

Awareness and active participation are essential elements in the celebration of the Church's liturgy. Lay men and women need to be given every opportunity to be active, knowing participants in the celebration. They are not present as spectators at an event being celebrated by someone else. Rather, together with the leadership of the faith community, they offer to the Father the sacred action of Jesus Christ. For this reason, it is most important that the laity actively participate. Lay women and men need to be incorporated into our sacramental rituals in ways expressive of their role in the faith community.

76. Some parishes and worshiping communities in our diocese have done remarkable work in developing this fullness of participation in ways that are most fruitful. They have kept in mind the liturgical and sacramental dignity and needs of all the worshiping community, including the women of the community, and have devised a variety of ways to signify more actively the responsibility of lay men and women in the celebration of the sacraments.

77. Here I wish to say a word about the ordination of women. Much has been written on this topic.

Some argue that to deny women ordination to the priesthood is to make them second-class members of the Church and is a denial of the dignity which is theirs by virtue of their incorporation into the Body of Christ through the sacraments of initiation.

There are some who judge the practice of the Church to be sexist in its origins and designed to keep women in a position of subservience.

78. Let me state as briefly as possible the current position of the Church on the ordination question. It holds that the ordination of women is excluded because Jesus, in choosing the Twelve, did not choose women (Matthew 4:19f.), and the Church in choosing their descendants must remain faithful to that original pattern. This position is held to be strongly supported in the writing of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and is witnessed to in the constant tradition of the eastern and western Church. Moreover, it has been pointed out that the priest, as another Christ (Cyprian, Epistle 63:14), a symbol on earth of the heavenly Lord, must naturally resemble the earthly Word made flesh in order to make that symbol understandable; a woman cannot properly symbolize Christ as is fitting of a Christian priest (Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.* 25, 21, 1a).

79. There are others, whose fidelity to the Church cannot be questioned, who hold that the ministry of the Twelve as witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of the Lord was an unrepeatable ministry (Acts 1:21-22). They argue that the Twelve probably were neither overseers nor elders of a local church in any real sense (Acts 15:22) and, therefore, not truly ancestors of the Christian priest in any historical way. Rather, it was the Christian community, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwelt in their midst, that chose leaders and set them apart for ordination. Celebrating the Eucharist flowed from the task of leading the community.

For those who hold this view, the question is not whether Jesus chose any woman to be a priest (since, strictly speaking, he chose none to be priests), but rather whether the historical fact that women were not chosen to preside at the Eucharist is a matter of divine tradition based on revelation or a human tradition rooted in cultural and sociological factors extraneous to the Gospel. The question for today, they would say, is how is the Church responding to the call of the Spirit in choosing leaders for the communities of today. In ages past a woman could scarcely be chosen as a leader of a community and was excluded by that fact from celebrating the Eucharist. But, today, in some cultures, women have begun to take positions of leadership in the secular realm, and so it is possible for a community to respect, accept, and desire the leadership of competent Christian women.

80. I spend time on this because I judge it to be of great importance that all members of our faith communion appreciate the fact that the decision of the teaching authority of the Church to ordain only men is made, not because the teaching authority is unmindful of the position of those who think the decision could be otherwise, but because it is striving to be faithful to what it understands as a divine tradition that comes to us from the earliest days of the Church.

81. I pray that as this theological discussion continues all of us may be alert to the Spirit who instructs us so patiently. This dialogue will be enriched by our wholehearted and prayerful attempt to live out as fully as possible the rich and diverse ways in which the risen Lord, who is always among us drawing us to a deeper understanding and a fuller commitment to his Father's will, makes himself known through our humble service in the Church and our constant vigilance to be faithful to the revelation of God's will. "For," as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation states, "as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."²⁸

82. Ordination to ministry is but one aspect, one form, of a larger common work to which we are all called. It is difficult for us to comprehend that in this work of sanctifying his people, Jesus Christ depends directly on each of us. We are his eyes, his voice, his healing hands in the earthly pilgrimage of his people.

Although we are aware of our constant failings and sinfulness, Christ insistently calls us to the kind of sanctifying love of one another that will bring fuller holiness to his people. Indeed, he counts such love of our

neighbor as love of him: "as long as we love one another, God will live in us and his love will be complete in us" (I John 4:12).

83. Our life is well served when all of us reflect on this work which is common to all, but which is extended by lay persons to every aspect and corner of human life. As Vatican Council II pointed out, "the faithful must learn the deepest meaning and value of all creation, and how to relate it to the praise of God. They must assist one another to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world is permeated by the Spirit of Christ, and more effectively achieves its purpose in justice, charity and peace." The Council noted clearly that "the laity have the principal role in the universal fulfillment of this purpose."²⁹ Women and men share equally and fully in this solemn responsibility for the renewal of the face of the earth.

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INVOLVEMENT
OF THE LAITY

84. Within our faith community, as in any human community, there is need for guidance and direction, for the ministry of administration in fidelity to Christ's purposes. Those who are ordained to the pastoral ministry of governing the Church, namely the bishops, are by definition the servants of their brothers and sisters in the Church. For this service they need the help of their assistants, priests and deacons, and of all the laity on whose faith, wisdom and expertise they rely. Vatican Council II instructed each bishop that "In exercising this pastoral care, he should preserve for his faithful the share proper to them in Church affairs; he should also recognize their duty and right to collaborate actively in the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ."³⁰

85. The call to this kind of collaboration is an exciting one, and one which will demand much from us. It is exciting because in this post-conciliar age the American Church has responded with vigor and creativity to the call to live out as fully as possible the vocation which we share through the sacraments of initiation. By this response we have tried to embody in our community life the profound insight that we are constituted full persons in the Church through these sacraments.

86. We have come to see and to live out in a new way the faith foundations for active participation and service in the life of the Church. What we have shared not only carries out the directions given us by the Council, but ratifies them and encourages us to move into the future.

For we have come to realize through this experience that the involvement of the laity in the life of the Church is not something commissioned to them by the hierarchy, but is something founded in the baptismal vocation.

87. This does not mean that the past involvement of men and women in the Church lacked these foundations, nor does it mean that in our age we have discovered something completely new. Rather, it means that through this experience we have progressed to a new degree of consciousness and appreciation of what it means to be the Church.

There are many examples of this — the beginnings of Parish Councils and Diocesan Pastoral Councils, as we know them in our day and age, the many new ministries and modes of service carried on by lay persons in liturgical assemblies, and most commonly the renewed understanding of the life of the domestic Church. The expertise brought to the affairs of