

4-1-2006

# Women in Campus Ministry: What Future Role?

Mary Romer Cline

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

---

### Recommended Citation

Cline, Mary Romer (2006) "Women in Campus Ministry: What Future Role?," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 29, Article 9.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol29/iss1/9>

# WOMEN IN CAMPUS MINISTRY: WHAT FUTURE ROLE?

By Mary Romer Cline

Something significant is happening with women in ministry in Jesuit higher education that invites our attention. Our Jesuit universities have been hiring women ministers, promoting collaborative ministry, and utilizing women's ministerial gifts for over four decades. Yet, this implementation of Vatican II-engagement of the entire people of God jointly responsible in mission is now threatened.

Nationally, campus ministry in Jesuit universities excels in ministerial depth, influence, and leadership. Informed by the Ignatian vision within an hospitable Catholicism, the 28 Jesuit universities are sites of Vatican-II-inspired, faith-filled, apostolic communities — “church” in the best sense — where men and women can contribute, serve and lead. Meaningful formation with spiritual depth characterizes this activity. Our cautious and hopeful young adults are learning with us, while welcoming authentic engagement in faith.

Quality matters. Few women would have found their way into roles of campus minister without welcoming environments, specific opportunities, and mentors. Sharon Daloz Parks, after researching young adult development, writes that “By intention or default, the environments in which young adults dwell become communities of imagination, mentoring environments with the power to shape or misshape the promise of young adult faith.” Mentoring communities provide essential components of young adult formation, including “a network of belonging, big enough questions, encounters with otherness, important habits of mind, worthy dreams, access to key images, concepts and content, and practices that mediate these gifts of a mentoring community.”

Campus Ministry and the overall spiritual formation of our university communities are a collaborative apostolic endeavors that engage the entire *Jesuit* and *university* community. When the doors were opened, many talented women joined campus ministry, religious and lay, welcoming opportunities to lead retreats, coordinate liturgies, conduct liturgical music,

promote peace and justice and develop service initiatives. Many women stayed in campus ministry, while others moved to teaching and administrative positions.

Today well-trained and theologically-educated women serve as liturgy and retreat coordinators, implement national events such as the Ignatian Family Teach-in. Women serve as chaplains to medical, nursing, and law and other professional colleges. Women coordinate Lilly vocation grants and chair ministerial efforts, lead international immersions, and coordinate ecumenical and multi-faith ministry. Women serve in national leadership positions. At many of our universities, women students preside at evening prayer and lead their peers in faith formation opportunities.

There was a time in the eighties and early nineties when the Jesuit universities had a difficult time attracting Jesuits to campus ministry. During that time, women stepped into leadership in ministry. Mission questions of sustaining Jesuit identity were not yet being raised. Lay directors pleaded with provincials to prioritize the assignment of Jesuits to campus ministry as a national priority amidst competing job placements. Some ministry centers went without priests on staff.

Now the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Since campus ministry exists within a broader church context, it is greatly affected by the overall ecclesial environment. In this context, roles and opportunities for women in ministry are diminishing. Advancement of talented women leaders appears to be stalling. One of our Jesuit universities, well-known for its promotion of social justice, has recently advertised for campus ministry director a “Jesuit- only candidacy.” Since Jesuits are scarce, the thinking goes, we need ordained Jesuits as campus ministry directors. With a few exceptions

*Mary Romer Cline is chair of the AJCU Conference of Campus Ministry Directors and director of campus ministry at Seattle University.*

this is a dominant hiring pattern. Why seek to be renowned in social justice yet exempt ministerial leadership? Women in leadership is a social justice issue.

### **Haunting Image**

Recently I have been haunted by J.G. Farrell's historical novel *Troubles* (1979). The images of the British residents of the Majestic Hotel in Ireland moving from habitable room to room as the exclusive resort collapsed around them unnerved me. *Conversations* editors had asked me to write about women ministers in the Jesuit universities. As much as I wanted to shove this disturbing image away I kept wondering whether Roman Catholic women ministers are like the British residents of Farrell's story — now merely grateful for a habitable room, in denial about diminishment of ministerial opportunities, reduced in scope and responsibility?

Growing and preserving vibrant domains where our students (and staff and faculties) can contribute and thrive is central to our Jesuit mission, an integral part of our identity and apostolate. While fear of difference or otherness paralyzes and imprisons our world, our universities exist to promote freedom. All the laborers are needed!

### **Questions We Might Ask**

Historical memory and our own lived experiences of women preaching, teaching, administrating, coordinating and ministering reflectively challenge us to do more than "hold on" like the desperate residents of the Magestic Hotel. Yet, when a local bishop can *redirect the shape* and leadership of campus ministry within the Jesuit university and *delimit the contributions of women* to these faith communities in 2006, we must ask, Where is the space being fostered, safeguarded for women's contributions? Why are women's roles at risk after more than three successful decades?

Comparable to other leadership positions in a Jesuit university, can the candidate who demonstrates the strongest capacity to contribute to our mission, whether female or male, be hired? Leadership, charisms, ministerial skills, theological knowledge and love for our students matter in these roles as much as ever.

Here are some additional questions: what are the best ways for a diversity of gifts and experience to be manifest? How can the Jesuit university recruit and retain the generous, capable ministers we need? Spirituality is key to sustaining our work for justice. Can the medium and the message have integrity through collaboration in mission and ministry? Can Jesuit universities honor the calling of Spirit for women to enter into ministry?



Saint Peter's College.

What structures and resources will ensure that our women will not be under-utilized? How can we ensure that the women who do the hard work and preparation behind the scenes also have public religious roles? What are creative ways to deal with the tensions young women perceive regarding gender roles in the church? How best shall we mentor them in their vocations? How can our Protestant sisters be called forth to minister in an ecumenical and interfaith context?

In the area of equity in professional development, do our lay and women ministers enjoy annual retreats, professional development opportunities and sabbaticals like the ones the Jesuits and ordained ministers receive? As competition grows among us for talented Jesuits, we must steward the essential contributions of both ordained and lay vocations, women and men, in a way that values personal and communal gifts.

We commend our Jesuit brothers and courageous men for collaboration in this area. Men who take risks in support of women in ministry have been and are essential in opening up and sustaining the development of women's gifts, voices and roles.

*Opportunities for women in campus ministry are diminishing.*

A hopeful, compelling vision of the reign of God which Christ proclaims calls us to take courage, to continue taking risks, to promote faith and to build justly, within our universities, and beyond. This necessitates the involvement of many lives. In this time of role diminishment and political polarization, Jesuit universities have the capacity to do more than preserve a few spaces in which women can minister. ■