Untener, "to stand humbly before the Lord, to help the flow of what Christ is doing, Christ who is the leader of all liturgical prayer." (Preaching Better: Practical Suggestions For Homilists: A hands-on

guidebook by a bishop who preaches and who teaches the art of homiletics: what to do, how to do it and, for heaven's sake, what to stay away from, by Ken Untener, 1999, p. 11).

Community Discernment

In the RCWP model of priestly and episcopal ministry, it is not my function as bishop to govern in a monarchical fashion either my region or the community of which I am co-pastor. Our governance processes are collegial and democratic. Nonetheless, I find that, as bishop, my opinions are valued and sought out. I am as free as any other member of the discernment group to offer my insights for the community's decision-making process. The following reflection will illustrate my point.

The Living Water Community has Discernment Days every four months. The purpose is to allow everyone in the community to feel included in the possibility of visioning and decision-making for the community. There is a solid core of about 12-15 people who almost always attend. Occasionally, others join in. It is always an exhilarating experience, which is not something that can often be said about church board meetings. Perhaps it is because we are small, and also because that gives us the luxury of issuing an open invitation to all in the community to attend, that we are able to have such a positive atmosphere.

It is not true that our decisions are always easily arrived at. There are frequently lengthy and spirited discussions. Perhaps because we take time at the beginning to have coffee and chat about things in general at the beginning, and again at lunch time, we are more relaxed. Also, we take time to center ourselves and remind ourselves of our mission, and that tends to focus us and make us more united in our purpose, I think.

Our last meeting had 11 participants. One of the issues that we were trying to wrap up was the final requirements for our new incorporation. Co-pastor Gloria Carpeneto and our committee designated to work on this had been working very hard and needed our cooperation to put the final touches on. One of the requirements is that we have an official board of directors for legal purposes. Gloria explained that there needed to be ten board members, and asked if all present would be willing to have their names listed as board members until actual elections could be held in a couple of months. There was slight hesitation on the part of some at first, but then, people were forthcoming when they realized that this was not a threat to our open and democratic way of operating in reality. It took some getting used to however to even talk in legal terms, but we managed quite well, acknowledging that we cannot remain in an undeveloped state of governance forever. We took a deep breath, and what I saw was a willingness to begin to take on the responsibility of growth and development of our community in a more institutional fashion.

Next, we talked about formal pledges and determined that this is a theme we are going to give legs to in the community. We will have different members of the community take turns giving short talks about what the community means to them and the importance of stewardship and participation in the community's visioning. There will be homilies as appropriate on the same topic. We will include short articles on the topic in the weekly community notes from time to time, and we will announce a pledge

campaign for next fall, which we will ritualize at Thanksgiving. This was a very creative and very productive discussion.

Another important piece at this meeting was re-visiting a discussion we had had at the previous meeting about joining the Federation of Christian Ministries as a community. We had already decided that we did not want to use the FM 501c3, but to do our own. We talked about the tension between our desire to not be listed as a church polity separate from Roman Catholicism and our desire to be connected to other communities like ourselves. We decided that it would be good to be a community member of FCM in order to belong to a larger body of folks with the same goals as we have, and also to have the FCM keep copies of our community records of sacraments. Although our priests are individual members of FCM and have the sacraments they celebrate recorded by FCM under their individual names, those priests might not always be with the Living Water Community, and the records might not be found easily by applying to FCM. Living Water, it was determined, needed to have its own corpus of records with FCM.

Looking at all of these decisions after the meeting had taken place, it became clear to me that our community is dealing with growing pains about the need to institutionalize more than we have been used to. We are entering another stage in our self-understanding, and we are finding our way together rather well because we have focused on trust and collaboration first. I am very grateful for this wonderful community, and look forward to building the stewardship piece together with them.

One of the big benefits for me of participating in this model of decision-making is that, as bishop, I am grounded and in good touch with the longings and the needs of the community. I am even able to take the insights I receive and put them to good use when meeting with national and international level leaders of RCWP about future planning. The *sensus fidelium* is always front and center.

Regional Visitations and Communications

In our RCWP model, bishops are called to visit local communities served by Roman Catholic Womenpriests as they are invited to do so. In the past three years, I have been invited to visit several communities for occasions other than ordinations. I have also been included on the mailing list for the newsletters of several of the communities in the region. One community, the Sophia Community in Newton, New Jersey, asked me to preach at one of their Sunday liturgies in late 2011. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with people who are intent on keeping their Catholic identity and traditions without accepting what they consider to be abusive ministry practices in their local parishes. I feel strongly the obligation as bishop to support our priests in any way that I can in their ministries. I find myself as bishop walking this walk with the priests of the region as they walk with their people. In all honesty, the path is not always a smooth one for these communities, and I find that it helps a great deal for people to see the bishop, to hear from the bishop on occasion. Here is a snippet from one of my reflections following a visit to the Sophia Community.

I find that this community really puts into practice the holistic concept that we are all listeners and learners; teachers and doers; and that conflict and change are the normal way of growth into God. I love the fact that I am consulted voluntarily, and trusted to give input, and to share the journey with this community which is seeking to live into the model of a discipleship of equals, operating with mutual respect and accountability. I pray that it will be possible for all in the community to continue to hold their differences in love as they walk forward together, and I pledge to them my full support.

I am thinking that, at some point, it might be good to get our communities in the region into newsletter correspondence with one another in order to offer encouragement and mutual support to one another. I am reminded of the words of St. Paul in the Letter to the Philippians: (Philippians 1:3-6; 9-11).

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will ring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ..... And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ, you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Public Presentations

Another experience that I have had in my role as bishop has been that of public presenter of our model of ministry. In June of 2011, I was part of a panel at the American Catholic Council where I spoke about my role in the RCWP model. Later that same month, I was a discussion leader following a showing of the award-winning documentary, *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*, which prominently features many of our RCWP members and gives excellent witness to our model. Here is an excerpt from my experience on that occasion.

...It was wonderful to gather with about 50 of our folks on Saturday, the 18th, for a showing of "Pink Smoke," an award-winning documentary of the struggle for Catholic women's ordination over the past 35 years. The mood was expectant and jubilant. The film, an hour in length, did not disappoint. So much information, so much emotion, so many questions raised. So many courageous stories told. It was like a torrent let loose.

We broke into four groups to discuss our impressions of the film. I led one of the groups. I wasn't really prepared for all that poured out, even into the next day at Sunday liturgy. I found myself barraged with questions about the history and the people of the movement. Because I had been at the center of the struggle from the mid-1980's, I was able to share a lot of the connections that allowed things to happen. There were tears and there was laughter. Many women began to share their own stories of having dared to hope that women's ordination would ever happen. Some said that the film hit them like a ton of bricks because the stories of the women were so real and human and down-to-earth that they could identify with them and

not see them as women on a pedestal. There was something “Yes, we can!” about the mood. A few women said seeing the variety of women priests (as well as well known theologians, political and spirituality thinkers and writers) in the film made them think again about what they might be called to. I was particularly bowled over and also delighted by an 86-year-old African-American former nun who said at first she hadn’t even thought that what we are doing was a good idea at all, but at this point (having viewed another African-American octogenarian priest from Chicago in the film) felt that she was ready to do something. She certainly seemed to have at least as much energy as I have!

On a serious note, though, I began to realize that this sort of film was very powerful indeed, and that people’s responses to it would materialize in a lot of pastoral work for me – a lot of listening and guiding of their exploration of how to identify a call. It was a bit overwhelming to say the least. On the one hand, I know that I have a whole cadre of people to whom, as bishop, I can refer them for this discernment process; but the fact that I am also their pastor complicates matters somewhat. I realize that I am going to have to deal with those roles separately, and try to help them to clarify in their minds as well that their discernment will have to include working with our preparation program team and probably also a spiritual director. It was a good lesson for me concerning the enthusiasm that can result from sharing the experience of the movement of the Spirit. It is going to be important for me to not overplay my role as candidates materialize from among the members of our congregation.

Something that I have learned from such public appearances and presentations is that people tend to respond to emotion and to charismatic leadership. History has shown us that this can lead to autocratic leadership if the charismatic leader seizes upon the opportunity. What I am finding is that is important as RCWP moves forward to continually clarify the responsibilities of the different parts of the authority structures we have put in place. This is critical to assuring the continuation of our reform movement beyond the time of service of the original charismatic leadership. The challenge will be to maintain the original vision while at the same time meeting the necessary goals of growing in strength and maturity.

In sum, I have come to understand that in a very real sense everything I do is part of my role as bishop because, in everything I do, I am called to model the type of open leadership and teaching style that Jesus modeled in the gospels. I remind myself each day that he is even known to have changed his mind, as he did in his interaction with the Canaanite woman. (cf. Mt. 15: 22-28)

Collegial Liturgical Leader

A Roman Catholic Womanbishop's leadership responsibilities are understood as first and foremost liturgical and pastoral in nature rather than administrative. Over the three years that I have served as regional bishop in RCWP-USA, East, I have had significant experiences in three different areas liturgically: 1) carrying out ordinations, 2) preparing and implementing community and regional liturgies, and 3) leading liturgy at an RCWP national retreat.

Ordinations

In the ministry of carrying out ordinations, my experience has been pretty straightforward. As bishop, I am the sacramental minister in charge of ordinations for the region. I am responsible to see that ordination liturgies conform to the Roman rite, and to celebrate those liturgies together with the regional clergy and the people of the communities who have called forth the candidates for ordination. On occasion, I have been called upon to celebrate an ordination in another region whose bishop is unavailable. (Over three years, I have ordained five deacons and seven priests for my eastern region, as well as one deacon and two priests for other regions). In keeping with the needs shown by this pattern, the regional bishops of RCWP-International have collaborated over the past few years to create an ordination template to be used as the basis for all RCWP ordinations. I will return to this topic in a more reflective mode in a later section which will deal with my work with the RCWP bishops' circles, both national and international. For the present topic, it is sufficient to say that I take very seriously my role as ordaining bishop and overseer of the process of ordaining priests of good character and with a solid call from the community. This is my ethical responsibility as bishop. I will elaborate on this further in the section on bishop as *Collegial Member of the Regional Leadership Team*.

Community and Regional Liturgies

With respect to ordinary community and regional liturgical celebrations, I have found that the most pressing concern within RCWP has been to encourage the use of inclusive language in liturgy, when employing either divine or human imagery. The reason for this focus is to allow the liturgy to proclaim clearly and unequivocally the universality of God's love and the message of freedom and justice which it conveys in a manner that can be heard by all. Our priests have sought out many sources for eucharistic prayers and other prayers in order to achieve this purpose. In accordance with modern liturgical scholarship, which points out that symbolic messages are complex – indeed, multivalent and received at many levels, making the efficacy of the symbols heavily dependent on the cultural sensors through which they must pass. Consequently, I have encouraged this creativity, and have been delighted to see that there is much sharing of resources going on. Recently, I suggested to the bishops' circle that we establish a liturgical resource "library" for members only on the RCWP web page to facilitate this sharing of resources.

Within my own worship community – now four years in existence – together with my co-pastor, the Rev. Gloria Carpeneto, I have written (in 2010) eucharistic liturgies for all of the liturgical seasons of

the church year for use in our community. These liturgies are solidly based on the pre-2011 version of the Roman missal, while at the same time, expanding and enriching the imagery in order to effect an inclusive and liberating form of prayer. We have bound these liturgies into one sacramentary which puts the entire liturgy into the hands of all participants. Below are some excerpts from my liturgy for the Advent season. The overriding theme is Christ-Sophia, the Wisdom of God.

*All are welcome at this Eucharist
that celebrates Christian discipleship;
where we gather as a community of equals,
and
we share the dream of a world
where all our brothers and sisters live in peace.
Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community*

THE ORDER OF MASS FOR SUNDAYS IN ADVENT

Presider: **Let us begin in the name of God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of all that lives.**

All: Amen.

Presider: **May our God be with you.**

All: And also with you.

Presider: **As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ's love, let us acknowledge that there are times when we fall short, and ask our God for pardon and peace.**

Deacon or Presider: **Jesus, faithful Word of God – Word of blessing and of Challenge – teach us your compassionate Wisdom, that we may be protectors of young and old: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.**

All: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.

Deacon or Presider: **Jesus, joy of all who trust in you, help us to be imitators of your openness, to be both teachers and learners in our church: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.**

All: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.

Deacon or Presider: **Jesus, Splendid Radiance of our God, be our strength for each new day, that we might be both hearers and doers of the Word: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.**

All: Jesus, Word of Wisdom, have mercy.

Presider: **May our gracious God have mercy on us, forgive us our failings and bring us to everlasting life.**

All: Amen.

Opening Prayer

Presider: **Holy One, the day draws near when the glory of your Anointed One, Jesus, will make radiant the night of the waiting world. May the lure of worldly concerns not impede us from the joy which enters the hearts of those who seek Christ. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of wisdom which fills the minds of those who find him. We ask this in the blessed name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

Offertory Procession: *(Those who bring up the bread and wine offer them to the Presider & Deacon. Then all walk around to stand behind the altar. The Presider prays the first prayer, commingling wine and water, then offers the bread & wine to ministers to her/his left and right, who pray over the gifts.)*

Offertory Prayers

Presider: (pouring water into the cup): **By the mingling of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, as Christ has come to share in our humanity.**

Presider or Bread Minister: **Blessed are you, God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread to offer which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.**

All: Blessed be God forever.

Presider or Wine Minister: **Blessed are you, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.**

All: Blessed be God forever.

Presider: **My sisters and brothers, let us pray together that these our gifts may be acceptable to God our Creator.**

All: May God accept these gifts from our hands, for the praise and glory of God's name, for our good and the good of all the church.

Presider: **Loving God, by sending Jesus to be among us you allowed yourself to be vulnerable. In so doing, you continue to challenge the powers that rule this world, through the voices of the needy, the compassionate, and those who are filled with longing for justice. Make us hunger and thirst to see right prevail. Give us the grace to be single-minded in seeking peace and justice, that we may see your face and be satisfied in you, through Jesus Christ, our Brother.**

All: Amen.

(Bread and Wine Ministers leave the altar and return to their seats.)

Eucharistic Prayer *(Please stand for the Eucharistic Prayer, and remain standing until after Communion has been received.)*

Presider: **May our God be with you.**

All: And also with you.

Presider: **Lift up your hearts.**

All: We lift them up to our God.

Presider: **Let us give thanks to our loving God.**

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Presider: **Blessed are you, compassionate and faithful God. We do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. When Christ humbled himself to come among us as a member of the human family, he fulfilled the plan you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to fullness of life in you. Now, we watch for the day, believing that the fullness of salvation promised us will be ours, when Christ, our Savior, will come again in glory. And so, in our joy, with the all the choirs of angels we sing to your glory:**

All: Holy, holy, holy God, Spirit of Love and Peace. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Hosanna in the highest.

Presider: **How wonderful the work of your hands, O God! All creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness, all blessing and encouragement come from you, through Jesus, your Anointed One,**

and the working of the Holy Spirit. From age to age, you gather a people to yourself so that, from east to west, from north to south, from all races, all genders, and all walks of life, a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.

Epiclesis

Presider: And so, Abba, we bring you these gifts. Loving God, let your Holy Spirit move in power over us and over our earthly gifts of bread and wine, that they may become for us, and we, for all the world, + the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Words of Institution

All: On the night before he met with death, Jesus came to table with the women and men he loved. He took bread and praised you, God of all creation. He blessed and broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples saying: Take this, all of you, and eat it: This is my body which will be given up for you.

All: When supper was ended, he poured a final cup of wine, and blessed you, God of all creation. He passed the cup among his disciples and said: Take this, all of you, and drink from it. This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Deacon or Presider: **Let us proclaim the mystery of faith.**

All: Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Presider: Holy One, we commemorate Jesus, your beloved Child, through Whom you entrusted your pledge of love to us. We celebrate the memory of his death and resurrection, and bring you the gift you have given us, the possibility of reconciliation, justice, and peace. We ask you to accept us, and to fill us with the Spirit of Jesus, through the sharing of this meal. Take away all that divides us, and enable us to be accepting of all.

Keep us in communion with one another, and with all people who love you throughout the world. Let your Spirit make us a sign of unity, a model of equity, and instruments of your peace.

Let your Spirit also come upon our leaders, both religious and political, so that they might act without fear. Move our minds and our hearts also, that we too might act without fear. May we, together with our leaders, become peacemakers – to transform your church and to protect your world.

Strengthen and console all who are suffering in any way. Bless all those who have gone before us in faith, and bring them into the everlasting joy and peace of your presence.

We ask that you gather together women, men and children of every race, language, religion and way of life to share in your one, eternal banquet. Then, in your presence, we shall give you glory, with all creation and with Jesus, through whom your goodness flows.

Doxology

All: For it is through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, that all glory and honor are yours, All-Loving God, forever and ever.

AMEN!

Prayer of Jesus

Presider: **Let us pray together to our Loving God as Jesus taught us:**

All: Our father/mother in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kin-dom come

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from all evil.

For yours is the kin-dom, and the power and the glory

Forever and ever. Amen.

Deacon or Presider: **The peace of God be with you all.**

All: And also with you.

Deacon or Presider: **As we share our joy, let us take one another's hands and wish our neighbors peace.**

Presider: **This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the brokenness of our world. How blessed are we who are called to this table.**

All: Jesus, *you make me worthy* to receive you. By your word, I am healed.

Presider: **This is the welcoming table of Jesus Christ. All are invited and welcome to participate in this meal.**

Closing Prayer

Presider: **Source of light and of life, you give us food from heaven. By our sharing in this mystery, teach us to judge wisely the things of earth, and to love the things of heaven. We ask this through Jesus, the Anointed One.**

All: Amen.

Final Blessing

Presider: **Our God be with you.**

All: And also with you.

Deacon or Presider: **Let us raise our heads and pray that God's blessing be with us.**

Presider: **We believe that Jesus, the waker of the dawn and the light of the world once came to us, and we look for him to come again. May Christ's coming bring you the light of his holiness, and his blessing bring you freedom.**

All: Amen.

Presider: **We rejoice that our Redeemer came to live among us as one of the human family. When Christ comes again in glory, may he reward us with endless life.**

All: Amen.

Presider: **May our God make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and untiring in love all the days of your life.**

All: Amen.

Presider: **And may our loving and compassionate God bless you, the Source of All Being, Eternal Word Made Flesh, and Holy Spirit.**

All: Amen.

Deacon or Presider: **This Mass is ended. Go in the peace of Christ to bring his compassionate presence to all the world.**

All: Thanks be to God.

This Advent liturgy was first introduced at the Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community for Advent 2010, one year before the new liturgical changes for the English language liturgy in the Roman rite. It was during that same liturgical year that we introduced and celebrated for the first time a complete Easter Triduum. This was a major milestone for our community. I include below my reflection on this momentous experience of my liturgical leadership as bishop and pastor of the community.

Gloria and I and our whole community had long anticipated our first full celebration of the Easter Triduum this year. Our anticipation had begun with last year's partial celebration, when we had done the Easter Vigil service for the first time. That, in effect, had been attempted based on our Holy Thursday celebration of the Lord's Supper the year before. It seemed clear to us that the community responded to the Easter Triduum events – quite appropriately – as a deeply bonding time, as we celebrated the core of our Christian faith. We had begun by reflecting upon ourselves as a sort of Exodus community, leaving Egypt and covenanting together in the desert as we formed inclusive Catholic community, irrespective of warnings of excommunication. Then, with last year's celebration of the Easter Vigil, we claimed the "through death to life" experience of the victory of Easter for our movement.

This year's celebration (2011) was special for so many reasons. Gloria and I had labored long to prepare beautiful liturgies for all of Holy Week. The people of the community had entered in by fully taking ownership of the preparation of the services. They gracefully helped to welcome many from outside our community who gathered with us to celebrate: Bishop Patricia Fresen, a South African white woman who currently lives in Germany – who was turned out of her religious order without pension when she moved forward to be ordained as priest in 2003, and who is largely responsible for the success of our movement here in North America; also, a group of five from Raleigh, NC – 3 nuns and a married couple with whom I had led a retreat last fall. This group is in mourning at the loss of a very pastoral bishop who has been replaced by one who is systematically destroying the progressive elements in their diocese of Raleigh. Together, we formed one body – one community of faith, hope and love. Resurrected life was shared – life that will lead us into the future.

I reflected upon all of this with profound gratitude to our loving God – for being present to me in my ministry – day by day; for filling the emptiness, and giving me and my co-workers the courage to expect and the patience to wait for the organic growth that surely manifests itself to those who wait in hope.

What I am learning from the experience of preparing and doing inclusive and empowering liturgy is that as a Roman Catholic Womanbishop in a church fraught with fear and oppression, I can, through fostering liberating liturgy, help bring together new forms of community based on love and mutual support. Liturgy is a very powerful tool for doing that.

Leading Liturgy as a Bishop at RCWP National Retreat 2011

A very particular opportunity arose to model the role of collegial bishop (i.e., to exercise the gift of bringing unity through liturgy) in summer of 2011. RCWP was having its second national retreat. Each region was asked to take responsibility for one of the liturgical celebrations during the retreat. The

planners came up with the idea that the final eucharist might be planned and presided over by the bishops. Not all members were pleased at this prospect as the following reflection excerpt indicates.

Two weeks or so before the retreat, two women from one region began to take issue with what they termed “the bishops’ mass”. They felt that it was inappropriate for the bishops circle to plan a liturgy together as bishops, indicating that the bishops should simply participate as part of their regions’ assigned prayer service preparation. The planners were taken completely by surprise. At first, there were no responders to this criticism. Eventually, the planners began to respond. The two planners who are not bishops gave painstaking explanations of why this was not a “takeover” of the final liturgy by the bishops. Then, other members began to register their thoughts as well, all very supportive of the planners and their way of handling the liturgical planning, with thanks to the two bishops who shouldered the composition of liturgy responsibilities. The matter seemed to die down after a few days. There were not any withdrawals from the retreat registration. However, I could sense when I arrived that there were some feelings of ‘let’s see what happens’ when we arrived. There were a number of new applicants and candidates present. Almost immediately on the first evening, one of them asked me a few questions about our collaborative model of ministry. As we began to pray that first evening, led by the Great Waters region, the body language was very good. Everyone was in it together. Each successive morning prayer and evening prayer - each led by a different region - was both joyous and deeply meaningful – nourishing and challenging. The western region led a magnificent eucharistic liturgy on Tuesday afternoon

The big test came in my book when we got to the final liturgy – the one that had been tagged “the bishops’ Mass’ by the ones who hadn’t come. I had been asked by the other two bishops who had written the liturgy to preside. After the brouhaha, I had thought about telling them to find someone who is not a bishop to preside. I had not been one of the bishop writers. Why did I have to be the one to preside? Would this not feed into the frenzy? I prayed about it. In the end, I did not withdraw. I thought, “I will take the risk that there might be a lot of women there who don’t like it. I will take the risk and model how I believe a bishop should preside. And so, I waited to see the configuration of the worship space. Our space was in a huge circle. For eucharist, we had a table in the center. We also had a smaller, lower table with oils on it because another bishop was going to lead us in blessing oils. She then asked two women to pass bowls of the oil around the circle in each direction so that the women could touch it in remembrance of – not their ordinations, but of their baptism! The liturgy was rich and beautiful. A number of phrasings were a bit different from our usual, I believe in order to make us take note of the less familiar words. I took this as a cue to be slow and purposeful in praying and leading others in prayer. I took a lot of time to look up and around the room, to make eye contact with the others celebrating. Our Eucharistic prayer had seven voices besides my own. As each woman spoke, I turned slightly, my hands raised in orans position, to make visual contact with the speaker wherever she was in the circle. I stood at the altar only during the offertory and the eucharistic prayer. My book lay on the table, propped up by a simple but exquisite cross. I left the altar area at the Lord’s Prayer to join the circle. The eucharistic ministers came to the altar without me there, and I read the remaining presider prayers from my chair in the circle. It was indeed a very simple, but powerful experience for us all. I was near tears when, after the liturgy, a number of women, including several new candidates came to me with smiles and hugs to say how much they loved this “bishop’s Mass.” I am grateful that the Spirit gave those who wrote the liturgy the inspiration to write such a beautiful piece, and me, the insight I needed to lead it in the setting we were in – in a way that served to model our discipleship of equals to be understood by all. I was reminded of this passage from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, ; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

(I Corinthians 12: 27-31)

This was a powerful as well as a humbling experience in which I allowed myself to be vulnerable and led by the Spirit to model as best I knew how the liturgical leadership of a bishop. I did not write the inspiring liturgy. Other bishops did. I simply tried to implement it with a mind to making it everyone’s – facilitating the flow of the Spirit’s gifts for the community.

In sum, I believe that what I am in the process of learning about liturgical leadership is to be a vessel and a conveyor of what the Spirit is gifting the community with– as well as a joyful participant in the circle dance of God and God’s people.

Collegial Member of Regional Leadership Team

I was elected regional bishop for the RCWP-USA eastern region in February of 2009, and ordained to that office on April 19, 2009. It is important to note that the RCWP discernment for ordination to priesthood program had already been in operation since 2005, under the overall supervision of Bishop Dr. Patricia Fresen (residing in Germany), with mentoring of candidates being taken over in 2006 by regional program directors appointed by Dr. Fresen. In 2007, RCWP-USA ratified its first structures document which called for election of program directors for each region as well as a collaborative model of regional leadership for the ordination process – to include the bishop, the program director and the regional administrator. Once US women bishops were ordained, beginning in 2008, this structure was tested with full, implementation as each region ordained a regional bishop.

The following reflection describes my experience as I assumed my role as a collaborative member of the eastern region's leadership team.

My first experience with an ordination discernment decision came just two months after my episcopal ordination. I was contacted by the Regional Program Director to be on a call with her and our Regional Administrator to discuss an applicant who had completed her requirements for admission to candidacy. This was an applicant who had taken the step of approaching me herself, doing what had appeared to be an "end run" around the Program Director. I later learned that she had also approached another mentor in the region as well. Her message had been that she thought she was being discriminated against because of a personality conflict with the Director. This was a contact that made me very uncomfortable. On the one hand, I knew that this was out of the process. On the other hand, I was unwilling to decide on my own that there was not a problem that required intervention. In addition, I was completely in the dark about the processes that are followed within the guidelines of the Program Direction structure, since these guidelines are not public knowledge throughout RCWP. Prior to being ordained bishop, I had never thought that these guidelines were particularly my business. Now, I felt that I had a need to know more about how things were done. The dialogue that took place among three of us, the Administrator, the Program Director and myself was reasonably informative. I was made aware of some of the difficulties that the other two members of the team had encountered with this particular applicant in the process. Between what I had observed of the applicant myself, and what was shared with me, it seemed to me to be more than a personality conflict. I saw definite signs that the applicant 1) was not totally clear what ministry as a Roman Catholic Womanpriest would entail; and 2) was expecting a kind of solidarity with her personal cause from the other members of RCWP-East that could best be described as activism, something I found inappropriate as an expectation. I shared my thoughts with the other two. Together, we came to the conclusion that there was really no reason to refuse to allow this woman to discern a call to priesthood with RCWP, but with the proviso that we expressed clearly to her the concerns we believed needed to be addressed during the course of the discernment. We all signed a letter of acceptance to her. She responded that she accepted the role of candidate. Subsequently, however, she chose to withdraw from our program, only to re-surface in another region over a year later. Ultimately, she withdrew entirely from any association with RCWP. All of this is by way of background for my current concern. I felt that this had been a healthy sharing and decision-making process. It was, of course, my first experience .

My current concern has to do with the fact that, as our Structures are being updated, the Program Directors' Circle has produced a new manual, quite detailed and extensive, without sharing its contents with the other members of the Regional Ordination Teams. I find this counter-productive. I believe that, if the teams are going to work collaboratively, these sorts of materials should be shared as information at least. (In fairness, I acknowledge that I am aware of some of the underlying reasons why this situation developed the way it did, but I am not at liberty to share that information).

Because I live in geographic proximity to one of our regional program directors, I was eventually able to see the materials, which made me feel a bit more confident that there will be continuing discussion about the manual since the new director for our southern area has submitted some additional suggestions for simplifying the document. I must admit that I had been somewhat frustrated that the bishops and administrators had spent so much time in the dark for a very long time in this process. While I have no interest in laying blame in this matter, at some point, I do plan to give feedback to my colleagues, the Regional Program Directors, about the process. I think it will be important to do this in a non-accusatory way, acknowledging the circumstances underlying the secrecy, but pointing out clearly that this is not a way to conduct ourselves in the future. Once again, I see that it is all about building trust and operating in a transparent and collegial manner. This is not a problem that is particular to RCWP, but is a perennial problem in all forms of governance.

On a spiritual plane, which must be at the foundation of any process we build in RCWP, I believe I am, and we as a community are called to be open with one another as we collaborate for the good of the whole. We also need to be open to input and resources from other non-USA regions in matters of program direction. Personally, my feelings and frustrations with the way things happened in the development of the proposed manual are a challenge to me to scrutinize my own reactions carefully, to be sure that I am not responding out of injured pride, but rather out of true concern for building the working relationship that the team needs to function accountably. It will always be important to reflect on what has happened and to seek to use the experience – no matter what it is – to build upon in a positive way for the future.

A scripture passage that comes to mind in this case is John 3: 21:

Whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.

Clearly, I see a big challenge to myself as bishop, and to all of the members of the regional leadership team to maintain open communication at all times and a growing trust in our relationship. We cannot avoid the reality that, while our work is in a spiritual arena, we are dealing with governance in the sense that we are making collaborative decisions about real people's lives, and we are ethically bound to do so with transparency.

The second part of my learning concerning what is appropriate to my role as the bishop member of the discernment/ordination team comes from my prayerful reflection on how I find that I actually walk with those about to be ordained. Below is a reflection from spring of 2011. It speaks to walking a fine line in order to avoid usurping the authority of the other members of the mentoring team.

As I write this reflection, it is just three weeks before our Eastern Region ordinations, to be celebrated in my home community in Catonsville, Maryland. There are four candidates for priesthood, two of which are members of the same community, and whose calls have been nurtured here over the past two years.

I have been serving as regional bishop for two years now, and I have been praying and thinking a great deal about my role in the process of ordaining new priests. I have tried to learn more about how to exercise my role in several ways. Recognizing that I have a weighty responsibility to ordain only worthy candidates, ones who are well prepared theologically and spiritually to assume the pastoral role of priest, and who are ready and willing to function in a mutually accountable way, I saw that I must find effective ways of coming to know the candidates personally, without in any way usurping the role of the Regional Program Director and mentors appointed to walk with them. I am also conscious that I am able to do the same for them. I am firmly of the mind that it is not important who gets the credit for success. Our common goal is a good, thorough discernment process which results in solid and growing ordained ministers.

A first step was to establish a working relationship with the other members of the Regional Ordination Leadership Team, the Regional Administrator and the Regional Program Director. I felt fortunate to have two women in those roles in our region who were very welcoming and forthcoming in sharing their insights and experience, offering me space to develop my own style and contribution to the process.

A next step then was to develop my own way of getting to know the candidates. Since our numbers are still relatively small, I have the advantage of being able to make personal contact with the candidates from time to time. I always wait, of course, until a person has been formally admitted to the discernment process, even though, as a member of the Leadership Team, I will already have been consulted concerning the appropriateness of the admission. When regional retreats take place, I make time to talk with, and especially listen to, the candidates present. I might also place occasional phone calls to them as well. So far, I have not kept a formal file on each candidate as I see that as a function best maintained by the RPC and mentors. I am always happy to receive feedback and updates on candidates from the RPC as she deems it appropriate to make them available. I might also occasionally ask her a question regarding a particular candidate. The key is not to usurp the RPC's role.

On regional meeting calls, I try to model the role of bishop as I understand it: the one who focuses the unity of the group, at the same time respecting diversity of opinion, collegiality in decision-making, and the ongoing nature of group process/becoming. I also try to be clear when it comes to those things for which I am held responsible under our structures. This would include supervision of the ordination liturgies to assure that they are in line with our RCWP template and do not include extraneous elements that would detract from the sacramental focus of the service, as well as assuring unity in what is essential theologically, sacramentally and liturgically. I think it only just not to deceive people when there are clear boundaries to be drawn.

All this being said, I am looking forward to the upcoming ordinations with great anticipation. The four ordinands are all women for whom I have been part of the entire discernment process as their regional bishop. I have had the chance to experience the steps described above with all of them. I have been particularly blessed to have been able to see the unfolding and development of the ministries of the two women who minister alongside me on a weekly basis. It is a humbling and deeply enriching experience to witness the work of the Spirit in them, and in the community, as their ministries grow and mature and radiate light!

The four ordinands invited me onto their most recent ordination planning meeting call to talk with them about some of the details pertaining to audio coverage on National Public Radio for their ordination event. I was struck by their spiritual maturity. While they had a concern that an atmosphere of reverence be maintained during the ritual and other prayerful moments, they also understood that

they had an opportunity and a duty to convey the reality – the truly spiritual and empowering nature- of what would be transpiring, and they were prepared to share their intimate moment with the whole listening audience for the sake of moving the church forward. I was so proud of their selfless vision. I was equally gratified by the joy each one took from the announcement by the most vulnerable of them that a worship community in which she had been serving as lay minister and communion service leader over the previous year had called her to be their pastor. These are women who have formed deep community among them, and who, I have no doubt, will continue to support and sustain one another in ministry. These women recognize Holy Wisdom in one another. I am a happy bishop! I am reminded of the gratitude of the Psalmist, who finds God’s reassuring presence among the holy people of his land in Psalm 16: 3, 7-9, 11:

“The holy people of my land are wonderful! My greatest pleasure is to be with them.....

I praise our God, who guides me; even at night, my heart teaches me. I am always aware of your presence; you are right by my side, and nothing can shake me. My heart is happy, and my tongue sings for joy; I feel completely safe with you.....

You show me the path to Life; your presence fills me with joy, and by your side, I feel enduring pleasure.”

An ongoing question, as our numbers grow, will be how I as bishop can continue to know enough about the candidates. One idea that came to mind is that, if communities begin to take a more active role in the calling of candidates from their communities, I could go and meet with the communities (or at least conference with them) to listen and to talk with them about their choice of particular candidates.

The key skill I believe I need to concentrate on as a member of this team so vital to our mission is listening well. If I listen well, I will ask the right questions, and offer good feedback. I will also hopefully remain flexible as needs evolve. Listening well builds good communication which in turn builds trust.

Model of Outreach to Margins

According to canon law (#383), part of the pastoral role of the bishop is to “show himself (sic) concerned for all the Christian faithful entrusted to his care....and to extend an apostolic spirit to those who are not able to make sufficient use of ordinary pastoral care because of the condition of their life, and to those who no longer practice their religion.” So it would seem that even the official view of the role of bishop includes that of outreach to those persons who for a variety of reasons are marginal in the church as well as in the world. As pastor to those who lead the priestly people of God, I believe that I have an ethical responsibility to lead in visible and tangible ways in this outreach ministry. In this section, I will discuss how through reflection on my own experiences over the past few years, I have come to see the RCWP model of bishop in this matter of outreach to the margins. My experiences fall into three categories: hands-on justice work; doing sacraments with the alienated; and preferring orthopraxis to orthodoxy.

Hands-on

A number of years ago, I served in a Washington, DC, small faith community at Georgetown University as coordinator for a project called So Others Might Eat. Our community took its turn cooking, transporting and serving meals at a Jesuit-sponsored city soup kitchen (SOME). The members of our community were phenomenal in their support for the program. Virtually everyone took part in some way. Those who actually served the meal loved the opportunity to be present to the SOME staff and the downtown homeless. It was a real blessing and opportunity to be church together. However, in all the years that our community participated in the SOME program, there was never an occasion when a priest from the university chapel would join with us, either in cooking or serving. There seemed to be a line of demarcation between the clergy and the laity when it came to ministry of hospitality and service to the unfortunate. Now, many years later, I am a bishop and also co-pastor of the Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community. LWICC, by vote of our community discernment team (in which all are welcome to participate) has taken on the project of helping with the harvest of fruits and vegetables at First Fruits Farm, a farm dedicated to delivering these products to shelters and soup kitchens all around the Baltimore and south central Pennsylvania areas. Remembering my experience at SOME In Washington, I discerned that it is indeed part of my role as bishop to model (in the Pauline tradition) laboring alongside co-workers in the vineyard. What follows is an excerpt from my reflection on what I think this experience means for my unfolding spirituality as a bishop, and for my witness as bishop in the community of faith.

This work is a blessing in so many ways. It brings the worker into community with his or her co-workers in the vineyard, whoever they may be, of whatever denomination, clergy or lay. It is very clear that we are all very different from one another, having different ways of praying and even of imaging God. Yet, we are bound together in love by the one Spirit who enlivens us all. We all work side by side in the field. We are all grateful for dry weather that is not too hot or humid. We are conscious of one another's weaknesses. Those who are older or whose knees are not what they used to be don't get sent to dig potatoes! Those who need to be indoors get selected to bag green beans in the barn! The strong tote the buckets full of vegetables. The less strong spot the vegetables and fruits and fill the buckets.

Some hold ladders for others (usually older for younger). Luckily, there are always lots of younger volunteers! I find this a true and gratifying experience of the Body of Christ where, as St. Paul tells us, all of the members are important, but their functions are different. All of the members must reverence and value the others. As a priest/pastor and a bishop, I now reflect back on all of the times and places in which I participated in such work of Christian service. I am conscious that, as a priest and bishop, it is a totally new experience in a lot of ways. I am conscious that, when it comes to the work of compassionate outreach, the "different functions" have nothing to do with being clergy or laity; they have more to do with one's strengths and weaknesses vis-a-vis the task at hand. In this case, they are physical strengths and weaknesses. For me, it is a humbling, but also a strengthening and affirming experience, to know that there are some things I am capable of doing, and others that I am not. I am who I am. I do what I can do. If my responsibilities as bishop or priest/pastor require that I be somewhere else when the First Fruits project is happening, so be it. But if not, I find that my pastoral responsibility is to be present with the other volunteers from the Living Water Community in witnessing to the solidarity with the poor that the gospel demands. It is a form of leadership that I find completely in keeping with the role of bishop.

Ministry with the alienated

Like many other non-canonical priests (and bishops), I am often called upon to celebrate sacraments or to provide other rites and services of the church (e.g. funerals and various types of counseling) to persons who either are alienated from the church, or who have family members who are). Harking back to what canon 383 says about the bishop's duty to reach out to such persons, I have reflected on my own experience in this regard. One funeral in particular comes to mind. The mother of one of our community members died at the age of 97. She was a loyal Catholic all of her life, and raised a number of children pretty much without the support of her husband who was addicted to alcohol. Many of her children for a variety of reasons are rather bitter toward the Catholic church, and consequently could not agree on how to do the celebration of the woman's funeral. We at Living Water were approached by the woman's daughter in our community for help with the dilemma. My co-pastor and I were able to counsel the daughter to do what she could to try to accommodate the needs of the different siblings, but at the same time, to remain true to the wishes of her mother. Since the mother was to be buried in New Jersey where she had lived most of her life, it was possible to arrange a funeral Mass for her in the parish church from which she had come. Not all of the children and grandchildren were comfortable going there. The daughter asked me if we could do something in the way of a memorial for her mother that would be something that would appeal to those who were too alienated from the institution to attend the parish funeral. The answer of course was yes. The value that loomed largest for me in this matter was bringing the mourning family together in a way that was unifying for them, and that would help them to heal in many ways. My purpose was not to bring them "back to church." It was rather to leave open the possibility that they could perceive church differently as a result of having experienced our RCWP model of ministry – not in competition with, but actually enriching and enlarging upon what the current institutional model offers those who mourn.

Another experience came to me as I was presiding and preaching at a Mother's Day liturgy during the Easter season. In this instance, it was brought home to me very strongly how very much the

church has, often with the best of intentions, wounded people by using familial images (e.g. father, mother) as absolute goods and indicative of a sacred God-created order in society that must not be criticized or rejected. In many ways, our church and its teachings have put people in a bind when their familial experience has not been wholesome or healthy, and they are still expected to uphold its goodness. One woman, who was new to the group shared that she has a very hard time on Mother's Day because she had a terrible relationship with her mother, and always chafed at the preaching she heard on that day. She told me that she appreciated my homily on the road to Emmaus which focused on the fact that we are disciples by choice and we are a community of faith by choice as well. What follows is an excerpt from my reflection on that experience.

Our eucharist was followed, as is our custom at home liturgies, by a potluck brunch. The new woman told me she had been searching for a way to return to the Catholic community, and was very hopeful that she had found it. I explained to her that our big endeavor in the coming year, moving toward next Easter, will be in the area of adult education outreach, scripture study and spirituality. I told her she was not alone in seeking these things from our community. I agreed that there were many on the road, the journey, together – all of us both teachers and learners.

Another couple overheard the conversation the woman and I were having. These folks are people I have known and hde worked with as co-leaders in a Catholic parish for a long time. They come rarely but occasionally to our Living Water community. The husband, a nice and intelligent man, finds that he is able to continue to attend the traditional parish church and just simply tune out the parts he doesn't like. The wife is a different story. Her anger at the church is deep-seated and is the result of being the victim of abusive ministry in the sense that she was badly counseled when in an abusive first marriage. She has tried participating in Protestant congregations, but still cannot overcome her anger at all clergy. As far as the Catholic clergy is concerned, every abusive incident that is made public seems to re-open old wounds for her. She has reached the point where she simply cannot trust any clergy person. She does not want to have to depend on any other person to find her relationship with God. Her parting comment to me on Sunday was, "I really love what you do with your liturgies (are they really MY liturgies??), and I hope you won't take this wrong, but I really hope you don't succeed in winning Catholics back (e.g. the new woman??) to the notion of clergy-led worship."

I felt the sharp challenge in this statement to be constantly aware of not falling into a "mediator" role in leading worship. However, I cannot deny that I was alarmed by her detachment from community, and her determination to "go it alone." Moreover, she seemed to be rejecting any need of feeling or community ties, but wanted to keep "her God" on a strictly intellectual plane! I have counseled this woman on occasion, usually at her urgent request. She is full of fear and angst and distrust. Her feelings are her valid feelings. I do not know her whole story, but then, I am not her therapist. My sense is that my role is to continue to dialogue with her when she requests counseling about the need to allow her emotions to surface – to not try always to suppress them (out of fear??) – that it is safe to do so with me. Most importantly, I need to respect her timing. I am called to be a listening bishop, not a pontificating one.

An empowerment – not a judgmental - model

When working with people on the margins, I have learned that the most important thing to remember is to listen carefully, and consequently, to learn before speaking or acting. So many of the poor and the marginalized are women. So much of what marginalizes people is due to the failure to

hear their voices. Our theology cannot serve the poor and marginalized if it comes from outside the experience of being with them. So much of the failure of the institutional church vis-à-vis the empowerment of the poor is due to out of theology from above rather than theology from the vantage point of service alongside them and in their midst. Below is a reflection I shared with all of the other Roman Catholic Womenbishops in 2011.

The Vatican's protestations of high regard for the persons and gifts of women fall on deaf ears in our society because people know that the lip service does not match the policies with regard to women, either in considering them equally as ministers of the church or as moral agents within the spheres of their own lives. We must ask ourselves as Roman Catholic women bishops: "How can we demonstrate our theology of the full valuation, inclusion and empowerment of women in a way that clearly tells all people that women, like men, are each unique human beings, and gifted by God for a variety of roles of leadership and service?" A few weeks ago, I was interviewed about my ministry as bishop by CNN. One of the questions I was asked was, "Isn't it true that you differ on church teaching from the official hierarchy when it comes to certain matters such as reproductive rights?" I guess I did not like the term "differ on church teaching" very much. I object to the idea that obedience to the gospel of love has to be set out in dogmatic terms. My answer was that the essence of the difference was not so much in doctrine per se as it was in the entire concept of priestly and episcopal ministry in general. I explained that we do not so much see ourselves as inerrant pastors and the final word on moral matters so much as pastoral ministers who serve to empower people to make good moral decisions of their own.

I believe that we women bishops need to place ourselves solidly in the camp of the liberation theologians in several ways. We must be more about orthopraxis than orthodoxy; that is, we must stand with the people holding justice as our highest value. We must put our money and/or our reputations where our mouth is. It is even more important that we act according to these values than that we speak words to that effect.

Let me give an example. In the city of Baltimore, Maryland, where Gloria Carpeneto and I lead an inclusive Catholic worship community of approximately 125 persons, there are two charities which our community supports, which serve women of the underclass. One of these is a recovery program for women drug and alcohol addicts in which the women also build Christian community as they progress in their recovery program. It is a program of tough love in which much is demanded of them, but they are also surrounded with support in many forms. Our community not only gives financial support, but some of our members offer counseling services, massage therapy and Reiki. Every first Sunday of the month, we also celebrate eucharist in their midst. The other charity is called YANA (You Are Never Alone). This is a shelter and safe space for trafficked women. The archdiocese has nothing to do with these two charities. They particularly avoid any contact with YANA because the women served by YANA are perceived as not having given up the life of prostitution, and therefore, not as worthy of church support. We do not agree. I guess we do differ theologically from the archdiocese about what the gospel imperative is in these cases. We haven't done a lot of talking about it or comparing of ourselves to the archdiocese; we are just doing what justice demands as we understand the gospel. So, I suppose I am saying that I believe we as bishops can encourage our priests and deacons to find ways to step out in faith and witness to the gospel in similar ways, and in so doing, preach the gospel, as St. Francis has told us, without words in many instances.

The liberation theology model is one that the present regime at the Vatican clearly abhors and has tried to eradicate from the church. As a bishop who takes seriously the model Jesus gave the church in the Beatitudes, and believes that Jesus' model should be the guideline which inspires canon law on

ministry, I believe that our RCWP model of priestly and episcopal ministry must always choose to come down on the side of empowerment rather than of judgment and definition – of opening doors rather than closing them.

Model of Ecumenical Outreach

In the area of ecumenical functions of bishops, Roman Catholic Canon Law (Canon 383.2) includes among the pastoral duties of bishops a concern for Christians who do not belong to the Roman rite, by providing for their spiritual needs according to their own rite. In the same canon, the very next section, bishops are also enjoined to act with humanity and charity toward the brothers and sisters who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and to foster ecumenism “as it is understood by the church” (Canon 383.3) Today, the church’s official stand on ecumenism, which was best expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), and written into official church teaching in November 1964 during the Second Vatican Council, has unfortunately been largely ignored by the official church, with the result that many of the issues addressed in it are surfacing again today. This document addresses many topics of ecumenical relations between Christian churches and ecclesial communities of different confessions or ways of expressing Christian belief in the modern world. Various sections of the document deal with such issues as interdenominational marriages, common worship, and the possibility of common participation in eucharist across denominational lines, as well as ways forward in ecumenical dialogue with *a view toward unity*. Following the close of the council in December 1965, several common declarations were also published with Pope Paul VI speaking jointly with leaders of other Christian churches (Orthodox and Anglican) whose Eucharistic theologies were very close to that of Rome. Here are a few salient examples of the hopefulness and openness to further rapprochement which came out of the Decree on Ecumenism and its daughter documents.

Unitatis redintegratio on Inter-denominational Marriage:

“...the code of behavior toward our separated brethren which has been solemnly established by the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on Ecumenism..would seem to suggest a mitigation of the rigor of the existing discipline on mixed marriages...” (Instruction on Mixed Marriages, March 18, 1966)

Unitatis redintegratio on Common Worship:

*(The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, speaking of the reconciliation they hope to effect, and of how they hope their declaration will be received by the whole Christian world, declare)...” the expression of a sincere mutual desire for reconciliation, and an invitation to pursue in a spirit of mutual trust, esteem, and charity, the dialogue that will lead them, with the help of God, to live once again for the greater good of souls and the coming of the kingdom of God, in the full communion of faith, brotherly accord, and of a **sacramental life which existed between them throughout the first millennium of the life of the Church.**”*
(Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athanagoras I, December 7, 1965)

Unitatis redintegratio on Eucharist in Common:

In summary, this Decree on Ecumenism did not give much ground on joint celebration of eucharist, except to say that commissions would be set up to promote joint study with separated brethren to explore unity of belief toward the end of being able to celebrate eucharist together in time. (From the Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters).

Unitatis redintegratio on Ecumenical Dialogue:

The aims of ecumenical dialogue include, in addition to seeking theological common understanding, learning to share more fully in the mystery of the reality of Christ and his Church; and learning to give common witness to the mission which Jesus Christ confided to his Church. So, the aims of ecumenical dialogue are not limited to academic discussion, but must be rooted in the mission of the Church.

“It is true that dialogue by itself does not suffice to bring about the fullness of unity that Christ wishes; nevertheless, that unity is the ultimate aim of the thoughts and desires of those engaged in dialogue, who are preparing themselves to receive it as the great gift that God alone will bestow, in the way and at the time that he wishes.” (Reflections and suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue, August 15, 1970)

RCWP’s Model and Ecumenism:

Building on the *aggiornamento* from which Vatican II called in its documents, and taking a somewhat less juridical and more relational and open-ended approach than does canon law, our RCWP-USA structures document refers to the bishop’s ecumenical role in this way: *“the bishop will engage in ecumenical conversation and dialogue.”* Having worked for many years before my ordination in ecumenical relations with other churches at the lay level, I am convinced that the approach taken by the official RC church to ecumenical relations with other polities has caused many, many promising initiatives to fail in the final analysis over the years. I much prefer the model of ecumenism that has developed over time in the World Council of Churches, in which the leadership of various churches choose to work alongside one another as equals to accomplish selected projects which effectively promote the gospel work of justice. My work ecumenically as bishop over the past three years has clearly been influenced by my previous experience.

When it comes to functions which are specifically bishop roles such as officiating at ordinations, and interacting with bishops who are not part of the RCWP community *per se*, I have found that the ecumenical role I play is complex, and must be discerned within the circle of the RCWP bishops. I will share several reflections which illustrate my point.

Collaboration with other Roman Catholic Bishops in Intra-Ecclesial Reform

Our RCWP understanding of the concept of ecumenism has been built, not solely on the documents of Vatican II, but also on the early church’s concept of the *oicumene* – or the collective of all of the local churches – as understood long before any formal separations had taken place. Therefore, our understanding encompasses the idea of different church communities working collaboratively from different cultures and/or with different charisms, even within the polity of the Roman communion. The following reflection deals with relations with other catholic bishops and ministry groups which, like RCWP, choose to remain within the Roman Catholic polity.

Two different Roman Catholic male priests and colleagues have asked me to act as a co-consecrating bishop at their episcopal ordinations. Both men were ordained to the episcopate by the

same bishop, who has impeccable Roman Catholic credentials. These men are, of course, not accepted as legitimate RC bishops by the Vatican because they are married and the pope has not approved of their Episcopal ordinations. These two men both belong to the RC ordained movement known as ECDA (Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America). In the first case, I agreed to consider the request, insisting on a transparent process which included all of the RCWP bishops as well as the prospective ordinand and his ordaining bishop. The decision at which I arrived was supported by all. When the second request came, there were just a few days before the event. Therefore, I decided with some input, but without a similar comprehensive process; however, subsequently, I sent out a full report to all of the other RCWP bishops, along with copies of the new bishop's ordination papers and apostolic mandate.

I have been thinking about what my participation in these ordinations might signify for the future of RCWP's ecumenical role, and specifically, for my role as an RCWP bishop. One thing that I see is an opening up of opportunities for men who cannot or do not wish to become candidates for canonical Roman Catholic priesthood. Already, some such men have made inquiries with RCWP. In fact, to date, there are three ordained male RCWP's, two of which have been ordained by us, and one who was already ordained, received by us as a member. However, many others have inquired, but have pulled back for a variety of reasons – one of which surely is discomfort with committing oneself to a mission that is woman-identified. These men might be more drawn to Roman Catholic bishops whose organization is essentially male-identified. To date, so far as I know, the organization Married Priests Now, which is led by the bishop who has ordained the two new bishops mentioned above, has not included homosexual men in its candidate pool. It remains to be seen whether that will change with the two new bishops whom I helped to ordain. In any case, there are reasons, both on the part of these male candidates and on the part of many regions of RCWP why there is reticence to become an RCWP candidate or to accept candidates who might not seem totally committed to RCWP's main mission of ordaining women. I can see how offering these inquirers information about ECDA or another option is an exercise of ecumenical cooperation. I do not see this so much as a gender question as it is a question of recognizing and honoring the need for compatibility of culture and focus of mission with the movement to which one is joining oneself, and to which one is giving one's allegiance. Even within the group who still call themselves Roman Catholics, such as ECDA and RCWP, there are legitimate differences of focus and mission, which do not preclude collaboration which, according to my definition, I would call ecumenical.

One question that will loom large in the future collaboration of RCWP and ECDA bishops is the feasibility and desirability of joint faculties for the ordained members of each group. There is always the danger that anything written concerning the "granting of faculties" would indicate the forming of a separate polity. This will need careful discernment. In my mind, this would be possible only if we continue to share the same commitment to not forming a separate polity.

Relations with other polities: Old Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Bishops and Priests

A second reflection below deals with a request I received to co-consecrate a bishop in an Old Catholic communion. It is excerpted from my letter of response to the bishop-elect.

Dear XXXXXXX,

Thank you for your note of last Saturday. I did receive an e-mail from Yyyyy on Friday to which she attached some of the correspondence between the two of you about your service as priest to the LGBT community, as well as your plans to be ordained a bishop within the Old Catholic communion. I want to offer you my congratulations on your selection for this important ministry, and to say that I am happy to be of support to you in any way that I can be. That being said, I must tell you that my serving as a co-ordaining bishop at your ordination is not within the realm of possibility, as I will explain.

Roman Catholic Womenpriests are covenanted as an initiative within the Roman Catholic Church to prepare and ordain women (and on occasion, men) for priesthood within the Roman Catholic communion. The Roman Catholic bishops in Europe (still in good standing) who set this initiative in motion by ordaining the original women bishops have done so for just this purpose. While we in no way discount the apostolic succession of the bishops of the Old Catholic communion, we also acknowledge that they are part of a polity separate from the Roman Catholic polity. We, by deliberate design, are not. We have a definite reason for remaining within the RC polity. By so doing, we challenge the Vatican hierarchy in a way that we could never do if we joined together with another polity. The Vatican knows that we can present ourselves as a credible RC alternative priesthood to the majority of Roman Catholics. They find this very threatening to their current authority structure. If we were to blur the lines between us and the Old Catholic communion by co-ordaining bishops, we would be dismissed as having joined another polity. This would be self-defeating for our mission. While we support the way in which the Old Catholic Church carries on the Catholic tradition and the sacramental ministry, we must maintain our identity as clearly within the RC polity.

This is not something we treat lightly. In North America, RCWP has five women bishops at this time. We meet regularly as a bishops' circle, and often deal with just such questions as the one you have presented. Questions about ways in which RCWP can effectively co-minister with other groups have led to many positive and creative conversations. We are, however, very clear in our consensus concerning the decision not to co-ordain with bishops who do not identify as part of the RC polity.

As a matter of transparency, I am copying this letter to the four other RCWP women bishops in North America. I am also copying Yyyyy. I reiterate my pledge to support you in any way that I can. I will hold you in prayer as you prepare for this anointing for episcopal leadership in your GLBT community. I wish you all the best with planning for your ordination.

May our loving and faithful God bless you and your community richly, and lead you on the journey

Once again, the issue seemed clear to me. This is a group which is affiliated with a separate polity from Rome, and that, while I do not reject its Episcopal line, I cannot make a personal choice to compromise the challenge RCWP presents to Rome. Although the gentleman to whom I wrote this letter

wrote back graciously expressing his understanding of my decision, this message is not always appreciated and well received. The next reflection will illustrate this point.

Recently, I was contacted by a woman friend and colleague of many years, who served as a lay pastoral family minister before becoming an ordained priest with the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (an Old Catholic polity) in 2002, just around the time of the very first RCWP ordinations in Europe. I have the greatest respect for this woman as priest, pastor, social worker and family counselor. She wrote to say that she was disturbed by some e-mail traffic on the listserv of the women priests of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (about 22 persons). There seemed to be resentment toward the women of RCWP for perceived attitudes of superiority. My colleague said she took great pains to write a long posting, giving historical background, and attempting to dispel what she considered to be false notions. Her recommendation was that the RCWP bishops might like to suggest a meeting (retreat-style) which members of both groups could attend together, and get to know one another in a prayerful setting. I acknowledged this as a good idea, at the same time pointing out that it would be a huge undertaking which would require resources and lots of planning. I took the idea to the Bishops' Circle, and it is currently under discussion. We all agreed to do some further investigating of the situation in our own regions. I have already had some feedback from individual bishops who have talked with their own friends and colleagues among the ECC women. It appears that there is a genuine desire to effect some sort of a national level retreat meeting. I am thinking and praying over this to determine what might be a proper role for the bishops in this matter. It does seem to fall into the category of our ecumenical role. It is the beginning of something that has the potential to bear good fruit. It will be a laborious, energy-sapping task I am certain – one that will require gifted and steady leadership. It will also be a challenge to our own openness as we continue to focus on walking the path of our own mission to remain within the Roman Catholic tent.

At first, the bishops were not inclined to become involved in such an initiative, largely due to sheer workload, suggesting that others within our organization might take the lead, perhaps doing some local interactions. I have continued to think and pray about this, and have decided to make a further proposal for a national coming together of the two groups. It should not be necessary for the bishops to be the leaders of the action. However, to attempt to foster the initiative to be carried out by other leaders does in my view fall within our episcopal ecumenical role, by lending our support to this project as a pastoral initiative on our part.

A third and final reflection that I offer in the category of relations with other than RC ministry leaders is, paradoxically, excerpted from an account of my participation in the Episcopal ordination of one of our own RCWP's, Marie Bouclin of Canada. At first glance, this would not seem to fit into the category of ecumenical relations. However, this experience taught me more about what it means to be a bishop in the truly ecumenical sense than all of the others.

When the first woman bishop for Canada, Marie Evans Bouclin, was elected in the spring of 2011, she invited all of the other women bishops to consider participating in her ordination rite. As the rite was to be celebrated in Europe, home to the woman then serving as bishop for Canada, participation

for those bishops residing in the United States meant a long journey. Of five women bishops in the USA, three were able to make the trip. I was one who did so.

My reasons for going included my desire to support the Canadian bishop-elect whom I happen to like very much. She wanted to have a bi-lingual service, and asked if I would assist her to do that by doing some of the praying and preaching in French. I agreed readily. I also wanted to go because I love visiting Europe. I was particularly delighted to be invited by the host bishop, Patricia Fresen, to visit parts of the Rhineland with her. I was also delighted to help as I could with the preparations for the ordination ceremony.

So, I went gladly. The fact that, in the end, there were three US women bishops and three bishops from Germany collaborating, together with a German Lutheran woman pastor, in the rite of ordination was extraordinary to say the least. I knew ahead of time that this would be an especially joyful event. It was, however, only in retrospect that I was able to grasp the much bigger picture of its significance for our movement and for the larger church.

The actual celebration of the rite itself spoke volumes to me about hope for the future of our church. First, there was the make-up of the celebrating congregation. Of course, Marie's husband was present. So were all of her children and their spouses— not only there physically, but present along with their father as strong and articulate voices for why they support their mother as bishop and how they understand her commitment to this movement for justice and inclusivity in the church. This young and passionate presence and support gave me great hope. There were other representatives from Canada also, the administrator for the Canadian group and her husband actively participated in the preparation and implementation of the beautiful liturgy. Two other Canadian women priests traveled all the way from the west coast of Canada to be present in support as well. We were also very fortunate to have with us two European women, old friends to some of us, who were founding members of Women's Ordination Worldwide. One of these women was for a long time not too keen on our RCWP ordinations, especially episcopal ordinations. She came because of her high regard for Marie Bouclin and for me, since we had worked together for many years on the ordination issue, and have been friends. She came away from this experience with a very positive attitude toward the work we are doing. Then, there were also significant numbers of German neighbors from the community Im Asemwald, some of whom are involved in ecumenical activities there, and others who had more or less given up on the church altogether. As the service unfolded, with six bishops sharing the prayers of ordination, and at the eucharistic table gathered round the altar in a truly loving and collaborative way together with the woman Lutheran pastor, one could see the eyes of many of the German folks glistening with tears. It was particularly lovely to see the warmth of the response of an elderly retired Lutheran pastor and his wife who kindly provided the musical accompaniment for us, even using music with which they were not familiar. This couple were visibly moved by the beauty of the service. Afterwards, the minister remarked to me that he was very grateful for the opportunity to participate and to witness this inclusive model of an ordination of a bishop, that while traditional and correct, was also warm and inviting. He marveled over the rich symbolism, saying to me and his wife, "This symbolism is so rich and has largely been lost to us in the Lutheran tradition. How I wish we could regain some of this."

The very last vivid memory is of the recessional from the tiny chapel to the entranceway. All were heartily singing the Taizé version of the Magnificat. What continues to flash through my mind was the enthusiastic singing of this hymn by a German woman with tear-filled eyes, a woman who no longer professes Christianity! The symbolism, the energy of the community expressed through words and body language – all of this – said to me: The church lives, and the church will go on living so long as we continue to gather compassionately, whether in faith or doubt, joy or sorrow – to hear one another, and to be present to one another, to be for one another. We do indeed find God in one another, and for me, that is the deepest meaning of church. As bishops, I find we have a position of leadership that calls us to be signs – even sacraments of unity in the church. The way we model that leadership speaks volumes symbolically about what we believe about Jesus and what he meant his community to be.

In light of the fragmentation of the church that is now commonplace in the 21st century, not just between different churches, but also within individual Christian communions, I am now acutely aware that we who serve as shepherds must come to a new sense of the *oicumene* or what it means to serve the church ecumenically, and certainly our RCWP priests are doing so in the open and inclusive communities that have become our hallmark.

Collegial Member of USA and International Bishops' Circles

In this last of seven sections of my episcopal journal, I will discuss my role as a member of the Bishops' Circles. What follows is a brief background thumbnail sketch.

How did the RCWP bishops' circles come to be, and when? Although RCWP began to ordain deacons and priests in Europe in 2002, and in North America in 2005, there were no bishops' circles formed until after the ordination of four US women bishops in Santa Barbara, CA, in 2009. It was following this event that those ordained as bishops realized that, in view of our vision of collaboration discernment as RCWP moves into the future, a bishops' circle was important for mutual support in fulfilling our role – both spiritually and in purely practical terms. RCWP-USA had been operating under a legally ratified structures document since February of 2007. This document detailed the operations of circles for regional administrators and for regional program directors (leaders of discernment teams). Under the 2007 structures, there was, of course, no provision for a bishops' circle. Wisely, the new bishops decided to come together as a circle to provide that mutual support to one another as we began the process of learning how to function as bishops in RCWP. Thankfully, we did have a “job description” in the existing structures that got us started. However, we intuitively realized that we needed one another as we walked this journey. We also knew from our theological, church history and pastoral studies that bishops traditionally and historically work collegially. There is clear evidence of this in the early centuries of the church's history when bishops came together ecumenically and in the name of their communities of faith to work through differences of theological understanding.

The first circle to be formed was the USA Bishops' Circle in July of 2009. We decided to have monthly conference calls to share what was going on in our regions, and to get to know one another better. By late 2009, we had been approached by a woman bishop in Europe about the feasibility of the US bishops meeting with the principal male bishop behind our movement. We did plan and execute such a meeting in summer of 2010, and I believe it was a major stepping stone in our coming together in a truly substantive way to move forward in, if not defining, at least expanding our understanding of our role. This meeting was also a catalyst in the formation of the international bishops' circle, which agreed to meet quarterly by e-mail for an “international bishops' dialogue” on matters concerning our role as Roman Catholic Women Bishops . This dialogue was launched in 2010, and is, I believe, about to bear significant fruit in an international bishops' gathering in November of 2012. In the pages that follow, I am going to attempt to share some reflections on how I see the work in progress of the USA and International Bishops' Circles of RCWP, and perhaps, point to some ways in which the circles' work might contribute to future directions in RCWP .

The following reflections will be divided into two categories. The first group will deal with theological questions, such as the RCWP understanding of apostolic succession; what we, as bishops,

can do as teachers of a new model of ministry in the present church crisis; and what we women bishops can offer in the way of renewed theology that promotes the full dignity and equality of women. The second group will revolve around our own *process* as a circle of bishops, considering questions of authority and accountability.

Theological Questions

Apostolic Succession:

The ordinations of Roman Catholic Womenpriests are valid because of our unbroken line of apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church. The principal consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops is a bishop with a line of unbroken apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church in full communion with the pope. Therefore, our bishops validly ordain deacons, priests and bishops. Consequently, all qualified candidates, including baptized ministers and priests from other Christian traditions, who are presented to our bishops for ordination are ordained by the laying on of hands into this same line of apostolic succession in the Roman Catholic Church.

The statement above appeared from the inception of the RCWP-USA website until its revision in late 2011. Because a number of other renewal Catholic organizations have pressed RCWP to explain why our mission statement insists on the fact that we have been ordained in apostolic succession by a Roman Catholic bishop in good standing, a discussion of what we really wanted to say about this issue became a topic of dialogue among the bishops' circle. We all agreed that our understanding of apostolic succession did not depend upon the laying on of hands from one bishop to another in an unbroken line back to the apostles. There is clearly no historical proof of such an assertion. No historical records of such lines of succession extend back beyond the Council of Trent in the mid-16th century. On the other hand, the symbolic importance of the bishop as teacher and liturgical leader of a local church in communion with bishops and communities of other local churches, is significant because it speaks to the handing down by the local churches (the People of God) of the apostolic tradition. The bishops held a very fruitful discussion, and gave their feedback as requested to the larger RCWP community for use in formulating a new RCWP statement on apostolic succession. The following statement now appears under the **Ordained** category on www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org.

The ordinations of Roman Catholic Womenpriests are valid because of our apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church. The principal consecrating Roman catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops is a bishop with apostolic succession within the Roman catholic Church in full communion with the pope. Therefore, our bishops validly ordain deacons, priests and bishops. Consequently, all qualified candidates, including baptized ministers and priests from other Christian traditions, who are presented to our bishops for ordination are ordained by the laying on of hands into apostolic succession in the Roman Catholic Church.

The words "unbroken line" have been eliminated, and, in the matter of "re-ordaining" ministers of other traditions, the emphasis is placed, not on the validity of other lines, but on the importance to the RCWP mission to offering our particular line of succession to all of our members.

Bishop As Teacher/Model:

In terms of teaching, and modeling a collaborative and inclusive ministry, our bishops' circles have an ongoing conversation about the practical ways in which we as bishops can be effective teachers and models, offering an alternative to the current dysfunctional pyramid model of the Roman hierarchy. Below, I include an excerpt from a reflection I shared on an international bishops' e-mail dialogue on this topic.

I have prayed about this question quite a lot because I do believe that our role as bishop does encompass teaching the tradition accurately and in a broad and holistic way. I am convinced that the reason why the Vatican has gone so far off the rails is because, for historical and political reasons, they have truncated the tradition by creating structures which: ignore whole chunks of the tradition; close doors rather than open them; and shut down dialogue rather than invite the Holy Spirit to speak through a variety of people.

I think one of our main roles is to keep the conversation going, clarifying our model of inclusivity in a community of equals. We also bear leadership responsibility, I believe, for keeping the dialogue going around what we mean by apostolic succession in the church. As our worship communities grow, and as we dialogue within them, we women priests will be able to gauge how the understanding of the people is evolving with regard to the apostolic succession question. We, as bishops and teachers, can help to guide that dialogue in our regions, by first continuing the dialogue among ourselves. We can use the tools of modern scholarship on early ecclesiology to do so.

Another role I see for us in this crisis of the model of authority in the big church is to take our role seriously as part of the formation process for new deacons and priests. We can offer suggestions for a new unit in the formation program that helps the candidates discern more fully the model we espouse and what it means to be called to Roman Catholic priesthood within the context of RC Womenpriests. We can also, as members of the leadership team in our regions, offer suggestions for continuing education and dialogue topics for our regional priests and deacons. In other words, we can be a force for ensuring ongoing open dialogue and clarity among our members about what we are about. This should result in clarity of witness by our women priests, and a clear cut distinction from the model being exercised by Rome.

I think that we must also commit ourselves to lots of prayer and reading of the signs of the times as we go along – openness to the voice of the Spirit wherever we hear it, but especially in one another; also, a willingness to discern the movement of the Spirit, both within and beyond our movement, and careful and honest discernment regarding appropriate interaction and collaboration with other movements to reform the church.

This dialogue paid a great deal of attention to the issue of the teaching/mentoring role of the bishop vis-à-vis the regional priests and deacons. It is a modeling way rather than an authoritarian or jurisdictional way. It was very fruitful and opened up all sorts of new questions of practical application for us to consider in the future. For example, one of the other bishops on the circle urged us to continue to pursue this topic as it specifically relates to promoting the full dignity and equality of women. She spoke of our role as offering new theological perspectives to that end. This led to a full discussion of our RCWP commitment to orthopraxis over orthodoxy as the gospel way of ministry. Here below is my reflection on that bishops' circle discussion.

The Vatican's protestations of high regard for the persons and gifts of women fall on deaf ears in our society because people know that the lip service does not match the policies with regard to women,

either in considering them equally as ministers of the church or as moral agents within the spheres of their own lives. We must ask ourselves as Roman Catholic women bishops: "How can we demonstrate our theology of the full valuation, inclusion and empowerment of women in a way that clearly tells all people that women, like men, are each unique human beings, and gifted by God for a variety of roles of leadership and service?"

A few weeks ago, I was interviewed about my ministry as bishop by CNN. One of the questions I was asked was, "Isn't it true that you differ on church teaching from the official hierarchy when it comes to certain matters such as reproductive rights?" I guess I did not like the term "differ on church teaching" very much. I object to the idea that obedience to the gospel of love has to be set out in dogmatic terms. My answer was that the essence of the difference was not so much in doctrine per se as it was in the entire concept of priestly and episcopal ministry in general. I explained that we do not so much see ourselves as inerrant pastors and the final word on moral matters so much as pastoral ministers who serve to empower people to make good moral decisions of their own.

I have been thinking about that answer as I have prepared to write on this subject. I believe that we women bishops need to place ourselves solidly in the camp of the liberation theologians in several ways. We must be more about orthopraxis than orthodoxy; that is, we must stand with the people holding justice as our highest value. We must put our money and/or our reputations where our mouth is. It is even more important that we act according to these values than that we speak words to that effect.

Let me give an example. In the city of Baltimore, Maryland, where Gloria Carpeneto and I lead an inclusive Catholic worship community of approximately 125 persons, there are two charities which our community supports, which serve women of the underclass. One of these is a recovery program for women drug and alcohol addicts in which the women also build Christian community as they progress in their recovery program. It is a program of tough love in which much is demanded of them, but they are also surrounded with support in many forms. Our community not only gives financial support, but some of our members offer counseling services, massage therapy and Reiki. Every first Sunday of the month, we also celebrate eucharist in their midst. The other charity is called YANA (You Are Never Alone). This is a shelter and safe space for trafficked women. The archdiocese has nothing to do with these two charities. They particularly avoid any contact with YANA because the women served by YANA are perceived as not having given up the life of prostitution, and therefore, not as worthy of church support. We do not agree. I guess we do differ theologically from the archdiocese about what the gospel imperative is in these cases. We haven't done a lot of talking about it or comparing of ourselves to the archdiocese; we are just doing what justice demands as we understand the gospel.

So, I suppose I am saying that I believe we as bishops can encourage our priests and deacons to find ways to step out in faith and witness to the gospel in similar ways, and in so doing, preach the gospel, as St. Francis has told us, without words in many instances.

Questions of Our Collaborative Process as Bishops' Circle: Authority and Accountability

Going back to the premise that the bishops' circles came into existence only in 2009 and 2010, It is interesting to note the evolution of our process as we have built a community of love and trust among us, and have gained experience through our own ministries as well as those of our sister bishops who have shared them.

We began in 2009 by deciding that the USA bishops would meet by conference call once a month to share prayer and news of our regional ministries. We also decided that, since we are not a body that makes administrative decisions, we would not keep formal published minutes, but would note the internal decisions we made and the important things we discussed. Each of us shares informally with our regional groups any significant topics that the bishops are discussing, with the exception of any sensitive issue of a pastoral nature that might arise. We decided to alternate the circle coordinator role every six months. Our USA bishops circle had a retreat-style meeting in summer of 2010 with our founding male bishop. This was a moment of significant bonding among us, I believe. We began to see more clearly the importance of our circle beyond mutual support and information flow. We began to take seriously the need for us to work together internationally as bringers of clarity in many respects, and of unity, as RCWP plays its role in the significant renewal of the Roman church (and the whole church) that is happening right now – the emerging church, as it is called. Very soon thereafter, the international bishops' circle was born, and quarterly dialogues began to occur. The same process of building of love and trust had to occur at the international level as well. Gradually, topics became more focused and more deeply rooted in the some of the key questions mentioned above. We set up a pattern that invited all participants in the dialogue to post a brief initial reflection, and once everyone had posted, to continue to talk back and forth throughout the weekend. The coordinator (who has a term of one year) would at the end summarize and try to gather some of the fruit of the discussion. More often than not, these summaries would raise all sorts of new and deeper questions, which we came to understand as the voice of the Spirit, leading us forward into new growth opportunities. This was and remains slow, but grace-filled work at the international level.

Collaboration with Those in Administrative Decision-making Roles:

Because we are RCWP in many different countries, our regions do not always share the same governance structures. We bishops, in North America at least, are not actually in a governance role. Although internationally, we are able to function in terms of a more theological and unitive role, when it comes to the national level in the USA, the bishops function as part of their regional leadership teams, which include the regional program director and the regional administrator; and therefore, they are accountable to that team in terms of transparency for any pastoral actions taken which will impact the whole of the region or the national group. An example of when this accountability policy was tested in RCWP-USA was in 2010, when a request came from the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America (ECDA), a group of priests and one bishop who are in Roman Catholic Apostolic Succession, for me, a RCWP bishop to participate as a supporting bishop at an ordination of a new bishop for the ECDA. The first step for me was to share the request with the USA bishops' circle. The circle then formulated questions and shared experience of other requests that had come before in different regions. The circle then held a meeting with the ECDA bishop and the ordinand to clarify a number of questions. Once the bishops' circle had expressed its willingness for this request to be approved, I then took the request to my region (all members) for their input. The region decided to approve the request, and, in the interests of transparency, we together wrote a letter to all members of RCWP-USA, explaining what we had agreed to do.

Saturday, September 04, 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers of RCWP,

This is to inform you that the Eastern Region has been honored with a request from Archbishop Peter Paul Brennan of Long Island, New York, and the priests of the Ecumenical Diocese of America/St. Barnabas Mission. The request is in the form of an invitation to Bishop Andrea Johnson of our Eastern Region to participate as an assisting bishop at the episcopal ordination of the Rev. Jim David, a former Holy Cross Father, and a married priest in the Roman tradition. Jim will become coadjutor bishop to Peter Brennan, and will eventually succeed Peter as leader of the ECDA/St. Barnabas Mission. This ordination will take place on October 31, 2010, at Harwich Port, Cape Cod, MA. No media attention has been sought for this event.

Jim David is the husband of Marie David, RCWP East. Jim and Marie have been co-pastoring their worship community at Harwich Port, St. Mary of Magdala, for many years. They lead the Evensong Retreat Center at the same location.

A process was followed for discerning the decision to participate. Bishop Andrea Johnson invited Jim David and Peter Brennan to conference with the five women bishops of RCWP-USA regarding Archbishop Brennan's line of apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic tradition, after which the women bishops had no objections based on this question. Then, the members of RCWP East were polled regarding the proposed participation. There was much enthusiasm for the proposal, and no objections were voiced.

Therefore, on October 31, 2010, Bishop Andrea Johnson will serve as one of several bishops assisting at the episcopal ordination of Rev. Jim David. As an assisting bishop, Andrea will not be required to offer paperwork concerning the line of succession from which RCWP derives, as it is customary for the newly ordained bishop to receive papers only from the principal ordaining bishop.

We offer this information to all in RCWP as a matter of transparency, and also in the hope that those members outside our region can share our joy in this opportunity to co-minister with Catholic brothers and sisters in the Roman tradition.

In Christ's love,

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, Administrator, RCWP East

Andrea M. Johnson, Bishop, RCWP East

Jean Marie Marchant, Co- Director of the Program, RCWP East

Gloria Carpeneto, Co- Director of the Program, RCWP East

In this instance, the bishops' circle clearly acknowledged the limitations of its decision-making role. Although this was a liturgical and theological question, the bishops do not hold the executive power in RCWP, and therefore, must collaborate with the administrators, and in fact, inform all of the

membership when moving forward with such a decision. This was an important step in building the collaborative model we envision.

Collaboration and Consensus Building:

This section demonstrates, I believe, the development of the bishops' circle as an instrument of both analysis and implementation of our role as bishops. The notes of the May 2010 meeting of the national USA RCWP bishops' circle record the first discussion of the collaboration of the five bishops on a draft of the section of the new RCWP constitution on the role of bishops. The RCWP Structures Committee had been working long and hard on a draft of the new constitution for RCWP-USA. Input had been sought by committee members from some, but not all, of the regions. The Structures Committee then sought input from the Bishops' Circle, at the request of the Administrative Circle, specifically on the articles that had to do with the role of bishops. All of the bishops felt hard-pushed to put our hand to something definitive since we were so new to the role. We felt that the best thing would be to avoid over-defining without the benefit of more experience than one year as bishops. We decided each to initiate dialogue within our regions about what our experience of having regional bishops had been thus far, and what we had learned about what we wanted the role to be according to our collaborative model of priestly ministry.

My own eastern region was able to articulate that it wanted clear lines of authority and accountability for the role of bishop and for all leadership roles, as well as clear processes for mutual evaluation within the region. Some of the other regions were able to implement similar processes. I believe that the fact that this method was successful in many regions helped even the bishops of other regions to find their own voice sufficiently to participate in the work ahead. From September 22, 2010 to January 28, 2011, the bishops' circle worked hard on building a composite draft, using suggestions from all members of the circle, and even some feedback from other members of the regions. On January 28, the Bishops' Circle sent their final draft to the Structures Committee, with a copy to the administrative circle. It was evident from the responses received from several members of the Structures Committee, and from the president of the Administrative Circle, that they were pleased with the work the bishops had done, and they felt affirmed in their own role as the Structures Committee, as in the case of the Administrative Circle, those responsible for coordinating our structures with our legal incorporation. For me, this was a great affirmation of our process. What follows is my theological reflection on what had transpired.

When we began the process in May 2010, I had seen two great dangers: 1) that by moving forward full speed ahead the bishops would be contributing to locking things in place prematurely, before enough lived experience had occurred; and 2) that if the bishops did respond honestly, their opinions might be perceived as signifying disrespect or lack of appreciation for the laborious work of the SC. Rumors had been flying around that "the bishops are completely re-writing 5.3." On reflection, I believe we were able to avoid both problems. I believe there were at least two factors contributing to the fact that the first problem – that of locking things in place prematurely - was avoided. First of all, we took time to pray over the problem and to dialogue about it honestly. We trusted each other enough to know that we could count on each other's support, and that this was not a regional competition. Secondly, some of us were able to model mutuality by discerning with our regions how things would

work best. This gave us all a lot of confidence, and signaled to our regions that we were not a cabal plotting on our own. Regarding the second issue – avoiding the appearance of disrespecting or undervaluing the work of the SC - I think that the fact that we did not gut their work, but rather worked within their framework, and that we took a lot of time with it, and consulted with other members in our regions, showed that we wanted the document to succeed. We were not out to undermine their work.

The key to the whole process is, I believe, that it was prayerful and reflective. There was active listening on several levels. We were able to hear one another, and to uncover the common threads, the common goals, and the common vision. This is thanks to the love, the patience and the openness to the Spirit of many women, bishops and many others. It is a pattern that we can use as we move forward. The solutions came from dialogical discernment.

I have heard the Holy Spirit preached as the glue that holds the church together. It has always seemed a rather inappropriate image in the past, since glue seems to convey the idea of being stuck fast, precluding any possibility of flexibility. However, in light of this experience, it has taken on new meaning for me. The Spirit as glue now seems much more fluid. I now see the Spirit creating bonds, not in the sense of cement, but rather in terms of lines of communication which lead to bonds of trust and openness. In this sense, it means a great deal indeed.

On a personal level, this situation presented an opportunity for spiritual growth. My normal reaction when a situation seems sticky and fraught with potential for explosive reactions is the “fight or flight” reaction. I don’t really like to fight, so I normally tend to get quiet and move away from the source of the contention. In this case, I felt that the bishops’ circle had had a graced period of roughly a year (from spring of 2009 to spring of 2010) to build a sense of bondedness as colleagues. We also had the wonderful experience of planning together for and implementing the meeting with Bishop X. We had written a sort of pastoral letter together at that same moment in summer of 2010 to our RCWP-USA women about our concern over the tone of the conversation in which we were engaged vis-à-vis our differences concerning governance. All of these were affirmations of our role as unifiers. We had learned to pray together and to work together collaboratively. The question now was: Can we work together and at the same time work collegially with our regions on this question of the authority of bishops? Can we avoid the perception that we are a closed group of bishops, writing our own job description without reference to what our regions’ experience has been? I suppose that I felt my contribution was to challenge us to consult within our regions. The difficulty was that not every bishop was in a position to do that effectively at that moment. Would this cause a breakdown in the plan? All of us bishops started out suffering a bit from anxiety in the face of seemingly being “reined in.” We felt pressed to finalize the document too soon. We were wary of the general malaise and polarization in the larger body, signified by conversation on the chat list, about issues of accountability. We were somewhat discomfited by seeming rivalries among the members of the SC. I was particularly worried that all of this would devolve into general inter-regional fighting. The challenge was to avoid having this infighting replicated among the bishops, and to focus on being a means of unifying the body. I consider it the grace of God that we were able to take the risk, and succeed in finding a process that bound us together rather than dividing us. For example, once the Association (RCWP-USA’s former southern region) separated from our governance in October, the bishops discerned together and decided to keep the bishop from that region, Bridget Mary Meehan, in the Bishops’ Circle. It was decided that since the Bishops’ Circle has no jurisdictional or administrative decision-making power, it was not necessary to close participation to her. Her wisdom was still welcome. We had found one specific way to witness to unity in diversity. I believe that this is where God is to be found in all of this. I believe that this is a huge piece of what God is calling us to as Roman Catholic Womenbishops. We are called to model unity without uniformity. In this way we

can serve the larger church as it struggles to reclaim its authentic sense of catholicity. Our model can be a contributing factor to the larger church's re-discovery of the ecumenical model on which the church operated prior to the separation of the eastern and western churches; prior to the building of the monarchical model of the papacy and its pyramidal hierarchy in the west.

How did this make me feel? I felt that I had valuable contributions to make to naming what was happening. I also felt delighted with the contributions of others: the organizational ability of Joan Houk; the reflective and balancing gifts of Olivia Doko; the critical questioning of Regina Nicolosi; the insistence on transparency and inclusivity of Bridget Mary Meehan; and also the generosity of spirit and the honest and prayerful contributions of the women of my region. I felt very affirmed by them especially. I also can't say how much I rejoiced in the positive reactions of the women of the Structures Committee. I am very hopeful that this arduous process is going to bear much fruit in the area of community building among our ordained members. We are slowly building the paths on which we can walk together. It brings to mind the words of St. Paul in I Corinthians 12: 12-14, 27:

For as with the human body, which is a unity although it has many parts – all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body – so it is with Christ. We were baptized into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free persons, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink. And indeed, the body consists not of one member, but of many.

....Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole.

Similar dialogic processes were followed by the bishops when it came time for them to re-draft the Addendum C document pertaining to the process for election of bishops. The important thing was that we had established a process for working through differences and reticence within our collaborative and transparent model, and we had discovered that one of our “point of unity” functions might be to model the way to arrive at prayerful and deliberative decisions, trusting in the wisdom of the Spirit we have in common.

Focus on Significance of the International Bishops' Circle

In 2003, two European women priests, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and Gisela Forster, were ordained as Roman Catholic women bishops for our movement. BY 2005, there was another bishop in Europe, South African former Dominican Patricia Fresen. By 2006, German theologian Ida Raming was ordained bishop. The first American woman bishop, Dana Reynolds, was ordained in 2008, with four more women bishops, Joan Houk, Andrea Johnson, Bridget Mary Meehan and Regina Nicolosi, following in 2009. By 2010, we were meeting virtually as the International Bishops Circle. We have come together in mutual support, and have continued to deepen our discernment of the practical ramifications of our role as bishops in our model of ministry which calls for a collaborative community of equals. Over the course of time, and drawing from our individual experiences, we have surfaced a number of important questions. We have now decided to hold an international face-to-face meeting in order to share at an even deeper level, and to try to deal more specifically with some of the questions we have surfaced. It is a great opportunity. Here is a reflection that I shared with the circle on a recent dialogue weekend as we prepare for the gathering to come.

Much has already been written in our documents about our model of priesthood and episcopacy, and shared authority. We are very aware that our model is a response to the oppressive hierarchical structures of the Roman institution which have pushed us to the margin. Therefore, we together with all other ordained women of RCWP have an enormous interest in not falling back into those oppressive behaviors. Nonetheless, our brief history as bishops has taught us that we do indeed have a responsibility to lead and to pastor priests in our care. We are not legislators. We are pastors. We do in fact have authority, but we also know that we are accountable for the exercise of that authority to God's people. We just haven't worked out all of the details yet as to how that authority gets exercised, and the "devil" is in the details!

About a year ago, the great Swiss theologian, Hans Küng, wrote an important open letter to the world's Catholic bishops. In it, he decried the failures of the Vatican system to adjust its governance practices to the needs of the contemporary church. Most importantly, he urged the bishops of the world to stand up and exercise their legitimate authority as bishops for the sake of the church. A summary of his six points are also good advice for us:

- 1) Do not keep silent in the face of legitimate grievances or you will be guilty by association of the Vatican's sins.*
- 2) Set about reform yourselves, and don't wait for Rome to act.*
- 3) Act in a collegial way. In other words, don't allow Rome to pick you off one by one. Support one another and speak up together.*
- 4) Do not allow your vow of obedience to prevent you from speaking the truth to power. Remember that unconditional obedience is owed to God alone.*
- 5) Work together regionally for solutions to problems that can best be resolved in your region or country. Change is possible and does not have to be uniform.*
- 6) Call for a council.*

Küng is urging bishops to claim their power. I believe that we in RCWP have already acted prophetically in all of these areas but one – calling the council. In a sense, we are making a beginning by having this international synod-like meeting in November of 2012. We have a great opportunity to make a difference for all. How? Not by legislating or defining anything. I believe we can make a difference by simply focusing and discussing the key questions which we have surfaced, getting as much clarity as we can, and then taking them to our regions for further reflection and ultimately for action.

Some of the key questions we have already surfaced are:

- 1) What specifically is the nature of our authority as bishops?*
- 2) How can we spell out more clearly what we mean by collaborative ministry and authority?*
- 3) How do we mentor our priests theologically in an ongoing way to be more concerned with orthopraxis than with orthodoxy? And also to hold ourselves accountable to the same standard?*
- 4) What specifically do we mean when we say that our bishops are to be a point of unity for their regions?*

- 5) *What are some specific ways we can guide or serve as resource persons for theological discussion and development within our regions, e.g. on topics such as what we mean by apostolic succession in the church?*
- 6) *How can we set the tone for collaboration with other groups working on reform within the church (including other denominations)?*

It seems to me that we must learn from the blindness of the Roman institution concerning the real nature of authority in the church. We live in an age when church authority does not trump civil authority in the developed world. Even in countries where this is still in question, the days of the present model of church authority as taught by the institution are numbered. It seems to me that the real nature of the authority of bishops and all office holders in the church is moral rather than coercive. As the scriptures of both Old and New Testaments teach, all authority comes from God and is given for the purpose of service, not dominance. Our authority as bishops is for the building up of the community, and we are accountable to God and to God's people. Our authority, contrary to the popular conception under the Roman model, comes from below, and, if abused, can be squandered. It is our responsibility as bishops not to squander our gift – to use it for the good of the whole community. I believe that our November meeting will be an incredible opportunity to lead in prophetic obedience to the Spirit.

Relevant scripture: Proverbs 29:2 When the upright are in authority, the people rejoice; when the corrupt are in power, they groan.

The International Bishops' Circle is currently well into the planning process for the meeting. We will have received in advance papers reflecting on the following topics which we will discuss: our roles as pastor to the pastors, as teachers, and as leaders in a model based on service to the community. The thread that will be woven into each discussion is: How, in this role, do bishops function as a point of unity? One goal might be to find a way forward to being more public in our impact without being perceived as "the voice" of RCWP. Another might be pressing the dialogue within RCWP about the public role of bishops at this stage of our development as we seek to expand our visibility and presence. It is my conviction that we are living in a *Kairos* moment in the church's life as Vatican II reform-minded Catholics all over the world seek authentic community in a non-dominator model of church. We are privileged to be bishops who serve as points of unity at this moment.

Conclusion

In drawing general conclusions about my overall function as bishop, I can say that each of the roles on which I have reflected in this paper speaks to both leadership and service. Each of these roles is fulfilled within the context of relationship to the community. None of them can be fulfilled by me acting alone or makes any sense outside of the context of the community. The roles of pastor, liturgical and sacramental minister and mentor, of teacher (which implies openness to being learner as well), of model of social justice and hospitality, and of collegial interaction with co-workers of all kinds— all of these have a component of leadership as well as a component of service.

It is obvious that the contemporary church and world are increasingly made up of highly educated and actively engaged people. What does this imply for the ordained ministry, and specifically in my case, for the ministry of bishop? What I have learned over the course of my reflection on the role of bishop over the past year is this: the most important thing is to be open and observant, reflective and flexible, to be always asking new and more focused questions. I believe that one question that I must ask myself repeatedly is: Does my overall ministry as bishop foster a community that is actively ministering in the world? Does the worship which I lead or influence engender actions on the part of the community which truly enliven the word that is preached and the sacraments that we celebrate? Only if that is so can I believe that I am fully and authentically living out my episcopal ministry.

In our renewed model of ministry in which priests and bishops are called forth and empowered by the community of priestly people to lead, the community of the church indeed lives into its role as a priestly people, and, at the same time, is also empowered by its leaders to grow in holiness and service. This is the discipleship model based on baptism of which Raymond Brown spoke, which I now see evolving into a form which is recognizable as mutual empowerment.

In the course of this pastoral internship, I believe I have internalized in a new way the truth that ordination is a sign through which a person accepts the call of the community to lead it in prayer and worship and breaking open the word of God; but also, that it is **a sign through which the church affirms the tasks to be performed by the whole community, and the necessity of appointing leaders!** One does not contradict the other. I am comfortable with the role of bishop in this context.

On my journey as an ordained Catholic bishop, I have come to see the balance between authority and service as at the core of most of the challenges and self-questioning we face as Roman Catholic women bishops, as we attempt to clarify and live out the role and ministry of bishop in a renewed church in the twenty-first century. While I am aware that some (though all too few) of our male bishops are engaged in the same struggle, my hope is that this struggle will eventually engage all bishops as we together try to live out a renewed model of ministry.

Raymond Brown's ideal of the bishop (or presbyter) as faithful disciple/servant, bold proclaiming apostle, and authoritative and compassionate shepherd must be the model for all who participate in ministry, ordained or not. The principle that underlies this entire model is that there is indeed only one spirituality of Christian ministry for all. I am more than ever convinced that we must make an end to dualism and class distinctions which have no place in our era, and we must trust our discernment done in community and in the light of the Holy Spirit to create a viable ministry for our time. I find myself at the end of this period of reflection and analysis energized to continue to listen to what people are saying, to ask and seek answers to the thorny questions that will continue to arise, to work collegially and to take reasonable risks on experiential paths toward living out the vision of an inclusive and empowering, diverse yet unified, ever-changing yet ever-the-same church.