



The Catholic Archdiocese of
Canberra and Goulburn

The People of God and Ministry

The Nature and Role of Ministry of the Lay Faithful

In the earliest days of the Christian Church, some people had responsibility for particular ministries (services) in the community, for example, they were apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers and administrators. Paul believed that the gifts given to each person were for the benefit of all and were of equal value. The gifts within the community were valued, just as all the parts of the body are needed for healthy human life.

There are several layers of understanding ministry. “Ministry of the laity” involves a call to the baptised to be the sacrament of Christ in the world today: in the family, workplace, ‘marketplace’ and in relationships. “Ministry” is usually understood as a limited term **public appointment** in the Church, formalised by a commissioning prayer. In the practice of a particular lay ministry, the minister reveals a gift of the Spirit which is celebrated by the Christian community. The purpose of ministry is the development of an informed, just, compassionate community that accepts all people and is grounded in the love and wisdom of God, as revealed by Jesus.

The person of Jesus Christ is the basis for a Christian understanding of ministry. His whole life and death were spent in service of others. He listened, taught, healed, reconciled, prayed, modelled hope, stood with the oppressed and outcast, and always taught and showed the love of God for humanity.

There are **many ministries**. They are distinct from each other but related in purpose. Our present forms of ministry were not established by Jesus, but have evolved throughout history to reflect the needs of the people at a particular time. Ministries must be revised and revisited in order to meet the spiritual and material needs of the

people of God. Thus since Vatican II (1962-65), some ministries operating in the early Church have been restored and new ones have been recognised.

The **source** of all ministry is the Sacrament of Baptism through which the gifts of the Spirit are given to individuals to empower them to serve God and the community.

All ministry is a response to God’s call. All the baptised are responsible for promoting, and are privileged to promote, the mission of the Church.

Ministry is **practical**: it is centred in prayer, reflection and action for the community and the world. Ministry is **relational**: it is the loving expression of oneself and one’s gifts in service of the community. The work of ministry is directed towards everyone, not just members of the church. In Christianity, ministry is active, urgent, servant-like, concrete and specific.

As a ministry is a public appointment by the Christian community, all those in ministry are **accountable** to the local Christian community.

Ministry is **important today**. All ministry is a response to God’s call.

All the baptised are responsible for promoting, and are privileged to promote, the mission of the Church. To leave the Church’s mission to the ordained ministers alone might encourage the faithful to be irresponsible and become passive. A partnership approach between clergy and commissioned lay faithful creates a true Christian community, and provides a rich form of pastoral, liturgical and spiritual leadership.

Pastorally, for both minister and the assembly, it is important to form and inform ministers, by **educating** them in scripture, liturgy and practical matters so they can fulfil their particular ministries well.

For Reflection.....

Underlying all ministry is a spirituality of hospitality, welcoming, generosity and service. Liturgical hospitality flows from Christian spirituality.

You might like to read and discuss some of the following:

- The prophet Elisha seeks and obtains hospitality: 2 Kings 4:8-37
- God offers us love and hospitality: Ps 23
- Jesus challenges us to invite the sick and poor to our table: Lk 14:15-22; Mt 22:1-10
- Jesus washes the disciples' feet: Jn 13:3-17
- There are various pieces of advice regarding hospitality: Rom 12:10, 11b, 13; Phil 4:5

Which of these reflect your ideas of qualities of hospitality?

"It is never enough simply to be a competent, efficient minister. The minister must embody and live by the spiritual values that she or he represents, proclaims, and tries to persuade others to embrace."

Richard McBrien, Ministry, 1988, p.77

From your own experience, is this true? Can you recall times when you/your family were ministered to?

Ordained ministry was never intended to carry out the entire work of the monitoring of the Christian community but rather the coordination of the gifts of the Spirit and the exercising of creative leadership in the local church. The role of the laity is not to be followers of clergy but responsible disciples of Jesus."

K. Treston, Ministry for Today and Tomorrow, 1994, p. 14.

To what extent do you agree?

"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 (cf. 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..."

Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 12.

What are some special graces and gifts that the Holy Spirit gives?

How/when have you seen these in operation?

How does your experience connect with the extract here?

It can be difficult for us to remember always that in ministry, while we surely are called to use our personal giftedness, we are not doing our own thing, but we are doing the Church's work; we are not building up ourselves but building up the Body of Christ. We can easily lose sight of how what we are doing is related to the larger picture of the mission of the Church. We can become isolated, somewhat narrow in our vision and perspectives and even rather proprietary and defensive. We are all part of the larger whole and that larger whole belongs to us all. We need to exercise our own role in such a way that others are encouraged rather than discouraged, to make their contribution to the Church.

Bishop Milkearns, Ballarat, Eastertide 1990.

How can ministries be both supported and challenged in ministry?

What types of ministries will the Church have to develop as it moves further into the 21st century?

