

Ministry in the Church of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council defines the Church for our time and for years to come. Its first document was the Constitution on the Liturgy, and the Second was the Constitution on the Church.

We're familiar with the effects of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*: using the vernacular language, a new form of the Mass ("Novus Ordo"), and a strong impetus for arranging the physical workshop space very much like St. Peter's is arranged today. (The arrangement of the assembly in our church, with pews gathered almost 180° around the altar, was cutting-edge in 1957!)

The Constitution on the Church outlines the roles of laity, religious, clergy, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and more. This document defines the Church in a new way, as "People of God," with the hierarchical leadership at the service of the Church. It goes on to define the role of the laity as essential, meaningful, and unique to the laity — meaning that the laity's role in the Church is not duplicated by that of the clergy or religious.

It's worth mentioning that the Church has *always* been the "People of God," but the definition and the implications of the *definition* are the new ingredients that the Council documents have brought to the Church.

It's also worth noting that, when these documents were promulgated, there was not the slightest thought of a "shortage" of priests or religious. Seminaries, rectories, and convents were bursting at the seams! Yet the Council devoted an entire Constitution to redefining and clarifying the roles of clergy, religious, and laity alike. We - the baptized - have meaningful, essential, and unique roles in the Church. There's one for you!

There's a word for doing work in the name of the Church: Ministry. Ministry is like other volunteer work in many ways, but not all. Like everything related to our life as baptized Catholic Christians, it's unique in that it's intimately joined with the Ministry of Christ in the world. And yes, we are unworthy of such a role in the building of the Reign of God, but Christ calls us anyway. So our options are either to accept with humility the call of Christ to serve in some way that is rooted in our gifts, skills, and passion, or to ignore this call and miss one of the most profound joys of Catholic Christian life.

Ministry, according to Dominican theologian Fr. Thomas O'Meara, is 1) *doing something* 2) *for the coming of the Reign of God* 3) *in public* 4) *on behalf of a Christian community* 5) *which is a gift received in faith, baptism, and ordination* 6) *which is an activity with its own limits and identity within a diversity of ministerial actions.* (From *Ministry*, by Fr. Richard P McBrien, HarperCollins, 1988).

We are called to ministry, just as we are called to Baptism. In fact, it's one and the same call. Baptism isn't a box to check before going on with our life. It's the beginning of a new life, and this life includes using our gifts from God for the service of God's people.

And we are gifted to do something meaningful for the advent (coming) of the Reign of God. Gifts that are given to each person for the good of the Church (the Body of Christ) are called "charisms."

Ministry is essential, unique, charism-based, and accountable. Next time, a further exploration of what this might mean for you.