

# Introduction

Among the many signs of life and growth in the Church since Vatican II has been the expansion of our understanding of ministry. Within the parish and well beyond its boundaries, men and women seek to bring about the reign of God, transform unjust structures, and allow themselves and their communities to be transformed by coming to know, love, and stand with the other on the margins of church and society. This issue of *New Theology Review* explores some of the signs of the pervasive presence of the Spirit at work in our midst. Such signs are revealed through the unfolding social mission of the Church, the transformative power of pastoral outreach in a committed engagement with those in need, combined with theological reflection, and pastoral presence to persons in the final stages of life.

In our opening article, Maria Riley, who has been actively engaged for over twenty-five years in the social mission of the Church, gives an overview of the rich body of Catholic social teaching. She explores how this teaching is being translated into social action in parishes and institutions addressing domestic and global issues. She grounds all in a spirituality of the reign of God, which calls for a commitment to solidarity, mutuality, and community. Our next two articles by Anthony Gittins, and Joseph Grant with Anne Walter, suggest how theological reflection on concrete experiences of social action, expressed in outreach to the homeless, the materially poor, and refugees, can open up ways for persons and parish communities to discover God's magnetic attraction in the struggle to live meaningful, integrated, and gospel-based lives.

The fourth article on the theme, by psychologist Elizabeth Turner Haase, is a valuable resource for ministers of pastoral care, called to accompany those in the very vulnerable final stages of life, as well as their families and loved ones in their experience of grief and loss. She draws on her experience as a specialist working with issues of death, dying, grief, loss, and trauma to suggest practical skills for beginning and seasoned pastoral caregivers.

Our theme is enriched and complemented by three further articles on topics of pastoral concern. Gilberto Cavazos-G. suggests elements for an inculturated Latino spirituality in the U.S.; Andrew Skotnicki offers insight into the role and

ministry of chaplains in correctional institutions. Finally, Lisa Fullam, one of the finalists in the 2003 theological reflection essay contest, invites us into a rural community in Jamaica, to reflect with her on the challenges and long-term implications of celebrating Sunday worship without presence of a priest.

Our columns and book reviews fill out this issue with news of interesting trends, theological updates, and pastoral challenges, as well as books to enrich our ministry within and beyond the parish.

In closing, we invite you to consider the announcement of the next essay contest in our November 2003 issue. We welcome your participation and encourage you to try your hand at theological reflection on some aspect of pastoral ministry. The editors will look for your article by May 2.

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**Coming in August:**

*The Priesthood Today*