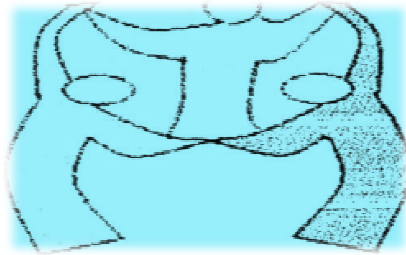


## *The Place of Lay Ministry in the Parish*



It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (I Cor 12.:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit." (I Cor 12:7). Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church.

**Lumen Gentium 12. (Vatican II)**

Lay people share in Christ's priesthood: ever more united with him, they exhibit the grace of Baptism and Confirmation in all dimensions of their personal family, social and ecclesial lives, and so fulfill the call to holiness addressed to all the baptized.

**Catechism of the Catholic Church (941)**

The parish offers an outstanding example of the apostolate on the community level, in as much, as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries and draws them into the universality of the Church. The lay faithful should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which need to be examined together and solved through general discussion. As far as possible the lay faithful ought to collaborate in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their own ecclesial family.

**Apostolicam actuositatem 10 (Decree on apostolate of the laity. Vatican II )**

Above all, each member of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a "member of the Church," yet entrusted with a unique task which cannot be done by another and which is to be fulfilled for the good of all. From this perspective the council's insistence on the absolute necessity of an apostolate exercised by the individual takes on its full meaning: ... Regardless of circumstance, all lay persons ... are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it."

**Christifideles Laici. Pope John Paul II, 1988**

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them.. The particular way in which, the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-7**

"And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too'" **Matthew 20:3-4**  
From that distant day the call of the Lord Jesus "You go into my vineyard too" never fails to resound in the course of history: it is addressed to every person who comes into this world.

**Christi Fidelis Laici 2. Dec.1988.**

For (us) priests, a vital element of our role is to recognise, awaken and rejoice in the great variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all God's people. ... We do not properly appreciate the gift of ordination unless we have a real appreciation of the first gift, the gift we share with all who are baptised, the gift of being reborn in baptism as members of the one Body of Christ and sent to bring good news to the world.

The Second Vatican Council places on us a concrete demand, an essential duty:

- "Priests are to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of lay people's dignity and of the special role that the laity have to play in the church's mission.
- They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognise their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity [perhaps it is worth reflecting why the Council chose to say that we are to give brotherly, rather than fatherly consideration].
- ... (Priests) must discover with faith, recognise with joy and foster diligently the many and varied gifts of the laity ...
- Priests should confidently entrust to the laity duties in the church, giving them freedom and opportunity for activity and even inviting them, when opportunity offers, to undertake projects on their own initiative".
- Because every Christian has received the gift of the Spirit, he or she has the right and duty to use these gifts for the good of humanity and the development of the church and to use them in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their brothers and sisters and with their pastors.

That *essential task* of the priest is about *trying to ensure that*, in spite of the noise, anxieties and often superficiality of life today, *each Christian can hear the calling, the vocation, that he or she has received in Baptism and Confirmation*. ... If any of us were to imagine that the life of parish or the diocese was meant to be the fruit simply of our gifts and our ideas and our way of doing things we would be settling for an impoverished, lifeless community.

... If gifts lie dormant in a parish, then, to that extent, the community is weakened and unhealthy, perhaps dying. It is very likely that one of the gifts that will fail to be awakened in that situation is the gift of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

We are all responsible for developing the gifts we have received and for encouraging the development of one another's gifts.

... I know that you do that in all sorts of ways. It is enormously heartening to see so many people so willingly involved in various pastoral initiatives at parish and diocesan level.

The generosity of your response ... has been extraordinary.

We are a community full of gifts. But we are also a community with weaknesses and flaws, divisions and sins. One particularly serious sin would be to discourage or to ignore one another's gifts – the gifts of wisdom and strength and joy and courage symbolised and given when the holy oils are used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination. That would be, in St Paul's disturbing words, to "quench the Spirit" ( I Thess 5:19 ).

... Because we have been baptised and confirmed, all of us have a vocation to bring good news to the poor, to 'proclaim the good news to the whole creation' (Mk 16:15 ). We often talk about a shortage of vocations, but this Church (Cathedral) is full of vocations! God calls every one of us, with all the variety of roles and gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, to carry out the task that Jesus committed to us. Every Christian is called to be his witness, to help make the good news known. This (Today's ceremony) puts the question to all of us, priests and lay people: 'how well are we hearing and responding to the vocation that we have received – to follow Christ with our whole heart and soul and might, to share his good news by all we say and do and are?'

**From Bishop Donal Murray, Chrism Mass, Limerick. 2005**