

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

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Pope John Paul II

Christifideles Laici, The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, December 30, 1988. An Apostolic Exhortation written as a summation of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops.

INTRODUCTION

This document is an apostolic exhortation written by John Paul II as a summation of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops. They met to deal with the vocation and mission of laity in the modern world twenty years after Vatican Council II. He specifically addresses this exhortation to Bishops, Priests, Women and Men Religious and all the Lay Faithful. Nineteen years after this document was produced perhaps it would be opportune to review its basic thrust and purpose. Have we, the lay faithful, actually carried forward our commission given us by the Second Vatican Council and re-focused again for us by the 1987 Synod of Bishops and the Holy Father?

In the first instance, I doubt whether many of us have studied, or even read for that matter, the document on the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, from the Second Vatican Council. Nor have we made ourselves aware of the follow-up to it, the topic of our current discussion, *Christifideles Laici*. Both deal precisely with the apostolate of the Laity. We are living the times in which their implementation is critical, times for which Pope John XXIII, when he called the Second Vatican Council, hoped would prepare us.

"You too go into my vineyard." (Mt 20:4) This call Pope John Paul II says is for everyone not only the clergy and religious. St. Gregory the Great centuries ago had admonished each person to take into account what he does and then consider if he is indeed laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. The Second Vatican Council reiterated this call. Then the Synod of Bishops once more in October of 1987 re-echoed the Council's words. It is significant to point out that in the midst of this Synod were not a few lay faithful who rendered important contributions.

At the same time, the Synod pointed out that the post-conciliar path of the lay faithful had not been without its difficulties and dangers. The Bishops cited two temptations not always avoided by the lay faithful. In the first instance, some have become so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that they failed to be actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world. Secondly, they have been tempted to legitimize an unwarranted separation of faith from life, not living the Gospel values amidst the world.

The Synod of Bishops found significant contemporary situations given prophetic expression by the Second Vatican Council. We find three in particular: those regarding ministries and Church services entrusted now and in the future to the lay faithful, the growth and spread of new movements alongside other group forms of lay involvement, the place and role of women in the Church and in society.

This apostolic exhortation is not something in contradiction to the Synod itself, but is meant to be a faithful and coherent expression of it – "a fruit of collegiality". By it the Pope intends to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church.

The Pressing Needs of the World Today: "Why do you stand here idle all Day?"

The heartfelt desire of this Synod is that the lay faithful hearken to the call of Christ to work in his vineyard: to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church at this great moment in history. John Paul II says that this "new state of affairs" does not permit anyone to remain idle. As we continue to read in the parable (Mt 20:6-7) the "householder" goes out even at the eleventh hour and with greater urgency repeats his invitation again: "you too go into my vineyard."

Each of us through our Christian initiation has been incorporated into the active part of the Church's mission of salvation. Guided by the Holy Spirit, a new light envelopes all things and makes known the full ideal to which God has called each individual. The Holy Father says that it is necessary for us to keep a watchful eye on our world with its problems and values. This is the "vineyard" in which the Lord wishes all his disciples to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (cf Mt 5:13-14).

What is the state of affairs of the "earth" and the "world" for which we ought to be "salt" and "light"? That which is true in the Gospel of the weeds and the good grain growing together has been true in the history of the world. Evil and good, injustice and justice, anguish and hope are always found intertwined.

Can we not see the growing *religious indifference* and *atheism* in its perhaps most virulent and widespread form, *secularism*? Adversely affected by the impressive successes of continuing scientific and technological development people have been tempted again by the ancient ploy of wanting to "become like Gods." The Synod and the Holy Father recognize the truly serious nature of secularization today because of which growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice. The Pope recalls how he himself on past occasions had noted the phenomenon of de-Christianization and our need for continual re-evangelization.

The Pope finally explains that if we in conscience have the courage to face up to the fundamental questions in life: the purpose of life, suffering and death and their meaning, then we will be unable to avoid St. Augustine's famous words, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." All is not bleak. There is evidence, even amidst this secular world, of an "openness to a spiritual and transcendent outlook toward life," a "renewed interest in religious research," the "return to a sense of the sacred and to prayer," and quite significantly the "demand for freedom to call upon the name of the Lord."

The Human Person: A Dignity Violated and Exalted

John Paul II begins this segment by noting that when the human person is not recognized in his dignity as the living image of God (cf Gen 1:26) then the individual is exposed to every kind of humiliating and degrading form of manipulation. Those who are "the stronger", exerting their inordinate influence, come in the forms of ideology, systems of political and economic power, scientific technocracy, and an intrusive mass-media. The Pope continues by recounting the many indignities suffered and, even worse, the forms of personal annihilation such as the killing of the unborn.

Nevertheless, the sacredness of the human person cannot be completely obliterated despite devaluation and violations. For it has its unshakable foundation in God as Creator and Father. This sacredness resurfaces again and again. The sense of the dignity of the human person must be pondered and reaffirmed in stronger terms. The Holy Father points to the hopeful sign that there is in society a growing awareness that the person is not a "thing" but primarily a responsible "subject" endowed with conscience and freedom. This "subject" is oriented as well towards spiritual and religious values.

It is said that this era is one of humanism. However, some of its atheistic and secular forms on the one hand diminish and annihilate the human person while on the other hand exaggeratedly elevate the individual to a status of veritable and real idolatry. There are other forms, however, that are in line with the truth so that they promote a sense of human "participation" especially where women and young people are concerned. To create a truly humane culture requires the participation of both the individual and peoples as a whole.

Conflict and Peace

Perhaps as never before in history, humanity is being buffeted by conflict. This opposition takes the forms of violence, terrorism and war. The Pope sees certain diverse sectors of society as wishing to exert their "omnipotence" in futile attempts once more to reconstruct the "Tower of Babel". The human family is thus in itself dramatically convulsed and wounded. Yet, there is that insuppressible longing by individuals for the inestimable good of peace and justice. Entire populations today live, suffer and labor to bring this about. Despite all the negativity, this *participation* grows increasingly day-by-day.

Jesus Christ, the Hope of Humanity

John Paul tells us then that this is the "vineyard" that stands before the "laborers" who have been sent by the "householder". The previously mentioned adverse conditions deeply affect the Church but they do not crush her. Nor even more, do they overcome her because of the presence of the Holy Spirit who sustains and gives her life. In spite of the fallen condition of humanity and the presence of the Evil One, the Church knows the full answer to the problem to be her Savior, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the world. Jesus Christ himself is the "good news" and *the bearer of joy* that the Church announces each day, and to whom the Church bears testimony before all people.

PART I: *I Am the Vine and You Are the Branches*

The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery.

From a particular perspective the vine serves to express the Mystery of the People of God. From an internal point of view the lay faithful are seen not simply as laborers who work in the vineyard but also as themselves being a part of the vineyard. In the Old Testament the prophets used images of the vine to describe the chosen people. Jesus himself used the vine as a symbol to illustrate various aspects of the Kingdom of God. John, the Evangelist, uses the vine not only as the people of God but as *Jesus himself*.

Drawing on Scripture, Vatican Council II also used the image of the vine and the branches. Christ is the true vine who gives life to the branches. The Church, then, is the vine in the Gospel. She is the gift of the Trinity freely offered to all those born of water and the Holy Spirit *and called to live the very communion of God, to manifest it and communicate it in history.* John Paul emphasizes that *only from inside the Church's mystery of communion is the "identity" of the lay faithful made known and their fundamental dignity revealed.* It is also from within this context that their mission is defined.

Who are the Lay Faithful?

The Synod Fathers rightly pointed out that the lay faithful's vocation must be defined in positive terms. The Second Vatican Council had previously insisted on the unique character of their vocation: to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God. The Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* understood the lay faithful to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belonged to a religious state. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ.

Pope Pius XII once stated that the lay faithful find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life. They, therefore, ought to have a much clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, *but of being the Church.* They are the community of faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the Bishops in communion with him. *These are the Church.*

The Holy Father tells us that according to the biblical image of the vineyard, the lay faithful, together with all the other members of the Church are branches engrafted to Christ the true vine *and from him derive their life and fruitfulness.*

It becomes evident that incorporation into Christ through faith and Baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church. This mystery constitutes the Christian's most basic features and it is only from here that we can come to a basic description of the lay faithful.

Baptism and the "Newness" of Christian Life

Pope John Paul II begins by reminding us that the purpose of the entire existence of the lay faithful is to lead a person to knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism. Baptism forms the lay faithful in an essential way: 1) It regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; 2) It unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; 3) It anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples.

Children in the Son

Baptism is a rebirth, a regeneration. The Apostle Peter declares that by God's great mercy we have been born to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (cf Pt 1: 3-4) He calls Christians those who have been born anew. (cf Pt 1:23) The Pope tells us that with Baptism we become *children of the Father in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.* What was said of Jesus at the Jordan can be said of us at our baptism, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Lk 3:22) In the Son we become *children of adoption* (cf Gal 4:4f) and in this way the eternal plan of the Father for each person is realized in history.

It is the Holy Spirit who constitutes the baptized as Children of God and members of Christ's Body. St. Paul reminds us of this: "for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13) ...and because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." (cf Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15f)

We Are One Body in Christ

The Council of Florence taught that, regenerated as "Children in the Son," the baptized are inseparably joined together as "members of Christ" and thus "*members of the body of the Church.*" Baptism brings about a mystical but real incorporation into the crucified and glorious body of Christ. The result is that "we, though many are one body in Christ." (Rom 12:5) The words of St. Paul re-echo the teaching of Jesus himself that reveals the mystical unity of Christ with his disciples and the disciples with each other. Jesus refers to this unity in the image of the vine and the branches. (cf Jn 15:5) This image speaks not only of the deep intimacy of the disciples with Jesus but also of the vital communion with each other that is derived as a consequence. For all are branches of the single vine.

Holy and Living Temples of the Spirit

In another comparison, the Apostle Peter defines the baptized as "*living stones*" founded on Christ, the "*corner stone,*" destined to "*be raised up into a spiritual building.*" (1 Pt 2:5ff) Vatican Council II in *Lumen Gentium*, the

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, likewise teaches: "By regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the baptized are consecrated into a spiritual house."

St. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit "anoints" the baptized, sealing each with an indelible character and constituting each as a spiritual temple filled with the holy presence of God. As a result each person's being is united and likened to Jesus Christ. The Holy Father draws the important conclusion that through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus, as the Christ, the Savior-Messiah.

Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Jesus Christ

Peter calls the baptized "*in God's sight chosen and precious, "living stones ...built into a spiritual house."* (cf 1 Pt 2:4f)

The Holy Father here points us to a new grace and dignity arising from Baptism. The lay faithful participate in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all "*anointed*" and in him are "*christs, "anointed ones,"* as well as Christ himself, "*The Anointed One.*" In summary form the Pope then gives us the essential teaching of the Second Vatican Council on this point.

The lay faithful are sharers in the *priestly mission* for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Incorporated in Christ, the baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and of their daily activities. All these varied activities, some with their attendant difficulties, become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Lumen Gentium teaches that in the celebration of the Eucharist all our sacrifices are lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. In this way the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God.

In the prophetic mission of Christ, the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith *and to proclaim it in word and deed.* They are called to allow the newness and the power of the Gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life; that is, through the very framework of their secular life.

Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his kingly mission. They are called therefore to spread that kingdom. They exercise their Christian Kingship in spiritual combat so as to make a gift of themselves in service of justice and charity.

In a particular way the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value, ordering creation to the authentic well being of humanity in grace guided activity. The threefold mission of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, finds its source in Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its full realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. This is not solely a collective mandate but it is given most importantly to each of the laity as individuals as well.

St. Augustine wrote many years ago: "As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood."

The Lay Faithful and Their Secular Character

Invested in the newness of the Christian life, all the baptized as members of the People of God share a common dignity. They also share the same filial grace calling them to perfection. As a result, each of the lay faithful share with ordained ministers, and men and women religious a responsibility for the Church's mission.

John Paul II recalls how his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, said that the Church had an authentic secular dimension. She lives in the world even if she is not of the world. The Church is sent to continue the redemptive work of Christ. That work by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity and involves the renewal of the whole of the temporal order. All members of the Church, though in different ways, share in this secular dimension. According to Vatican Council II, the lay faithful have a particular approach that is properly theirs. It has a "*secular character.*"

The Council expressly speaks of the lay faithful as receiving their call from God in the secular world. They "*live in the world,*" ...in every one of its secular professions and occupations, in every segment of society and culture. This is not just an external and generalized framework but a reality *destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its own meaning.* Jesus sanctified these human ties, especially the family ones, by submitting himself to the human condition.

The Holy Father concludes that "*the world*" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation. Baptism does not take them out of the world at all. (cf 1 Cor 7:24) On the contrary God entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. Led by the Spirit of the Gospel they are to contribute to the world's sanctification as from within like leaven. Through their situation in the world, God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of seeking the Kingdom of God by ordering temporal affairs to that plan.

The Council Fathers had this in mind when they said that the secular character of the lay faithful needed to be defined particularly in a theological sense. They must be seen, in a sense, as participating with God in the work of

creation. The images of salt, light, and leaven taken from the Gospel, while applying to all, are specifically applicable to the lay faithful. These images, in a particularly meaningful way, tell of the radical newness and unique character of lay Christian involvement that has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.

Called to Holiness

The Father assigns to each of the lay faithful in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit his primary and fundamental vocation: his call to holiness, the perfection of charity. When we understand this we then come to a full sense of the dignity of the laity. The Holy Father says that holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council has spoken as well to a significant extent about the universal call to holiness, a basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church. This was expressed so as to bring about a renewal of Christian life based on the Gospel. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation but an undeniable requirement arising from the very mystery of the Church, *the choice vine, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Beloved Spouse of the Lord Jesus*. For the Pope it is of great significance that the Spirit that sanctified the human nature of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary is the same Spirit that also abides in the Church to make us holy.

Extra-ordinarily difficult times demand extra-ordinary effort from extra-ordinary individuals, saints in effect. Today is such a time. We have the greatest need of saints for whom we must assiduously beg God to raise up.

John Paul staying with the same theme, once more declares that everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receives and thereby shares in the common vocation to holiness. He says that in this the lay faithful are on an equal par with everyone else. All of Christ's followers are invited *and bound* to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their own state in life.

The call to holiness is rooted in Baptism and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the Eucharist. The Apostle Paul never tires of admonishing all Christians to live *as is fitting among saints*." (Eph 5:3) This same Apostle says again that life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness, (cf Rom 6:22; Gal 5:22) stirs up every baptized person and requires each to follow and imitate Jesus Christ.

The Life of Holiness in the World

The laity's vocation to holiness requires that life according to the Spirit be immersed in worldly affairs. The lay religious program includes family concerns as well as secular endeavors. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, emphasizing the importance of unity of life for the laity, noted how they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Their daily activities must be the occasion for uniting themselves with God, fulfilling his will, serving others and leading them to communion with God in Christ.

We begin this week by listening to the Holy Father as he explains that the vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful. First of all, it must be understood as an *undeniable and demanding* obligation. Secondly, it is a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in his own life of holiness. He sees this vocation as an essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism. As such, it is one, which determines their very dignity as Christians.

At the same time this vocation to holiness is intimately connected to the mission and responsibility given the laity in the Church and the world. This same holiness represents their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the Church herself, who is the "Communion of Saints." John Paul calls holiness a *fundamental presupposition* and an *irreplaceable condition* for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church. Only to the extent that the Church, Christ's spouse, is loved by him and she, in turn, loves him, does she become a mother fruitful in the Spirit.

The Holy Father returns to the Gospel image of the branches united to the vine as an important illustration of bearing much fruit. (Jn 15:4-5) During the Synod that gave rise to this Apostolic Letter a number of lay faithful were proposed for beatification and canonization. The Pope says that the laity can find in these individuals new models of holiness and witnesses of heroic virtue lived in the ordinary every day circumstances of human existence.

As John Paul closes this part of his reflection intended to define the lay faithful's position in the Church, he recalls how noted spiritual leaders through the centuries spoke quite forcefully about the baptized Christian's calling to holiness. He mentions in particular such individuals as Pope St. Leo the Great and St. Maximus, Bishop of Turin. He quotes the great St. Augustine as saying: "Let us rejoice and give thanks; we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice, we have become Christ."

Our dignity as a Christian is the source of equality for all members of the Church. It guarantees and fosters a spirit of communion and fellowship, and at the same time becomes the hidden dynamic in the lay faithful's apostolate and mission. The Holy Father concludes this important section by reiterating that the *exalted duty* of working to assure the progress of the divine plan of salvation rests very much with the laity. It is they who must see to its extension to every person, of every era, in every part of the earth.

The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Life of the Church as Communion

(I have refrained from interjecting my own personal commentary into these condensations of papal documents because they are supposed to reflect the mind of the Pope and in this case the mind of the Synod of Bishops as well. However, I believe that this next section is of critical significance for it expresses a fundamental element of the Church; *the Church as Communion*. I merely wish to emphasize that it is imperative, nay critical, that we understand who we are and what is our life of relationship, *both vertical and horizontal*, within the context of the Church's life that is called *communion*.)

The Mystery of Church Communion

The Holy Father recalls the words of Jesus, "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser... *Abide in me and I in you.*" (Jn 15:1, 4) These simple words reveal the mystery of *communion* that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized—a living and life-giving communion. The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity as its model and source. Further, it is itself the means to achieve this communion: united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father.

"I am the vine, you are the branches." (Jn15:5) From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there flows the communion, which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus prays for this communion: "That they all may be one..." (Jn 17:21) Such communion is the very mystery of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council recalls the words of St. Cyprian, "The Church shines forth as 'a people made one with the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'" The Pope, for the moment reflecting on the mission and responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world, says that a proper understanding of these aspects can only be found in the living context of the Church as *communion*.

The ecclesiology of *communion* is a central and fundamental concept in the documents of Vatican II. The idea of *koinonia-communion* finds its source in the Sacred Scriptures and has been held in high esteem from the earliest times in Church. The Second Vatican Council, in its turn, did much to clarify the understanding of the Church as *communion* and its concrete application to life.

What then does this word, "*communion*," mean? Next week the Holy Father will enlarge upon this concept.

As we will see, the Holy Father will express the "*communion*" that is the Church in many different ways. Admitting that *communion* is a complex word, Pope John Paul says that fundamentally this word speaks "of the union with God brought about by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit." This *communion* is present in the Word of God and the Sacraments. Baptism is the door and foundation of *communion* in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. The Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist is a sign (*sacrament*) and actually brings about the intimate bonds of *communion* among all the faithful in the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

On the conclusion of Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI addressed the faithful in the following words, and I paraphrase here: The Church is a *communion*. It is the *sanctorum communionem*, "the Communion of Saints". This *Communion* speaks of the incorporation (*being made part*) of Christians into the life of Christ, and the communication (*giving*) of that life of charity (*love*) to the entire body of the Faithful in this world, (*earth*) and in the next (*heaven*), (*the horizontal and vertical dimension of the Church*). It is a union *with Christ and in Christ*, and a union among Christians in the Church." [*The underlining and parentheses in this paragraph are mine.*]

Vatican Council II used biblical images to bring to light the reality of the Church as *communion*. Therefore, it used such figures as the sheepfold, the flock, the vine, the spiritual building, the Holy City. Above all there is the image of the Church as *Body* given us by the great St. Paul himself. Additionally the Church looked at the entire history of salvation and re-proposed the image of the Church as the *People of God*. The Council said that it had pleased God to save us not merely as individuals but also by making us into a single people who acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness. The Document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, summarizes: "The Church in Christ is a kind of sacrament... a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all the human race."

The reality of the Church as *Communion* is indeed the central content of the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. Ecclesial *communion* is not merely a sociological or psychological reality. This *Communion* is the "new" and messianic People who has Christ for its head. The bonds that unite the members of the New People among themselves and -first of all with Christ- are not those of flesh and blood, but are those of the Holy Spirit, whom all the baptized have received.

That Spirit is the One who from all eternity unites the one and undivided Trinity. That Spirit is he who *in the fullness of time* forever unites human nature to the Son of God. It is that same identical Spirit who in the course of Christian generations is the constant and never-ending source of communion in the Church.

PART II All Branches of a Single Vine

An Organic Communion: Diversity and Complementarity

Church communion is more precisely like an “organic communion,” like a living body. John Paul II points out that it is characterized by diversity and a *complementarity* of vocations, states in life, etc. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the laity is seen *in relation to the whole body* and each offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body.

Vatican Council II echoes St. Paul’s teaching on the Mystical Body of Christ when it says that Jesus Christ by communicating his Spirit to his brothers and sisters made them mystically into his own body by communicating his life to those who believe. The one Spirit gives different gifts for the welfare of the Church. In the first place it gives an authority to apostles to whom the Spirit subjects even those with special charisms. Further, this same Spirit urges love among the faithful.

The one and the same Spirit is always *the dynamic principle of diversity and unity* in the Church. He gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body, head and members. The Fathers of the Church referred to this work as happening in much the same way that the soul, as the principle of life, animates the entire human body. Again, the Council writes that the Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the Faithful, as in a temple. In them he bears witness that they are adopted sons (cf Gal 4:6). He guides the Church in the way of all truth. Unifying her, he bestows upon her varied hierarchical and charismatic gifts. By the power of the Gospel he makes the Church grow, renews her continually, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse.

Church communion then is a great gift of the Holy Spirit to be gratefully accepted by the laity, and at the same time to be lived by them with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through the lay faithful’s participation in the life and mission of the Church

A member of the laity can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the treasure each has inherited. The Spirit gives a vast variety of charisms to be used in different ministries. The Holy Father tells us that what distinguishes persons is not an increase in dignity, but a special and complementary capacity for service. The different forms of service exist *in communion* and *on behalf of communion*. These treasures complement one another for the good of all under the wise guidance of their Pastors.

Ministries and Charisms: The Spirit’s Gifts to the Church

The Second Vatican Council says that the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, lavishes diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts on all the baptized. She calls each to be, in an individual way, active and co-responsible.

Ministries, Offices and Roles

The ministries as they now exist and function in the Church are a participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ himself. The Apostle, Paul, is clear in speaking about the ministerial make-up of the Church in his times. He says that God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers. (cf 1 Cor 12:28) In a somewhat expanded statement he speaks similarly in Ephesians. (cf Eph 4:7, 11-13) These and other New Testament texts indicate the diversity of ministries as well as of gifts and ecclesial tasks in the early Church

The Ministries Derived from Holy Orders

In the primary position in the Church are the ordained ministries; those coming from the Sacrament of Orders. The mission of the Apostles, even as it is now entrusted to the pastors of his people, is a true service referred to in the Scriptures as “*diakonia*,” service or ministry. From the risen Christ through the Sacrament of Orders in an uninterrupted way the ministries receive the authority and sacred power to serve the Church. Acting “*in persona Christi capitis*” (in the person of Christ, the Head) these ministries gather the Church in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Sacraments.

The ordained ministries, apart from the persons who receive them, are a grace for the entire Church. The Holy Father now makes a very significant statement. He says, “These ministries express and realize a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ that is different, *not simply in degree but in essence*, from the participation given to all the lay faithful through Baptism and Confirmation.” He takes note, however, that the Second Vatican Council recalls how the ministerial priesthood has the royal priesthood of all the faithful as its aim and is ordered to it. The laity, for its part, must acknowledge that the ministerial priesthood is necessary for their participation in the mission in the Church.

The Ministries, Offices and Roles of the Lay Faithful

John Paul begins this section by noting that the Church’s mission of salvation is realized not only by the ministers of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful. In fact, because of their Baptismal state the laity participates in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. Pastors should foster these ministries, offices and roles of the lay faithful that derive from Baptism, Confirmation and most especially from the Sacrament of Matrimony.

When necessary the Pastors (*Bishops*) according to Canon Law can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles connected to pastoral ministry but that do not require the Sacrament of Orders. (e.g. in the absence of lectors or acolytes, laity may serve in the ministry of the word and distribute Holy Communion) The Holy Father is careful to point out that the word, “minister,” refers to one who has received sacramental ordination. Simply exercising a “ministry” does not make one a minister. The Second Vatican Council says that only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and in his Eternal Priesthood.

The Fathers of this Synod on the Laity have appreciated the varied contributions of the lay faithful in circumstances of necessity. As a consequence of the liturgical renewal the lay faithful themselves have become aware of and are more disposed to fulfill certain appropriate roles in the Church. The liturgical celebration is indeed a celebration of the entire assembly. It therefore is natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful.

Along with its positive expression of gratitude, this same Synod voiced its concerns as well about a too indiscriminate use of the word, “ministry,” the confusion and equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood and the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms. It expressed a particular concern over the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of “supply” and a tendency towards a “clericalization” of the lay faithful that risked the creation of a parallel ecclesial structure of service not founded on Sacramental Orders.

John Paul II remarks how the Synod Fathers sought a greater clarity of expression and more precision of terminology when referring to *the unity of the Church’s mission* in which all the baptized participate, and the substantial *diversity of the ministry* of pastors that is rooted in the Sacrament of Orders. All the while they certainly wished to respect the various ministries and roles in the Church rooted in Baptism and Confirmation.

The Synod took care to express its concern that Pastors in instituting such lay roles base them firmly upon Baptism. They voiced further concern that Pastors also guarded against a “facile yet abusive recourse to presumed situations of emergency” or to “supply by necessity” were objectively this did not exist or where alternative possibilities could have been created through better pastoral planning. The Holy Father expresses the concern of the Synod in saying that the various ministries, offices and roles pertinent to the lay faithful ought to be exercised in conformity to their specific lay vocation which is different from that of the sacred ministry.

According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, the lay faithful’s critical collaboration is in their own field of evangelization; namely that of the vast and complicated world of modern society. The more Gospel-inspired lay people that are involved in this arena the more this vast reality will be at the service of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

The Synod Fathers devoted much attention to the ministries of *Lectorate* and *Acolytate* that were previously mere stepping-stones to the sacramental priesthood. By an action of Paul VI (*Ministeria Quaedam*, 8.15.72) they assumed an autonomy and stability with the possibility of being given to the laity, although reserved for men. (Canon 230, #1) (*In an extra-ordinary way today they are being exercised by the laity, both men and women.*)

The Pope tells us of how the Synod also acknowledged that the Church is enriched by a generous gift of *charisms*. These are the gifts recognized by St. Paul, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (cf 1 Cor 12) Whether they are exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, the charism are graces of the Holy Spirit that have a usefulness for the ecclesial community, oriented to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world.

In writing of the apostolate of the lay faithful, the Second Vatican Council knew as well of the importance of these gifts for the good of the People of God; so that each might place “at the service of others the grace received.” Pope John Paul tells us that the charisms are received in gratitude both on the part of the one who receives them, and also on the part of the entire Church.

Here he does offer a caveat. It is that the action of the Holy Spirit, who breathes where he wills, is not always easily recognized and received. He reminds us that we must always be aware of the power of sin and its ability to disturb and confuse the life of the faithful and the community. For this reason no charism dispenses a person from reference and submission to the *Pastors of the Church*. The Vatican Council clearly states that judgment as to the charisms’ genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church and to those whose special competence it is to test all things and hold fast to what is good.

The Lay Faithful’s Participation in the Life of the Church

John Paul II says that this participation finds its first and necessary expression in the life and mission of the *particular Church*, in the diocese in which “the Church of Christ, one holy, catholic and apostolic, is truly present and at work.”

The Particular Churches and the Universal Church

In order to adequately participate in the life of the Church, it is critical that the laity absolutely have a clear and precise vision of the *particular Church with its primordial bond to the universal Church*. There is a real, essential and constant bond uniting the both of them to one another.

The particular churches, the subject of the Holy Father's previous discussion, are not only bonded to the universal Church but also are constituted after the model of the universal Church. It is from them that the one and unique Catholic Church is formed. The lay faithful function within these particular churches but always with an ever-increasing "catholic" (*universal*) spirit. At the same time our world with the ever more prevalent mobility of its population, the growth of mutual relationships and the ease of communication no longer allows any sector of society to remain closed in upon itself. Our concern must be for the People of God scattered throughout the world.

The Synod on the Laity favored the creation of *Diocesan Pastoral Councils* that incorporated lay representation. The revised Code of Canon Law had already provided for Diocesan Synods and *Local Councils*. Episcopal Conferences in varying ways are urged to more effectively utilize and meet with the lay faithful.

The Parish

The Church community finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is the place where the mystery of the Church is present and at work. Pope John Paul makes the significant point that the parish is principally not a structure, territory, or a building but rather, "the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit." It is founded on a theological reality because it is a *Eucharistic community*. In effect the parish is a *community of faith* and an *organic community*, one that is constituted by the ordained ministers and other Christians. In this community the pastor, *who represents the diocesan Bishop*, is the hierarchical bond with the entire particular Church.

Since the Church's task in our day is so great, its accomplishment cannot be left to the parish alone. Various forms of collaboration among parishes are provided for within a given region. Various groups of baptized Christians along with even the non-baptized, who are not under the normal pastoral care of the Bishop, are recommended to his concern. Likewise there exist as well many other forms of spreading the faith and other settings for the apostolate that cannot have the parish as their center and origin. Nevertheless, the Pope says that the parish still enjoys a new and promising season.

John Paul recalls the words of Pope Paul VI at the beginning of his own pontificate. Paul VI said that he believed that the old and venerable structure of the parish had an indispensable mission of great contemporary importance: *to create the basic community of the Christian people*. The parish, in his thought, formed the basic expression of the liturgical life of the people, conserved and renewed the faith in the people of today, served as the school for teaching the message of salvation, putting solidarity into practice and doing the works of humble charity. This Synod's Fathers, taking note of the state of parishes today, felt a need to call for a greater effort toward its renewal.

As we commented last time, the Synod Fathers felt a need to call for a greater effort toward the renewal of parishes. In their minds, renewal should consist of promoting 1) participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities; 2) formation of small, basic, "living" communities that more easily could communicate the Word of God, finding better ways to express it in service and love while always in communion with their pastors; 3) cooperation between diverse parishes within the same area.

The Apostolic Commitment in the Parish

A closer look at lay faithful involvement in parish life reveals how important it truly is. Without lay participation the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. This is an important affirmation by the Second Vatican Council, recalled here, of "ecclesial communion." John Paul notes that ministries and charisms, differing yet being complementary, are –each in their own way- all necessary for the Church to grow.

In a significant way, the parish offers an outstanding example of the apostolate on a community level because it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries, drawing them into the universality of the Church. Accustoming themselves to working with their pastors, lay faithful, as far as possible, ought to collaborate in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their own church family. As a consequence, the Holy Father highlights the Synod Fathers' insistence on the need for a deeper appreciation and more extensive development of the Parish Pastoral Council.

In the present circumstances the laity have the ability to do a lot and therefore should do very much towards the growth of an authentic ecclesial communion in their parishes. This is particularly so with regards to a re-awakening of missionary zeal towards non-believers, and believers who themselves have abandoned the faith or grown lax in the practice of the Christian life.

The Pope says in a quite expressive way that *the parish is the Church placed in the neighborhoods of humanity*. Often times the individual is lost and disoriented. However, there always remains in the human heart the desire to experience and cultivate caring and personal relationships. The response to such desires can come from the parish. When the lay faithful adheres to its fundamental vocation and mission, that is to say, when it comes to be a "place" in

the world for the community of believers to gather together as a “sign” and “instrument” of the vocation of all to *communion*, it accomplishes its purpose. In a word, this community of faithful then becomes a house of welcome, and a place of service to all. Pope John XXXIII was fond of saying that the parish should be “the village fountain” to which all could have recourse to quench their thirst.

The Forms of Participation in the Life of the Church

The lay faithful, together with the clergy and women and men religious, make up the one People of God, the Body of Christ. God calls the individual in Jesus Christ, each one personally by name. Each member’s unique and unrepeatable character is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community while, at the same time, singularly sharing the common richness of all the Church. John Paul focuses us upon the fact that this is the “*Communion of Saints*” which we profess in the Creed. “*The good of all becomes the good of each one and the good of each one becomes the good of all,*” he explains.

Individual forms of Participation

The Holy Father recalls for us that each of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a “*member of the Church.*” Yet each is entrusted with a unique task, which cannot be done by another and is to be fulfilled for the good of all. In this way the Second Vatican Council’s insistence on the absolute necessity of an apostolate exercised by the individual takes on its full meaning. The Pope emphatically states that the apostolate exercised by the individual, flowing abundantly from a truly Christian life, is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even in its organized expression, *and admits of no substitute.*

Such an individual form of apostolate can contribute greatly to a more extensive spreading of the Gospel. Further, the spread of the Gospel will be continual since a person’s life and faith will be one. Likewise the disseminating of the Gospel will be particularly incisive because of fully sharing in the unique conditions of work-a-day life and its conditions.

Group Forms of Participation

In recent days the phenomenon of lay people associating among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. In modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus resulting in a multiplicity of group forms. We truly can speak of a new era of group endeavors of the lay faithful. Great is the richness and versatility of the resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community with the many movements and new sodalities that have sprouted with specific features and purposes. These lay groups show themselves to be very diverse. Yet, they all come together in an all-inclusive and profound convergence when viewed from the perspective of their common purpose: i.e. the responsible participation of all of them in the Church’s mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ.

The actual formation of groups of laity for spiritual purposes or the apostolate responds to various needs. A broader cultural effect results when groups are formed. In a secularized society, for many, groups represent a precious help for the Christian life in remaining faithful to the demands of the Gospel and to the commitment to the Church’s mission and the apostolate.

The Holy Father notes that justification for the formation of these groups comes from a theology based on ecclesiology. The Second Vatican Council as well acknowledges that this approach to the apostolate is a “sign of communion and of unity of the Church of Christ.”

The Pope says that it must be acknowledged that lay people have the freedom within the Church to form such groups. Such a liberty is a true and proper right that is not derived by way of “concession” but flows from the very Sacrament of Baptism itself. That sacrament calls the lay faithful to participate actively in the Church’s communion and mission. Vatican Council II was quite clear that as long as the proper relationship is kept to Church authority, the lay faithful have the right to found, run and join such associations. The new code of Canon Law says as much. Finally, it is a question of a freedom that is to be acknowledged and guaranteed by Church authority and always and only to be exercised in Church communion.

“Criteria of Ecclesiality” for Lay Groups

What follows is a series of criteria that, as the Holy Father says, “might be useful” in evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church.

1. *The primacy is given to the call of every Christian to holiness* and in a growth towards the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity. Whatever the situation might be, the association should be an instrument leading to holiness in the Church through fostering a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith.
2. *The association has the responsibility of professing*

the Catholic faith. It must embrace and proclaim the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity in obedience to the Church's Magisterium (i.e. Teaching Authority). Every association of the laity must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its *total content*.

We began this section last week by mentioning the first two criteria set forth by the Holy Father. We continue this week by dealing with the other criteria for lay groups. We begin with the third that he formulated.

3. The group gives witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope as the visible center of unity of the universal Church and also with the local Bishop who is the principle and foundation of unity in the particular (diocesan) Church.
4. The group demonstrates a conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals; i.e. the evangelization, sanctification and Christian formation of people's conscience.
5. Finally, the group makes a commitment to a presence in human society by becoming a fruitful outlet for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more loving and just.

Critically, Pope John Paul II emphasizes that the fundamental criteria mentioned find their verification in the actual fruits (Are the groups doing their job?) and here he lists a number worth specific mention: *Do they generate*

-a renewed appreciation for prayer,

contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life.

*-a reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage,
priesthood and the consecrated life.*

-a readiness to participate in Church programs; local, national and international.

-a commitment to Catechesis with a capacity to do it.

*-readiness to be present as Christians in the various
settings of society.*

*-a spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty
leading to a greater generosity towards others.*

-a conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized but fallen away.

The Pastors in Service to Communion

Pastors ought to accompany this lay activity with discerning guidance and encouragement so the lay associations might grow in Church communion and mission. All, pastors and laity, have the duty to promote and nourish stronger bonds and collaboration among the various lay groups with patience, farsightedness and readiness to sacrifice. In such a way, this essential communion leads to mission, and mission itself to communion.

PART III I Have Appointed You To Go And Bear Much Fruit

The Co-responsibility of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mission

Mission to Communion

The Holy Father begins by telling us that the person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion (*in union with*). (cf Jn 15:2) The consequence of communion with Jesus is the communion of Christians among themselves and an indispensable condition for bearing fruit. (Jn 15:5) Communion with others is the most magnificent fruit that branches can have. It is the gift of Christ and his Spirit.

Communion begets communion and is like to a *mission on behalf of communion*. Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other. John Paul says that communion and mission interpenetrate each other to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission*. *Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion*. He further says that the Church knows that its communion, received as a gift, is destined for all. The Church's mission, in effect, flows from her very nature. Christ has willed it so. John the Evangelist puts it this way: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 Jn 1:3)

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the members of this Synod, knew well that the Lord entrusted a great part of the responsibility for her mission to the laity and this to be worked out in communion with all other members of the People of God.

Proclaiming the Gospel

The lay faithful, because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel. They have been prepared for this by the sacraments of initiation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Many times, they engage in evangelization that is possible by no one else.

The entire mission of the Church is truly concentrated and manifested in *evangelization*. Pope Paul VI wrote, "To evangelize is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity." Through evangelization the Church is built up into a community of faith, more rightly a community that confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God. The "good news" is directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Pope notes how "Go and preach the Gospel" always maintains its ever-pressing obligation. Every disciple is called by name; none can withhold making a response. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel." (1 Cor 9:16)

The Hour Has Come for a Re-evangelization

Where once Christian life flourished, communities of faith are now being put to a hard test. John Paul II says that this particularly concerns countries and nations of the so-called First World in which economic well-being and consumerism, even as they co-exist with poverty, inspire and sustain a life lived "as if God did not exist." Even where vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religion still prevail, they run the risk of being dispersed especially by such processes as secularization and the spread of sects. Only a re-evangelization can make Christianity a vital force once again.

The Pope recognizes that there must be a mending of the Christian fabric of society in all parts of the world. For this to happen, there is a need to remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself. At this moment in time the laity are an important part of this work. Their responsibility is to testify as to how the Christian faith constitutes the only wholly valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses for every person. This becomes possible only if the lay faithful learn to live an integrated approach to life by bringing to bear on it the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.

The Holy Father reiterates once again the now famous declaration with which he began his Papacy, "*Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ.*" "Do not be afraid," he continues, "Christ knows what is inside a person." Christ knows far better what is there than often times we ourselves. Too often we are uncertain about our sense of life. Invaded by doubts we are too often led into despair. Therefore he says that we must allow Christ to speak to the person in us. Only he has the words of life, yes, eternal life.

When we make this vital synthesis in our lives then our testimonies will be shining and convincing. Not fear but love in the pursuit of Christ will be our guiding light. This will lead us to new ways of living more in conformity with human dignity.

Humanity is loved by God! The Church owes this simple yet profound proclamation to humanity. John Paul II tells us with certain firmness that each Christian's words and life must make this proclamation resound: *God loves you. Christ came for you. Christ is for you "the Way, the Truth and the Life.* (Jn 14: 6)

This re-evangelization is directed not only to individuals but also to entire portions of populations. Its purpose is to formulate mature church communities of lived Christianity. The laity must play a role through an active and responsible participation; through also a missionary thrust towards people who still do not believe and those who no longer live the faith received at Baptism.

The Synod Fathers foresee a great and necessary work of catechesis performed by the lay faithful in the future. The Holy Father also notes that it goes without saying that Christian parents are still the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children. We must be aware as well of the rights that each baptized person has to be instructed and supported in the Christian life of faith.

Go into the Whole World

While pointing out the need for re-evangelization, the Pope says that the Church cannot withdraw from her mission to bring the Gospel to the many who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. Even in this activity the laity have an increasingly necessary role. This command of the Lord to "go into the whole world" is finding a generous response from laypersons ready to go into mission territories. This missionary concern is reaching such a proportion that only a consolidated effort from within the Church can lead to hope for a more fruitful response.

It is not only the Church as a whole that is charged with this missionary responsibility but the particular (diocesan) churches as well must understand that they are sent as well to those who do not believe in Christ. The Church must take a giant step forward in a new stage of history in her missionary dynamism. Because of modern

advancement, the world is a much smaller place. The so-called “younger” churches have need of the stability of the “older” churches. On the other hand the “older” churches need the witness and impulse of the “younger.” In mutual cooperation there is great potential for a shared enrichment.

The younger churches are finding the need too for the formation of a local clergy as well as a mature and responsible laity. This then will make them capable of witnessing to the Gospel in their turn. All the Faithful, especially lay persons, find themselves living among people of other religions. Dialogue among religions leads to a beneficial love and mutual respect among peoples.

John Paul II closes this section by saying that what is needed for the evangelization of the world is those who will evangelize. Everyone must therefore feel the responsibility of fostering vocations, both priestly and religious as well as in the lay state specifically directed to the missions. Every appropriate means of encouraging vocations should be utilized while never neglecting the privilege means of prayer. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest!” (Mt 9:37f)

To Live the Gospel: Serving the Person and Society

Because of the Gospel, the Church is at one and the same time an *evangelizing* and *evangelized* community, thereby becoming *the servant of all*. The Holy Father says that without doubt the Church has the Kingdom of God as her supreme goal. On earth she is its seed and beginning. The Church lives with the intimate reality that the Kingdom is the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people.

Through the Incarnation (becoming man), the Son of God has united himself in some fashion to every person. Having received the responsibility of making known to the world the mystery of God that shines forth in Jesus Christ, the Church likewise awakens one person to another, opening each to the truth about himself and each person’s final destiny. This is her service of evangelization. To fulfill this mission, the individual is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself. This way leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption.

The Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* said basically the same thing. In this document it stated that the Church not only communicates divine life to all, but in some sense casts the reflected light of that divine life on all the earth. She does this most of all through her healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the human person. The whole Church is responsible for the work of contributing to the human family. In a particular way, the lay faithful find a place of great importance by reason of their “secular character.” This “secular character” obliges them in their proper and irreplaceable way, to work for the Christian animation of the temporal order.

Promoting the Dignity of the Person

To discover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up the central and unifying task that the Church and the laity in her are called to render to the human family. Here the Holy Father makes specific note of the fact that among all other earthly beings, *only a man or a woman is a “person,” a conscious and free being*, and because of this, the “center and summit” of all that exists on the earth. The dignity of the person is the most precious possession of the individual. The value of one person transcends the entire material world. The words of Jesus give us to understand that the value of the individual comes not from what a person “has” ...even if he possess the whole world, as much as from what a person “is.” (cf Mk 8:36)

The dignity of the human person is manifested in all its radiance when the person’s origin and destiny are considered. Created in the image of God, redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a “child in the Son” and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God. For this reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual.

In virtue of a personal dignity, the human being is always a value as an individual. Therefore he is always to be treated as a person and never as object of some utility. The Holy Father is emphatic that the dignity of the person constitutes the foundation of the equality of all people among themselves. Every form of discrimination therefore constitutes an absolutely intolerable injustice for the dishonor inflicted on the dignity of the person. Dialogue and communion are rooted ultimately in what people “are,” first and foremost, rather than on what people “have.”

John Paul continues by saying that the dignity of the person is the indestructible property of every human being and this is based on the uniqueness and irrepeatability of every person. The Son of God made the most radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being in his becoming man in the womb of a woman.

Respecting the Inviolable Right to Life

No one, no individual, no group, no authority, no state, can change, let alone eliminate, the rights of the human person because such rights find their source in God himself. The Pope makes the point that all other rights, to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture, are false and illusory if the right to life, the most fundamental of all, is not defended with maximum determination. The Church does not yield where this right is in question. The human being

is entitled to such rights in every phase of development, from conception until natural death and in every condition. All offenses against life itself, and the Pope enumerates many, are certainly criminal and poison human society. In point of fact, these violations do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury.

Many lay people, such as parents, teachers health care workers, the many who hold political and economic power, are especially charged with the responsibility of protecting the dignity of the human person and defending the right to life. The Pope speaks of how the Church lives a fundamental aspect of her mission when she generously accepts especially those who are the weak and the sick. It is made necessary especially in the face of a rising "culture of death." Against the selfishness and pessimism of the world, the Church stands for life. To the "No" of the world, she replies with a living "Yes." It is the responsibility of the lay faithful to make the Church's "Yes" to human life concrete and efficacious.

The enormous development of biological and medical science, along the with amazing power in technology, puts us on a new frontier. The Holy Father reminds us that the moral conscience of humanity cannot turn aside or remain indifferent in the face of these gigantic strides.

An ominous concern arises in the thought of the Pope, as he notes how the *moral conscience* of humanity cannot turn aside from technology's ever increasing dominion over the processes of the beginnings of human life. Today wisdom must be the firm basis of salvation in that persons engaged in scientific research in these areas must act with intelligence and love. These individuals must remain in veneration of the dignity of the personhood of every human being from the first moment of existence. In consequence of this dignity, they must refuse to perform operations falsifying the genetic patrimony of the individual and of the human generative power.

The lay faithful, having responsibility and capacity in these secular fields, must courageously accept the challenges posed by the new problems in bioethics. The Synod Fathers see the laity as the masters of technology, not its slave. With the help of the Church, where the biological essence of the human species is concerned, lay Christians must call our culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism. There is an immense danger in the concentration of power and technology to warp human existence.

Free to Call Upon the Name of the Lord

Respect for the dignity of the individual demands the recognition of his religious dimension. John Paul II says that the individual's relation to God is a *constitutive element* of the very being and existence of the individual. (cf Acts 17:28) Even if not all believe this truth, he points out that nevertheless this must be an admitted element of the faith of individuals that possess the right of freedom of conscience and religion. Religious freedom, integral and essential to the dignity of the person, is a cornerstone in the structure of human rights. It is an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and the whole of society.

The Synod did not forget that many brothers and sisters do not enjoy such a right. They face suffering, persecution and often times death for professing the faith. This suffering and martyrdom experienced by the Christian faithful make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ's disciples. St. Augustine reminds us that the Church, that "vine," as predicted by the prophets and by the Lord himself, spreads its fruitful branches in the world becoming the more fruitful the more that it is watered by the blood of the martyrs.

This Synod's Fathers gave thanks for all the many laity who have continued to give tireless witness to the faith despite their restricted liberty. Often times they have risked everything, even life itself. The Pope says that in this way the lay faithful bear witness to an essential property of the Church: *God's Church is born of God's grace expressed in an excellent way in martyrdom.*

Respect for personal dignity and the acknowledgment of human rights must concern every Christian. They have a global dimension. Respect for the human person, well beyond the demands of individual morality, touches the very structure of society itself.

The Family: Where the Duty to Society Begins

Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* taught that God willed the brotherhood of all; that society reveals the truth about itself in being a community of persons. The result is an interdependence and reciprocity between the person and society. The Catholic's duty in the apostolate must then always be viewed in the context of his service to the person in his uniqueness and irrepeatability as well as to the entirety of society.

The married couple and the family is the basic expression of the social dimension of society, the first form of communion between persons. The Holy Father puts it down that the lay faithful's duty to society begins in marriage and the family. The family is the basic cell of society as well as that of the Church. The Pope expresses it so beautifully when he says that the family is the *cradle of life and love*. In the face of ideological attacks of every sort from every direction, a vast and systematic effort must be made to safeguard the family's role in its mission of being the primary place of "*humanization*" for the person and society.

Catholic laity has a significant duty to make the family aware of its identity as *the primary social nucleus*. It is in this that the Christian family must require from all, beginning even with public authority, the respect for those rights

that in saving the family will save society itself. Experience testifies that whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families. In *Familiaris Consortio* John Paul himself had already noted how the Church, for her part, was deeply convinced that *the path to the future passed through the family*.

Charity: The Soul and Sustenance of Solidarity

The whole Church as such is directly called to the service of charity. The Pope recalls how in the very early days the Church added the *agape* to the Eucharistic Supper. In this way the Church showed herself united around Christ by the bond of charity. She, thus, laid claim to the works of charity as her own inalienable duty and right. Mercy to the poor and the sick, works of charity and mutual aid to relieve human needs, are held in special honor in the Church. Charity in its many forms towards one's neighbor represents the most immediate, ordinary and habitual way that leads to the Christian animation of the temporal order. This work of charity is the specific duty of the lay faithful. It is precisely in this endeavor that the laity manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ. (Mk 10:45) At the same time, it should be remembered that charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for building up the Church. (cf. 1 Cor 13:13)

John Paul II says that paradoxically such a mission is made increasingly necessary the more that institutions become complex and pretend to manage every area at hand. Such projects quite often lose their effectiveness as a result of impersonal functionalism, over-grown bureaucracy, unjust private interests and a generalized disengagement from a sense of duty. In the wake of such failure, the apostolate of lay men and women finds a primary role to play.

Public Life: For Everyone and by Everyone

Society is ordered to the full rights of the individual. A charity that loves and serves the person cannot be separated from justice. These two statements are a given requiring that the lay faithful never relinquish their participation in *public life* in all those areas that *organically and institutionally* promote the *common good*. This Synod's Fathers reaffirmed with vigor that every person has a right and duty to participate in public life. Distaste for an alleged amoral environment in the public arena is no excuse for Christian non-participation. The Second Vatican Council held the same.

Public life on behalf of the person and society finds its basic standard in the pursuit of the common good as the good of everyone and as the good of each taken as a whole. The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and organizations can achieve more thoroughly their own fulfillment. Furthermore, public life requires an understanding and an education to foster the rights and duties of each person based on the personal dignity of each human being.

The spirit of service is fundamental in the exercise of political power. The Pope says that along with service goes a certain necessary competency and efficiency that can make "virtuous" and above reproach the activity of individuals in public life. It does indeed require great effort to avoid temptation from all sides and of all kinds. *Gaudium et Spes* (Vat. II) points out how important it is in a pluralistic society that the lay faithful maintain a proper balance between the political community and the Church. They must distinguish clearly between acting individually or collectively guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience and an activity in communion with their pastors in the name of the Church

The Church by reason of her role and competency is not bound by a specific political community or system. Again listening to *Gaudium et Spes*, we are told that she is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person. There is a pressing responsibility that the lay faithful bear witness to those human and gospel values necessarily connected to the many and varied areas of public endeavor. This demands that the laity always be animated by a real participation in the life of the Church and enlightened by her social doctrine.

Solidarity is the manner and the means of achieving a public life that has true human development as its goal. It means the active participation of all in public life. All of us, each and everyone, are *the goal of public life* as well as *its leading participants*. In a previous encyclical, John Paul II had already taught that *solidarity* is not a *vague compassion or shallow distress* at the misfortunes of others. Rather, it is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*, that is to say, the good of all and of each individual because *we are all really responsible for all*. Solidarity today requires going beyond single nations or a single block of nations, to a consideration on a properly continental and even world level.

The fruit of sound political activity is peace. The laity cannot remain indifferent in all that denies and compromises peace. As disciples of Jesus Christ, they ought to take upon themselves the task of being peacemakers. This is done through a conversion of the "heart" in justice and charity. All of which lays the foundation for peace. The Synod Fathers have invited Christians to reject all forms of violence, to promote attitudes of dialogue and peace, and to commit themselves to establish a just social order.

Placing the Individual at the Center of Socio-Economic Life

The universal destination of goods forms the basis for the social doctrine of the Church. This means that according to the plan of God the goods of the earth are offered to all people, to each individual as a means towards the development of a truly human life. *Private property* plays an important role here and possesses an intrinsic social function. The Pope says that concretely personal work represents the most common and most immediate instrument for the development of economic life. In the socio-economic order personal human dignity must be honored and advanced along with the welfare of the whole of society. This is so because man is the source, the center and the purpose of all socio-economic life.

Amid the transformations taking place in economics and work that are a cause of concern, the laity has the responsibility of leading the way in working out solutions to the many serious problems. John Paul names a number of them. With such an end in view the lay faithful must accomplish these tasks with professional competence, honesty, with a Christian spirit, and especially as a means to their own sanctification. Especially does the Pope note that in work offered to God, the individual associates himself with the redemptive work of Christ who greatly ennobled the dignity of work by the labor of his own hands at Nazareth.

Today we are aware of another challenge, *the so-called "ecological" question*. It has a socio-economic impact on life and work. Humanity possesses a gift that must be passed on to future generations, if possible, passed on in better condition. The dominion over nature granted to humankind by the Creator is not an absolute power. No one can speak of a freedom *"to dispose of things as one pleases."* The Holy Father recalls for us that Gen 2:16-17 shows quite clearly that, when it comes to the natural world we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones that cannot be violated with impunity. True development takes into consideration the use of things, the renewability of resources, and the consequences of haphazard industrialization. These three considerations alert our consciences to the *moral dimension* of development.

Evangelizing Culture and the Cultures of Humanity

The Second Vatican Council understood "culture" as all those factors that go to the refining and developing of humanity's diverse spiritual and physical endowments. It means the efforts of the human family to bring the world under its control; to humanize social life; to express through its works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of all people through the ages; and lastly, to communicate and preserve them as the inspiration for the progress of even the entire human race. Only in this sense is culture held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity. Only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the veritable creator of history.

The Church calls upon the lay faithful to be present as signs of courage and intellectual creativity in the privileged places of culture: in the world of education; in places of scientific and technological research, in areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities. Such a presence is destined for the elevation of these cultures through the riches that have their source in the Gospel and the Christian faith. The rapport between the Gospel and culture represents a constant historic fact and serves as a working ideal of particular and immediate urgency. It is a challenge given the entire Church as well as the individual in a particular sort of way.

The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen humanity. It combats and removes the error and evil that flows from fallen humanity. The Church never ceases to purify and to elevate the morality of peoples. In this way she carries out her mission and makes her contribution to human and civic culture.

At this point the Holy Father interjects some significant thought from the apostolic exhortation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in Our Time)*. The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims. For the Church, it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel, but also of affecting, and challenging through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria that are so in contrast to the Word of God and the plan of salvation. The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time. Hence, every effort must be made to fully evangelize cultures of all types.

The Pope points to the means of social communications as the privileged way for the creation and transmission of culture. He continues by saying that the world of the mass media represents a new frontier for the mission of the Church because of its rapid development and worldwide influence. As professionals, the lay faithful find in this field a particular and most important area of responsibility. This lay pastoral responsibility is not solely one of defense. More importantly in the arenas of the press, cinema, radio, television and theater, Catholics are called to find fruitful opportunities to proclaim the Gospel that brings salvation.

PART IV Laborers in the Lord's Vineyard

Good Stewards of God's Varied Grace

The Variety of Vocations

In the gospel parable, the "householder" calls the laborers for his vineyard at the various times (hours) of the day. Pope St. Gregory the Great in commenting on this parable says that it is possible to compare the different hours to the various stages in a person's life, from childhood to old age. The laborers, then, are called and sent forth into the vineyard at different hours. It means, in effect, that one is led to a holy life during childhood, another in adolescence, another in adulthood and another in old age.

The various "hours" can also refer to the diversity of callings and situations, charisms and ministries to which the person is called. Pope John Paul II further says that this variety is not only linked to age, but also to the differences of sex, to the diversity of natural gifts, to careers, and finally to the many varied conditions affecting a person's life. This variety makes the Church rich, more vital, more concrete.

Young People, Children and Older People

Youth, the Hope of the Church

The Synod wished to give particular attention to the young because in many countries they represent half the population, and many times in those circumstances, half the People of God. As a result, they create a huge potential and a great challenge for the Church of the future. In fact, the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth. They are "the hope of the Church."

Emphasizing the importance of youth, the Pope says that the Church in a special way looks at herself in the youth, in all and in each. It was so from apostolic times. St. John in his first letter wrote: "I am writing to you, *young people*, because *you have overcome the evil one*. I write to you, children, because *you know the Father*. I write to you *young people*, because you are strong and the word of God *abides in you*. (cf 1 Jn 2:13ff)

The Holy Father makes an important point in saying that youth must not simply be considered as an object of the Church's pastoral concern. More, they must be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leaders in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society. "Youth" the Pope says, "is a time for growth that ought to progress "in wisdom, age, and grace before God and people." (Lk 2:52)

This Synod notes how the hearts of youth are disposed to fellowship, friendship and solidarity. They are greatly moved by causes relating to the quality of life and the conservation of nature. But they are also troubled by anxiety, deceptions, anguishes and fears of the world as well as temptations that come with their state.

The Church, for its part, must rekindle the special love displayed by Christ for the young man of the Gospel. (cf Mk 10:21) In imitating the call of Christ, "Come follow me," she does not tire in proclaiming Jesus Christ. She proclaims the Gospel as the uniquely satisfying response to the deep-seated aspirations of the young. The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. Vatican Council II said to young people that it looked to them with confidence and love, and that they, in looking upon the Church, will find the face of Christ.

Children and the Kingdom of Heaven

Children are certainly the object of the Lord's tender love and care. To them he promised the Kingdom of Heaven. They are the eloquent symbol of the moral and spiritual conditions essential for entry into the Kingdom. They are also the example of life in total confidence in the Lord. (cf Mt 18:3-5; Lk 9:48) Children are the constant reminder that the missionary fruitfulness of the Church rests not in human means but in God's absolute gratuity of grace.

Vatican II understood that within the context of the "domestic Church," children, as living members of the family, contribute in their own way to the sanctification of their parents. John Gerson, a noted theologian of the Fifteenth Century, had already long ago emphasized how children and young people were in no way a negligible part of the Church.

Older People and the Gift of Wisdom

The Holy Father now reminds older people that the Church expects them to continue to exercise their mission in the apostolate and missionary life. In certain ways, old age provides opportunities for them. The Bible delights in presenting older persons as the symbol of those rich in wisdom and fear of the Lord. (cf Sir 25:4-6) Specifically, they are witness to tradition in faith in the Church and society, as teacher of the lessons of life, and as worker of charity.

The growing number of older people worldwide along with the expected retirement of persons from various professions and the workplace provides them with new opportunities. They should have a clear knowledge that their role in the Church and society does not stop at a certain age, but that it knows only new ways of application. The Pope emphasizes that arriving at older age is to be considered a privilege because this period provides real possibilities for better evaluating the past, knowing and living the Paschal Mystery more deeply, and becoming an example for the whole People of God.

John Paul speaking directly to the elderly says that they are not to feel themselves as person underestimated in the life of the Church or as passive objects in a fast-paced world, but as participants at a time of life that is humanly and spiritually fruitful. According to the divine plan, each individual human being lives a life of continual growth, from the beginning of existence to the moment at which the last breath is taken.

Women and Men

The Synod Fathers drew particular attention to the role of women and their indispensable contribution to the building up of the Church and the development of society. Basing themselves on the great consciousness that Pope John XXIII manifested as to their dignity and entrance into public life, time and time again they strongly affirmed the urgency to defend and to promote the personal dignity of women and their consequent equality with men. Above all, if anyone has this task of advancing the dignity of women in the Church and society, it is women themselves who must recognize their responsibility as leading characters.

Vigorous and incisive pastoral action must be taken by all to overcome completely the many forms of discrimination pointed out by *Familiaris Consortio*, the Apostolic Exhortation on the Family previously published by the Holy Father. As an expression of her mission, the Church must stand firmly against all forms of discrimination and abuse of women thereby restoring the dignity of women so gravely wounded by society. The Second Vatican Council had previously urged a more generous role for women in the various fields of the Church's apostolate as well.

The awareness that women with their talents and tasks have their own vocations has increased and deepened in the years since Vatican II. John Paul II acknowledges that these vocations find their fundamental inspiration in the Gospel and the Church's history. Though not called to the apostolate of *the Twelve*, and thereby to the ministerial priesthood, many women nevertheless accompanied Jesus in his ministry and assisted the Apostles. (cf Lk 8:2-3; Lk 23:49; Lk 23:55; Lk 24:1-10; Acts 1:14) As evidenced by the Gospel, the Church early on detached itself from the culture of the time and called women to tasks connected with spreading the Gospel. The Apostle Paul cites by name a great number of women in the service of the primitive Christian community. (cf Rom 16:1-15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15; 1 Cor 11:5 and 1 Tim 5:16)

In her earliest days and in her successive development, the Church has always known women who have exercised often times decisive roles in the Church. The Holy Father further points out how history is marked by their grand works, as well as lowly and hidden, but not for this reason any less decisive to the growth and holiness of the Church. Women, today, have a significant role to play in light of the urgency of a *re-evangelization* and a major effort towards *humanizing* social relations. The Synod Fathers made a direct reference to the place of the role of men and women in the work of the Church: "This Synod proclaims that the Church seeks the recognition and use of all the gifts, experiences, and talents of men and women to make her mission effective."

Anthropological and Theological Foundations

At this point, the Pope seeks to establish a more penetrating and accurate anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man. There is diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only where roles and functions are concerned, but more deeply as it concerns woman's make-up and her meaning as a person. The Synod Fathers themselves felt that a deeper study was needed to resolve the true significance and dignity of each sex.

The Church wishes to enter into the historic process of the various movements for the promotion of women. She wants to provide her own most precious contribution as the Church unfolds God's plan that *from the beginning* has been indelibly imprinted in the very being of the human person, man and woman, and therefore in the make-up, meaning and deepest workings of the individual. There is richness in this plan that was brought to completion *in the fullness of time when God sent his Son, born of a woman*.

"In the fullness of time God sent his Son, born of a woman." (Gal 4:4) That "fullness" continues in history: God's plan for woman is read and is to be read in the context of the faith of the Church and in the lives of Christian women living today. Vatican Council II reminds us that beneath all occurring changes there are many realities that do not change. These find their foundation in Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. The anthropological and theological foundations of woman's dignity as a person were highlighted in a significant way in the Pope's Wednesday General Audiences. In these he reflected on the "theology of the body." He had already upheld Mary as a unique and incomparable example of womanhood in *Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer)*. That the Father would entrust the Son into the hands of a woman is important for the Holy Father.

The document, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (*Dignity of Woman*) made a notable contribution to the deepening appreciation of women and the place that women can have and ought to have in the Church and in society. Christ's words as well are normative with regard to the individual's relationship with himself that "there is neither male nor female." All are one in Christ. (Gal 3:28) John Paul affirms that the Holy Spirit visits his gifts equally on all.

Mission in the Church and in the World

Through Baptism and Confirmation, women along with men are equal sharers in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. *Evangelization* is a common charge given to both. However, the Holy Father points out that women are to put to work those gifts that are specifically hers, those that are hers in her very dignity as a person.

The Pope is specific when he approaches the subject of sacramental ordination of women. He says, "A woman cannot receive the Sacrament of Orders, and therefore cannot fulfill the proper function of the ministerial priesthood. This a practice that the church has always found in the expressed will of Christ, totally free and sovereign, who called only men to be his apostles, a practice that can be understood from the rapport between Christ, the Spouse, and his Bride, the Church." John Paul emphasizes, "Here we are in the area of function, not of dignity and holiness."

Pope Paul VI had already said, "We cannot change what our Lord did." However, we can recognize and promote the role of women in evangelization and in the life of the Christian community. The acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the church needs to be realized in practice. For this reason this Exhortation continually refers to "men and women." There are indeed Canonical Roles open to women; on diocesan and parochial Pastoral Councils as well as Diocesan Synods. The Holy Father now indicates other areas of participation open to and needful of women. He also notes that woman's vision illumined by faith (cf Eph 1:18) becomes ever more able to discern what truly corresponds to her dignity and vocation as a person.

Two great tasks entrusted to women merit the attention of everyone. First is the bringing of full dignity to the conjugal life and to motherhood. Additionally, by decisive and loving intervention they can help men, husbands and fathers, to overcome forms of absenteeism, of periodic presence, as well as fulfilling their just parental responsibility. Secondly, women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, namely of a culture worthy of the person. The Second Vatican Council said that the lay faithful in a combined effort should remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin. In doing this, they will infuse culture and human works with a moral value.

As women increasingly participate more fully and responsibly in the activities of institutions, an important field in the apostolate of women, the personal dignity of woman and her specific vocation ought to be respected and promoted. John Paul points out how God entrusted the human being to woman. (cf Gen 2:18) In a special way the human being is entrusted to woman because she, in virtue of her special experience of motherhood, is seen to have a specific sensitivity towards the human person beginning with the fundamental value of life. The Holy Father sees how great the possibilities and responsibilities of women are in this area especially in these times. Additionally, woman's participation in the life of the Church and society is the path necessary for her personal fulfillment. Many justly insist upon this today.

The Presence and Collaboration of Men together with Women

Many in the Synod feared that an excessive insistence on the status and role women would lead to an unacceptable omission with regard to men. Within the Church, lamentably men are absent in certain areas, abdicating their proper responsibility, allowing women to fulfill them. Such are certain participations in the liturgical life of the Church, catechesis of their own sons and daughters and other children, presence at religious and cultural meetings, collaboration in missionary and other such like activities. The coordinated presence of both men and women is to be urged.

Pope John Paul II sees the presence of both men and women as arising from the "beginning" by design of the Creator. The two were willed to be a unity by which man and woman were to be the prime community of persons and source of every other community. At the same time, they were to be a "sign" of that interpersonal communion of love that constitutes the mystical and intimate life of God, One in Three.

The Pope's exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, encourages that the family's sharing in the mission of the Church should follow a community pattern. The spouses, as a couple, the parents and children, as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world. It is in the love between husband and wife and between members of the family, lived in its totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness, that the Christian family realizes its participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Christ and of his Church.

From the perspective of the Synod Fathers, there is an urgent need for every Christian to live and proclaim the message of hope contained in the relationship between man and woman. The Sacrament of Matrimony consecrates and reveals this relationship as a sign of the relation between Christ and his Church. Additionally, these same Fathers emphasized that the esteem for virginity and reverence for motherhood respectively must be restored.

The Sick and the Suffering

Though people are called to joy, every day they experience many forms of suffering and pain. Under the many forms of suffering that individuals endure the Church reminds them that she shares their suffering. She takes it to the Lord who in turn associates them with his redeeming Passion. This suffering is needed to teach the world what love truly is.

Sickness is the most frequent and common expression of human suffering. However, even the sick are called by Christ and are sent forth as laborers into the Lord's vineyard. Rather than being exempt, the sick are called to live their human and Christian vocation in a new and even more valuable manner. The Holy Father urges that the words of the Apostle Paul ought to become our approach to life illuminating each situation as a moment of grace. "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is, the Church." (Col 1:24) Precisely in arriving at this realization, the Apostle is raised up in joy: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." (Col 1:24)

It was noted in the Synod by a handicapped presenter how important it is to make clear that Christians who live with illness, pain and old age are called by God not only *to unite their suffering to Christ's Passion* but also to receive in themselves now, and to transmit to others, the power of renewal and the joy of the risen Christ. One might recall, amongst other passages one such from St. Paul as 2 Cor 4:10-11.

In his Apostolic Exhortation on suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*, the Pope says that the Church has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of suffering. He points out that the suffering individual is the way of the Church because that person is, first of all, the way of Christ himself who is the Good Samaritan who "does not pass by" but "has compassion on him, goes to him... binds up his wounds... takes care of him." (Lk 10:32-34)

Through the centuries the Christian community has reenacted that gospel parable in caring for the vast multitude of persons who are sick and suffering. In these days there is an increased presence of lay women and men in Catholic health care institutions. It is in just such as these- doctors, nurses, other health care workers, volunteers- that their calling becomes a living sign of Jesus and his Church to a practical love for the sick and suffering.

(My own comment: These words of Pope John Paul II on suffering seem exceedingly prophetic when we recall how this Holy Father with dignity, amidst his personal physical debilitation and suffering, lived out the final years and days of his life.)

Renewed Pastoral Action

It is necessary that this most precious heritage, received from Christ, of pastoral activity for and with the sick and suffering be ever more valued and enriched. The Church must grow in an attitude that does not only look upon the sick person, the handicapped, or suffering individual merely as an object of her love and service. Very importantly these individuals as well must become active and responsible participants in the work of evangelization and salvation. They are to make the good news resound within a culture that, having lost all sense of human suffering, "censors" all talk of such a hard reality of life.

The good news is that suffering can have a positive meaning for society. The Holy Father says that each person is called to participation in both the salvific suffering and the joy-filled resurrection of Christ. All become a force leading to the sanctification of the Church. The proclamation of the good news gains credibility when it is not simply words but also becomes a testimony of life.

The Pope's Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, had already invited all the suffering who believe in Christ to gather beneath the cross. There, united in spirit, they offer their sufferings so as to hasten the fulfillment of the Savior's prayer *that all may be one*. John Paul exhorts all of good will to find beneath the cross the slavific meaning of their sorrow and the valid answer to all their questions. He likewise asks all to stand with Mary, the Mother of Christ who stood beneath *the* Cross, to pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man. He prays that the support of especially the weak become a source of strength for the Church and humanity.

The States of Life and Vocations

All the members of the People of God are recipients of the Church's work of communion as well as participants in the mission of salvation. Being Christian means being branches of the one fruitful vine, Christ, and through the Spirit, living members of the one Body of the Lord. Being a Christian, however, stems also from the *states of life* that characterize the clergy, men and women religious, secular institutes, and the lay faithful. The states of life form a Communion of life ordered to one another. Though different yet complementary, they share, in their Christian dignity, a manner of living out the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love.

The Pope says that the lay state finds its distinctive features in its secular character. Other states, such as clergy and men and women religious, bear witness each in their own distinctive way. Uniquely, the ministerial priesthood is the permanent guarantee of the Sacramental Presence of Christ the Redeemer. In the end, all the states of life, collectively or individually, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion." Finally, it is in the diversity of these states of life and the variety of

vocations that the unique mystery of the Church reveals *and* experiences anew *the infinite richness of the mystery of Christ*.

The States of Life and Vocations

The Various Vocations in the Lay State

Within the lay state, the richness of the Church is manifested in its diverse vocations. One of these is the flourishing today of the varied forms of secular institutes, offering laity, and even priests, the opportunity of following the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows and promises. All the while these individuals are able to retain their lay or clerical status. It is at this point that the Holy Father offers the example of St. Francis de Sales who fostered holiness in all Christians of whatever status according to their specific state in life. St. Francis felt it was a “heresy” to banish devotion (pursuit of spiritual perfection) from amidst the laity.

The Second Vatican Council, as well, fostered lay spirituality according the individual’s secular state in life. It strongly encouraged all not to cease to develop with vigor the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with the conditions of their life. The Council Fathers urged the laity to make use of the gifts that they had received from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father reminds us of St. Peter’s very appropriate statement, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” (1 Pt 4:10)

PART V That You Bear Much Fruit

The Formation of the Lay Faithful

A Continual Process of Maturation

The gospel image of “the vine and the branches” reveals another fundamental aspect of the laity’s life and mission. That is *the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit*. Jesus calls his Father an attentive vinedresser who prunes the fruitful vines assiduously, discarding the unfruitful ones. John Paul notes how the vitality of the branches depends on remaining attached to the vine, Jesus Christ. “*He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*” (Jn 15:5)

The Pope makes a salient point, “People are approached in liberty by God who calls everyone to grow, develop and bear fruit. A person cannot put off a response nor cast off personal responsibility in the matter.” The Synod Fathers, too, emphasized the gospel imperative of continual spiritual growth and development. This formation is described as “a likening to Christ according to the will of the Father under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” They clearly affirmed that “formation of the lay faithful” must be among the priorities of a diocese. The Pope’s thought is that this be placed within a *plan of pastoral action* and that the efforts of the whole community (clergy, lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal.

To Discover and Live One’s Vocation and Mission

The objective of the Laity’s formation is the ever-clearer discernment of their vocation and the willingness to live it. God calls me and sends me forth as a laborer in his vineyard, to work for his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation defines the dignity and responsibility of each member of the lay faithful. It becomes the focal point of the whole of their formation.

From all eternity God has thought of us and has loved us as unique individuals, calling each by name as the Good Shepherd “calls his sheep by name.” (Jn 10:3) However, to discover God’s will in our lives means following a receptive listening to the eternal plan of God revealed to each of us. The Pope says that the discovery of God’s will in our lives follows a “receptive listening” to the Word of God and the Church, fervent and constant prayer, listening to a wise and good spiritual guide, and a faithful discernment of talents given us by God.

In the life of each of us there are particularly significant and decisive moments for discernment of God’s will. God calls laborers into his vineyard *at every hour of life* to make his holy will more precisely and explicitly known. However as the Holy Father points out, it is not a question of simply knowing what God wants of us in the situations of life. We must also do what God wants, as we are reminded in the words that Mary, Mother of Jesus, addressed to the servants at Cana, “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2:5)

A Total Integrated Formation for Living an Integrated Life

There cannot be two parallel lives in our existence, on the one hand, the “spiritual” life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the “secular” life, the life in the family, at work, in social relations, in the public and cultural spheres. The fruitful branch grafted into Christ bears fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, it is precisely in these “places and times” that God wishes us to reveal and make real the love of Christ.

The Pope recalls how the Second Vatican Council invited all the lay faithful to this unity of life as it forcefully decried the grave consequences in separating faith from life, the Gospel from culture. In fact, the Council would go on to say that the split between the faith that many profess and their daily lives must be counted as one of the more serious errors of our age.

Various Aspects of Formation

There is no doubt that spiritual formation ought to occupy a privileged place in a person's life. All are called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ. John Paul calls attention to the fact that the situation today points to an ever increasing urgency for a doctrinal formation, enabling us to "give a reason for our hoping." Therefore, a systematic approach to *catechesis*, geared to age and the diverse situations of life is an absolute necessity. This is especially true for those who have responsibilities in various fields of public life. This Synod's Father thought that it was not enough to just exhort formation but to offer a formation in social conscience, providing the criteria for judging and practical directives.

It is the right and duty of pastors to propose moral principles and all Christians to apply them in defense of human rights. However, active participation in political parties is reserved to the lay faithful. For a totally integrated formation, human values must be cultivated toward significant application within the context of lay missionary and apostolic activity. Finally, the lay faithful are to be guided interiorly and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of unity and fullness of life.

Collaborators with God the Teacher

John Paul II says that God is the first and great teacher of his People. A striking passage from the *Song of Moses* finishes by stating that the Lord alone led Israel and that there was no foreign God with Jacob. (Deut 32:10-12) Finally, God's work of forming his people is fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Teacher. He, in turn, entrusts *Mother Church* with a share in this divine work of formation. In consequence, the whole ecclesial community, in its diverse members, receives the fruitfulness of the Spirit and actively cooperates to that end.

There is an ordered procedure here. First of all, the Church is a teacher in which the Pope takes the "primary" role in the formation of the lay faithful. As successor of Peter, he has the ministry of "*confirming his brothers in the faith*," instructing all believers in the essential content of vocation and mission in light of the Christian faith and membership in the Church. His ministry is active not only through his own words but also in *those words* transmitted by the various departments of the Holy See. All call for a living and receptive hearing by the lay faithful.

The Holy Father further explains that the universal Church is present in and through the particular Churches (*diocesan churches*). In each, the Bishop in his person has the responsibility of animating and guiding the laity's formation. Within this diocesan Church the Parish has the essential task of an immediate and more personal formation of the laity. It is to instruct its members, in listening to God's word, in liturgical and personal dialogue with God, in a life of fraternal charity. Life and formation at this level are more direct and concrete.

Within vast and territorially extensive parishes *small Church communities* could be beneficial. The Synod Fathers also said that a post-baptismal catechesis akin to the catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults can help re-invigorate Baptismal richness and responsibilities. The diverse elements within a diocese can be helpful in the formation of its various segments. Priests and religious ought to assist in the formation of the lay faithful. The Synod Fathers urged that priests and candidates for orders be trained with a view to fostering the vocation and mission of the laity. In turn, the Holy Father says that the lay faithful can and should help priests and religious in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey.

Other Places for Formation

The Holy Father takes note of the fact that the *Christian Family*, as the "domestic Church," makes a natural and fundamental school for formation in faith. Fathers and Mothers are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. Their daily family life makes up, as well, their children's first "experience of the Church." As a result, their sons and daughters will perceive the beauty of dedicating their energies to the service of the Kingdom of God.

Schools and Catholic Universities, along with ever more widespread centers of spiritual renewal, are important places for formation. Over and above this, however, what is truly needed is a "formation community" comprised of parents, teachers, clergy, women and men religious and representatives of youth. The Synod Fathers esteemed, as well as encouraged, the lay faithful's participation in educational programs with a civic and Christian spirit. Further, they emphasized the urgent need in various schools, Catholic or not, for teachers and professors to be true witnesses of the Gospel through example of life, professional competence, and Christian inspired teaching. All the while they are called to maintain the autonomy of the various sciences and disciplines.

This Synod appealed to the prophetic task of Catholic schools and universities, praising teachers and professors now lay for the most part, for fostering institutes of Catholic education that can form men and women in whom the *new commandment* is enfolded. Their presence, along with clergy and religious, offers students a vivid image of the Church.

Reciprocal Formation: Received and Given to All

Formation is not the privilege of a few, but the right and duty of all. Most of all, one cannot offer an effective formation to others if the person himself has not engaged in a "formation of self." Importantly, it is to be recognized that the work of formation is made more effective the more it is open to *the action of God*.

An Appeal and a Prayer

At the end of this post-synodal document John Paul II makes a strong appeal to one and all, pastors and faithful, never to become tired of taking an active part to fix deeply in our mind, heart and life an *ecclesial consciousness*, what it means to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. All Christians must be aware that through Baptism they have received an *extraordinary dignity*. Through grace, they are called to be children loved by the Father, members incorporated in Christ and his Church, living and holy temples of the Spirit. It is to be noted that this “Christian *newness of life*” receives expression and is fulfilled in the lay faithful through the “secular character” that is “uniquely and properly” theirs. This ecclesial consciousness brings a sense of belonging to *the mystery of the Church as Communion*. The laity for their part must take an active role in the great challenge facing the Church of today: *re-evangelization*.

Finally the Pope entrusts the fruits of the Synod to Mary’s intercession with a poetically prayerful *Magnificat* made his own.