

# LECTORS: Ministers of the Word

In my column last week, I attempted to show you that ministry in the Church is the co-responsibility of all Christians, ordained and lay alike. The reality which is stressed so strongly by Vatican II is also visibly signified in our liturgical celebrations by the sharing of roles in ministering at the Lord's table.

Some might think that the functions of lector and acolyte are so much window-dressing thought up by "way-out" liturgists. But this is not the case. On August 15, 1972, Pope Paul issued an apostolic letter (a motu proprio) which established the rank of lector and acolyte as ministries to be conferred upon lay Christians. This was an historic statement.

Previously these offices had been given to young men as they were advanced toward priesthood. But now, in the light of the norms laid down by the Council for the general and orderly renewal of the liturgy, these roles are to be carried out, as they were in early Christian times, by lay members of the Church. Pope Paul's letter states:

Even in the most ancient times certain ministries were established by the Church for the purpose of suitably giving worship to God and for the offering service to the People of God according to their needs. By these ministries, duties of a liturgical and charitable nature, deemed suitable to varying circumstances, we entrusted to the performance of the faithful . . . It seems fitting to reexamine this practice and to adapt it to contemporary needs . . .

"The lector," this document continues, "is appointed for the function of reading the Word of God." This in itself is an awesome responsibility. In effect, he has been selected by the Church to proclaim the Scriptures and thereby make God present.

For many years in the Roman Catholic tradition, the presence of God in His Word was not stressed. We did not fully appreciate the dynamic power of this Word to elicit from us a response of growing and maturing in Christian love. Instead, we emphasized the presence of God in the Eucharist.

But just as we genuflect to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, our respect and honor should be no less for the presence of God in His holy Word. So important is the role of the lector, then, that William Carr in his Handbook for Lectors can say:

When he (the lector) reads the scriptures, God is speaking through him. He is effecting a presence of God in the congregation just as truly as the ministerial priest effects the presence of God in the consecration of the Mass.

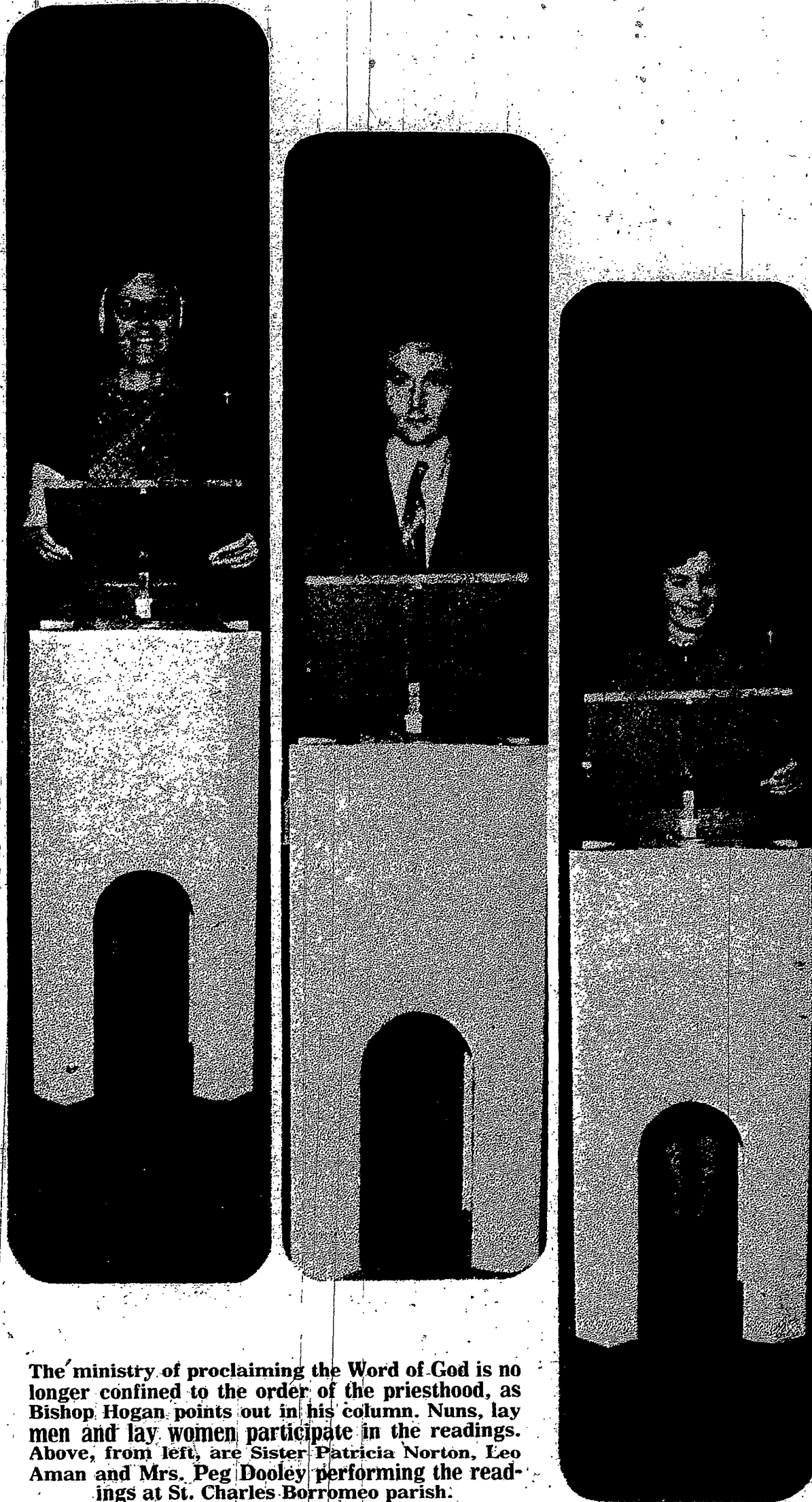
Aware of this great responsibility, the Pope's letter continues: Let the lector be aware of the office he has undertaken and make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of the Scriptures that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord.

In order to carry out this responsibility, it is my hope that we will soon be able, with the help of our diocesan resources, to establish a training program for lectors. This would provide for a deeper knowledge of the Scriptures and practice in methods of proclaiming them. The training course could be concluded with a ceremony installing the lectors as official ministers of the Word.

In the meantime, it is my hope that lectors throughout our diocese will continue to exercise their ministry with attention and love, knowing that through them, the presence of God in His Word nourishes and renews all of us.

## Part 2 of 4 MINISTRY TODAY

Next week: The Acolyte: Minister at the Lord's Table.



The ministry of proclaiming the Word of God is no longer confined to the order of the priesthood, as Bishop Hogan points out in his column. Nuns, lay men and lay women participate in the readings. Above, from left, are Sister Patricia Norton, Leo Aman and Mrs. Peg Dooley performing the readings at St. Charles Borromeo parish.