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A generation or two of real darkness

Tom Roberts | May. 15, 2009

6th in the series

I just filed an interview with Fr. Donald Cozzens, who believes the church will submerge in many ways before any emergence occurs.

Cozzens told me: "If what I've written earlier is more or less on target, we're witnessing the last era of the feudal church, especially in the West. ? If we are witnessing the last decades or generation of the feudal church, what is going to happen?"

A sobering assessment. Read the full story: **The church will submerge before any emergence** [1].

"The church is grieving," said Dr. Marti Jewell, director of the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project. "There's no way around that," she said, as we walked to her office at Washington Theological Union. The project was initiated by and shares office space with the National Association for Lay Ministry.

That's just one of the conclusions Jewell has reached during her tenure as head of the program, funded by the Lilly Endowment, since its start in 2003.

Change is occurring everywhere, and every sector of the church, she said, is going through one or a combination of Kubler-Ross's stages of grieving ? denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. After years of research that compiled not only mountains of data (in short, the clergy shortage crisis is real and ongoing; the number of trained lay ministers available and in use is increasing) but also books of detailed stories from around the country (lay ministers in one part of the country might be astounded at the responsibility bestowed on their counterparts in another part) she is convinced that change is inevitable and unstoppable.

Indeed, it is underway. If change were a continuum, she said, "Then every diocese is on that continuum and Eastern dioceses would be at the back end. They are the latest to realize how much things are changing" and the pace at which change is occurring along demographic and ministerial lines.

Jewell will be writing about these findings and fleshing them out in a practical theology approach when she takes a new position this summer at the University of Dallas, School of Ministry. She said she took the position because wants to think and write more about what the project has unearthed and because she has family in the Dallas area.

Christopher C. Anderson, executive director for the National Association for Lay Ministry, said he's now accepting applications to find the next director of the project which has received a final grant from Lilly that will allow the project to develop a second phase.

Jewell is co-author of two forthcoming books for the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Book series, one on the next generation of pastoral leaders, which was done with the late Dean Hoge, and one on best practices of

pastoral leadership, with David Ramey. Both books will be available in late fall, 2009.

Jewell will continue to develop theological research on the findings of the Project and offer consultation to the Project as it moves into its second phase.

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[1] http://ncronline.org/node/13094