



Best Practices Suggested at 2015 Assembly Workshop "Let's Talk About It" (Clergy/Lay Dialogue)

Facilitators: Mary Beth Carmody, email mec1mom@aol.com; Bill Murphy, email jbzmurphy@rcn.com; Fr. Leo Shea, email LShea@maryknoll.org

We'd thank each and every one for your participation and input—it was rich and helpful. With respect to the suggestions below, you may not be able to do all of them for any number of reasons, but if you choose one, two, or maybe more, and you have some success, dialogue and communication can snowball and everyone will be the richer for it.

These suggestions were gathered from the three workshop sessions conducted at the April 18, 2015, National Assembly.

1. Communication

- Don't address priest differently than anyone else (i.e. "father").
- Speak your truth to power—become a power.
- Identify obstacles.
- Take time to welcome new clergy before a challenge arises.
- Help clergy understand who you are, and if and when a need arises, the connection will already be there.
- Clarify request and/or message.
- Speak up, speak out.
- Communicate both the positive & the negative, not just all one or the other.
- Put it in writing.
- Practice one-on-one (or preferably two-on-two) dialogue.

2. Respect

- Be tolerant & respectful with each other.

Best Practices for Clergy/Lay Dialogue: VOTF 2015 Assembly Workshop

- Understand (before a confrontation) that clergy are often very afraid which can manifest as “defensive.”
- Don’t automatically clericalize clergy or categorize them; don’t assume.
- Recognize different views.
- Maintain a respectful tone.
- Communicate and respect the context of the other.
- Ask questions, clarify positions, and say thank you.
- Ask for their guidance when requesting something they might say no to.

3. Socializing/socialization

- Eat together: BBQ, potluck, etc.
- Have communal meals, social gatherings.
- Food-food-food! Everyone can enjoy this, especially in small groups.
- Establish relationship with pastor and the bishop.
- “Get to know me”: invite a priest to dinner.

4. Self-identity/Christ-like

- Turn tragedy into triumph:
 - Once fired from ministry, this former priest started “Road to Recovery.”
 - “After seven years training for the diaconate, I was dismissed for being part of VOTF. The blessing in disguise was that when my wife died suddenly there is no worry now about remarrying.”
- In Ireland, intergenerational involvement has helped the development of new communication skills and mobility.
- House priests in ordinary dwellings, not rectories.

Best Practices for Clergy/Lay Dialogue: VOTF 2015 Assembly Workshop

- Bishops need to become more mobile and more present in ordinary situations, not just at liturgical/Confirmation events.
- Put Jesus in the center: what would He do in any given situation being considered?
 - We are faithful and involved Catholics (demonstrate this)
 - Stand up for what you believe in
 - Let the Spirit do her work, too

5. Support for Priests

- Ask questions, clarify positions, and say thank you.

6. Formation

- Continue to develop formation activities for priests which actually prepare them for the job they are going to do (e.g., talk about collaboration, team building skills, management and leadership skills, listening, clinical pastoral training)

7. Persistence

- Keep asking for meetings, don't take "No" as a "forever" answer.
- Don't ask permission—at least, not always—it often is easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask permission.
- Get tough if you must: This is your Church.
- Be persistent, be visible.
- Just do it anyway.

8. Thank You/Gratitude

- Take time to welcome new clergy before a challenge arises

9. Methodology

- One-on-one (or preferably two-on-two) dialogue

Best Practices for Clergy/Lay Dialogue: VOTF 2015 Assembly Workshop

- Set up meetings; expect people to come; clarify the agenda beforehand.
- Educate seminarians for *servant* leadership and management.
- Have to REMEMBER WE ARE THE CHURCH.
- Go to another parish; you can always vote with your feet.
- Examine how power/control affect discussion.
- Protest with silence if appropriate/necessary.
- Stand up for what you believe in.
- Opt for consensus/voting vs. command and control.
- Keep to the facts.
- Keep emotions to a minimum.
- Insist on due process and fairness between clergy, laity, and diocese.
- Take on small issues initially, something that can be accomplished successfully

10. Research

- Educate at the seminary for servant leadership and management.
- Do homework on ideological compatibility.
- Speak your truth to power—become a power.

REMEMBER:

WE MAY NOT HAVE IT ALL TOGETHER, BUT TOGETHER WE HAVE IT ALL!