

Ministry Through the Ages

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Jesus never called Himself or His disciples priests. Neither the Gospels nor St. Paul refer to a baptised person as a lay person. On the contrary St. Paul uses the word *hagioi* which means holy or sacred when he refers to the baptised. *Hagioi* described the Christians as the new people of God taking the place of the Old Testament people of God. So the example of all ministry is Jesus Christ Himself who was the TRUE SERVANT OF GOD. He washed His disciples' feet. He gave His life for us and like all servants of God He was chosen and called.

The first of these ministries described especially in Matthew and Luke as the Ministry of the Twelve. They were present at the Last Supper and after Jesus had consecrated the bread and wine they were told to "Do this in memory of me". Twelve was a sacred number for the new people of God which is why Mathias had to be selected to replace Judas.

The word Apostle was frequently used in the early church to describe a stable ministry. It has the same meaning as the Hebrew word *SCHIALIC* which means an authorised representative who has the same authority and standing as the person who sends him. The first apostles were the 12 but the term was not restricted to them. Some of Paul's co-workers were named apostles e.g. Barnabas. Paul uses "apostle" in a wide sense when he talks of Andronicus and Junias "those outstanding apostles" Romans 16:7 who were his fellow prisoners. Some reputable theologians think that Junias was a female name which would mean that women ranked among the apostles.

PROPHETS played an important role in the early Church. In Ephesians 2:20 we see that the church is built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.". Prophets were appointed and empowered by God. They were not chosen or commissioned by the Community but called by the Spirit. PROPHETESSES played the same role in the church ministries. Paul even allows a woman to prophesy in the church - but she must keep her head covered 1 Cor 11.5. Peter announces that the Spirit will be poured on all flesh "and daughters will prophesy" Acts 2:17

Teachers have an important place both in the Acts and in the Pauline letters. It is clear that the teaching ministry was a separate and distinct ministry. Later the PRESBYTERS became the official teachers but before that teachers were considered charismatic ministers needed to build up the Church.

As Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist we are commissioned to serve a specific parish. If a person moves from one parish to another it does not automatically follow that he or she becomes a minister in the new parish. The decision is reserved for the parish priest who will know the needs of his parish. But obviously you would I hope offer your services to the parish priest if you wished to continue your ministry.

Just to reflect on our specific ministry of the Eucharist: the life of the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should be one of being and giving the Body of Christ. The rite of commissioning contains certain words that are worth often recalling' "**in this ministry you must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; you must strive to grow in holiness through the Sacrament of unity and love. Remember that, although many we are one body because we share the one bread and the one cup.**"

It is well to remember, "no Christian community can be built up unless it has as its basis and pivot the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is from this therefore that any attempt to form a community must begin." Our call is special since we are given the opportunity to serve our people in this particular people. We are SERVANTS as the early ministers of the Church were called servants.

I feel it would be appropriate to remind you of the words of the prophet Micah

This is what Yahweh asks of you. That you act justly. That you love tenderly. That you walk humbly with your God.

BUT ALSO REMEMBER PARISH PRIEST RULES OK.

the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.[259] This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.

[159.] It is never allowed for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone else to administer the Eucharist, as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick person who is the communicant.

[160.] Let the diocesan Bishop give renewed consideration to the practice in recent years regarding this matter, and if circumstances call for it, let him correct it or define it more precisely. Where such extraordinary ministers are appointed in a widespread manner out of true necessity, the diocesan Bishop should issue special norms by which he determines the manner in which this function is to be carried out in accordance with the law, bearing in mind the tradition of the Church.

EUCHARISTIC MINISTRY - FOCUS AND PRACTICE

The person appointed to be an Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist must be instructed. They should live a Christian life and cultivate a devotion to the Holy Eucharist and must reverence the Holy Sacrament. No-one should be chosen whose selection may cause scandal.

At the parish Masses the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should take it in turn to distribute Holy Communion, so as to avoid any impression that the parish has only one Eucharistic Minister.

On Sundays, or Holy days of Obligation when the Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist is to assist in distribution he or she should not fulfil any other liturgical function at that Mass, such as reader, server, cantor - because these are ministries in their own right. Clearly the position during the week maybe different but please bear this position in mind.

Nor should a Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist distribute communion if there are sufficient priests present. Of course if a priest is suffering from ill health or advanced age then it is permissible for the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist to distribute communion for him.

In the early church the ministries of apostle - prophet - teacher gave way to bishop - presbyter - deacon. The bishop is primarily a functional overseer. By the end of the New Testament period especially in the pastoral letters presbyters and bishops had acquired some of their stability of office. These were ordained ministries. The primary function of the bishop was to proclaim the word of God and to help sanctify and govern the people. The priests or presbyters helped the bishop in this respect and so only priests or bishops gave sermons as they were speaking for the Church.

The term **priest** came from the Old Testament, and these were the ones who were allowed into the inner sanctuary. Only one priest would go into the sanctuary to stand before God to offer sacrifice and speak to God for the people.

The role of **deacon** came about when the Hellenist community expressed its dissatisfaction with the Hebrews. What happened was that they expressed their need by murmuring and the 12 acknowledged the need for a new ministry. They relied on an indigenous ministry - the 7 new ministers or deacons who were chosen had Greek names and came from the Greek community (who were Greek-speaking Jewish converts). The 12 trusted the community to select their own ministers and then confirmed their choice - by the laying on of hands and sending the 7 on their mission. The 12 announced some qualifications for ministry such as a good reputation and evidence of the spirit and of wisdom in the candidate. Even though the ministry was a material one of waiting on table and changing money it also had a material aspect. Stephen one of the 7 was stoned to death for preaching. Philip was also soon preaching to the multitudes, exorcising unclean spirits and healing the paralysed. So this was a flexible ministry.

Deaconesses are also mentioned in the New Testament. In Romans 16:1 Paul commends "our sister Phoebe a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae". It is possible that the women mentioned in the 1st letter of St Paul to Timothy 3:11 were deaconesses. They must be "respectable, not gossips, but sober and quite reliable", in other words they required the same qualifications as the deacons.

So what does the New Testament's experience of ministry say to the ministry of our time? It certainly gives us the seeds to reflect on for the growth of our ministries to day.

The external forms of ministry cannot be defined in absolute, unchanging

categories. They are always dependent upon the changing needs and the new calls of the Spirit who calls when and how the Spirit wishes. Christian ministry must always move the people in one direction namely that of God's reign. Women may not be excluded from ministry. In the early church the functional terms of prophet and teacher and deacon as well as apostle included women.

By reflecting on ministry in the New Testament we are given some preliminary insights into the principles that have some value for Christian ministry for all time. Ministry is always about service that it is functional i.e. concerned with doing like teaching or preaching or leading.

Throughout the ages the Church has had to respond to new needs, new cultures and new calls of the Spirit. We have to admit that sometimes there have been failures but through the centuries the church has tried to be true to Christ's call as it has responded to the needs of God's people scattered around the world.

EUCCHARISTIC MINISTRY The Historical aspect

One of the ways that ministry developed was in taking the Eucharist to the people. In the earliest years of Christianity deacons carried Holy Communion from Mass to those who were absent. Hippolytus in his writing "Apostolic tradition" written in about 215 AD stated that every one of the faithful should take care of the Eucharist in their homes and protect it from being profaned in their homes by unbelievers or animals. In his day the celebration of the Eucharist only took place on Sundays and so the faithful would receive Communion during the week, whether sick or not, in their own homes.

“All shall be careful so that no unbeliever tastes of the eucharist, nor a mouse or other animal, nor that any of it falls and is lost. For it is the Body of Christ, to be eaten by those who believe, and not to be scorned.”

Tertullian (160-225A.D.) referred to the difficulties that a Christian would encounter in marrying a pagan. They were advised to receive in secret to safeguard the Eucharist.

Cyprian (B208a.d.) accepted the custom of the faithful taking the Eucharist home and keeping it there in a receptacle. He was concerned about the worthy reception of the sacrament in the house but also saw the good effects in the sacrament helping to protect the faithful from danger and giving them courage in the face of martyrdom.

Hence the name “minister of the Eucharist” belongs properly to the Priest alone. Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon,^[255] to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ's faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete.

[155.] In addition to the ordinary ministers there is the formally instituted acolyte, who by virtue of his institution is an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion even outside the celebration of Mass. If, moreover, reasons of real necessity prompt it, another lay member of Christ's faithful may also be delegated by the diocesan Bishop, in accordance with the norm of law,^[256] for one occasion or for a specified time, and an appropriate formula of blessing may be used for the occasion. This act of appointment, however, does not necessarily take a liturgical form, nor, if it does take a liturgical form, should it resemble sacred Ordination in any way. Finally, in special cases of an unforeseen nature, permission can be given for a single occasion by the Priest who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist.^[257]

[156.] This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not “special minister of Holy Communion” nor “extraordinary minister of the Eucharist” nor “special minister of the Eucharist”, by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.

[157.] If there is usually present a sufficient number of sacred ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may not be appointed. Indeed, in such circumstances, those who may have already been appointed to this ministry should not exercise it. The practice of those Priests is reprobated who, even though present at the celebration, abstain from distributing Communion and hand this function over to laypersons.^[258]

[158.] Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when

The document is a response to perceived anomalies, primarily in the Western World.

EXTRAORDINARY FUNCTIONS OF LAY FAITHFUL

[146.] There can be no substitute whatsoever for the ministerial Priesthood. For if a Priest is lacking in the community, then the community lacks the exercise and sacramental function of Christ the Head and Shepherd, which belongs to the essence of its very life.[247] For “the only minister who can confect the sacrament of the Eucharist *in persona Christi* is a validly ordained Priest”. [248]

[147.] When the Church’s needs require it, however, if sacred ministers are lacking, lay members of Christ’s faithful may supply for certain liturgical offices according to the norm of law.[249] Such faithful are called and appointed to carry out certain functions, whether of greater or lesser weight, sustained by the Lord’s grace.

[151.] Only out of true necessity is there to be recourse to the assistance of extraordinary ministers in the celebration of the Liturgy. Such recourse is not intended for the sake of a fuller participation of the laity but rather, by its very nature, is supplementary and provisional.[252]

[152.] These purely supplementary functions must not be an occasion for disfiguring the very ministry of Priests, in such a way that the latter neglect the celebration of Holy Mass for the people for whom they are responsible, or their personal care of the sick, or the baptism of children, or assistance at weddings or the celebration of Christian funerals, matters which pertain in the first place to Priests assisted by Deacons. It must therefore never be the case that in parishes Priests alternate indiscriminately in shifts of pastoral service with Deacons or laypersons, thus confusing what is specific to each.

[153.] Furthermore, it is never licit for laypersons to assume the role or the vesture of a Priest or a Deacon or other clothing similar to such vesture.

1. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

[154.] As has already been recalled, “the only minister who can confect the Sacrament of the Eucharist *in persona Christi* is a validly ordained Priest”. [254]

There was always concern about the lack of respect for the Eucharist. In the 3rd century wrote in a document known as "De Spectaculis" it was reported that a certain believer came from a Eucharistic service and attended a pagan spectacle with the Eucharist still in his pocket.

The custom of reserving and receiving the Eucharist at home continued up until the end of the 8th century, although even after that there are reports of the custom continuing right up to the early 13th century.

The fact that reservation of the Eucharist in church was the exception rather than the rule until the end of the 8th century meant that the common practice was for lay people to administer Holy Communion to the sick, and in homes where the Eucharist was reserved for the sick to give themselves Holy Communion.

But there was a decree in the Diocese of York in the 13th century that "Presbyters should diligently visit the sick on all Sundays and festivals. Nor should they ...send deacons with the Eucharist to the sick whilst the Presbyters devote themselves to drinking and other delights of the flesh. The presbyters should personally go to the sick and solicitously hear their confessions".

SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL TO NOW

At the 2nd Vatican Council 1962 -1965 Pope John XXIII opened the windows both for the church and for its ministry. It certainly brought an end to the long narrowing process of the ministries of the church. It did so by recalling the rich biblical teaching of diakonia. Returning to the New Testament teaching on ministry opened the door to new approaches to ministry.

The institution of the permanent diaconate moved the ordained ministry back into the secular world. These married deacons brought into the ministry a tremendous variety of life experiences that enriched the ministry and contributed to the acceptance of more diversity even in the ordained ministries. With the conclusion of Vatican II the laity took on a more expanded role.

Going from the general to the specific we as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are called to a specific ministry which is a service rendered to others in Christ. We are called in the name of the church and for the sake of helping the church to fulfil its mission. This call is rooted in some form or act of designation by the church and is therefore sometimes called designated ministry.

IMMENSAE CARITATIS 25th January 1973

By 1973 the church recognised that modern conditions demanded easier access to Holy Communion. It was feared that reception of the Eucharist might become difficult or even impossible (especially for the sick) because of insufficient ministers. So Rome issued

IMMENSAE CARITAS which covered 4 issues.

- Special Ministers of the Eucharist
- Holy Communion more than once a day
- The Eucharistic fast
- Holy Communion in the hand.

Christ Our Lord has left to the church. His spouse, a testament of His immense love. The wonderful gift of the Eucharist is the greatest gift of all and demands that this important mystery should be increasingly better known and its saving power more fully shared.

Present day conditions however demand that while the greatest reverence towards this Sacrament is constantly maintained easier access to Holy Communion should be made possible. So Immensae Caritatis re-introduced in the 20th century an ancient custom of the church.

A number of documents have led to the extension of the role of the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. From ministering the Host and the Chalice during Mass to take communion to the sick and to Celebration of the Word and Communion on weekdays when there is no priest available. This has included taking the liturgy of word and communion on a Sunday in an emergency. The minister may also provide for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for perpetual adoration and Holy Hour and lead prayer during times of exposition, in our Diocese Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist have also been asked by their priests to assist in non-sacramental situations such as the distribution of ashes, veneration of the cross, and leading the Stations of the Cross.

A bishop is the normal celebrant when Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are commissioned. Ministry by its nature is public and not private so it is fitting to have

a public ceremony to witness to its public nature. This gift of the Spirit on the individual and on the community deserves a public celebration. When we are commissioned we are given the support of our bishop, our priests and our community. We are required to be accountable for our ministry. There is always the danger that some individual may see the ministry as an "ego" trip or as a means of finding status. It is neither. We have come a full circle and are back to the word "service". We are called to be at the service of our community.

COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

We have now come to a stage in our history when there is less of a tendency to define either clergy or laity in separate categories. To speak about lay ministry or clergy ministry separately makes little sense. We are together the people of God, the Body of Christ and together we are called to use our gifts to build up that body. We are striving now to find new ways of working together- priests and people in unity; this is talked about as collaborative ministry.

In recent years communion has been proposed as an ideal model for our Church. Admission to the Lord's Table includes a measure and a criterion of sharing in the social, ministerial and disciplinary life of the local church. We are now trying to find the balance between the ministries of the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the baptised.

We have a long way to go in building a truly collaborative ministry. This ministry of course includes members of the local community, priests, religious and laity, working in partnership and recruiting and supporting a diversity of talents and ministries. The ultimate goal of collaboration is always to involve in ministry 100 % of the baptised gifted people of God.

WHAT NOW?

The Vatican released a document called *An Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* ordered to be promulgated by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. You can find this document on the web site of the Vatican.