

Collaborating with the Church Hierarchy

Occasionally, laypersons are called to collaborate in ministries and functions usually reserved to the clergy.

This is especially true in chaplaincy work, in serving as eucharistic ministers, and leading liturgies of the Word with communion services when priests or deacons are unavailable.

In addition, they might also be called to serve the Church by collaborating with the hierarchy in roles such as *pastoral assistant*, usually reserved to the ordained clergy.

Your Experience:

1. Can you name a layperson who acts in a role which would have been filled by a priest twenty years ago?
2. How does this person's ministry help their faith community?

What Vatican II says:

... the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord. Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), No. 33

Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. For even if some of them have to fulfill their religious duties on their own, when there are no sacred ministers or in times of persecution; and even if many of them devote all their energies to apostolic work; still it remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, (Lumen Gentium), No. 35.

Some Additional Questions

1. Name an area where your pastor or diocese may require the laity to collaborate in functions usually reserved to clergy, due to a shortage of priests.
2. How can laypersons best support decreased numbers of clergy carrying increased pastoral responsibilities?

Praying Your Experience

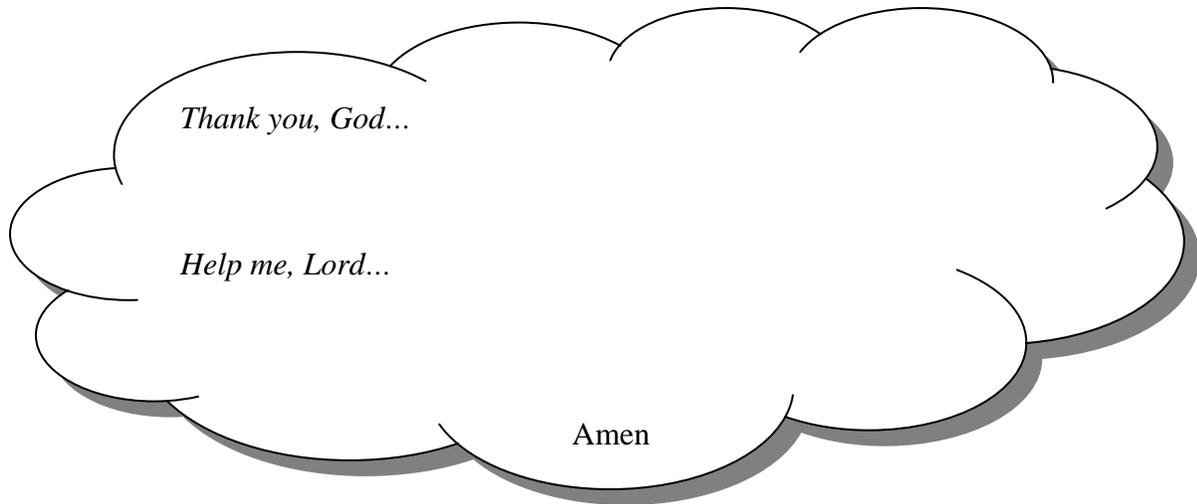
You have been reflecting on the laity's collaboration
in the ministries of the clergy.

Please use the space below to bring to God what is in your heart.

your hopes...

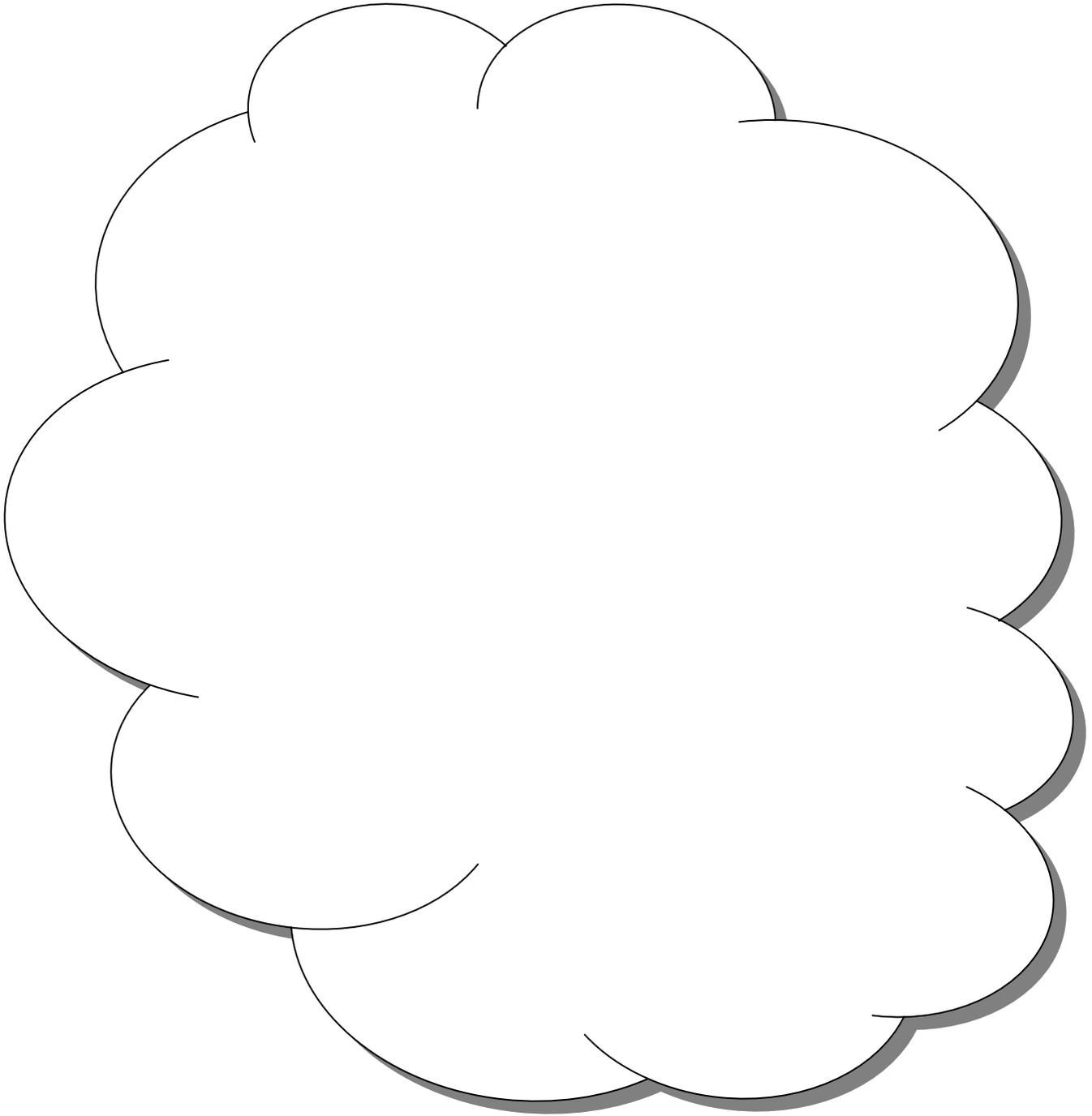
your needs...

dreams, fears, pain, thanksgiving...



Integrating Activity

Design an image or poem/write down a word or phrase
that reflects your feelings and aspirations
as you ponder the reality of lay persons
collaborating with pastors in roles usually reserved to clergy.



Further Reading

There is a very urgent need for this individual [lay] apostolate in those regions where the freedom of the Church is seriously infringed. In these trying circumstances, the laity do what they can to take the place of priests, risking their freedom and sometimes their life to teach Christian doctrine to those around them, training them in a religious way of life and a Catholic way of thinking, leading them to receive the sacraments frequently and developing in them piety, especially Eucharistic devotion. While the sacred synod heartily thanks God for continuing also in our times to raise up lay persons of heroic fortitude in the midst of persecutions, it embraces them with fatherly affection and gratitude. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem)*, No. 17.

The Synod Fathers for their part have given much attention to the present state of many parishes and have called for a *greater effort in their renewal*: “Many parishes, whether established in regions affected by urban progress or in missionary territory, cannot do their work effectively because they lack material resources or ordained men or are too big geographically or because of the particular circumstances of some Christians (e.g. exiles and migrants). So that all parishes of this kind may be truly communities of Christians, local ecclesial authorities ought to foster the following: *a*) adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, especially in promoting participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities; *b*) small, basic or so called “living” communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization, in communion with their pastors.” For the renewal of parishes and for a better assurance of their effectiveness in work, various forms of cooperation even on the institutional level ought to be fostered among diverse parishes in the same area. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *On the Mission and Vocation of the Lay Faithful (Christifideles Laici)*, No. 26.

It must be noted with great satisfaction that in many Particular Churches the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the pastoral ministry of the clergy has developed in a very positive fashion. It has borne an abundance of good fruits while, at the same time being mindful of the boundaries established by the nature of the sacraments and of the diversity of charisms and ecclesiastical functions. It has also brought about bounteous and tangible results in situations of a shortage or scarcity of sacred ministers. In situations of emergency and chronic necessity in certain communities, some of the faithful, despite lacking the character of the sacrament of Orders, have acted appropriately and within their proper limits, in dealing with these realities. The necessary aspect of hierarchical relationship has been maintained while constantly seeking to remedy the situation of emergency. Such faithful are called and deputed to assume specific duties which are as important as they are sensitive. Sustained by the grace of the Lord and by their sacred ministers journeying alongside them, they are well received by the communities which they serve. Sacred Pastors are extremely grateful for the generosity with which numerous religious and lay faithful present themselves for this specific service, carried out with a loyal "sensus Ecclesiae" and an edifying dedication. Particular thanks and encouragement should be extended to those who carry out these tasks in situations of persecution of the Christian community. This is also true for mission territories, whether these be geographical or cultural, and for places where the Church is newly planted or where the presence of the priest is only sporadic. Holy See, *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest (Ecclesiae de Misterio)*, 1997.