NALM AT 40— TAKING A Look BACK, A History of NALM 1977 to the Present

A compilation of articles from the NALM Archives stored at Notre Dame University and Virginia Sullivan Finn, Zeni Fox, Brother Lough-lan Sofield, S.T., Ed Sellner, Ph.D., and John Reid by the NALM Advocacy Committee

The National Association for Lay Ministry is a collaborative organization of lay, religious and ordained ministers that empowers, advocates for, and develops lay pastoral leadership and promotes the growth of lay pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church. (2017 Mission Statement)
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HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LAY MINISTRY

In 1977 a group of about 20 lay ministry formation directors (the original core membership of the organization) met in Philadelphia at the invitation of Br. Loughlan Sofield. The meeting was a success, and the group decided to reconvene the next year in Dallas. Once again, the second gathering was productive and a 3rd National Conference of Lay Ministry Coordinators was planned for Chicago in 1979. It was during the Chicago conference that the question was formally raised as to whether there was enough in common among this loosely affiliated group of formation leaders to form an association. A task group was charged to study the question.

The 4th National Conference was held in Washington D.C., at Trinity College in 1980, and the task force recommended that a national association be formed. The recommendation was accepted, and the planning committee for the 1981 conference in Cleveland was also asked to complete preparation for the new association. The NCCB document “Called and Gifted” on the American Catholic laity was released in November 1980 and provided a strong foundation for the new association. One of the gifts the new organization offered was that of inclusion. All who supported the growth and development of lay ministry – lay and ordained ministers, single and married, vowed religious, priests and deacons – were welcome to join.

In June 1981, the National Association of Lay Ministry Coordinators (NALMC) was formally established during the 5th conference, and a nine-person board was elected from the membership. The new board developed an organizational plan with priority focus on meeting the needs of two groups of members: volunteer and career lay ministers, and ministry formation coordinators.

At the 1984 conference in Boston, the organization completed a significant process of examining its identity and mission. This process resulted in a new name: The National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM). The main reasons for this change were as follows:

● to clarify the focus on lay ministry rather than on lay ministry coordinators;
● to emphasize the lay advocacy role through the phrase “for lay ministry”; and
● to welcome more paid and unpaid lay people as members.

NALM co-sponsored the “Synod Conference on Lay Ministry” in Rome in 1987, and a large contingent of members participated in representing the voice of lay people at that 300-plus person meeting. In the 1990s the membership chose “Vision, Voice & Vitality” as the foci for the organization.

{Taken from archived documents stored at Notre Dame University.}
A silver anniversary is evocative of endurance along (one hopes) with bearing fruit, bonding and blessings. Such evocations and reminiscences came to mind this year on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the National Association for Lay Ministry, a Catholic organization in which I was active for over a decade.

In the mid-1970’s, 20 believers came together in Philadelphia for conversation on lay ministry. A gestation period followed that included meetings in Dallas and Chicago, culminating in a 1980 gathering of 120 participants (lay leaders, women religious and clergy) at Trinity College in Washington D.C., from which emerged the National Association of Lay Ministry Coordinators.

As an M.Div. graduate with training in spiritual direction, I had been a campus minister and was leading parish workshops on the spiritual dimension of lay ministry.

Not every parishioner embraced this new development of service within the church: “Don’t use the word minister when you talk about me. I’m just lending a hand to Father Shea because he’s overworked.” An introduction by a pastor startled me: “Virginia...that is Mrs. Finn...is leading the spiritual workshop for the bouncers. Excuse me, for the ushers. Or do we call them greeters? It’s tough with all the changes these days.”

The remark about the bouncers was what led me away from my family and out to the 1982 N.A.L.M.C. conference at Regis College (now Regis University) in Denver. Two memories remain from that event. One was of a large, sunny room with over 100 people—lay believers, priests and women religious—all attentive and engaged in intense open dialogue about lay ministry. I suddenly knew that I was no longer a solitary boundary-dweller within the church.

Later, in the Regis College dorm, I contemplated the colors of the distant Rocky Mountains as they shifted from gray to blue to purple as if the rock formations were alive. Though I did not know it, I was embarking on a long voyage in a vessel that shifted, like the Rockies’ colors, between benign and daunting currents.

To deny the value of lay leadership in ministry was more difficult after the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Called and Gifted: Catholic Laity* (1980), which declared, “We welcome this gift to the church.” Episcopal endorsement, along with the heady freedom the association’s lay members had felt in Denver, enabled them to advocate in 1984 at their conference in Boston a change of name to the National Association for Lay Ministry. Its primary goal was to “be a representative voice of lay ministers, helping their experience to further the eventual transformation of Church structures and ministries.” By the following year, 384 members belonged to N.A.L.M., which often has included on its executive board clergy and women religious and has alternated its head position, chair of the board, between women and men. The conference in St. Paul in 1986 urged the bishops to empower women in ministry and to insure the availability of Eucharist.

**Reaching Beyond Boundaries**

Through the 1980’s the boisterous spirit and cutting-edge sensibility of the Boston conference, along with lay ministry growth countrywide, led to creativity and to collaboration with other national organizations. The National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy, was especially supportive of the fledgling lay ministry organization.

With 20 other Catholic organizations, N.A.L.M. planned “Synod’ 87 Conference: An American Gathering of Lay Leadership,” to be held in Rome in October 1987 as a gesture of solidarity with the Synod of Bishops on the Laity. Leaders of the association were surprised when 250 pilgrims signed on, and again, on arrival in Rome, when welcome mats seemed in short supply. At initial meetings with clergy from Rome, it was strongly suggested that we not act too American. What did that mean—modesty in dress at St. Peter’s or muting voices in Vatican offices?
On the first morning of our daily seminars, an Irish journalist whispered in my ear, “I hear your troops are out to hijack the synod.”

The idea seemed so far-fetched, I wondered whether to laugh or to accuse him of paranoia. Later, when asked what cardinal had given permission for our synod journey, we replied, “We never thought of asking for permission.”

“That’s so American!” was the rejoinder, one that brought to my mind an image of Norman Rockwell’s “Four Freedoms” portrait of a New Englander speaking up at a town meeting.

But when Pope John Paul II welcomed the group, there were welcome mats everywhere we American pilgrims went, visiting Curia offices, meeting bishops from back home, attending panels of international lay speakers. We savored the sublimity and faith of the ancient city.

**Initiating Research**

In the late 1980’s much-needed grants—particularly from the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities—came to the association for research on grass-roots laypeople as well as lay ministers.

To me, the crux of the contemporary situation was: a) whether, through lay ministry, the church was increasing by thousands the number of service workers for tasks not requiring ordination or b) whether the church was truly embracing within its ministerial leadership vibrant Catholic lay believers called by God. Hoping the latter might be the case, I aligned myself with N.A.L.M.’s Spirituality Task Force’s grant-supported projects.

But how should we enter unexplored territory without a map? The initial project of the task force was therefore to engage a dozen “spiritual cartographers” to reflect on the responses to three fundamental questions asked both of lay members of N.A.L.M. and of lay persons who were not in ecclesial ministry: 1) Describe what happened in an event in which you experienced God. 2) What meaning does this event have for you? 3) How has this affected your life?

No significant differences were noted between the groups. Our consultants reported: “What emerged with particular strength was religious experience rooted in the circumstance of ongoing life experience. People met God in the strangest, most unexpected and wonderful ways. Our theological doctrine that God is everywhere received such lovely proof.”

Some contexts for the encounter with God were stressful, like selling one’s house or losing one’s job or the death of a parent. Others were peaceful, like being with friends or walking through a Christmas tree farm. In spite of the striking variety, both the meaning and the fruit of the experience revealed common ground. Discovering God’s availability in an unexpected way had an irreplaceable, positive impact on the vibrancy of the respondents’ faith and lives.

The second project gave members of the association a way to speak about their own spiritual practices. A detailed questionnaire, designed with help from a professional researcher, was sent to all N.A.L.M. members. The high rate of response (56 percent) indicated, once more, diversity of spiritual practices. One common complaint was that, although respondents desired spiritual direction and retreats, too few had the opportunity owing to lack of encouragement in their ecclesial setting, lack of funds and lack of time.

In the third phase of the research, 16 adult laypeople not engaged in ecclesial ministry were recommended by pastors for individual in-depth interviews on their spiritual practices and sense of mission. Conducted anonymously and transcribed from tapes to typed texts, the interviews were studied for commentary by 18 consultants.
Again the diversity of spirituality was striking—from being ‘slain in the Spirit’ to having a near-death experience, from founding a soup kitchen to discovering liturgical dance as the way to meet God.

Will lay ecclesial ministers stay the course? A simultaneous project, the N.A.L.M. Longevity Study, revealed that the “item which had the strongest ability to predict future employment of lay ministers was commitment to vocation as distinct from work or job.” In other words, the significance of calling, a spiritual dimension of ministry, predicted commitment to ministry. The second predictor was the collaborative atmosphere within the ecclesial setting where one ministered. Acceptance and affirmation were key.

Meanwhile...
Through the 1980’s and the early 1990’s the association became a circuit rider as its national office shifted from Cleveland to Colorado to Arizona to Minnesota to Chicago, while its board members, scattered around the country, were often engaged in local ministries that absorbed 50 hours a week. More and more the association identified its purpose as advocacy and support for professional lay ministers. This mirrored what was happening throughout the church: a) diocesan training programs for lay adults prior to and during their ministerial service and b) graduate offerings of theological degrees for lay believers responding to a vocational call.

By the turn of the millennium, the number of priests serving the average parish had fallen by 28 percent compared with 1982, and the number of vowed religious in parish service had shrunk by 33 percent, as had deacons. In less than two decades the number of lay ministers had soared by 54 percent and the number of parishes with at least one compensated lay minister had grown from 30 percent to 68 percent.

In the 1990’s the association was ready to shift into a more pronounced professional direction by conducting research on competency-based standards for ministry and on diocesan certification programs.

How “Vitality, Voice, and Vision,” the motto of N.A.L.M., might be enhanced by certification requirements was problematic for some members who perceived it as blunting the earlier thrust of advocacy and creativity. Others felt that the explosion of lay ecclesial ministers and lay ministries, along with marked variations in preparation across the country, called for research and for proposals regarding competency and certification.

The Silver Anniversary Year
Like the gradations in colors on the Rockies that I remembered from my first conference, the shades and tones of the association of lay ecclesial ministers keep shifting. Its 25-year history offers a synopsis of broader church trends.

The N.A.L.M. gathering near Baltimore, Md., at the end of May this year featured several speakers from the N.C.C.B. and the U.S. Catholic Conference, the latter having recently given the association $57,000 in grant support. This is a partial indication of the degree of support given by the American bishops to N.A.L.M. and lay ministry. The six paragraphs devoted to ecclesial lay ministry in 1980 expanded to over a page in the 1995 N.C.C.B. document, Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium, which urged gratitude: “Indeed, the pastoral needs of this moment are being ably and generously served by many kinds of ecclesial lay ministers.”

Most recently Lay Ecclesial Ministry (1999), published by the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on the Laity in collaboration with leaders from N.A.L.M., declared: “All ministry serves the mission of Christ....The baptized share this mission and share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal office.... Lay ecclesial ministry is a gift of the Spirit to the church. The experience of the last thirty-five years can be seen as the grace-filled work of the Spirit.... Special charisms of the Holy Spirit, which flow from the sacraments of initiation, equip lay ecclesial ministers for their special tasks within the Church.”
Twenty-five years ago, few of us had an inkling that the waters into which we tentatively dipped our toes would become a tidal wave. We surely did not foresee the figures reported last year by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate: 26,000 lay ecclesial ministers (in parish ministry alone) with 31,168 in preparation through diocesan formation programs—compared to 34,500 active priests nationally. Welcome mats are certainly more numerous in the United States for lay ministry than a quarter century ago, when it was considered an anomaly. If the “bouncers” have vanished, have we ushered in a New Deal or a New Pentecost?

For some, cadres of lay ministers are still nearly invisible. The more appropriate model is the New Deal. An institutionalized ministerial civil service may be in the making, if lay ministers and their clerical collaborators fail to recognize vocational calling and to facilitate a spiritual depth that enables empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Others see subtle signs of a new Pentecost. At the first Pentecost discernment was needed between drunkenness and diversity. Were the vitality and talents of the earliest disciples the result of the outpouring of wine or the outpouring of God’s Spirit? The testing today comes when fruit is enabled by the Spirit, in this instance through the ministerial leadership of lay women and men. As that enlivens the church, those who may see even themselves as no more than loaves and fishes will witness a transforming superabundance through the love and power of the Holy Spirit. The institutional church may then be humble and honest enough to proclaim a New Pentecost through the vibrancy of faith and mission of those whom it designates as “lay.”

**Virginia Sullivan Finn**

Virginia Sullivan Finn has served on the National Association for Lay Ministry executive board as a member and as chairperson. At the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass., she taught the practicum in spiritual direction.
NALM AT 40 - Taking a Look Back: One Perspective by Zeni Fox Ph. D.

NALM News & Notes December, 2016

A sociologist once taught me that one sign of professionals is that they gather together with others who do what they do, to learn, to advocate, to socialize. A further benefit of engaging in this way is, I believe, that these processes strengthen a sense of identity. The National Association for Lay Ministry is almost forty years old. What are some of its accomplishments, and what identity has it strengthened? A brief overview of its history will give a partial answer to this question.

At the beginning, those who gathered together, before the organization even had a name, were persons responsible for the formation of laity for ministry - some priests, many vowed religious, some lay persons. They served on diocesan staffs, at colleges, universities and seminaries, and in parishes and other settings. Deeply influenced by the teachings about the laity of the Second Vatican Council, they came together to share their stories, to learn about best practices and challenges in formation, and to advocate for lay ministry. After a couple of years, they formed a formal organization, the National Association for Lay Ministry. The title is significant, in that it is not of lay ministers, or for lay ministers but for lay ministry. The goal of NALM was not like that of a labor union, to further the well-being of its members, but rather for lay ministry, or, said another way, for the ministry of the Church as performed by its lay members. Central to this goal is the formation of laity, so that they are deeply grounded in the life and tradition of the Church.

An aspect of the work of the organization has been a conference each year, planned by members, held in different parts of the country, offered as a service to members and to other laity. They come to learn from the major presentations, the workshops and each other, to celebrate together in shared prayer, especially at the Eucharistic table, and to socialize. Keynote addresses have been offered by bishops, lay men and women, priests, and vowed religious, a setting for the Church teaching and learning, together.

A second thread running through the life of NALM is that of collaboration. For each conference, NALM members along with local diocesan offices and individuals engage in the planning and execution of the event. Extensive collaboration with additional groups has also been important in NALM's history. Throughout the life of the USCCB Sub-Committee on Lay Ministry (1994-2005) which developed the watershed document, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, the NALM Board and many of its members were part of the dialogue. Certainly, their experience and perspective helped to shape the final work; in addition, they were among those invited to critique its
numerous drafts. For a number of years the Executive Director met monthly with the leaders of several other lay organizations, to think and strategize. NALM leaders have collaborated with St. John's University-Seminary, Collegeville, in each of the national conferences they have sponsored. Most recently, NALM leadership worked with members to outline key issues regarding lay ministry, which they brought to the Summit planned by the USCCB Office of the Laity on Lay Ecclesial Ministry.

Founding members of NALM were deeply concerned about adequate formation for lay ministers. For this reason, the organization was in the forefront of the effort to develop competency standards for lay ministers. The **NALM Competency-Based Standards for Pastoral Ministers**, The **NALM Competency-Based Standards for Pastoral Associates** and The **NALM Competency-Based Standards for Parish Life Coordinators** were developed, and were approved by the USCC Committee on Certification and Accreditation in 1995. Subsequently, NALM, along with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (each of which had developed competency-based standards for their areas of ministry) was part of the effort to create the **Common Formation Goals for Ministry**, published in 2000. These goals have significantly helped to shape college, diocesan, seminary and university programs which prepare laity for roles in ministry.

In the Catholic community, the designation "lay ecclesial ministry" has only been officially used for about ten years, and the description given by the United States Bishops in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* is such that it is used to circumscribe varied groups of people. Throughout the country, the usage of the term varies, depending on which aspect of the description is emphasized. Official authorization (which also has varied interpretations), a role in leadership, professional education and formation and service rendered in the church community each defines various individuals as lay ecclesial ministers, or not. NALM has not used the varied descriptions to delimit membership in the organization. In one way, this dilutes the development of a strong sense of identity as an LEM; on the other hand, it allows the organization to do all that it can to develop a strong sense of identity of lay ministers as ministers of the Church, with their particular calling as lay people, to serve according to their gifts and the needs they are aware of.

Zeni Fox PH. D.
Zeni Fox, Professor Emerita, Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University and author, "Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Pathways Toward the Future."
I was delighted when invited to write a short piece for its membership about the history of NALM. I would like to focus on three areas (after all, I am a Trinitarian): Beginnings, The Present, Dreams for the Future.

**Beginnings**
Sr. Catherine Francis Lamb, M.S.B.T. and I were co-directors of the Missionary Servant Office of Lay Ministries. Both of our communities were founded by Father Thomas Augustine Judge, a Vincentian with a dream to make every Catholic an apostle and missionary in the daily providence of their everyday lives. Father Judge’s first foundation was a lay group, the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate. That lay group gave birth to a congregation of Sisters, a Congregation of Priests and Brothers and a Secular Institute. In 1977, Sister Catherine and I convened a meeting, inviting those who shared a similar dream of fostering lay people who felt called to engage in some form of intentional ministry. A general invitation was also published in CRUX. The purpose of the meeting was to share hopes, experiences and concerns. We met at the motherhouse of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity in Philadelphia, PA. The fee for the conference was $25 per person, which included room, board and nightly booze and refreshment. The attendance totaled about twenty five people and the presenters were the participants, themselves. The participants primarily consisted of lay leaders and vowed religious who were leaders of programs for foreign and domestic missionaries. At that time we were not using terms such as lay ecclesial ministers and I don’t believe there were any diocesan offices for lay ministries. A similar meeting was held the following year with an increase in attendance. It was in 1980, at the third annual meeting, that NALM was born. From those simple beginnings NALM has grown to be the dynamic organization it is today, offering support to many lay ministers.

**The Present**
Lay ecclesial ministries have blossomed during the intervening forty years, and NALM has assumed the leadership to provide both support and a strong united voice to foster lay ecclesial ministry in particular, as well as the broader reality of lay ministry.

In 1995 the USCCB issued a prophetic document, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*. That document, as many of you know, identified the four calls of every Christian, to holiness, community, ministry and mission, and Christian maturity. One of the more radical elements of that document was that in describing the call of all to ministry and mission, they did not begin with what people did in the church, but rather in their homes, neighborhoods and workplaces. In the years since the publication of that document there has been a strong erosion of the understanding of the universal call to ministry, despite the fact that Saint John Paul II in his documents on work and family has indicated that what
people do in these two settings is ministry. From 1994 until 2005, the United States Bishops studied the reality of the increasing number of lay people serving in ministerial roles on parish staffs. They concluded their work with the publication of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. Here they described men and women in ecclesial service who: have the authorization of the hierarchy, serve in a leadership role in a particular area of ministry, work in close collaboration with the ordained and have appropriate preparation and formation; they used the term lay ecclesial ministry for these persons, noting that lay ecclesial minister is a generic term meant to encompass and describe various roles.

**Dreams for the Future**

As NALM moves into the future, I, as one of the co-conveners of that first meeting, hold some hopes and dreams of where its trajectory will take it. I pray that while continuing to foster and support lay ecclesial ministry, it will focus on two areas, collaboration and inclusion.

NALM has been one of the leaders in fostering collaboration. My own journey has led me from a complete focus on lay ministries to the need for greater collaboration among all ministers in the Church. I discovered that my early efforts to foster the ministries of the laity were thwarted by resistance from some clergy and religious. The reasons for that were varied. It is important to note that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states: “The ministerial priesthood…is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians.” (#1547) It is my hope and prayer that this will be the goal of all those engaged in full-time ministry.

When I consider the issue of inclusion I recall being struck by a publication of the Episcopal Church, “The 99 Percenter.” The premise was simple, that 99% of those called to make the mission of Jesus become a reality in our time were not ordained, vowed religious or ecclesial lay ministers.

I realize that the issue of the universal call to ministry is one that is still sometimes hotly debated at the current time. However, I would like to repeat the wisdom of Cardinal Avery Dulles contained in an article in *Origins* (April 20, 2006, Vol. 35, #44, pp. 725-731, “Can Laity Properly Be Called “Ministers?” This was written after the publication of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*.

In official Catholic documents since Vatican II there has been a growing tendency to apply the term 'ministry' to lay activities... Pope John Paul II spoke of lay ministries on many occasions: *Some contend that the terms 'minister' and 'ministry' should be reserved to the ordained and never applied to lay persons. Others object that the term 'ministry' should be restricted to the exercise of an established office in the church. But neither of these positions seems to be warranted by official Catholic teaching; still less by Scripture and tradition. [Some] contend that overemphasis on lay ministries is partly responsible for obscuring the secular mission of the laity...[it] would be a mistake to make a sharp dichotomy between ministry in the church and apostolate in the world, as if it were necessary to choose between them.*
It is my hope and dream that NALM will have a both/and agenda as they move into this new year: advocating for lay ecclesial ministers and all lay ministers serving the inner life of the Church, and at the same time fostering the role of all laity to assume their God given call to ministry in their homes, neighborhoods and workplaces.

**Brother Loughlan Sofield S. T.**

Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., a Missionary Servant of the Most Holy Trinity, has worked in almost 300 dioceses in six continents. He previously served as a member of the Advisory Board of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Laity, Family, Women and Youth. Loughlan has been the recipient of a number of awards, including, National Association of Lay Ministry's Gaudium et Spes award presented to one who has "given evidence to the vision of Church articulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and who in a special way has advocated and fostered the enhanced role of laity."
NALM at Forty—A Look Back 30 Years! By Ed Sellner, Ph. D.

NALM News & Notes, April, 2017

John Reid, a dear friend of mine from our graduate days at Notre Dame, was the one who first made me aware of the fledging organization called NALM, and invited me to join. I had recently been hired at the College of St. Catherine (now St. Catherine University) as half-time professor of pastoral theology and half-time coordinator of the new pastoral ministry program there. Somehow, at John’s instigation, I found myself chairing, planning, and coordinating NALM’s June 1986 national conference, “Birthing: Delivering the Minister in Every Christian”. A lot of work, but so exciting to be meeting lay ministers from around the country who were involved in the same sort of ministry formation programs as myself. I no longer felt so alone! People I met at the conference became friends and mentors. And then, SUDDENLY, I was elected national chairperson. (John Reid, again, I hold responsible!) Thus began one of the most exciting and exhausting experiences of my life, only possible with the help of the Executive Board and countless others—and, most of all, through the patient endurance of my wife, JoAnne, and our two young sons, John and Daniel.

NALM’s Executive Board had just decided that we needed more visibility, not only by taking out advertisements in national publications, but having representatives of NALM at various national and regional conferences concerned with lay ministry. The Executive Board took this goal seriously. At a time when the NALM was increasingly being recognized as an important resource for lay ministers, the support and encouragement of Dolores Leckey, then Executive Director of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on the Laity, got NALM involved in significant ways. In July of 1986, as NALM chair, I was asked to join the planning committee for Pope John Paul II’s meeting with lay leaders in San Francisco, scheduled for the fall of 1987.

Our task was to plan a reception for national lay leaders the evening before the Pope’s meeting, and write the talks that would be given to the Pope by two lay ministers, Donna Hanson and Patrick Hughes, at St. Mary’s Cathedral in San Francisco the following day. I was charged to write a preliminary draft on lay ministry professionals which was then critiqued by the committee and a wide variety of theologians and leaders of lay organizations. This was at a time when some outspoken clergy and lay writers were suggesting that lay “ministry” as such (and there was some controversy over whether that term even applied to laity) did not belong in ecclesial structures. They divided life and ministry into two distinct realities: “the world” for lay people and “the church” for priests and religious.

Following a year of conference calls and meetings, the talks were finally presented to the Pope on September 18, 1987. The talks clearly affirmed how much lay people had to offer the Church, and explained that our own identity as ecclesial lay ministers came from the personal discernment of our baptismal call and of our particular gifts which could benefit the entire Church. Hughes articulated three special concerns of “lay professionals in church ministries” at a time (1987) when there were some 200 programs in over 120 dioceses preparing laity for ministry. First, he told the Pope, “We would benefit greatly if more dioceses would provide educational and employment information for lay people who seek to work within the church.” Second, “Lay persons need to be involved in the formation, administration, and evaluation of these programs,”
and “forms of financial assistance need to be made available by the Church for those laity...” A third area of concern specifically focused on women in ministry, stating plainly that “sexism” was still perceived as a major issue among those who work for the church. Donna Hanson, president of the American bishops’ National Lay Advisory Council, affirmed this too, challenging John Paul not only to give lay people a greater voice in the Church, but to take seriously the significant contribution of women. Her talk “drew loud and long applause” (as reported by the New York Times) when she stated, “Accustomed as I am to dialogue, consultation, and collaboration, I do not always feel that I am heard.”

I watched John Paul as he listened to our two lay representatives, and could tell by his demeanor that he was not particularly happy with the challenges he was hearing. His response, while gracious, affirming “the great flowering of gifts in the service of the church’s mission,” also warned of “the risk of ‘clericalizing’ the laity or ‘laicizing’ the clergy, and thus robbing both the clerical and lay state of their specific meaning and their complementarity.” (He seemed to affirm that division I mentioned earlier: laity for ministry in the world, and clergy and religious for ministry in Church structures.) Though disappointing, the important thing, I believed, was not whether there was papal affirmation, but that a theology of lay ministry was presented to the universal church by American lay professionals, and that NALM had had major input on this. With many NALM people there, the total experience was one of communio, of bonding with three thousand laity from all over the country, representatives of our universal church.

All of this was leading to the Synod on the Laity, planned for Rome the next month. The executive board and I believed that we should have some voice there as well. If the bishops were going to discuss lay people, why shouldn’t lay people be there to reflect upon and share their experiences? In November 1986, NALM collaborated with PILLAR (Pallottine Institute for Lay Leadership and Apostolate Research) regarding the international conference to be held in Rome. We agreed that such a gathering would provide lay leaders world-wide “a chance to dialogue among ourselves and strategize for the future.”

So began the second major event that fall in the life of NALM: the Synod ‘87 Conference in Rome from October 16-25, co-hosted by NALM, PILLAR, and ACLN (the American Catholic Lay Network), and sponsored by 20 other organizations, including the National Office for Black Catholics, The Institute for Applied Spirituality, National Federation of Priests’ Councils, and Pax Christi USA. It was promoted as “A Gathering of Prayerful Solidarity” with the synod bishops; its purpose to support the synod of bishops by creating a forum for dialogue with three communities: (1) Vatican offices which assist the Bishop of Rome; (2) Catholic Christians from the entire world—Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the English-speaking regions; and (3) conference participants on the Catholic experience in the United States. Two hundred and fifty people participated in the conference, literally from around the world, at least thirty-five who were NALM delegates, including one of our own, Lucien Roy, who, along with Dolores Leckey, had been named lay periti for the U.S. Bishops at the Synod.

Bringing NALM to Rome was a truly remarkable time, experiencing a worldwide church—and its ecclesial
representatives seeing and hearing from us. I awoke one morning saying, “Vatican II began just 25 years ago, and now we’re here,” experiencing the universal church first-hand as we listened to speakers on topics related to women’s issues, our emerging church, just treatment of church personnel, youth and global awareness, and “Career Lay Ministry: Formational and Professional Concerns,” which I presented. We met lay people, priests, and religious worldwide in a series of nightly panel discussions on laity in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and North America. Through the American bishops’ help (thanks again to Dolores Leckey!), we also had the opportunity to go directly to Vatican offices and discover a “Church with a human face,” to discuss and advocate for lay ministry in such offices as Christian Unity, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Secretariat for Non-Christians, offices on Culture, Family, and others. Only Cardinal Ratzinger’s office was closed to us! We also met each evening with various bishops and cardinals.

My last year as chairperson went quickly. as NALM, growing in membership from 300 in 1986 to 600 in 1988, continued to be a very significant voice for lay professionals. All our conferences, consultations, and participation in national and international events helped increase NALM’s membership and visibility. In my last newsletter of May, 1988, I pointed to three areas I thought we should continue to pursue: (1) the need for a national office, as well as a fulltime Executive Director or Secretary who could be responsive to the ongoing needs and concerns of NALM members at the grassroots; (2) the need for all of us “to ground our lives in a healthy spirituality of the everyday which includes appreciation and gratitude for our families, friends, work, and leisure,” and (3) our need “to continue a national dialogue on the importance of lay contributions, especially women’s gifts, to the life of the church.”

Ed Sellner, Ph. D.

Ed Sellner, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of theology at St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota, where for 35 years he taught graduate and undergraduate students and administered pastoral ministry, spiritual direction, and master’s degree programs. He is also the author of 12 books on mentoring, Celtic spirituality, the history of Western monasticism, men’s issues, and, more recently, Buddhism and other Asian religions. He is also a Fellow at the Oxford Centre of Animal Ethics, Oxford, England, and is teaching and writing more on animal rights and animal theology.
This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.

I have been reflecting recently on the meaning of this excerpt from a prayer entitled “Prophets of a Future Not Our Own.” These words have been widely attributed to both Archbishop Oscar Romero and Bishop Ken Untener. I have been thinking about these words in light of the 40th anniversary of the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM).

Forty years ago seeds were planted by some visionary faith leaders who were attuned to the Spirit’s work that flowed so freely from Vatican II. Br. Loughlan Sofield ST invited 20 men and women engaged in lay ministry formation to a gathering in Philadelphia in 1977 to what was then called the National Conference of Lay Ministry Coordinators. At the end of that first gathering, participants agreed to meet again in Dallas in 1978 and to invite more participants. Eventually there was a third meeting in Chicago in 1979.

My first conference was in Washington D.C. in 1980 where the question was raised: do we share enough in common to begin a national association? With a resounding response of “yes” by conference participants, the planning committee for the Cleveland gathering in 1981 became the organizing committee for the new association. I had the privilege of serving on that early planning committee. It was quite an experience for me to suddenly be working with a talented group of lay women and men as well as priests and sisters who were all committed to the growth and development of lay ministry in the United States.

According to the 20th Anniversary Conference Booklet, that original planning committee included Fr. John F.X. Burton SJ, Joe Chamberlain, Pat Davis, Zoila Diaz, Trish Dunn, Suzanne Elsesser, Bill Hardwick, Sr. Julie Harkens, Michael Lyons, Fr. Elmer Marquard, Arline Nosse, John Reid, Sr. Florita Rodman CDP, Marian Schwab, Mercedes Scopetta and Br. Loughlan Sofield ST.

In 1981, Cleveland conference attendees voted affirmatively to authorize new by-laws and install the first governing board. NALM was on its way, under the name of the National Association of Lay Ministry Coordinators (NALMC).

Over the years NALM has faced many challenges – some financial; some about the choice to become larger or smaller, some regarding questions of who we represent and for what did we want to advocate.
Always staying true to its mission, I believe NALM has continued to be a significant partner with many organizations within the Catholic Church in the United States.

I would like to share some reflections with you from the early years to the present and will do so in eight year segments. The diversity of locations throughout the years shows clearly the national nature of our association.


The first seeds from the initial eight national gatherings between 1977 and 1984 bore good fruit in many meetings among lay, vowed religious and ordained focused on the present and future of lay ministry within the Catholic Church in the United States. While we did not always agree on the meaning of lay ministry, there was a strong consensus in three priority areas as follows:

● the importance of promoting collaboration between and among lay, vowed religious and ordained ministers;

● the significance of welcoming lay ministers from many cultures who speak a variety of languages;

● focusing membership in the association beyond lay ministry coordinators to all who are committed to the growth and development of lay ministry.

NALM began publication of Lay Ministry, its regular newsletter, in 1982 with Sue Elsesser as the first editor. This newsletter continues online to the present day. These early conversations over many years ultimately led to a proposal in Boston in 1984 for a change in the name of the association. They also led to a new set of mission, values, goals and objectives statements that was widely discussed by conference participants and approved by consensus. Thus the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM) came to be with a new mission stated as follows: The National Association for Lay Ministry is a professional organization which supports, educates and advocates for lay ministers and promotes the development of lay ministry in the Catholic Church. The values approved in 1984 were as follows:

As disciples of Jesus Christ, rejoicing in our baptismal call and in our vocation to minister in the Roman Catholic tradition, we value:

● The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Catholic Church;

● Faith that works for justice;

● The dignity of each person and the richness that results from diversity;

● The ongoing conversion of persons and structures;

● Collaboration in ministry and participative Church leadership;

● The life experiences lay ministers bring to ministry from their unique relationships and responsibilities as family members, workers and citizens.

These mission and value statements have stood the test of time and have remained in place since they were approved 33 years ago.

At that time in 1984 I was a lay ministry director of the CHANNEL program in the Archdiocese of Seattle.
The network of national colleagues I met along the way was invaluable to me in learning about the realities and challenges of directing a program of educating and forming lay ministers for meaningful service within the Catholic Church in the United States. In so many ways, the seeds planted in the late 1970’s had been watered well and faithfully in order to “lay foundations that will need further development.”

In 1985, NALM published its first book, A Gospel Call to Collaborative Ministry. This book co-authored by a priest, sister and lay person resulted from reflections on the first eight years of what became NALM. In 1987, NALM co-sponsored the Synod Conference on the Laity in Rome that brought together more than 300 Catholics from throughout the United States. This gathering was held at the same time as the Synod on the Laity called by Pope John Paul II. We participated in three dialogues:

● A Global Dialogue with laity and Bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America
● A Vatican Dialogue where each participant met in small groups with representatives of four different Vatican offices
● An American Dialogue on Collaboration where we explored how we might work together more effectively in the future as distinct lay organizations

This gathering was a remarkable opportunity to meet with and learn from Catholics all around the world and to support the four Catholic Bishops from the United States (Cardinal Bernardin from Chicago, Archbishop Weakland from Milwaukee, Archbishop May from St. Louis and Bishop Ott from Louisiana) as well as their two lay advisors (Dolores Leckey and Lucien Roy). During this period, NALM also established two annual awards: the NALM Tribute Award and the Gaudium et Spes Award.

NALM made the decision during this time to develop standards for lay ecclesial ministry to be certified by the USCCB. The first standards were published in the 1990’s. Once again, the seeds planted in the late 1970’s that were watered well in the 1980’s to hold “future promise” continued to bear good fruit.

In 1996, NALM hired its first Executive Director, Sr. Louise Bond. Louise was followed in future years by Irene Dymkar and Chris Anderson. NALM also published Formation of Laity for Lay Ecclesial Ministry in 1997.

In 1998, NALM spearheaded a collaboration of national organizations to develop common competencies in lay ministry and published the booklet, No Turning Back.

In 1999 NALM was asked to be an official observer, representing lay ministers, as the USCCB launched their first document on lay ecclesial ministry, The State of the Question.
In 1999 and 2000, NALM issued four more publications:

- Forging Ministerial Identity
- Moving Ministry Forward: Perspectives Beyond the Pew
- Common Formation Goals for Ministry
- Competency-Based Ministry Assessment Tool

2001-2008: Baltimore, Chicago, Tampa, Kansas City, New Orleans, Cleveland, St. Louis, Orlando

In 2002, NALM secured a $2 million grant from the Lilly Foundation to fund Phase 1 for the Emerging Models of Pastoral Ministry Project. Marti Jewell was hired to oversee this initiative.

In 2003, NALM played a significant consultative role in drafting Co-Workers in the Vineyards of the Lord for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). NALM members Zeni Fox and Rick McCord made important contributions to this document.

In 2004, NALM published the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministry, 2nd Edition. In the same year, the Emerging Models project published the first of eight symposium reports and a profile of lay ecclesial ministers serving as Parish Life Coordinators.

In 2005 and 2006, the USCCB published Co-Workers in the Vineyards of the Lord and NALM published an accompanying study guide.

In 2008, NALM led collaboration with five other national organizations in hosting the Emerging Models Summit in Orlando with more than 1500 participants.

Also in 2008, the following materials were published:

- Emerging Models: Deacons Entrusted with the Pastoral Care of a Parish According to Canon 517.2
- Emerging Models: Listening to the Spirit: Bishops and Parish Life Coordinators
- Emerging Models: Summit Recommendations
- Emerging Models: Ministry in Multicultural and National/Ethnic Parishes
- Emerging Models: Young Adult Catholics and Their Interest in Ministry
- Distance Learning Directory for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

I think the many founding members and so many other conference participants from the early years continue to be pleased and amazed at the many ways NALM has continued over these past decades to “provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.”
In 2009, NALM secured a $1 million grant from the Lilly Foundation to launch phase 2 of the *Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership* project. This phase began a new set of research initiatives focused on pastoral leadership. Working with CARA, NALM helped to develop the largest study of U.S. parishes to date.

More recently NALM published the following materials through Loyola Press:

- Emerging Models Book Series: *Shaping Catholic Parishes: Pastoral Leaders in the 21st Century*
- Emerging Models Book Series: *Pastoring Multiple Parishes: An Emerging Model of Pastoral Leadership*
- Emerging Models Book Series: *Parish Life Coordinators: Profile of an Emerging Ministry*
- Emerging Models Book Series: *The Next Generation of Pastoral Leaders: What the Church Needs to Know*

In 2011, NALM co-sponsored, along with several other Catholic ministry organizations, the Collegeville National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry.

Also, one more document was published from the Emerging Models project entitled: *Pay & Benefits Survey of Catholic Parishes*

In addition, the USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation approved a revised *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* and the first national certification process.

In 2012, NALM co-sponsored a pilgrimage to Rome, led by NALM member Rick McCord, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II by Pope John XXIII.

NALM is now proudly celebrating its 40th Anniversary Year of service to lay ministers, lay ministry and the Catholic Church. Much has certainly been accomplished in NALM’s first 40 years and much remains to be done in the next 40+ years to help serve the people of God and our hurting world.

In closing, when I reflect back on the history of NALM since the first seeds were planted in 1977, I am reminded of the three priorities I mentioned earlier in this reflection. These included:

- the importance of promoting collaboration between and among lay and ordained ministers;
- the significance of welcoming lay ministers from many cultures who speak a variety of languages;
- focusing membership in the association beyond lay ministry coordinators to all who are committed to the growth and development of lay ministry.
After reviewing our history, I would add three more priorities to this list as NALM embarks on the next 40 years and more. These are:

● continuing to advocate for ministerial competence for all who serve as ministers in the Catholic Church
● continuing to research and publish best practices in ministry and leadership
● continuing to advocate for both the ministry of all flowing from our Baptism and as well for lay ecclesial ministry

One central question remains for me: How can NALM best evolve as a national association for these new times in the 21st century as the needs of lay ministry continue changing to meet the emerging Catholic Church in the United States and beyond?

I am proud of the many accomplishments by so many lay and ordained leaders since 1977. While NALM’s work “may be incomplete, it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.”

John Reid

John Reid is the founder and a partner with The Reid Group since 1997. John focuses his work as a Reid Group consultant in the areas of prophetic planning with Catholic dioceses and religious communities, searches and mediation. Previously, he worked with the Archdiocese of Seattle for 18 years where he had responsibilities for formation, training and placement for lay and ordained ministers, and was also the Coordinator of Transition Services. John also worked at the University of Notre Dame and is a former Catholic High School teacher. He is a past chairperson of the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM) and co-authored The Art of Change: Faith, Vision and Prophetic Planning. John is married to Maureen Reid since 1972 and together they are the parents of two adult sons, Tim and Chris. John has given talks and workshops nationally on topics of Leadership, Collaboration, Planning and Transition. He holds Master degrees in Divinity and Administration from the University of Notre Dame.