

Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Remarks to the 2012 Class of the Ministry Formation Program
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
June 17, 2012

1. I give thanks for this eight men and women representing the best of our lay faithful who come from eight different parishes. These brothers and sisters have persevered in pursuing a demanding three years formation program. With their completion, our records show that 303 persons in the last twenty eight years have enriched our local Church with their commitment of time, talent and treasure. I give thanks to teachers, mentors and administrators who enable this project to exist. I give thanks to their families and friends whose support was essential to their participation.

2. The letter to the Ephesians 4: 1-16 gives us such precious insights on the way of serving our Church. St. Paul addresses the laity as the “holy ones”. The Primacy of the quest of holiness is rooted in our baptism and confirmation. The pursuit of holiness of life seeks to live the Gospel allowing the power of the Gospel to shine in us. What makes our service valuable to the Church is measured by our growth in the life of Christ as Paul states: “but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” v.15. The way of discipleship requires the practice of daily prayer, daily participation in the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacrament of reconciliation, the practice of spiritual mentoring. Only the ministers who are attuned with the Spirit of the risen Lord build up the Church.

3. Building up the unity of the Body of Christ. The Church as body of Christ can be understood as a symphony. Many players, many instruments need a discipline to render the total output. The necessary harmony requires that each one does the particular task well but not as an individual but in connection with all the others. Each one is valued, each one is important yet what is aimed is the common good, the work of beauty and the truth intended by the author of the piece. As Benedict XVI has said the theology of communion is the key of interpreting the texts and the spirit of Vatican II whose beginnings mark this year its 50 anniversary. A theology of communion affirms the authority of Bishops and pastors in the Church as indispensable for the common good. A theology of communion is rooted in the Eucharist where all ministries are harmonized in remarkable visibility when there is a genuine liturgical participation. A theology of communion reminds us that our service in the Church builds up a peaceful and just society as the Church is called: sacrament to the world. Our tradition has a saying, “sentire cum ecclesiae”; it is like an instinct or a tendency that seeks always the good of the Church as our beloved family.

4. Lay ministers for the new evangelization. You are here because you have encountered the Lord and his personal love has given you an enthusiasm for spreading his good news. In the new missal, at the end of the mass, we hear one of the options: Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. The end of mass is the beginning of the mission. In the Church of Christ the King in Jacksonville, as the faithful leave the building a huge sign in startling bright and bold letters state: Entering the mission field. What a helpful reminder this is!! The gravity of the current HHS mandate is that the federal government dares to define religion in the strictest way, whereas the Church needs wide open field to serve, to love, to bring good news, to announce the truth wide open with no restrictions to the entire society. The Church cannot be restrained because its scope is not only for its members; it serves humanity with its own identity in true integrity. It is also the mission of the laity in the Church to be the mustard seed, the sympathetic presence as Cardinal Newman would say, in all fields. As Paul would say: the charity of Christ impels us.