



What constitutes a “ministry” within the Church?

Baptized Christians, as the People of God within the new covenant of Jesus Christ, actively participate in their call from God through the dynamic of an organic communion in accord with their diverse, God-given gifts, talents and charisms.

The roles and responsibilities of the ministerial office of Pastor are to: teach, sanctify and govern. Authority to assist in these areas may be delegated by the Pastor to the non-ordained at times to fulfill its mission; however, the responsibility is retained by the incumbent office holder.

With this in mind, not every activity or organized singular or recurring event within the day-to-day life of a typical Catholic Church (i.e., parish) is accurately referred to as a “*ministry*”.

Referring to the *Ecclesiae de mysterio* (The Mystery of the Church, dated August 15, 1997): “*The source of the call addressed to all members of the Mystical Body to participate actively in the mission and edification of the People of God, is to be found in the mystery of the Church.*”

From the early years of the church – but especially noteworthy today in the 21st Century – activities have been borne within the life of the lay Church faith community which have been called a “ministry”. Historically, its’ very meaning (“ministry”) is however, limited to and derived from, in most cases the Church’s liturgy.

During the celebration of the Liturgy of the Mass, for example, the ordained priest is the principal celebrant—responsible for leading the faithful in the prescribed liturgical rite—which is proper to his ordained, ministerial role.

Among the various aspects of the participation of the non-ordained faithful in the Church's mission considered by the Second Vatican Council documents, that of their direct collaboration with the ministry of the Church's pastors is considered. Indeed, “*when necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry, but do not require the character of Orders*”. ... “*This collaboration was regulated by successive post-conciliar legislation and particularly by the Codex Iuris Canonici [Code of Canon Law].*”

The Code, having referred to the rights and duties of all the faithful, in the subsequent title devoted to the rights and duties of the lay faithful, treats not only of those which are theirs in virtue of their secular condition, but also of those tasks and functions which are not exclusively

theirs. Some of these latter refer to any member of the faithful, whether ordained or not while others are considered along the lines of collaboration with the sacred ministry of cleric. With regard to these last mentioned areas or functions, the non-ordained faithful do not enjoy a right to such tasks and functions. Rather, they are "capable of being admitted by the sacred Pastors ... to those functions which, in accordance with the provisions of law, they can discharge" or where "[ordained] ministers are not available ... they can supply certain of their functions ... in accordance with the provisions of law" (cf. Canon 516, 517, et al).

Where the existence of abuses or improper practices has been found, Pastors will promptly employ those means judged necessary to prevent their dissemination and to ensure that the correct understanding of the Church's nature is not impaired. In particular, they will apply the [necessary catechetical instruction] to promote knowledge of and ... respect for that distinction and complementarity of [ministerial] functions which are vital for ecclesial communion.

Need for Use of Appropriate Terminology

In his address to participants at the Symposium on "*Collaboration of the Lay Faithful with the Priestly Ministry*" (August 15, 1997), St. Pope John Paul II emphasized the need to clarify and distinguish the various meanings which have accrued to the term "*ministry*" in theological and canonical language.

1. "For some time now, it has been customary to use the word *ministries* not only for the *officia* (offices) and non-ordained *munera* (functions) exercised by Pastors in virtue of the Sacrament of [Holy] Orders, but also for those exercised by the lay faithful in virtue of their baptismal priesthood. The terminological question becomes even more complex and delicate when all the faithful are recognized as having the possibility of supplying -- by official deputation given by the Pastors -- certain functions more proper to clerics, which, nevertheless, do not require the character of Orders. It must be admitted that the language becomes ... confused, and hence not helpful for expressing the doctrine of the faith whenever the difference 'of essence and not merely of degree' between the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood is in any way obscured".
2. "In this original sense the term *ministry* (*servitium*) expresses only the work by which the Church's members continue the mission and ministry of Christ within her and the whole world. However, when the term is distinguished from and compared with the various *munera* and *officia*, then it should be clearly noted that only in virtue of sacred ordination does the work obtain that full, univocal meaning that tradition has attributed to it."
3. The non-ordained faithful may be generically designated "extraordinary ministers" when deputed by competent authority to discharge, solely by way of supply, those offices mentioned in Canon 230 and in Canons 943 and 1112 [such as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC)]. Naturally, the concrete term may be applied to those to whom functions are canonically entrusted (e.g. catechists, acolytes, lectors etc.). Temporary deputation for liturgical purposes -- mentioned in Canon 230 -- does not confer any special or permanent title on the non-ordained faithful [however].

(SR: Ecclesia de mysterio

(http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html)

(June 12, 2017)