

*The Leadership Roundtable's "Profiles in Excellence," highlights people who are committed to best practices for the betterment of the Church's temporal affairs. These Profiles in Excellence are intended to inspire hope for and confidence in the best that the Church has to offer.*

*This profile features Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington. He has long been a champion of the Leadership Roundtable and its work, even keynoting at our Annual Meeting in 2014.*



Cardinal Donald Wuerl's extensive work as both a bishop and theologian has prepared him well to understand the need for an overlap between the secular life of the faithful and the life of the Church. He immediately cited the Second Vatican Council on this issue, reminding that "the teaching of Vatican II is that to the laity belongs the task of this sanctification and transformation of the secular order; they do that through their ordinary activities – their careers, their professions, their work." Therefore, he notes, the role of the laity becomes paramount when the Church moves to address temporal matters within the institution.

Cardinal Wuerl sees the Roundtable's mission as inexorably tied with the mission of the Church: "I think this is one of the foundational blocks on which the Leadership Roundtable is built: that bishops and priests have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel via teaching the faith; the great body of faithful have the responsibility of taking that teaching out to transform the world." Herein is where Wuerl identifies the intersection of temporal expertise and service to the Church. Cardinal Wuerl cites Pope Francis' call and appointment of "competent lay people to serve the temporalities of Vatican City," which is a more universal representation of what is occurring on diocesan and parish levels.

An example cited by Wuerl of his own commitment to working with laity toward best practices was the Archdiocese of Washington's recent 2-year synod process. Seventy-five percent of

the people engaged in the work of the synod were lay: a singular example, he says, of the talent, ability, and commitment of lay women and men. “The result was a twofold blessing for our Archdiocese,” Cardinal Wuerl explains. “It was an opportunity to review all that we do for the Church – where it’s done well and where it can be improved.” Wuerl has been committed to heeding the discussions and recommendations of the synod in order to better the workings of the archdiocese. “Out of that,” he continues, “came the reaffirmation of the laypeople who are much more actively engaged in their parishes and the archdiocese because of it. The greatest strengths are the gifts that the laypeople, specifically because of their background and vocation, bring to build up the Church in all of her works.”

Engagement, he claims, is the vehicle for addressing the challenges which the Church faces today. Indeed, Wuerl considered them less like *obstacles* to developing best practices, and more *opportunities* for engagement of people in the work of the Church writ large. “Remember,” he cautions, “the sacramental ministry of the Church is the goal of saving souls; it is not the goal of the Church to be well-financed or have property – these are simply means to get the work done. The reason we have a parish building, a hall, the chapel, is that the life-giving work of the Church can continue, via community and sacraments. When people are responsible for one sector, like finances, they must remember that the purpose is to preach the gospel, bring more people to church, and provide sacraments.” Wuerl added that the responsibility addressed by those caring for temporal affairs is “ultimately the spiritual mission of the Church” as well.

Therefore, Wuerl notes, the Roundtable provides a very real and valuable, not to mention unique, service. He considers it an ongoing forum for engagement of both laity and clergy, his preferred method of best practices. “The Roundtable is the agent to see that temporal affairs are addressed properly, provide encouragement, and offer expertise. I think it’s a very important voice and mechanism in the Church, a catalyst.”

*Nicole Perone contributed to this article.*