

FROM PASSIVITY TO ACTIVITY: THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE PARISH

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Pope John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* reechoes the concern of the Fathers of the Synod when he says that the Church should be a participatory Church in which no one feels excluded.¹ The millennium of the laity has already dawned and their participation in the life and mission of the Church is not the result of volunteerism on their part or concession from the hierarchy but a right and responsibility arising from their baptismal consecration. It is above all in the parish that this participation is to be realized to the maximum. The parish priest cannot fulfil his pastoral ministry without the active involvement of the great majority in the parish i.e. the laity.

1. WHO ARE THE LAITY?

The Latin Code gives only a negative definition of the laity as non-clerics. Canon 207 says, "By divine institution, among Christ's faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are called lay people." *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on the Church, gives a more comprehensive understanding of the laity when it attributes the term to "all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is,

¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45

the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people, in the Church and in the world". The same Constitution further underlines the secular character of the laity which is proper and peculiar to them.² The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* follows *Lumen Gentium* very closely in their description of laity. The magisterium of the Church on the role and mission of the laity with reference to the hierarchy can be summarized thus:

1. The bishops together with the presbyters and the deacons received the ministry of the community in order to preside over the flock of which they are pastors in the name of God, as teachers of doctrine, priests of divine worship and ministers endowed with authority.
2. The sacred pastors should know that they are not created to assume solely for themselves the salvific mission of the Church, but must, likewise, recognize the services and charisms of the laity in such a manner that all should cooperate unanimously in the common work of the Church.
3. The laity participating in the priestly, prophetic and the kingly ministries of Christ exercise their apostolate in the world as a leaven, and to which everybody is called.
4. There are lay persons who either through personal initiative or through hierarchical invitation, consecrate themselves temporarily or perpetually to the apostolate of the hierarchy in accordance with the law by engaging in the service of its various institutions and work.³

² The Code of Canon law for the Eastern Churches defines the laity more positively. Canon 399 says, "In this Code, the name of lay persons is applied to the Christian faithful whose proper and special state is secular and who, living in the world, participate in the mission of the Church, and are not in holy orders nor enrolled in the religious state".

³ Cf. J.M Tinoko, "The Ministry of the Laity", *Philippiniana Sacra* 26, No. 78 (1991) 435-450.

1.1. Parish and Parish Priest

Inspired by *Christus Dominus*, canon 515 of the 1983 Code gives a new definition of the parish which has a profound pastoral and ecclesiological emphasis: "A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted to the parish priest as its proper pastor." The definition makes it clear that there are two essential elements to an understanding of the parish: a personal element, which is *a community of faithful* and an institutional element in the person of *the parish priest*. Though territoriality is an important element, it is not however an essential element since there can be personal parishes on the basis of nationality, language, rite or some other criterion.

The new understanding of the role of the parish priest too is more theological and pastoral than merely juridical. Canon 519 says, "The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, in accordance with the law." The law of the Church thus highlights the preeminent role of the parish priest who is the proper pastor of the parish that is entrusted to him. At the same time, the canon asserts that parochial ministry necessarily entails some form of collaboration.⁴ The parish priest cannot remain isolated in the exercise of pastoral care.

Vertically, he is the principal collaborator of the diocesan bishop and he functions under his authority, keeping always intact the hierarchical communion. Horizontally, he is to exercise his ministry in fraternal communion and collaboration with other priests deacons and the laity. The other priests may be assistant parish priests (cc.545-552), rectors of churches (cc.556-563),

⁴ Cf. A.Borras, *La Parrocchia, Diritto Canonico e prospettive pastorali*, Bologna, Edizione Dehoniane Bologna, 1997, pp.99-102.

chaplains (cc.564-572) and even other priests who have domicile or quasi domicile in the parish. The principle of cooperation of all priests is rooted in the unity of their consecration and mission with their bishop.

1.2. Assistance of the Laity

The canon recognizes the contribution of the laity to parish life with the words *with the assistance (operam conferentibus)* of the laity. While the sacrament of orders links the other priests and deacons very closely with the parish priest and enables them a higher level of participation, the unique value of the mission of the laity cannot be undermined. In fact, one of the authentic sources of this canon *Christus Dominus*, no. 30 uses the word cooperation (*cooperatio*) even with reference to the contribution of the laity.

It was long thought that the activity of the parish priest consists in *giving* the faithful the goods of salvation and that of the faithful in *receiving* the same. Thus the parish priest proposes the truth when he teaches; administers the sacraments and other acts of worship in his sanctifying mission; directs the parochial life with various acts of charity and offers the faithful spiritual and material helps. On the other hand the faithful receive from the parish priest the above mentioned goods: the truth, worship, directives and the spiritual and material helps. However, the faithful are active not only in receiving but also in giving (c.204). They participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission, which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world. The activity of the parish priest consists not only in giving the faithful the goods of salvation but also in enabling them to give the same to others. The parish priest is not to take upon himself all that the laity can do for the building up of the community. The whole community is to be involved in those pastoral activities that do not require the sacrament of order. The parish priest is to help the laity to discover their charisms and vocations. He is to coordinate the resources available and stabilize them for the good of the parish.

F. Coccopalmerio raises the question whether the *operam conferentibus* of the laity is for an activity proper to the parish priest

or to the laity themselves.⁵ It appears that the laity support or help the activity which is proper to the parish priest. Canon 528 #1 says: "With the collaboration of Christ's faithful, he is to make every effort to bring the gospel message to those also who have given up religious practice or who do not profess the true faith." This recalls canon 225 #1 which underlines the obligation and right of the lay people to strive so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all the people at all times and all places. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them people are able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ. However, we cannot limit the activity of the laity to those who have given up religious practice or those who do not profess the true faith. The parish priest is to recognize and promote the specific role which the lay members of the Christ's faithful have in the mission of the Church, fostering their associations which have religious purposes (c.529 #2).

Though the active role of the laity in the parish is not denied, it does not appear to be sufficiently emphasized. It is unfortunate that there is not a single canon in the section on parish that is wholly dedicated to describe the role of the laity. Regarding catechism too, the Code does not explicitly affirm that the laity are the subjects of the activity. Though their role is pointed out in cc.774 and 776 it would have been fitting to affirm the same in the section on parish. It is also strange that nothing is said of their role in works of charity. With the exception of canon 517 #2, the Code is almost silent in this section with regard to the governing function of the laity. Even in the case of the parish pastoral council, it is described in very general terms, and in fact the universal law does not make it obligatory. Yet we can reconstruct the role of the laity in the parish with the ample material available in the other parts of the Code.

2. LAITY IN THE TEACHING OFFICE

The sacred ministers are those primarily responsible for the exercise of the ministry of the Word. In the exercise of the office of

⁵ F. Coccopalmerio, *De Paroecia*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1991, p.28.

preaching everyone is bound to observe the norms issued by the bishop of a diocese (c.772 #1). The parish priest and rectors of churches are to take care that the norms about preaching are observed (c.676#4). But the other faithful can receive from the competent authority the mission or faculty to preach and exercise it in the name of the Church (c.759).

In order to ensure the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children, the parish priest is called upon to enlist the help of lay members of Christ's faithful especially catechists (c.776). It is not a simple possibility or a pious exhortation. The parish priest has a serious obligation to ensure the catechetical formation of all who are entrusted to him and to this end he has to involve the laity who have sufficient skills and qualities.

2.1. Lay Preaching

The new Code speaks of the lay persons being admitted to preaching the Word of God under certain conditions (c. 766):

1. If it is necessary in certain circumstances (certain peculiar situations in mission lands or in the case of persecution or due to clergy shortage).
2. If it is useful in particular cases (perhaps the persons concerned are specialists in doctrine or have the esteem and admiration of the people, known for their impeccable character).
3. Admitting a lay person to preach must be done in accord with norms established by the conference of bishops.
4. The homily during mass is reserved to priest or deacon. And the diocesan bishop cannot dispense from the prescription of this canon⁶.

It is also interesting to note that while the priests and deacons can obtain the *faculty* to preach, the laity have only the possibility of *being admitted* to preach. The use of the terminology *faculty* is directly related to the exercise of some form of the powers of orders and of ecclesiastical governance, which in this instance is

⁶ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Authentic Interpretation of Legislative Texts, AAS 79 (1987)1249

teaching. In the light of cc. 770 & 771, the laity can be called to mission preaching and to preach to those who cannot avail themselves of ordinary pastoral care.⁷

2.2 Laity as Catechists and Missionaries

The Second Vatican Council recognized the important role of laymen who serve as catechist calling them co-workers of the priestly order.⁸ Pope John Paul II paid them rich tributes in his encyclical *Catechesi Tradendae*:

"I am anxious to give thanks in the Church's name to all of you lay teachers of catechisis in the parishes, the men and the still more numerous women throughout the world, who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generation. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal and it is an eminent form of lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people do not receive suitable religious training at home."⁹

It is true that catechesis can be given anywhere, but Pope stresses in accordance with the desire of very many bishops, that the *parish community* must continue to be the *prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis*. The new Code has canonized the ministerial figure of the catechist in mission territories attributing to them liturgical and lay functions especially that of proclaiming the evangelical doctrine, of organizing liturgical acts and initiating works of charity (c. 785 #1). In the fulfillment of his catechetical responsibility, the parish priest is to enlist the support of different groups of persons: 1. Clerics attached to the parish that is, priests

⁷ E.Zanetti, "I laici possono predicare e insegnare nella Chiesa?" *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale*, 6 (1993) 254-286.

⁸ "In our days when there are so few clerics to evangelize such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of the catechists is of the greatest importance. Therefore, their training must be in keeping with cultural progress and such that, as true co-workers of the priestly order, they will be able to perform their tasks as well as possible, a task which involves new and greater burdens". *Ad Gentes*, no. 17.

⁹ *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 66.

and deacons each according to his possibilities; 2. Both male and female religious and members of the societies of apostolic life; 3. Lay persons especially catechists and parents. The Code calls for collaboration of all of these persons with the parish priest in catechetical tasks.

Because the whole Church is of its nature missionary and the work of evangelization is to be considered a fundamental duty of the people of God, all Christ's faithful must be conscious of the responsibility to play their part in missionary activity. Lay people should cooperate in the Church's work of evangelization and share in its saving mission both as witnesses and as living instruments. In mission lands, lay people should be invited to teach in schools, administer temporal affairs, collaborate in parochial and diocesan activities, establish and promote various forms of the lay apostolate, so that the faithful of these new Christian communities might as soon as possible be able to play their own part in the life of the Church. They should willingly give socio-economic assistance to people in the process of development.

The Code does not require the parish priest to reserve to himself all the functions of the ministry of the word but only to ensure that the ministry is accomplished with the involvement of all the members of the parish community in the best possible manner.

3. LAITY IN THE SANCTIFYING OFFICE

Following the liturgical renewal promoted by the Council, the lay faithful themselves have acquired a more lively awareness of the tasks that they fulfil in the liturgical assembly and its preparation, and have become more widely disposed to fulfil them. Liturgical celebration is in fact a sacred action not simply of the clergy, but of the entire assembly. It is therefore natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful. In spite of the riches of the ministries and the diverse tasks of the ministers, the whole assembly of the faithful remains the celebrating subject.

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the

sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.

Every ministry instituted must be appreciated for its intrinsic value and not simply because it fills the vacuum caused by the scarcity of clerical vocations. The lay ministers are not called to simple substitutions, delegation or execution of that which is proper to the pastors but to an exercise of an ecclesiastical office which is proper to them and thus respond to their fundamental Christian vocation.

The lectors are for instance called upon to proclaim the Word of God in the liturgical assembly. They are to educate the children and the adults and guide them to receive the sacraments worthily. They have to prepare the faithful who are temporarily appointed to read the scriptures. The parish priest is to ensure that all the ministers (the cantors, acolytes, lectors, collectors of offerings, and communion – distributors) play their role with due diligence and preparation.

The ministries of lector and acolyte can be conferred to lay men with requisite qualities in a stable manner by means of a liturgical rite.¹⁰ Lay persons may be deputed on a temporary basis to exercise the role of lector. They can also fulfill the roles of commentator, cantor and other similar functions as required by the liturgical assembly (c. 230 #2). When the need of the Church so demands and when there is a lack of ministers, lay persons even without the institution through a liturgical rite can also be called upon to exercise the ministry of the word, leadership in liturgical prayers, the administration of baptism, and the distribution of Eucharist with a less stable character (c. 230 #3).

3.1 Sacraments

If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded a catechist or some other person deputed to this office by the local ordinary, may confer baptism; indeed, in a case of necessity, any person who has

¹⁰ The exclusion of women from permanent liturgical installation in the ministries of acolyte and lector has been questioned throughout the process of revising the Code. However the limitation has been retained in the canon taking into account perhaps their close link with the ordained ministries. Cf. *Communicationes*, 13 (1981) 321.

the requisite intention may do so. Pastors of souls, especially parish priests, are to be diligent in ensuring that Christ's faithful are taught the correct way to baptise (c. 861 #2). The revised Code does not use the term extraordinary when someone other than the ordinary minister baptises. When the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, the laity baptise licitly.

The catechists and other lay people collaborate with the parish priest and the deacons in preparation for baptism and confirmation. The presence of parents, god-parents, friends and other members of the local community at the celebration is important. They make the profession of faith and thus it is in the faith of the community that the child is baptised. They make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child and bind themselves to the formation of the child in Christian faith.

There is no mention of an Eucharistic ministry for lay persons in the 1917 Code. In the revised Code the word "only" is removed and the acolyte or some other deputed person is included as extraordinary minister. In case of necessity or with at least the presumed permission of the pastor, any priest or other minister of the Holy Communion must bring the most Holy Eucharist to the sick in the form of viaticum (c.911 #2). Acolyte or some other person deputed by the local ordinary may in particular circumstances be minister of exposition and reposition.

The role of the laity in the sacrament of reconciliation especially when it is community celebration is significant. Likewise, those who serve the sick persons and the members of their family have a great responsibility in preparing them for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. In the absence of priests and deacons, a lay member of the faithful can take the viaticum to the sick.

In accordance with canon 1112, where there are neither priests nor deacons, the diocesan bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages, if the Bishops' Conference has given its prior approval and the permission of the Holy See has been obtained. A suitable lay person is to be selected to give instruction to those who are getting married and to conduct the marriage liturgy properly.

Lay persons can administer sacramentals according to the prescription of liturgical books and with the consent of the

Ordinary (c. 1168). The minister of the sacramentals is a cleric who has the requisite power. In accordance with the liturgical books and subject to the judgement of the local ordinary, certain sacramentals can also be administered by lay people who possess the appropriate qualities.

4. LAITY IN THE PASTORAL OFFICE

That the lay people have moved from passivity to activity, non-recognition to recognition, absence to presence, silence to voice is evident in the new role accorded to them in the governance of the Church.¹¹ A number of ecclesiastical offices no longer require the power of orders in the new Code. They include chancellor (c.482 #1), notary (c.483 #1), diocesan finance officer (c.494 #1), mixed teams who direct a parish as long as there is a priest who is appointed supervisor and has the powers and faculties of a pastor (c. 517, #2), and other tribunal judges (c.1421 #2).

There is a recognition of their special and proper competence and experience and they are asked to participate in collegiate bodies, most of which are consultative in nature (cc. 212, 228 #2). The possibility of lay participation is envisaged in diocesan pastoral council (c.511), diocesan synod (c.460, 663 #1.5, #2) and diocesan finance council (c.492 #1). Pastors are urged to listen to lay persons (cc. 529, 1064). The role, responsibilities, duties and rights of parents have received greater recognition in the new Code. They are to oversee the Christian education of children, their preparation and their readiness for the reception of sacraments (cc. 835 #4, 843 #2, 914, 226 #2).

4.1. Parish Pastoral Council

The constitution of parish pastoral council is not obligatory in the universal law. In fact c.536 says: "If after consulting the council of priests the diocesan bishop considers it opportune, a parish pastoral council is to be established in each parish." The opportuneness is to be decided by the diocesan bishop after

¹¹ J.J.Koury, "The Limits of Collaboration: The New Legal Language for the Laity", *Studia Canonica*, 26 (1992) 415-436.

consulting the council of priests. Nevertheless, particular law may make its constitution obligatory and stabilise norms for its establishment and function.

The parish pastoral council is an organ of ecclesial communion, participation and coresponsibility. It is a representative body of the faithful working in close collaboration with the priests of the parish with a view to furthering the mission of Christ and his Church in this corner of the Lord's vineyard. It is collegiality in action at parish level. The council must concern itself with the whole range of pastoral activities in the parish. The parish priest is the president who acts as animator and facilitator.

The members of the council at times mistakenly consider it merely as a *grievance - airing forum, a talk - shop, a board of directors or a legislative body for issuing decrees or statutes that the parish priest must either sign or veto*. On the other hand some priests are allergic to the formation of such a council. Priests who are loudest in their criticism of the lack of consultation and shared decision making at universal and diocesan level are often the very worst offenders when it comes to applying these same principles in their own parish.¹²

The purpose and nature of the council should be rightly understood by the president and the members. In fact, the suggestion to include the parish pastoral council in the very definition of the parish priest was not accepted in order to emphasise the pre-eminent role and responsibility of the parish priest.¹³ Its role is to help the parish priest identify the pastoral needs in the parish, help him plan pastoral programs and improve pastoral services, evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and services with a view to their improvement or at times their substitution or termination. The parish priest should have sincerity of purpose, respect for each person and openness to new learning and thus provide an acceptable style of leadership for the success of the council.

¹² W.Dalton, "Parish Councils or Parish Pastoral Councils", *Studia Canonica*, 22 (1988) 169-185.

¹³ Cf. *Communicationes*, 13 (1981) 149.

The Code gives only a general indication on the composition of the parish pastoral council. Without doubt the parish priest has a significant place in the council with the right of presiding. It is but natural that all others who by virtue of their office participate in the pastoral care of the parish are also enlisted members such as assistant parish priest, chaplains, rectors of churches or permanent deacons, lectors and catechists.

One should take into consideration the local situations and circumstance peculiar to each parish. Care should be taken to constitute the council to be really representative of the parish community. Particular law or statutes can determine the qualifications, mode of election, tenure and the functioning. The members should be in full communion with the Church and love it and be distinguished for their faith, Christian life, prudence, and openness for dialogue and capacity for pastoral collaboration.

Because he is ultimately responsible for the care of the parish, the parish priest presides at the parish pastoral council in a way strikingly similar to his presidency at the Eucharist. His presiding role has to be seen within the context of the process of decision-making, which involves many stages. The purpose of the parish pastoral council is to collaborate in the promotion of pastoral activity. Like the diocesan pastoral council it needs to study and weigh those matters that concern pastoral works in the parish and propose practical conclusions to the parish priest. The parish pastoral council has only a consultative vote. This does not mean that the parish priest can do what he wants. The responsibility for the decision rests with the parish priest after he has seriously listened to and evaluated the suggestions and proposals of the members.

4.2. The Parish Finance Council

The parish maintenance council of the 1917 Code is replaced by the parish finance council of canon 537. The documents of Vatican II gave a tremendous impulse to the active participation of the lay faithful including in the administration of Church property. Canon 1280 prescribes that every juridical person is to have its own finance committee or at least two counsellors who are to assist in the performance of the administrator's duties in accordance with the statutes. This general principle is also applied to the parish and canon 537 states: "In

each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish without prejudice to c.532." It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

The parish finance council is obligatory in all parishes irrespective of the number of members and the quantity of temporal goods they possess. It is meant only to assist the parish priest. It does not specify any other constitutive element other than by referring generically to universal law and episcopal norms. The council is to function making use of the provisions of Book V, Title II, *The administration of goods* and the norms governing Diocesan Finance Council which can be applied to it analogously. The members should not only be expert in administration, but also honest and devoted to the Church and her apostolate.

The parish finance council does not have the task of administering the goods of parish but only collaborates with the parish priest in the administrative management of the parish. It is the competence of the parish priest to administer the goods of the parish and not that of the parish finance council in itself. It is interesting to note that in the earlier draft of this Canon, the establishment of this council was not necessarily obligatory but only when circumstances suggested it.

The Code does not explicitly state that the parish finance council has consultative or deliberative vote. However, the diocesan law can grant it deliberative vote in certain cases or at least require the parish priest to get its consent to perform certain acts. C.1287 #2 requires the administrators to render an account to the faithful on the goods offered to the Church.

It is a bit surprising that the revised law does not explicitly require that particular law specify the working relationship between the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council. We need to take into account that in many parishes both the councils are amalgamated into one and the same council and it is entrusted with diverse tasks, pastoral and economical. Since the parish finance council is mandatory in universal law, a bishop may permit such an arrangement, if he finds it appropriate for some parishes.

All should understand the real purpose of participatory structures. It would be an error to judge *ecclesial structures of participation and co-operation* by secular democratic standards or to consider them as forms of power-sharing or means of imposing partisan ideas or interests. They should be looked upon as forms of spiritual-solidarity proper to the Church as a communion of persons who, "though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom 12:5). Such structures are fruitful, to the extent that they manifest the true nature of the Church as a hierarchical communion, animated and guided by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

4.3. Participation in the pastoral care

An important innovation in the new Code is the participation of the lay person in the exercise of pastoral care because of a shortage of priests. In this case a priest is appointed with the powers and faculties of the parish priest (c. 517 #2). Obviously the lay person who shares in the pastoral care of the parish cannot perform those functions which require the power of Order. However, he or she *participates in the exercise of pastoral care* in a special and significant way. He is to work in close collaboration with the priest moderator who on his part encourages the former's initiatives for the building up of the community.

It is necessary that the person is sufficiently qualified to undertake the pastoral care. We can expect from him, a great concern for people; formal theological training combined with a good sense of the Church; a great deal of stamina for pastoral experience; a knowledge of counselling, capacity of planning and leading in prayer; a keen financial sense and a healthy Christian spirituality. This provision shows the anxiety of the Church to provide for the pastoral needs of the faithful. Such an arrangement is not meant to be permanent and at the earliest opportunity a priest needs to be appointed parish priest. Care should be taken not to undermine the significance of the ministerial priesthood.

¹⁴ Cf. Pope John Paul II, "Ad Limina Address to the Bishops of US", 2 October 1993, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 October 1993, p.3.

4.4. Associations of the laity

The Code exhorts the parish priest to foster the associations which have religious purposes such as public worship, promotion of Christian doctrine, evangelisation, works of piety and works of charity (c. 529 #2). The multiple charisms given to the Church by the Spirit are in operation through these associations. Even though the territorial structures are firmly established in a parish, there may be simultaneously a certain lack of community feeling, and especially a lack of active and committed community effort in organising worship, reflecting on faith and dealing with problems of mission, justice and peace. Therefore, the parish priest is called upon to recognize and promote the role of the laity in the mission of the Church by encouraging their active participation in the above mentioned associations.

There can be in the parish other groups that form part of and in measure leaven the general practising community. These groups can well be of three broad kinds: (1). Neighbourhood groups that meet for prayer, for more intimate celebration of the Eucharist and for neighbourly support; (2) Development groups that are animated by a concern for peace and justice; that are oriented towards works; and that organise to serve the poor within and the poor without; (3) Groups who are willing to explore the intellectual and spiritual implications of the faith (charismatic, liturgical and study groups). In the words of Pope John Paul II, the growth of small christian communities especially within the boundaries of the parishes is both a means of formation for lay people and an impetus for mission in the world. In most cases, these communities serve to enliven parish life by being active instruments for evangelization and mission.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The laity have within the Church and in the world their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God. Both the laity and clerics share a common commitment to the welfare of the Church and to its presence in the world. Ministry is not merely functional but also relational. The laity must be enabled "to do

¹⁵ *Communicationes* 25 (1993) 169.

more or *be* more" in order to build up the Church into a community, marked by love and fellowship, solidarity and brotherhood.¹⁶ We can say that the Church is not fully alive unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. It is for the parish priest to recognise and promote the mission of the laity in a spirit of co-responsibility. All are partners in the global mission of salvation and the parish priest has to animate the community, permitting it to exist, extending its possibilities, and representing the wonderful diversity of its charisms. We have to acknowledge the fact that the new Code has greatly enhanced the role of the laity. Even if there were thousands of priests and religious in all parts of the world, the participation recognised and ordained as proper of the laity through diverse services and ministries would always be necessary for the realisation of the mission of the Church.

¹⁶ C.M. Michael Joyce, "Laity and Clergy Collaborating in Parishes", *The Jurist* 59 (1999) 90.