

## Reflections

by the  
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### LAY MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH TODAY - I

A phenomenon of the Church today is the growth and development of lay ministry which is theologically based on the shared baptism we have as Christians which makes us members of the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. Lay ministry is rooted in Scripture and Tradition, but our own age has witnessed the fuller consciousness of the involvement and participation of the laity in the life of the Church. Lay ministry exists as part of the Church's life whether there exists a sufficient number of priests and religious or not.

Lay ministry helps the Church fulfill its responsibilities to the community in countless ways from education to liturgy. As this involvement hopefully grows, to be effective, as well as spiritually rewarding for the individuals themselves and for the Church.

First, lay ministry calls for a lifestyle of witness to the values of the Gospel and the Christian Catholic tradition we share. It must never be seen in terms of tasks or functions. Lay ministry is a vocational commitment to a service of others reflected in a spiritual grounding evident in the life of the lay minister.

Secondly, lay ministry must be open to continued and ongoing growth of an understanding and appreciation for the theological and spiritual bases which enables and empowers it. The Church through the parish and the Diocese must look for ways in which that growth becomes a reality. Without such development, lay ministers could well become ecclesiastical functionaries.

Thirdly, lay ministry must be ecclesial which responds to the expectations of a universal Church while being open to adapt these expectations to the needs of the local situation. Ministry independent of a tradition and lived expression of Church in the 1980's is a ministry exercised in a vacuum. The guidelines and directions of the Church gives ministry its identity, without which it becomes scattered and isolated.

Fourthly, lay ministry must be a gift which complements and relates to the other ministries of a Christian community. Though lay ministers share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, they must relate to the ordained ministry, which differs essentially and not only in degree from the priesthood of the faithful. Only in union with other ministries of the Church, and especially the ordained ministries of deacon, priest and Bishop, will lay ministry contribute to the development of that elusive dream called "Christian community" at a parish and diocesan level.

Finally, lay ministry must have a sense of mission which it receives from the Bishop in a Diocese who is responsible for the mission of the Church in a given area, a responsibility shared with the People of God within that local Church community. All ministries - ordained and non-ordained - achieve a relationship with a universal Church and a Catholic faith tradition by union with the Bishop, who is asked to support, encourage, initiate, sustain, and foster all ministries within the community. Next week, I would like to share with you the practical implications of these thoughts on lay ministry in Eastern Montana from my perspective.

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After the Retreat in Spokane, it was a chilling experience to return to the subzero weather of Montana. However, it was good to get home and then to celebrate Mass at Fort Shaw and to continue on to Butte for a Montana Catholic Conference Meeting. After a few days in Billings and attendance at a CARE AND SHARE COMMITTEE MEETING and the Ashes to Easter program, it was a return trip to Great Falls for a Liturgical Commission Meeting. This past weekend was good with travels to Sand Coulee, Eden and Stockett to join the people of these communities for Mass. This week priests of the Diocese will be on Retreat at the Ursuline Academy and I would ask your prayers for all those making this Retreat. At the end of the week, I will be involved with some travel to Minneapolis to visit the seminary there and to share some thoughts with the priests of that Archdiocese. Afterwards, under the auspices of the Knights of Columbus, which is funding the travel and the program, I will be attending a four-day workshop in Dallas on Medical-Moral issues in society today. Over 120 Bishops will be in attendance. It should prove informative and interesting.

Have a good week and may God continue to bless you and your families.