

LAY MINISTRY IN THE PARISH

RCIA Article #26

In the Vatican II Document entitled *Apostolicam actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People – November 18, 1965), there is an exhortation given by Bishops and Cardinals:

“The Council, then, makes to all the laity an earnest appeal in the Lord to give a willing, noble and enthusiastic response to the voice of Christ, who at this hour is summoning them more pressingly, and to the urging of the Holy Spirit. The younger generation should feel this call to be addressed in a special way to themselves; they should welcome it eagerly and generously. It is the Lord himself, by this Council, who is once more inviting all the laity to unite themselves to him ever more intimately, to consider his interests as their own (cf. Phil.2:5), and to join in his mission as Saviour. It is the Lord who is again sending them into every town and every place where he himself is to come (cf. Lk. 10:1). He sends them on the Church’s apostolate, an apostolate that must all the time be adapting itself to the needs of the moment; he sends them on an apostolate where they are to show themselves his cooperators, doing their full share continually in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord their labor cannot be lost (cf. Cor. 15:58).”

A WILLING, NOBLE AND ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE TO THE VOICE OF CHRIST

– Jesus calls us by name to be disciples who love, serve and follow him. This summons, prompted by the Holy Spirit, is spoken in our daily lives. We hear it in the Gospels, the silence of prayer and deep in our consciences. Often times this summons might be the one we disregard first because living the Gospel is not always easy. We are called by the Gospels to love our enemies, and to do good things to those who hate us. In prayer we are called to worship God in a disciplined way which means we have to make a conscious choice to set aside time to “be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10).” Our consciences remind us daily of the call to holiness; a calling that sets us apart from the rest of society; a calling which demands generosity to the poor, compassion to the sick, gracious hospitality to visitors and lively worship with our faith community.

The great challenge of this statement is not just that a response must be made, but that it should be willing, noble and enthusiastic. These qualities describe a powerful desire to put God’s will first in our lives. We have been blessed with the gift of free will which enables us to hear God’s Word with openness so that our response will be made with noblesse oblige; that is, an attitude that says our faith is such that it demands that we treat all we do in our lives with a nobility that identifies us as Catholic and Christian.

We are invited to unite ourselves to Christ in the response we make to follow him. As followers we are to be ministers who are so united with Jesus Christ that we act in his name. In this way, we are ministers who express God's Word in what we say and in the examples we set. Through ministry we work to build up the Church. Our work is hospitality. We are to welcome one another graciously and joyfully when we are together at Mass. This is true, also, for strangers and visitors, especially those we invite to be with us in our worship.

Our work is service to the Lord carried out with dignity, generosity and joy. It is always wonderful to see the younger altar servers when they first start out. They are nervous, they are excited, and they want to do a good job. They learn quickly how to adapt to the style of the presider and when they are comfortable with what they are doing they bring a wonderful sense of dignity to the Mass. The same is also true for the adult ministers: lectors, ushers, musicians and choir members and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. They apply their skills and talents to the work they carry out at Mass. They practice their readings, they come to choir practice with great discipline, they do their very best to be ready for the work they do.

Our work is also carried out by volunteering to be leaders and members of different organizations within the parish. Roman Catholics have begun to understand that we no longer live in the days when Father makes all the decisions all by himself and doesn't need the laity. We no longer live in a Church in which Father Pastor is the owner, CEO and sole decision maker for the entire parish. The laity must understand that **they ARE the Church**, they have a say in what happens in their parishes. The Church needs the gifts, talents and integrity of the laity in order to thrive.

We are all called by name to ministry of some sort. God will never ask us to do something we are incapable of doing. People have all kinds of "I.T." skills, plumbing skills, electrical, administrative, liturgical and organizational skills that the Church really needs. Gone are the days when Father does it all. Goodbye to that mentality!

Listen carefully to the voice of God in prayer. We are all being called by name to live in and be the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Do I feel the appeal to give a willing, noble and enthusiastic response to the voice of Christ in my life? In the life of our parish? How do I respond to that appeal?

How do the ways that you work in our parish help you feel united with Christ? In what ways do you think you could get more involved in our parish? How do your interests and abilities match up with the different volunteer opportunities?