

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- The lay (nonordained) faithful are essential in the life of the Church.
- The laity help serve the kingdom of God.
- Laypeople live out their call to holiness in the world of family, work, and community.

The word *layperson* once connoted being a passive recipient of the faith while the ordained priesthood and those in the consecrated life (vowed religious sisters and brothers) were viewed as having an active role in dispensing and passing on the faith. The role of the laity in today's Church is anything but passive.

A layperson is an adopted child of God (Romans 8:15), a sister or brother of Jesus, and an heir to God's wealth of grace and life eternal, called to serve God's kingdom here on earth.

## The Role of the Laity

Each of us is tremendously important to God's plan for the world. Drawing on the graces received at baptism, members of the *common priesthood of the faithful* serve God's kingdom. God marks all Christians as children of God, empowering us to act in Christ's name as priests, prophets, and kings.

*"But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

1 Peter 2:9

As *priests*, laypeople offer worship to God, especially by participating in the eucharistic liturgy. As *prophets*, we speak the word of God and witness to the life, teachings, and saving actions of Christ. As *kings*, we profit from the authority and power of God to continue Christ's ministry of service and love to all people.

*"While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians."*

CCC 1547

*"No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as life of the body: so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church."*

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity  
(*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), 2

- How do you feel called to participate in the Church community?



## A Shared Work

Though the ordained priesthood is unique, bishops, priests, and deacons work in collaboration with the laity. Christ sends the laity into the world to transform the values of society and individuals into those of the kingdom of God, to minister as he would minister.

Before his passion and death, Christ prayed for all his disciples, present and future:

*"They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world."*

John 17:16–18

Christ identifies his disciples with himself. As a body, we're united with the Father to the same degree the Son is united with the Father and the Holy Spirit in perfect unity.

Each member of Christ's body works in harmony with the rest and is indispensable.

Laypeople go into the world:

*"bearing consistent witness in their personal, family and social lives by proclaiming and sharing the gospel of Christ in every situation in which they find themselves."*

*On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Nonordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest*

*"Lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church."*

*Pope Pius XII, Discourse, February 20, 1946; see also CCC 899*

- How do or can you share the good news of Jesus in the particular circumstances of your life?



## Doing God's Work in the World

While we're all called to holiness as a *universal vocation*, we're each also called to a particular vocation. The priesthood of the faithful includes celibate religious, married, and single persons, each with special gifts and opportunities to serve. Each is called to develop the qualities and talents given by God.

*"Love is...the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.... Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being 'created in the image of God.'"*

*Pope St. John Paul II, On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio), 11*

*The whole world is full of opportunities to do God's work. One might consider working in "the more important fields of action, namely, church communities, the family, youth, the social milieu, and national and international levels."*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem), 9*

- How are you living out your vocation to love?



### As Married Couples and Parents

Husbands and wives are called to help their spouse and children along the path to sainthood. Their primary responsibilities are focused on family life; other kinds of service to the Church come second.



*“Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life.”*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem), 11*

### As Single Adults

While being single is considered a state of life, not a primary vocation—exclusive and enduring—like marriage, priesthood, and consecrated life, we all share in the fundamental call of Christians to love. Our belonging to God and our call to holiness isn't dependent on marital status.

We find models of Christian living in Scripture. Jesus was single, as were Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others. Saint Paul saw value in his single status and encouraged others to use their gifts within this state of life:

*“Each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. Now to the unmarried and to widows I say: it is a good thing for them to remain as they are, as I do.”*

*1 Corinthians 7:7–8*

### As Workers

Our daily work offers us opportunities to glorify God through the use and development of our talents and our witness to God's love. The ways in which Christian laypersons perform their daily chores can be powerful witnesses to the grace of God.

*“In the pilgrimage of this life, [they].. generously dedicate themselves wholly to the advancement of the kingdom of God and to the reform and improvement of the temporal order in a Christian spirit.”*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem), 4*

Sharing Christ in the workplace is a sensitive issue since Christian charity demands we respect the beliefs of others. We don't force Christ on others: Christ invited people to believe in him and let the Spirit do the rest. But there will be times when an explicit explanation of the life and work of Jesus Christ may be in order.

In the workplace, there are always opportunities to pray for the needs of fellow workers. Through prayer, God can open hearts to the reception of God's healing.

- *When have you shared your faith at work? How was it received?*



### As Church Members

While liturgical ministries such as lector, cantor, and extraordinary minister of holy Communion are important, they're no more important than service to shut-ins, setting up the hall for parish socials, or serving refreshments.

Some laypeople are called to perform tasks that assist priests in serving the needs of the community. Some use their gifts in parish or diocesan administration, pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, bereavement ministry, or faith formation.

*“There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification.”*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem), 6*



## As Community Members and Citizens

Finally, laypersons touch the lives of friends, extended family, and the community in unique and deeply personal ways.

*"The effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others."*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity  
(Apostolicam Actuositatem), 13*

## Getting Ready

The laity are most effective as disciples if we're educated and updated in our faith. We can seek out formation opportunities to form us more and more into God's divine image, as a potter forms clay into vessels. Authentic Christian formation takes place within the context of a believing community, usually the local parish, which is centered on the Eucharist, other sacraments, good preaching and teaching, social outreach, and community involvement.

Laypersons may share personal concerns, insights, and inspirations in small groups or seek individual spiritual direction. All adults can grow spiritually through praying regularly, studying Scripture, and reading good books written by respected authors about faith or the spiritual life.

## Getting Involved

It's time to take your place alongside other members of the Church community for daily service of the kingdom of God. It's time to get involved and put your faith into action. Some people get involved in Church programs; others bring their faith to secular involvements. Some join groups; others prefer to make a difference as individuals.



- How is God calling me to get involved in my local parish?
- How is God calling me to put my faith into action at work or within the larger community?

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