

Lay Ministry

**Christians who minister to the needs of others
in a spirit of faith and charity
make the Church and its evangelizing mission present to the world.
In addition, certain persons are recognized as *lay ecclesial ministers*.
They are assigned by the Bishop and Pastor
to serve the faith community's needs
(e.g. music ministry, youth ministry, lectors and acolytes, ministry to the bereaved).
Lay ministers retain their secular character as laypersons.
Their collaboration in parish life
complements the ministry of the ordained
and *strengthens* the bonds of communion
in the local Church
to *build up* the body of Christ.**

Your Experience:

Name a time when you helped someone in your faith community. Have you ever considered you were helping build up the body of Christ?

What Vatican II Says:

Thus every lay[person], in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him [sic.], is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal." (Eph 4:7)

... 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.

Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all [peoples] of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, (Lumen Gentium), No. 33.*

What the Catechism Says

"The Laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them." (CCC 910, quoting Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 73)

In the Church, "lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this power [of governance] in accord with the norm of law." And so the Church provides for their presence at particular councils, diocesan synods, pastoral councils; the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, collaboration in finance committees, and participation in ecclesiastical tribunals, etc. (CCC 911)

Your Experience:

Name a gift (e.g. hospitality, music, working with youth, reading, caring for the sick, prayer, listening, counsel, etc.) that you would contribute to the life of your parish community, if asked.

Praying Your Experience

You have been reflecting on your service to others,
whether visible and recognized or hidden,
as a form of *ministry*.

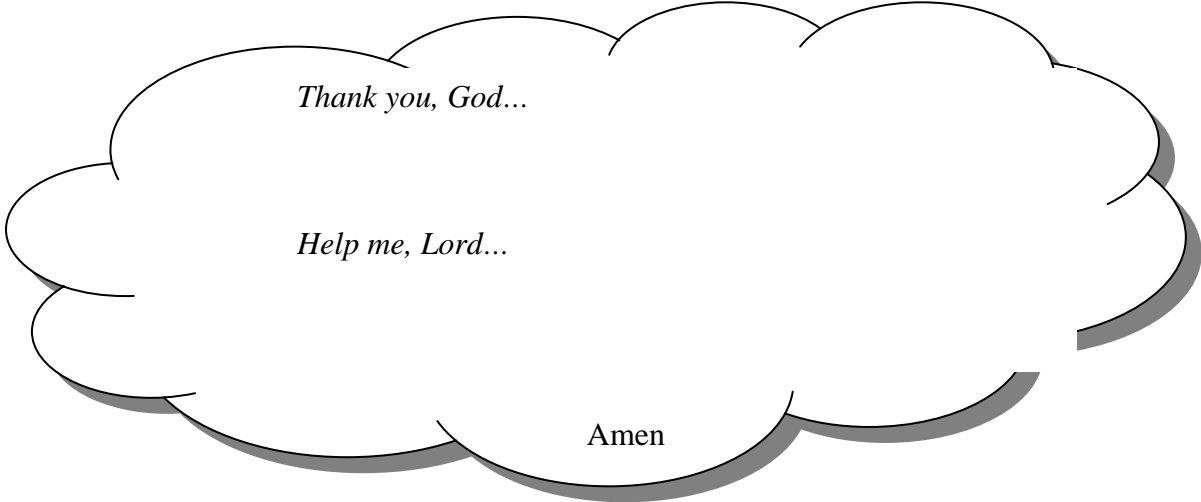
Please use the space below to bring to God what is in your heart.

Some areas to consider:

your hopes...

your needs...

dreams, fears, pain, thanksgiving...



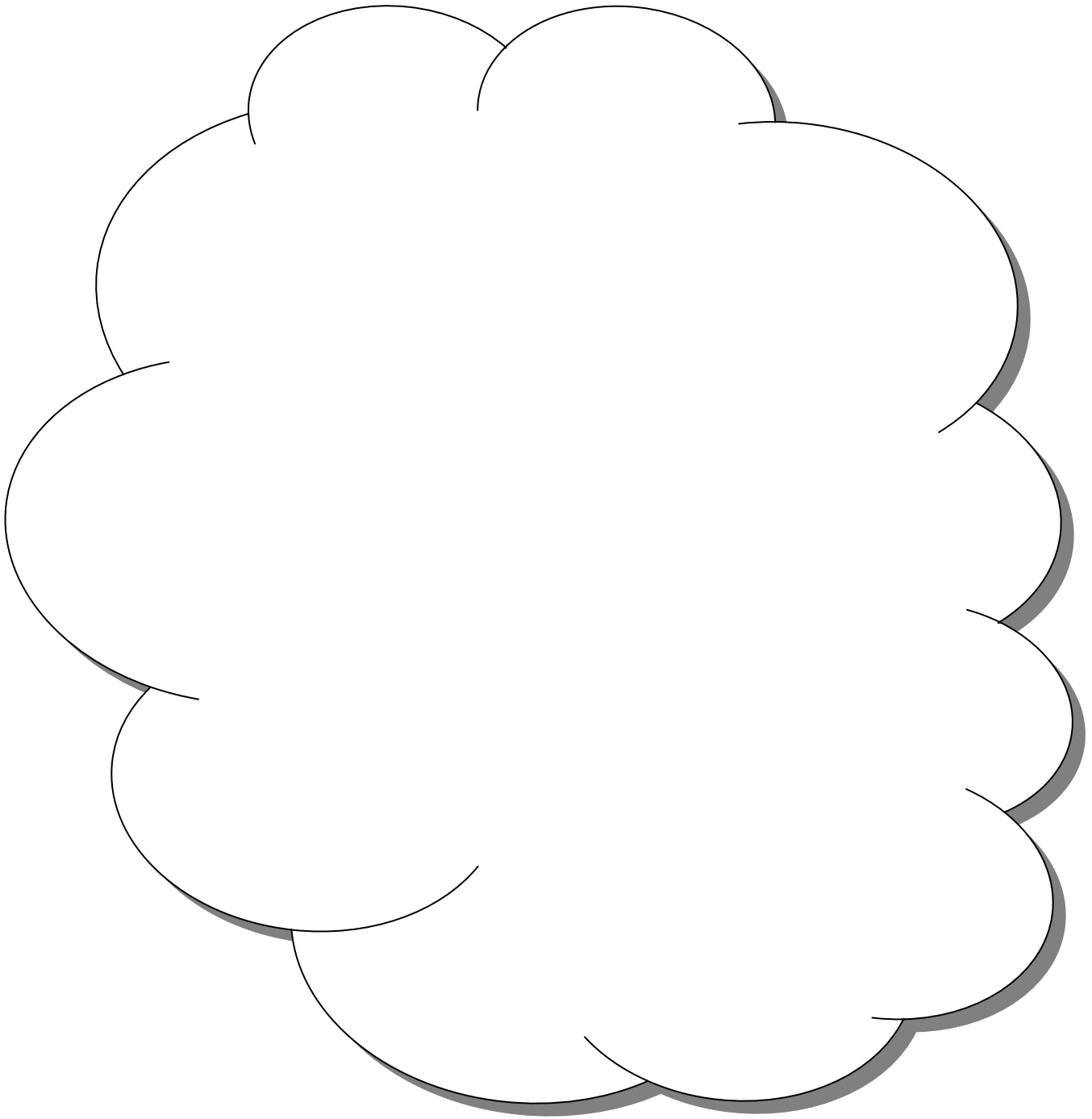
Thank you, God...

Help me, Lord...

Amen

Integrating Activity

Design an image or poem/write down a word or phrase
that reflects your feelings and aspirations
as you ponder your life in Christ as a call to minister to others in his name.



Further Reading:

For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), "allotting them to everyone according as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11) in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10), to build up the whole body in charity (cf. Eph. 4:16). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who "breathes where He wills" (John 3:8). This should be done by the laity in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors who must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold for what is good (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12,19,21).
Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem)*, No. 3.

We see a true source of hope in the willingness of a considerable number of lay people to play a more active and diversified role in ecclesial life, and to take the necessary steps to train seriously for this. **Pope John Paul II, *Ad Limina Apostolorum* (Jan 25, 1997), No. 2.**

The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their *foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation*, indeed, for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *On the Mission and Vocation of the Lay Faithful (Christifideles Laici)*, No. 23.

There is a second area in which many lay faithful are called to work, and this can be called "intra-ecclesial". A good number of lay people in America legitimately aspire to contribute their talents and charisms "to the building of the ecclesial community as delegates of the word, catechists, visitors to the sick and the imprisoned, group leaders, etc." (162) The Synod Fathers expressed the hope that the Church would recognize some of these works as lay ministries, with a basis in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, without compromising the specific ministries proper to the Sacrament of Orders.

...There is a need to promote positive cooperation by properly trained lay men and women in different activities within the Church, while avoiding any confusion with the ordained ministries.

...In any event, while the intra-ecclesial apostolate of lay people needs to be promoted, care must be taken to ensure that it goes hand in hand with the activity proper to the laity, in which their place cannot be taken by priests: the area of temporal realities.

Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, 44.

The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12). Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.

Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 46.

At the same time, it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognized as "co-responsible", for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity. This common awareness of being Church of all the baptized in no way diminishes the responsibility of parish priests. It is precisely your task, dear parish priests, to nurture the spiritual and apostolic growth of those who are already committed to working hard in the parishes. They form the core of the community that will act as a leaven for the others.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme: "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility."* Tuesday May 26, 2009.