

"Did you get it?"

"Get what?" I asked.

"The invitation to my ordination," came the response.

The man had been ordained a deacon ten months before. We had become friends in spite of the few years <sup>which</sup> separated us at school: It was my first year in theology.

"Yes," I replied, thinking how unnecessary the question was: Everyone at school was receiving invitations from all the deacons. It's a rite of spring quite common in seminaries. His invitation was fairly typical. Have you ever received one of these? A <sup>simple</sup> liturgical art design on the cover and a grand statement of faith on the inside. "I believe in Jesus, God, Mary Magdalene and the angels and through deep thought and much prayer I believe that God is calling me to be a priest," something like that--It stops short of the announcement of a birth in the royal family but still reads like a misplaced page from the call of Isaiah the prophet. Then it continues: "As you have shared so deeply in these significant years of preparation, so I now invite you to share in this, the most important day of my life."

The deacon standing in my doorway beamed. "Well," he beamed, "what did you think?" Deacons crave affirmation.

"It was lovely," I said, "except for one mistake."

He was crestfallen. In fact, the Guinness record for the farthest fall of a crest was set that very day. "What mistake?" he asked plaintively.

"This will not be the most important day of your life," I said. "That was the day you were baptized." It was a snippy thing for a first year theologian to say, but quite accurate.

I tell you that story to make this point: Collaborative ministry is possible only because we start from a common footing, our baptism. It is baptism into the community which sets the pace for our ministry together.

Still, even though we are washed clean, even though we are reborn in the Spirit, even though we are enlightened by Christ, we are not perfect communities. We have parish councils who waste time, we have organists who play too slow, guitarists who play too fast, pastors who will not collaborate, catechists who will not learn. Riddled by sin, isolated by pride, the baptized do fail.

If you leave this conference tomorrow, expecting the wounds in your pastoral teams to be healed, you will be wrong, you will be angry. You will write bitter letters condemning this conference for offering hope in a land of tears.

Why will this happen? Because we cannot change teams. We can only change hearts.

"If our life in Christ means anything to you," St. Paul says, "then be united. There must be no competition among you, no conceit." We must be like Christ, the Christ, Paul says, who emptied himself and accepted death. Death to personal preference, death to being like God.

If collaborative ministry is possible only because of baptism, it is probably only through the Christian life, through humility and forgiveness. We strive to be a community where teachers forgive students, associates forgive pastors, and conductors forgive choirs. 70 times 7 times a day.

Our teams will grow strong, our co-operation will be lively, our skills will improve only if our hearts ~~will~~ change: if we take on--you and I, my friends--the humble mind of Christ.