

Put Out Into the *Deep*

Acknowledging Our Lay Ministers

▲ Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio



My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

On Sunday, March 6, our diocese will commemorate Lay Ministry Sunday which gives us an opportunity to affirm and publicly acknowledge the service that the laity contribute to the life of the Church both in parishes and the diocese-at-large. Our pastors and parish administrators, as well as those who are ministered to, are very grateful for the dedication of those who work as leaders of a parish ministry, members of a parish committee, liturgical ministers, and those in outreach in many ways. The increase of lay participation is truly exponential in our day and age. Lay Ministry Sunday allows us to acknowledge this contribution.

Although anyone is capable of giving of themselves to ministry, our diocese has undertaken the responsibility to form those in lay ministry so that they will have the proper foundation and orientation to accomplish many good things for many people.

Our Pastoral Institute, under the direction of Gerald Tortorella, is a great example of the diocesan commitment to the development of Lay Ministry. Our program is

accredited by the United States Catholic Conference Commission on Certification and Accreditation. It is a three-year program of holistic formation for the laity offered both in Spanish and English for pastoral leaders to assist pastors, administrators, and parish staffs to serve as unpaid volunteer coordinators or team members for a particular ministry.

The focus is always the New Evangelization for which they are prepared first to understand and then to actualize. Over 525 people have completed the program since it began in 2001. Currently there are 220 active participants, who are nominated by their parish, which provides mentoring and financial support.

The program itself consists of theological courses, spiritual formation through days of recollection and theological reflection, always in the context of adult learning with mentoring in order that pastoral skills will be developed. It is a supervised ministry with a practicum and project to be completed by each participant before they graduate from the institute.

These people are then commissioned in

a public ceremony so that they can begin their work in our parishes in Brooklyn and Queens, or in diocese agencies. The graduates serve on RCIA teams, youth ministry, parish outreach, bereavement ministry, adult faith formation coordinators, ministry of consolation, liturgical planners, evangelization and stewardship committee members, coordinators of social justice ministry, coordinators of Bible study groups and so much more.

If you are interested in assuming a more formal preparation for ministry in your parish or in the diocese, contact Mr. Tortorella at www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/pastoral_inst/lay.aspx.

For many, taking a more active part in ministry to others is like putting out into the deep since the action many times brings unexpected results.

I can assure you that the effort to enter into the structure of the New Evangelization brings great rewards and satisfaction. If you feel prompted to follow this path, please consult your parish or the Pastoral Institute website as provided above.