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Faith Today

Who celebrates the liturgy? You do.

By Father Lawrence Mick
NC News Service

His hair was gray, his face lined with age. He did not look as old as the 73 years to which he admitted, but he was clearly over the "senior-citizen" boundary.

Appearances were deceiving, however. When he stood to address the assembly of 400 religious educators gathered recently in the small town of Piqua, Ohio, only those who already knew him were not surprised by the youthful spirit and enthusiasm Sulpician Father Eugene Walsh conveyed.

He spoke with the comfortable informality of anybody's grandfather, but he communicated a vision of worship that was fresh and vigorous and hopeful.

Father Walsh, of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., has traveled extensively, speaking about worship to gatherings across the United States as well as Great Britain, Australia, and other nations. Wherever he goes, one of his main

themes has been the ministry of the celebrating assembly — the people who worship together.

Father Walsh insists that all who form the assembly, clergy and laity alike, "make the Mass." They celebrate together, and each has a responsibility to help make worship a life-giving experience for others. Father Walsh goes so far as to suggest that the reason for coming to church on Sunday is "to give life to somebody else."

For centuries the Mass was seen as the action of the priest which was piously observed by the lay people who often said other prayers to occupy their time and express their own spirituality.

Today the Catholic Church is at-

Often overlooked, writes Father Lawrence Mick, is the pivotal ministry of the assembly in liturgical celebrations. Since all the people offer the Mass, he says, every person is required to contribute to the celebration.

contribute to creating an atmosphere of hospitality in the church — that we be attentive to each other. A climate of warmth can help us all be open to others. That openness in turn makes it more likely that we are open to experience God's presence and God's power in our worship.

•It requires that every member of the community put personal energy into the common

actions of the assembly — joining in the prayers and responses, contributing to the singing, listening attentively to God's word, entering into the spirit of the liturgy.

If any one of us fails to offer our unique contribution to this common worship, the whole assembly suffers and our worship is less than it should be. We all recognize that a priest or a lector who does a half-hearted job hurts us all. It is just as true that anything less than full participation by any one of us diminishes us all.

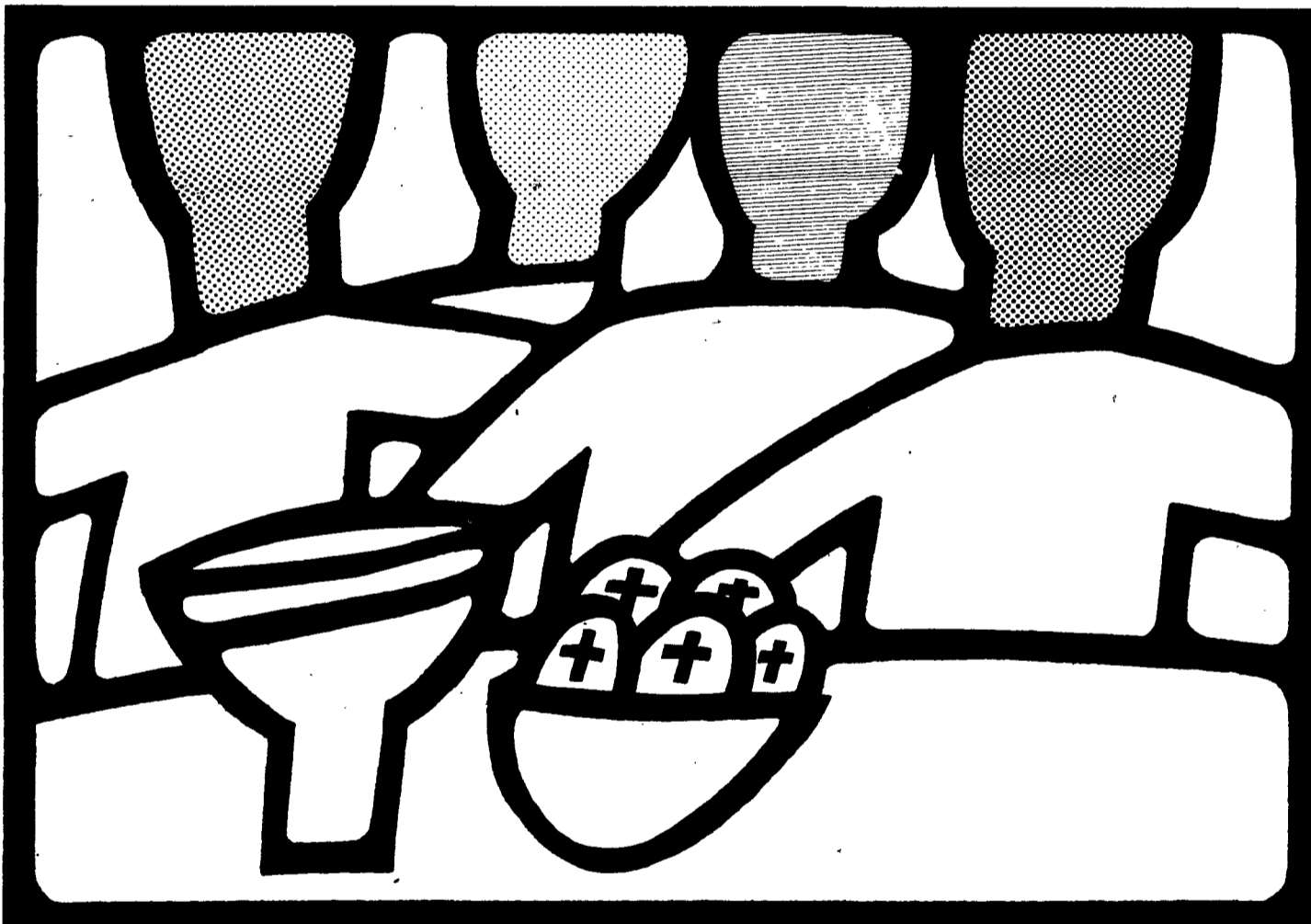
Finally, good worship requires that worship extend into all of life. Everyone has the responsibility to

carry the spirit of worship into our daily lives and thus work to further the kingdom of God in our own time.

We will have more to take with us if we have fully entered into the liturgy. And each member of the assembly will be enriched to the extent that all have given of themselves in our common worship.

All receive if all give and all share. Thus we become, as the fourth eucharistic prayer puts it, "one body in Christ, a living sacrifice of praise."

(Father Mick is a pastor and author in St. Mary's, Ohio.)



tempting to regain a sense of its worship as the work of all the people — which is what the word "liturgy" meant in its origins.

The liturgy does not belong to the priest alone. It is worship which all the members of the church celebrate together.

Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, various ministries have been reintroduced in the Mass. Parishes now have readers, communion distributors, song leaders, servers, ushers, greeters, choirs and folk groups. All work together to fulfill the various roles that the liturgy requires.

The growth of these ministries is a clear symbol that the com-

munity is more involved in the liturgy. Yet the most basic of all the ministries in the Eucharist is the one most often overlooked — that of the assembly itself.

The whole assembly offers the eucharistic sacrifice. The whole assembly celebrates the meal.

In his writings Father Walsh has reminded us that this basic principle makes demands on each of us. Every person who joins the worshipping assembly has a responsibility for creating good worship, a responsibility no one else can fill.

That responsibility has several dimensions.

•It requires that each person