THE REFORM OF INSTITUTED MINISTRIES IN LIGHT OF *SPIRITUS DOMINI* AND *ANTIQUUM MINISTERIUM*: CANONICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SYNODAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The 2021 motu proprios *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, promulgated by Pope Francis, mark a decisive moment in the Church's reception of Vatican II's ecclesiology by reshaping the theological and canonical understanding of instituted ministries. These reforms ground instituted ministries explicitly in baptism and recognise the catechist as a stable form of ecclesial service. In light of these developments, this thesis offers a comprehensive historical, theological, and canonical study of instituted ministries, beginning with the fluid and charismatic roles of the early Christian communities and tracing their gradual incorporation into the clerical *cursus honorum*, their codification as minor orders, and their consolidation within the Tridentine framework. The reform initiated by *Ministeria quaedam* (1972) abolished the minor orders and established the instituted lay ministries of lector and acolyte; however, the subsequent formulation of c. 230 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law left unresolved tensions concerning baptismal foundations, women's participation, and the distinction between instituted, temporary, and extraordinary ministries.

Through a critical analysis of these historical trajectories and recent papal reforms, the thesis argues that instituted ministries must be understood within a synodal framework that emphasises co-responsibility, discernment, and the recognition of charisms. It evaluates the adequacy of the current canonical structure, identifies limitations in the existing terminology and categorisation, and proposes a more flexible continuum of ministries capable of responding to diverse pastoral realities. Drawing on historical precedent, theological reflection, and contemporary pastoral practice, the study also considers the possible institution of a ministry of deaconess, clearly distinguished from the sacramental diaconate yet expressive of baptismal participation.

Overall, the thesis contributes to the ongoing theology and canon law of ministry by articulating a coherent model in which instituted ministries function as an authentic expression of synodality and the shared mission of the People of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*
AAS	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis: Commentarium officiale*, Rome, 1909-
AG	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*
AM	FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter Instituting the Ministry of Catechist *Antiquum ministerium*
ASS	*Acta Sanctae Sedis*
AT	The *Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr (also referred to as *Apostolic Tradition*).
c.	canon
cc.	canons
CCBI	Conference of Catholic Bishops of India
CCC	*Catechism of the Catholic Church*
CCCB	Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
CCEO	*Codex canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus, fontium annotatione auctus* (Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches)
CCLA	E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*
CCLS	Canadian Canon Law Society
CD	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

CDWDS	Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments
CEI	Italian Episcopal Conference
CELAM	Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council
CEP	Portuguese Episcopal Conference
CIC/17	*Codex iuris canonici, Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus* (1917 *Pio-Benedictine* Code of Canon Law)
CIC/83	*Codex iuris canonici, auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus, fontium annotatione et indice analytico-alphabetico auctus* (1983 Code of Canon Law)
CL	JOHN PAUL II, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*
CLD	*Canon Law Digest*, 14 vols.
CLSA	Canon Law Society of America
CLSA Comm1	J.A. CORIDEN, T.J. GREEN, and D.E. HEINTSCHEL (eds.), *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*
CLSA Comm2	J.P. BEAL, J.A. CORIDEN, and T.J. GREEN (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*
CLSANZ	Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand
CLSANZP	*Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand Proceedings*
CLSAP	*Canon Law Society of America Proceedings*
CLSGBI	Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland
CLSGBI Comm	G. SHEEHY et al. (eds.), *The Canon Law: Letter & Spirit*
CNBB	National Conference of Bishops of Brazil
CT	JOHN PAUL II, apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*

DfC	PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELISATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, 2020
DEO	ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*
DMC	SACRED CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, *Directory for Masses with Children*
DV	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*
EDM	CONGREGATION FOR CLERGY et al., Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding Collaboration of Non-ordained Faithful in Sacred Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*
EG	FRANCIS, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*
EN	PAUL VI, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*
ES	PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on Norms for Implementing the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ecclesiae sanctae*
Exegetical Comm	Á. MARZOA, J. MIRAS, R. RODRÍGUEZ-OCAÑA (eds.) and E. CAPARROS (gen. ed. of English translation), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*
Final Document	*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2024
FLANNERY1	A. FLANNERY (gen. ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1
FLANNERY2	A. FLANNERY (gen. ed.), *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 2
GDC	*General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997
GE	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis*
GIRM	*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*
ICEL	International Commission on English in the Liturgy

IL	*Instrumentum laboris*, Working Document for the Synod on Synodality, 2023
IM	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter mirifica*
ITC	International Theological Commission
Letter to the Presidents	Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists, 3 December 2021
LG	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*
LP	*Liber pontificalis* (The Book of the Popes)
MQ	PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on First Tonsure, Minor Orders, and the Subdiaconate *Ministeria quaedam*
NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops (of the USA – prior to 1 July 2001)
PE	FRANCIS, apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*
PO	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis*
PR	*Pontificale Romanum* (Roman Pontifical)
QA	FRANCIS, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*
RM	JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris missio*
SC	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*
SD	FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter Modifying Canon 230, §1 of the Code of Canon Law regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte *Spiritus Domini*
SEA	*Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*
StC	*Studia canonica*

Synthesis Report	*Synthesis Report* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2023
USCC	United States Catholic Conference (prior to 1 July 2001)
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Since 1 July 2001)
Vatican II	Second Vatican Council
VD	BENEDICT XVI, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The question of ministry in the Catholic Church has long been shaped by a dynamic interplay of historical development, theological insight, and canonical expression. From the earliest Christian communities, whose life was marked by a diversity of charisms, the Church recognised that ministry arises from the manifold gifts of the Spirit, for "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:4). These charismatic forms of service gradually took on stable expressions, eventually becoming incorporated into the clerical *cursus honorum*. Over the centuries, ecclesial structures, cultural circumstances, and theological reflection contributed to the consolidation of the minor orders and to the predominance of clerical forms of ministry.

This long and complex development formed the necessary background for the reforms of the Second Vatican Council,[1] which brought into focus a renewed vision of the People of God, the common priesthood, and the charismatic dimension of ecclesial life (*LG*, 9–12). Vatican II emphasised that the Holy Spirit "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank" (*LG*, 12) and that the lay apostolate is "a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself" (*AA*, 3). These teachings have had far-reaching consequences for the Church's understanding of ministry, especially by emphasising that ecclesial service is rooted in baptism and oriented towards the mission of Christ. They also prepared the ground for the post-conciliar reform of the minor orders undertaken by Pope Paul VI in *Ministeria quaedam*.[2]

Within this theological and historical context, the present study undertakes a comprehensive investigation of instituted ministries, examining their development

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[1] The Second Vatican Council, hereafter cited as "Vatican II," constitutes the primary conciliar reference throughout this thesis.

[2] See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter by which the Discipline of the First Tonsure, Minor Orders and Subdiaconate in the Latin Church is Reformed *Ministeria quaedam*, 15 August 1972 (=*MQ*), in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 529–534, English translation in *FLANNERY I*, 427–432.

from the early minor orders through *Ministeria quaedam* and into the reforms promulgated by Pope Francis in *Spiritus Domini*[3] and *Antiquum ministerium*.[4] These interventions represent significant moments in the ongoing reception of Vatican II's ecclesiology. They invite renewed reflection on the baptismal foundations of ministry, the participation of the laity in the Church's mission, and the canonical structures that recognise and regulate such participation.

For the purposes of this study, instituted ministries are understood as stable forms of ecclesial service formally recognised through institution by competent ecclesiastical authority according to the prescribed rite. They must be distinguished from the temporary deputation of laypersons to particular functions under c. 230, §2 and from the extraordinary exercise of certain functions under the conditions established by c. 230, §3. These forms of service differ in their stability, manner of ecclesial recognition, and juridical conditions. Their relationship, however, raises important questions about how the Church recognises the charisms of the faithful and organises their participation in her mission.

A central argument emerging from this study is that instituted ministries today must be understood within a synodal ecclesiology. Pope Francis has repeatedly affirmed that "synodality is the path which God expects of the Church in the third millennium."[5] This affirmation provides an important interpretive framework for assessing both historical developments and contemporary reforms. Synodality, rooted

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[3] See FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter Modifying Canon 230, §1 of the Code of Canon Law Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte *Spiritus Domini*, 10 January 2021 (=*SD*), in *AAS*, 113 (2021), 169–170, English translation in *Origins*, 50 (2021), 571–572.

[4] See FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter Instituting the Ministry of Catechist *Antiquum ministerium*, 10 May 2021 (=*AM*), in *AAS*, 113 (2021), 527–533, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html (2 February 2025).

[5] See FRANCIS, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, in *AAS*, 107 (2015), 1140, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (26 September 2025).

in baptismal dignity and expressed through participation, discernment, and co-responsibility,[6] offers a framework for evaluating the theological principles and canonical structures that shape instituted ministries. While *Ministeria quaedam* marked important progress by recognising lector and acolyte as lay ministries, its reception in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, particularly in c. 230, reveals areas of ambiguity, including residual clerical patterns and pastoral tensions in the distinction between instituted, temporary, and extraordinary forms of service.

The reforms introduced by Pope Francis address several of these limitations. *Spiritus Domini* opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women and men, while *Antiquum ministerium* established the instituted ministry of catechist. Together, these developments reflect a clearer reception of Vatican II's baptismal ecclesiology and provide new opportunities for lay participation in the Church's mission. At the same time, they raise further theological and canonical questions concerning the nature of instituted ministries, their relationship to other forms of ecclesial service, and the adequacy of the existing canonical framework.

The central research question of this thesis is therefore whether the present framework of canon 230 adequately expresses the theological and pastoral development of ministry since the Second Vatican Council, particularly in light of *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. This question is examined through historical investigation, theological analysis, and canonical evaluation. The study seeks not only to identify the strengths and limitations of the existing legislation but also to consider how the canonical regulation of ministries might develop in response to the Church's understanding of baptism, charisms, ecclesial communion, and mission.

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[6] See INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2 March 2018 (=*ITC*), nos. 7, 10, 46, 67, 72, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html (18 December 2025).

In response to this question, the thesis proposes a more coherent framework for understanding the different forms of ecclesial service. It explores the possibility of a continuum that relates instituted ministries, temporary deputation, and extraordinary forms of service according to their respective degrees of stability, ecclesial recognition, and juridical responsibility. This proposal does not seek to eliminate the distinctions established by canon law or to assign identical status to every form of service. Rather, it aims to clarify the relationship between these categories while recognising that ecclesial ministry involves more than the performance of an individual function. It may also involve vocation, charism, formation, discernment, sustained commitment, ecclesial recognition, and responsibility for the Church's mission. Such an approach seeks to hold together the diversity of ministries and the need for an appropriate canonical framework.

Drawing on historical precedent, theological reflection, and contemporary pastoral needs, the study also explores the possibility of an instituted ministry of deaconess. This proposal concerns a distinct and stable instituted lay ministry and does not propose the sacramental ordination of women to the diaconate. It is presented as an avenue for further theological and canonical research, attentive to historical evidence, ecclesial discernment, and the pastoral needs of the Church. The proposal is therefore not advanced as a definitive resolution of the questions surrounding women's ministries, but as a contribution to the wider reflection on baptismal participation and the development of ecclesial service within a synodal Church.

The study is organised into four interrelated chapters.

Chapter One traces the historical and theological foundations of ecclesial ministry. Beginning with the early Church and the diversity of charisms, it examines how Roman societal structures influenced the development of the clerical *cursus*

honorum. It then analyses the historical and theological development of the minor orders, including their consolidation in the medieval and Tridentine periods, their treatment in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, and the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council. The chapter concludes with an examination of *Ministeria quaedam* as a significant, though incomplete, step in the post-conciliar reform of ministry.

Chapter Two offers a detailed canonical analysis of c. 230 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. It explores the theology of ministry, the relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, and the legal configuration of instituted, temporary, and extraordinary forms of service. Particular attention is given to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, temporary liturgical functions, and extraordinary forms of ministry, as well as to the exclusion of women from instituted lector and acolyte ministries before the reform introduced by *Spiritus Domini*. The chapter also examines the relationship between instituted ministries and other ecclesial realities, including ordained ministry and ecclesiastical office, in order to identify the theological and pastoral tensions arising from the existing canonical framework.

Chapter Three examines the 2021 reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, situating them within broader ecclesial developments, including recent magisterial teaching and the Synod on Synodality. It analyses the theological and canonical implications of opening the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women and of formally instituting the ministry of catechist. The chapter also considers the historical development of catechetical ministry, relevant ecclesiastical documents, and the perspectives of theologians and canonists. Through an examination of the synodal process, it evaluates how these developments contribute to the Church's understanding of baptismal participation, co-responsibility, and the recognition of diverse charisms.

Chapter Four synthesises the findings of the preceding chapters and considers the theological and canonical implications of recent developments in lay instituted ministries. It revisits *Ministeria quaedam* fifty years after its promulgation, evaluates the continuities and discontinuities between the reforms of Paul VI and Francis, and examines the strengths and limitations of the current canonical framework. The chapter then develops a synodal framework for ministries, giving particular attention to the relationship between instituted and temporary forms of service, the role of universal and particular law, and the importance of formation, accountability, pastoral support, and ecclesial discernment. Finally, it proposes possible pathways for broadening the spectrum of instituted ministries and reforming c. 230, including further consideration of an instituted ministry of deaconess and other forms of service responsive to contemporary pastoral needs.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that instituted ministries, when understood within a baptismal and synodal framework, can serve as effective instruments for strengthening the Church's mission. They provide concrete ways of recognising the charisms of the faithful, encouraging collaborative forms of service, and fostering a more participatory and co-responsible ecclesial life. By examining their historical development, theological foundations, and canonical structures, this study seeks to contribute to the Church's ongoing discernment of how best to support and integrate the ministries of all the baptised.

The central concern is not simply to multiply ministries, but to articulate a coherent understanding of ecclesial service that remains faithful to the Church's tradition while responding to contemporary pastoral realities. Such an understanding must recognise the diversity of charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit, provide appropriate forms of ecclesial discernment and canonical recognition, and preserve the

distinction between lay ministries and Holy Orders. In this way, the study seeks to contribute to a vision of ministry that is faithful to tradition, responsive to present needs, and attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who continues to lead the People of God in communion and mission.

CHAPTER ONE
HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF MINOR ORDERS INTO INSTITUTED MINISTRIES

Introduction

The evolution of ecclesiastical ministries within the Catholic Church reflects both theological shifts and practical necessities. Among these, the development of minor orders into instituted ministries highlights the Church's adaptability while maintaining its traditions. This chapter explores the historical and theological evolution of minor orders, from their early roots in apostolic tradition through the significant reforms of Pope Paul VI's *Ministeria quaedam*.

Initially, we examine the early Church period, where the framework for minor orders began with directives from various conciliar and papal sources. The chapter then examines key ecumenical councils, including the Fourth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent, which solidified the role and theology of minor orders in response to historical challenges.

The 1917 Code of Canon Law marked a pivotal moment by codifying minor orders within the Church's legal framework, ensuring their relevance in the modern world. The chapter concludes with the transformative reforms of *Ministeria quaedam*, where Pope Paul VI redefined minor orders into instituted ministries to better serve contemporary needs while staying true to the Church's mission and tradition.

This exploration aims to shed light on the evolving nature of minor orders and the enduring principles that sustain their significance within the Catholic tradition, setting the stage for the detailed discussion in the following chapter.

The relationship between charism and ministry lies at the heart of the Church's understanding of ecclesiastical roles and functions. To comprehend how minor orders have evolved into instituted ministries, it is essential to first define these foundational

terms. This section aims to define and clarify these terms, exploring their theological significance and how they have shaped the development of ecclesiastical ministries over time. By understanding the relationship between charism and ministry, we gain deeper insight into the rationale behind the transition from minor orders to instituted ministries.

1.1 – Impact of Roman Societal Structures on the Evolution of Minor Orders

The emergence and development of the minor orders have been examined by historians from different theological, historical and ecclesiological perspectives. Particular attention has been given to the origins of these ministries, their relationship to the early Church's forms of service, and the possible influence of Roman social, administrative and religious structures on their institutional development.

This section first examines the principal historiographical interpretations of the origin and development of the minor orders, paying particular attention to the contributions of Bradshaw, Lindsay and Harnack. It then considers the historical development of individual orders, beginning with the subdiaconate, in order to assess how particular ministries emerged and acquired more stable positions within the ecclesiastical structure.

1.1.1. Historiographical Perspectives on the Origin and Development of the Minor Orders

The historiography of the minor orders reflects differing interpretations of their origins and subsequent development. While some scholars emphasise the continuity between early ecclesial ministries and the later system of minor orders, others draw attention to the influence of the social, administrative and religious structures of the Roman world.

Bradshaw notes that, alongside the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, the early Church also recognised other permanently appointed ministers

responsible for specific liturgical functions. These would eventually be known as the minor orders. According to him, "the most ancient of these offices seem to have been those of reader and subdeacon."[1] The Council of Trent later affirmed that the various "functions of holy orders from the deacon to the porter" had "been laudably received in the Church from the times of the Apostles"[2] and further asserted that from the Church's earliest period the names and duties of subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, lector and porter were already known.[3]

Lindsay situates the expansion of the lower clergy more precisely within the life of the Roman Church, observing that the multiplication of minor orders occurred principally in the late third and early fourth centuries. The organisational capacity of the Roman Church, he argues, played a decisive role in this development. In the West, the minor orders seem to have reached a stable form by the early fourth century, if not earlier.[4]

At the same time, not all historians support a strictly apostolic origin for the minor orders. The Catholic Encyclopaedia clearly states that they "are not of Divine or Apostolic origin,"[5] and suggests that certain roles emerged from adaptations of functions found in the civil and religious structures of Roman society. For instance, the office of porter (*ostiarius*) bears striking resemblance to the Roman household slave who guarded the entrance of the home. As Christian communities began to possess

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[1] P. BRADSHAW, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West*, New York, Pueblo, 1990, 93.

[2] COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter XVII, "In What Manner the Exercise of the Minor Orders Is to Be Restored," in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 174–175.

[3] See COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter II, "Who Are to Be Promoted to Cathedral Churches," in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 153–154.

[4] See LINDSAY, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 353.

[5] A. BOUDINHON, "Minor Orders," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1911, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10332b.htm. (23 August 2024).

dedicated buildings for worship and administration from the late second century onward, analogous roles naturally arose within ecclesial life.[6]

Lindsay expands this argument and claims that several clerical ranks, not merely the porter, reflect the influence of Roman civil and religious institutions. He argues that "the Christian churches did copy that great pagan hierarchy in the multiplication of the lower orders of clergy on the model of the organisation of the state temple service."[7] After outlining the hierarchical divisions and personnel of pagan temples, he proposes that the Christian system of major and minor orders reflects the Roman pattern of higher sacrificial priests assisted by subordinate attendants.[8] While such comparisons must be handled with nuance, the structural parallels between Christian lower clergy and Roman temple attendants are too significant to dismiss.

Crucially, neither Lindsay nor Harnack suggests that Christian priesthood or sacramental ministry derives from pagan cults. Rather, what appears to be adopted is the administrative and hierarchical pattern and not the theological substance. Christian priesthood, rooted in Christ and transmitted through the apostles, remains distinct. However, the Church did not hesitate to utilise effective organisational forms available within the surrounding culture, distinguishing clearly between what could be borrowed structurally and what was divinely instituted.

It is within this interpretative horizon that Harnack's influential study, *On the Origin of the Readership and of the Other Lower Orders*,[9] must be understood. He challenges the view attributed to Thomas Aquinas that the lower ranks derived

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[6] See J.P. KIRSCH, "Porter," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 12, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1911, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12284b.htm. (23 August 2024).

[7] LINDSAY, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 350.

[8] See ibid., 354–355.

[9] See A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons; with a Treatise on the Origin of the Readership and Other Lower Orders*, L.A. WHEATLEY (trans.), London, Adam and Charles Black, 1895.

uniformly from the diaconate.[10] Harnack argues instead that the lower clergy arose from three distinct sources: the subdeacon from the diaconate; the reader and exorcist from charismatic and prophetic ministries of the earliest congregations; and the acolyte and porter from Roman temple attendants and administrative servants.[11] This tripartite origin explains the diversity of functions within the minor orders and the composite character of the later hierarchical structure.

1.1.2 – Subdeacon

On the subdiaconate Harnack broadly agrees with Thomas Aquinas, although he provides greater historical specificity. He sees the subdiaconate as a development within the diaconal ministry. Two factors contributed to its emergence. The first is that some early Christian communities hesitated to appoint more than seven deacons, following the symbolic precedent of Acts 6. In growing urban congregations, however, the needs of worship and charity exceeded what seven deacons could address. Additional assistants therefore emerged as "supplementary deacons."[12]

The second factor is that as the office of deacon gained dignity, particularly through its proximity to the liturgy and the bishop, deacons increasingly delegated practical or logistical tasks. These assistants gradually became a distinct group who participated in certain diaconal responsibilities but were not deacons in the full sense. Harnack describes them as the *διάκονοι ὑπηρέται* (*diakouoi hypēretai*), servants supporting the deacons, and he notes that their dual identity as supernumerary deacons and practical assistants explains why they soon occupied the highest place among the

[10] See A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 55.

[11] See ibid., 56.

[12] See ibid., 84.

minor orders. Their liturgical proximity also facilitated their eventual inclusion among the major orders in the West, especially under Pope Innocent III.[13]

The subdiaconate therefore exemplifies a ministry that grew organically out of apostolic structures and adapted to pastoral needs while reflecting the Church's gradual differentiation of liturgical roles.

1.1.3 – Exorcist and Reader

The origins of the exorcist and reader lie not in the diaconate but in the charismatic ministries of the early Christian communities. Harnack argues that these functions arose from the "prophets and teachers" of the apostolic age who exercised Spirit-given gifts for the edification of the congregation.[14] Readers, who were responsible for proclaiming Scripture, held a role of considerable dignity because public reading required skill, clarity and an ability to edify the assembly. Although they did not possess the authority associated with prophetic speech, their role was essential within the liturgy.[15]

As prophetic ministries gradually declined in the second century and the threefold structure of bishop, presbyter and deacon became dominant, the reader assumed part of the teaching and exhortatory function previously exercised by prophets.[16] Harnack notes that in certain early canonical texts the reader is placed between the presbyter and the deacon, and this reflects this transitional stage.[17]

By the early third century, as ecclesial structures matured, these roles were formalised within the clerical state. Readers and exorcists, although originally diverse

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[13] See A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 84–85.

[14] See ibid., 79–80.

[15] See ibid., 80.

[16] See ibid., 81.

[17] See ibid., 82.

in origin, were now incorporated into what became the hierarchy of minor orders. Harnack highlights the notable parallel between this developing Christian hierarchy and Roman religious structures in which priests were assisted by a range of subordinate ministers.[18]

1.1.4 – Porter and Acolyte

The offices of porter and acolyte represent the clearest examples of Christian adaptation of Roman institutional forms. Unlike the reader and exorcist, whose functions arose organically within the early Church, the porter and acolyte appear suddenly and without clear Christian antecedents in the mid-third century. Their emergence coincides with the increasing institutionalisation of Roman Christianity and the acquisition of dedicated church buildings.[19]

Harnack identifies the Roman *aedituus minister* as the functional precursor of the Christian porter. This temple servant opened and closed the sacred space, regulated access, and oversaw the order of worshippers. These are precisely the tasks later assigned to Christian porters. Christian adoption of this role became necessary as church buildings were regarded as sacred spaces requiring responsible custodians.[20]

Similarly, the acolyte appears to derive from the *tabellarii* and *calatores*, attendants and messengers attached to Roman priestly colleges. These officials assisted priests in practical and ceremonial duties, much as acolytes assisted Christian clergy. The designation "acolyte" (ἀκόλουθος), meaning an attendant or follower, reflects this personal association with the priest.[21]

Lindsay's synthesis makes this parallel explicit:

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[18] See A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 82.

[19] See ibid., 85–86.

[20] See ibid., 88.

[21] Ibid.

> The acolytes and the doorkeepers (*ostiarii*, πυλωροί) correspond to these two classes of the lower priesthood in the pagan state temples. The acolyte (ακόλουθος) was originally an attendant, a scholar, a follower, or more definitely the boy or man-servant who followed his master when the latter went out of his house. They were the servants of the Christian priests doing all manner of services for them, carrying their messages or letters, and in general acting like the *calatores* of the state temples. The doorkeepers or *ostiarii* had the same duties in the Christian churches that the *aeditui* had in the state temples.[22]

This resemblance does not imply a theological derivation. It simply denotes a practical adoption of functional roles already present in Roman society.

1.1.5 – Synthesis and Improvement

Harnack and Lindsay agree that the minor orders as an *ordo* emerged from a deliberate Christian appropriation and transformation of Roman administrative patterns. Lindsay emphasises that the decisive development was not simply the Church's adoption of practical assistants for worship and pastoral service. Rather, it was the incorporation of these assistants into the clerical state. In the pagan religious system, lower attendants were permanently excluded from advancement and could never enter the ranks of the higher priesthood.[23] The Christian arrangement, by contrast, allowed for gradual progression through the orders. This progression, however, took place within the Church's own hierarchical and disciplinary framework. Lindsay describes this:

> The Church, however, did not copy its pagan models slavishly. It broke the pagan rule that the higher ministry was to be reserved for men of a certain rank, and that there was a social gulf between the acting and the serving priesthood. It made those lower orders the recruiting ground for the higher, and in this was constructed a ladder by which deserving men could climb from the lowest to the highest ranks of service within the Church of Christ.[24]

Harnack highlights the ecclesiological significance of this innovation when he notes that the Church "broke with the ancient view that the priesthood should be

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[22] LINDSAY, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 355.

[23] See ibid., 354.

[24] See ibid., 356.

accessible to certain classes only"[25] and constructed an inclusive and formative clerical structure. The lower clergy, therefore, became not a servile class but a genuine nursery for higher ministry.

This Christian reconfiguration transformed a static and stratified model into a dynamic and integrated ecclesial hierarchy. The Church adopted organisational elements from Roman society when they served pastoral and liturgical needs, yet reshaped them according to a theological vision grounded in baptismal equality, vocational discernment, and the unity of the clerical state. In this way, the Christian community developed a coherent system of minor orders that combined early Christian ministries with adapted Roman structures. This synthesis ultimately produced the clerical *cursus honorum* that shaped Western ecclesiastical life throughout the medieval period.

1.2 – The Nexus Between Charism and Ministry

The minor orders within the early Church emerged as essential components of its ecclesiastical structure, reflecting the theological and practical needs of a growing Christian community. Roles such as acolytes, exorcists, lectors, and porters were not merely functional; they were deeply rooted in the Church's understanding of ministry as an expression of divine charism. The early Church recognised these roles as extensions of its ministerial charisms, highlighting the integral connection between spiritual gifts and ecclesiastical functions. In this section, we will explore how this relationship influenced the formation of minor orders and their support of the major orders, ensuring the effective execution of liturgical and administrative duties. This examination will demonstrate how the foundational concepts of charism and ministry

[25] A. HARNACK, *Sources of Apostolic Canons*, 92.

shaped the development of minor orders, solidifying their significance within the broader context of the Church's mission and governance.

1.2.1 – The Nexus Between Charism and Ministry

The term "charism" originates from the Greek words *charisma* (gift), *charis* (grace) used in the New Testament, meaning "favour" or "gratuitous gift,"[26] "benefit."[27] Charisms are special abilities bestowed upon all Christians by the Holy Spirit, empowering them to represent Christ and act as channels of God's goodness.[28] The New Catholic Encyclopaedia defines charism as "a spiritual gift or talent granted by God to the recipient not primarily for his own sake but for the benefit of others 'in order to perfect the saints for a work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,' i.e., the Church (Eph. 4:12; see also 1 Cor. 12:7)."[29] Regardless of their nature, whether

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[26] See P.K. NJIRU, *Charisms and the Holy Spirit's Activity in the Body of Christ: An Exegetical-Theological Study of 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 and Romans 12:6–8*, Rome, Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2002, 76; F.A. SULLIVAN, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study*, Ann Arbor, MI, Servant Books, 1982, 17; M. DOWNEY, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1993, 140.

[27] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium (=LG)*, no. 12, 21 November 1964, in *AAS*, 57 (1965), 5–75, English translation in A. FLANNERY (gen. ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, new rev. ed., Northport, NY, Costello Pub. Co., 1996 (=*FLANNERY1)*, 363.

[28] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ottawa, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (=*CCC*), no. 2003, 1994.

[29] W.F. DICHARRY, art. "Charism," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, New York, McGraw-Hill, Catholic University of America, 1967, 460. Similar definitions of "charism" can be found in a variety of sources. To cite five representative examples: L. BOFF, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, New York, Crossroad, 1985, 156 ff; J.M. LOZANO, *Foundresses, Founders and Their Religious Families*, Chicago, IL, Claret Centre for Resources in Spirituality, 1983, 30–33; G. MURPHY, *Charisms and Church Renew*al, Rome, Catholic Book Agency, 1965, 13–17; L.J. SUENENS, *A New Pentecost?* New York, Seabury Press, 1975, 32; R. LAURENTIN, *Catholic Pentecostalism*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1977, 51.

extraordinary[30] or service-oriented,[31] charisms are meant to be exercised in the service of God and the community.[32]

In the Church, because of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit received through baptism, every Christian is called for some service to the community, each one thus responsibly contributing towards building it up. This service of the baptised is commonly designated as "ministry." In this sense, not only individuals but also the whole Church is ministerial.[33]

The term "ministry" is derived from the Latin word *ministerium* which means ministry, service, office, or duty.[34] "In early Latin versions of Scripture *ministerium* was used as the translation for the Greek *diakonia*."[35] The common English translation of *diakonia* is "service." In later ecclesiastical usage, *ministerium* was applied exclusively to the clergy and became associated with the power and authority of ecclesiastical office.[36] "The original Greek word *diakonia* had none of these connotations."[37] Thus, in the Catholic Church prior to Vatican II it may be said that "ministry" had a limited and exclusive application to the activity of the ordained. This evolution reflected a shift

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[30] Extraordinary or miraculous charism embrace the gifts of healing, miracles, faith, such as would "move mountains," exorcism, and immunity from harm arising from deadly things such as serpents or poison. See W.F. DICHARRY, "Charism," 460.

[31] "Service charisms include gifts for governing, guiding, ministering, giving, mercy, and services of help. The exercise of Holy Orders might possibly be included here as well" (W.F. DICHARRY, "Charism," 460).

[32] See *CCC*, no. 2003.

[33] See ASIAN COLLOQUIUM ON MINISTRIES SPONSORED BY THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, "Ministries: Heralding a New Era," in *Origins*, 8 (1978), 129.

[34] See L.F. STELTEN, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin*, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 162.

[35] E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," in *The Jurist*, 47 (1987), 204.

[36] For example, K. RAHNER and H. VORGRIMLER, *Theological Dictionary*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1965, 287 has one entry for "Ministry" in which the reader is referred to "Office."

[37] E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 204.

towards institutionalisation within the Church, limiting the concept of ministry to ordained activities.

A helpful later reflection on the relationship between charisms, services, and ministries was offered by the Asian Colloquium on Ministries (FABC, 1977), which clarified the progression from charismatic gifts to more stable ecclesial ministries and the need for communal recognition and leadership authentication of such roles.[38]

1.2.2 – Pauline Perspective on Charism and Ministry

The apostle Paul presents one of the earliest and most influential articulations of the relationship between charism and ministry. For Paul, charisms are not private spiritual advantages, but manifestations of the Spirit given "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). In 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, he distinguishes but interrelates three dimensions of ecclesial life: charisms are rooted in the Spirit, ministries arise in service to the Lord, and workings or activities originate in God. This triadic framework places charisms at the foundation of ecclesial ministry, since ministries are the concrete expressions through which the Lord is served by means of Spirit-given gifts.

Paul's catalogues of charisms (1 Cor 12:8–10, 12:28; Rom 12:6–8; Eph 4:11) illustrate the diversity of gifts within the community. These include wisdom, healing, prophecy, teaching, exhortation, administration, and various other capacities ordered

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[38] Asian Colloquium made the following distinctions:

"1. "Charisms" are enduring gifts of the Spirit given to Church members to be put to use in services and ministries.

2. "Services" are those ways of sharing the Church's ministeriality which are undertaken spontaneously and on occasion.

3. "Ministries" apply more properly to those services which Church members undertake with a certain stability and exercise on a sufficiently broad basis, thus sharing formally in the Church's responsibility to signify the presence in the world of Christ's saving action. All such ministries must be recognised by the community and authenticated by it in the person of its leader. Thus, every service and ministry of the Church suppose a charism but not every charism blossoms into a ministry" (ASIAN COLLOQUIUM ON MINISTRIES SPONSORED BY THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, "Ministries: Heralding a New Era," in *Origins*, 8 [1978], 133–134).

toward the building up of the Body of Christ. Not everyone receives all charisms, and Paul cautions the community against rivalry or jealousy among different gifts (Rom 12:3). Instead, the proper functioning of the Church depends on the harmonious interplay of diverse members, each contributing according to the gift received.

Within this context, the prophets and teachers who appear in Paul's letters are usually recognised as early leaders of local congregations. Schillebeeckx describes them as "incipient local leaders and pioneers,"[39] highlighting their role in shaping the community's faith and practice. Wayne Meeks, drawing attention to Paul's ranking of apostles, prophets, and teachers in 1 Cor 12:28, notes that certain roles appear consistently across Paul's lists and that some leaders were supported materially by their congregations from an early period (Gal 6:6). Such evidence indicates that a degree of functional differentiation and early formalisation of ministry had already taken place within Pauline communities.[40]

Paul's vision therefore provides a theological basis for understanding how charisms become ministries. Charisms are gifts that originate in the Spirit; ministry is their stable, communal, and ordered expression within the life of the Church. This dynamic interplay between gift and service would later underpin the emergence of structured ecclesiastical roles, including the minor orders, as the early Church sought to integrate diverse charisms into a coherent ministerial framework.

1.2.3 – Institutionalisation of Charism

In the early Church, specific roles such as *episcopoi*, *presbyteroi*, and *diakonoi* began to emerge, governed by precise rules and established through rituals like the

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[39] E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, New York, Crossroad, 1985, 79.

[40] See W.A. MEEKS, *The first urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2003, 135.

laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:17–22). This period marks the institutionalisation of charism, where the Spirit's gifts were integrated into formal ministry roles, leading to a structured hierarchy of Church leadership.[41] Presbyters were appointed in every town (Tit 1:5), established through the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:17–22). They took precedence in Christian assemblies (1 Tim 5:17). The institutionalisation involved a moralisation of offices (1 Tim 3:1–7; 3:8–13; 1 Tim 5:17–19) and centralisation of liturgical celebrations and doctrinal teaching (1 Tim 2:1–15; 4:6, 13–16; 6:3). Over time, the roles of presbyter/bishops encompassed community leadership and teaching. This shift led to the emergence of a threefold ministry of bishop, presbyters, and deacons, which was established by the end of the second century.[42]

While the threefold ministry effectively provided pastoral care and linked local Churches into a universal communion, it came with some losses. The Pauline concept of the multiplicity of charisms became less prominent, with later New Testament books referencing charisms mainly in connection to Church leaders and those who received the laying on of hands (1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).[43]

Another development was the gradual sacralisation or sacerdotalisation of the Church's pastoral office. By the end of the first century, the Christian community order began to be compared to the Jewish cult's structure,[44] leading to the use of sacerdotal

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[41] See J. PATHRAPANKAL, "Ministry in St. Paul," in D.S. AMALORPAVADASS (ed.), *Ministries in the Church in India: Research Seminar and Pastoral Consultation*, New Delhi, C.B.C.I. Centre, 1976, 208–210.

[42] See ibid., 210.

[43] See T.P. RAUSCH, "Ministry and Ministries," in S.K., WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, Collegeville, MN, 2003, 55.

[44] "As early as the year 96, the author of 1 Clement compared the order of the Jewish cult, with its high priests, priests, and Levites (1 Clem. 40), to the order of the Christian community, with its apostles, bishops, and deacons (1 Clem. 42). As the Church became more aware of the sacrificial dimension of its Eucharist, it began using sacerdotal language for its eucharistic presiders. The *Didache* recognises the wandering prophets as eucharistic leaders (10) and calls them "high priests" (*Apostolic Tradition*, 3.4). Tertullian (d. 225) and Cyprian (d. 258) also speak of the bishop as *sacerdos*. Cyprian extended the term to presbyters, but only in conjunction with the bishops, a usage that became traditional in the Church. It

language for eucharistic presiders.[45] Over time, the terms *episkopos* and presbyter became associated with priestly roles, integrating Jewish and Greek priestly concepts into Christian ministry.[46] Raymond Brown noted that "in Churches associated with the three great apostolic figures of the NT, Paul, James, and Peter, presbyters were known and established in the last third of the century."[47] The threefold ministry of a bishop, assisted by presbyters and deacons, already evident in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch around 110 A.D., was in place throughout the Church by the end of the second century.[48] Tertullian bears witness to the stabilisation of the names and functions of *episkopos*, presbyter and deacon.[49] O'Meara speaks of the "metamorphoses of ministry,"[50] Schillebeeckx of its "sacerdotalising,"[51] Osborne of its "clericalisation."[52] By the end of this period, ministry involved a personal call, ecclesial discernment and recognition of a genuine charism, appropriate formation, authorisation by community leadership,

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is also in Cyprian that we find the first reference to presbyters presiding at the Eucharist without the bishop (Letter, 5)." (T.P. RAUSCH, "Ministry and Ministries," 56).

[45] See T.P. RAUSCH, "Ministry and Ministries," 55. See also T.H. GROOME, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education & Pastoral Ministry, The Way of Shared Praxis*, San Francisco, CA, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, 308–311.

[46] See T.P. RAUSCH, "Ministry and Ministries," 55; See also K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood: A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church*, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 2003, 128. For a summary of developmental changes of *episcopos* and *presbyteros* see K.B. OSBORNE, "Envisioning a Theology of Ordained and Lay Ministry: Lay/Ordained Ministry - Current Issues of Ambiguity," in S.K., WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 209–220.

[47] R.E. BROWN, "*Episkopē* and *Episkopos*: The New Testament Evidence," in *Theological Studies*, 41(1980), 325.

[48] See IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, Letter to the Trallians, nos. 2, 3 in R.M. GRANT (trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, *Ignatius of Antioch,* vol. 4, London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966, 72–73.

[49] See TERTULLIAN, *De praescriptione haereticourm*, 41, 6, in A. ROBERTS and J. DONALDSON (eds. and trans.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963, 263, see also https://bkv.unifr.ch/de/works/cpl-5/versions/the-prescription-against-heretics/divisions/42 (17 June 2024).

[50] See T.F. O'MEARA, *Theology of Ministry*, New York, Paulist Press, 1999, 95–133.

[51] See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, 144–147.

[52] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 145–148.

and ritualisation, including prayer for the assistance and sending forth of the Holy Spirit.[53]

1.2.4 – Charism as the Basis for Ministry

Ministry begins with recognising a charism[54] that contributes to building up the Church in mission.[55] While all Christians possess charisms for their daily lives, some charisms necessitate a new public, ecclesial role within the Church.[56] Ordered ministries involve a distinctive public relationship, acknowledged, and supported by the community, which helps prevent appointing individuals to ministry without a discernible charism.[57]

Charisms are divine gifts that empower Christians for specific services. When these gifts are recognised and nurtured by the community, they evolve into formal ministries. This process underscores that all ministries are manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit for the common good, building up the body of Christ and fulfilling the Church's mission.

1.3 – The Terminology Associated with Minor Orders

The terminology associated with minor orders, such as porter, lector, acolyte, and exorcist, reflects the diverse functions and ministries within the Catholic Church, which were embedded in the ordination rites and shaped by underlying ecclesiological principles.

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[53] See R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion," in S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 36.

[54] See T.F. O'MEARA, *Theology of Ministry*, 62–63; see also J.J. DRISCOLL, "Laser Focus on Charism for Ministry to Thrive," in *Health Progress*, 101 (2020), 21.

[55] See R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion," 36.

[56] Ibid.

[57] See ibid., 37.

1.3.1 – *Ordo*

Understanding the liturgy of ordinations requires exploring the terms *ordo* and *ordinatio*. The term *ordo* originated in civic institutions, referring to distinct social groups like the senatorial order (*ordo clarissimus*) and the order of knights.[58] In civic life, *ordo* represented those in governance, leading to phrases like *ordo populusque* ("the 'order' and the people").[59] This term, free from pagan connotations, was adopted by Christians to describe the clergy's role within the people of God.[60]

In the early third century, Tertullian distinguished between the *ordo* (clergy) and the *plebs* (lay people),[61] cementing this terminology in Latin literature. The clergy was identified as an *ordo* within the context of Christian ministry, separate from the lay people.[62] This terminology became commonplace in the West.[63] In the liturgy of the Eucharist, one can find this ancient prayer statement: "*nos* (i.e., those in order) *et plebs tua sancta* (we [i.e., those in order] and your holy people)."[64] This distinction became official from the time of Constantine.[65] The term *ordo* does not imply a sacramental connotation but denotes honour, dignity, and leadership responsibilities.[66] Osborne

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[58] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 114.

[59] See P. JOUNEL, "Ordinations," in A.G. MARTIMORT and R. CABIÉ, *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, new ed., Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1986, 140; see also K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 114.

[60] See P. JOUNEL, "Ordinations," 140.

[61] Tertullian highlighted this distinction: "Differentiam inter ordinem et plebem constituit Ecclesiae auctoritas" (TERTULLIAN, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 7, 3), in A. ROBERTS and J. DONALDSON (eds. and trans.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 54.

[62] See TERTULLIAN, *De praescriptione haereticourm*, 41, 6, in A. ROBERTS and J. DONALDSON (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 263.

[63] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 115.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

cites Dupuy, observing that, "One notices how much the structure of the Church has been influenced by the structure of political society."[67]

In the fourth century, the distinction was sanctioned by imperial law, recognising the existence of an *ordo ecclesiasticus*.[68] Initially applied broadly to the clergy, *ordo* gradually came to specify the various hierarchical levels within it: the order of deacons or subdeacons, the presbyteral order (*ordo presbyterii*), and the episcopal order (*ordo episcoporum*).

1.3.2 – *Ordinatio*

In Rome, the term *ordinatio* originally referred to the appointment of officials, a term adopted by Christians for selecting individuals for ecclesiastical function.[69] "Since the highest ecclesiastical functions are liturgical in nature, requiring consecration or blessing, *ordinatio* also came to signify the rite of consecration."[70]

The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus[71] established technical terminology in Greek. In secular Greek, an official was said to be "instituted" or "established" in his

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[67] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 115.

[68] See *Imperatoris Theodosii Codex*, lib. 16, tit. 2, no. 26, https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Constitutiones/CTh16.html#2 (13 August 2024).

[69] P. JOUNEL, "Ordinations," 140.

[70] Ibid.

[71] The *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus of Rome is an early Christian text that provides valuable insights into the liturgical and ecclesiastical practices of the early Church, around the 3rd century. Some scholars regarded it to be a Church order from Rome, ca. 215. It includes detailed descriptions of early Christian liturgical practices, such as the Eucharist, baptism, and ordination rites. This helps scholars understand how these rituals were conducted in the early centuries of Christianity. It outlines various aspects of Church governance, including the roles and duties of bishops, presbyters, deacons, and other Church officials. While the exact authorship and date of the *AT* are debated among scholars, it is generally attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, an early Christian theologian and bishop who lived in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries. For the question of the authorship of the document, see, for instance, J.F. BALDOVIN, "Hippolytus and the Apostolic Tradition: Recent Research and Commentary," in *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), 522–529. The text remains a crucial resource for understanding the development of early Christian liturgy, ecclesiastical structure, and community life. See G. DIX and H. CHADWICK (eds.), *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr* (=*AT*), London, The Layton Press Ltd., 1968, xi–lxxxi. For the sake of brevity, references to this text will be abbreviated as *AT*, followed by the relevant number of *AT* and page number from the book. See also P. BRADSHAW, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, 91.

office (*kathistatai*) and could also be "designated" (*cheirotoneitai*). According to Jounel the root of the term "institution" means "to be charged with a task." It was used at the time of Hippolytus to indicate the entrance into responsibility for a certain function.[72] Hippolytus applied both terms to ecclesiastical offices, reserving *cheirotoneitai* for ordinations that required consecration, indicating membership in one of the three hierarchical levels. The ritual gesture for this consecration was the imposition of hands (*cheirothetein*), of Jewish origin, as attested in the Acts of the Apostles. This terminology highlights that ordination (*cheirotonia, cheirotonein*) involves the imposition of hands.[73] This important distinction sheds light on what is meant when the *Apostolic Tradition* says of the lector (for example): "The Reader ἀναγνώστης (anagnōstēs) is appointed or instituted (*kathistatai*) by the bishop's handing to him the book. For he does not have hands laid upon him χειροτονέω (*cheirotoneō*)."[74] The lector does not undergo the ritual of having hands laid upon him (χειροθετέω - *cheirotheteō*), which is typically associated with the ordination of higher clergy. This indicates that the lector's role, while important, is distinct from those who are ordained through this formal rite (χειροτονέω - *cheirotoneō*).

The Roman liturgy prescribes the rites described in the *Apostolic Tradition*: the imposition of hands by several bishops for the ordination of a new bishop, the imposition of hands by the entire presbyterate for the ordination of a priest, and advancement to lesser orders by presenting the relevant instruments, without the imposition of hands. The minor orders are conferred through the presentation of the

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[72] See P. JOUNEL, "Ordinations," 140.

[73] Ibid.

[74] *AT*, xii, "Of the Reader," 21.

appropriate instrument, following the ritual in the *Pontificale*,[75] aligned with the *Apostolic Tradition* and *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*.[76] The ordination ritual for each minor order includes: (1) An admonition concerning the duties of that office. The *Pontificale* states: "*Moneat ordinandos, quod instrumenta, in quorum traditione character imprimitur, tangant*."[77] (2) Presentation of the instruments proper to each order with a formula indicating the power conferred: Porter: Keys of the Church (*claves Ecclesiae*); Lector: Lectionary (*Liber lectionum*); Exorcist: Book of exorcisms (*liber exorcismorum*); Acolyte: Candlestick (*candelabrum*) and empty cruet (*urceolus*). (3) A concluding prayer for God's blessing, with the form of each order recited by the ordaining pontiff while holding the instrument touched by the ordinand's right hand:

> Porter: "*Sic agite, quasi redditúri Deo ratiónem pro iis rebus, quae his clávibus reclúduntur*."[78]

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[75] See *Pontificale Romanum: editio typica, 1961–1962.*, Ed. anastatica / e introduzione a cura di M. SODI, A. TONIOLO, Monumenta liturgica piana, no. 3, Città del Vaticano, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2008 (=*PR*), 19–27.

Pontificale Romanum (Roman Pontifical) is one of the books of the Roman liturgy. It contains the rites for ordinations, consecrations and all other liturgical rites and ceremonies reserved to bishops. The Roman Pontifical has its source in the early Roman Sacramentaries and Ordinals. Beginning with the 8th century, however, attempts were made to collect into one book the various rites proper to the bishop. Such collections were known under the names of "Liber Sacramentorum," "Liber Officialis," "Liber Pontificalis," "Ordinarium Episcopale," "Benedictionale," etc. See art. "Pontifical, Roman," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., no. 11, Detroit, MI, Thomson/Gale, Catholic University of America, 2003, 474. For detailed references to the rites of ordination for the various minor orders, consult the *Pontificale Romanum, Editio Typica, 1961–1962*.

[76] The *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* (=*SEA*), a collection of disciplinary and liturgical canons drawn up in Gaul, in the province of Arles, about the beginning of the sixth century. We find in them the principal ceremonies of ordination for all the orders. It is evident from these ceremonies that the use was Gallican. It is probably the only text in which that use is preserved free from any admixture, for the Gallican liturgical books do not contain the ceremonies of ordination. Its ordination rubrics were found in the ordination rites of the Roman Catholic Church until the Pontifical of Paul VI (1972); many of its directions are reflected (with modifications in the Ordinal attached to the Book of Common Prayer from the time of the Reformation to the present). See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 116-117; see also "*Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., no. 13, Detroit, MI, Thomson/Gale, Catholic University of America, 2003, 501. For Ordination rites according to the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, see L.M.O. DUCHESNE, *Origines du Culte Chrétien*, M.L. MCCLURE (trans.), *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution; A Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne*, 350, 363-368, https://archive-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/details/christianworshi00mcclgoog/page/345/mode/2up (21 August 2024).

[77] "Let those to be ordained be advised that they touch the instruments by the tradition of which a character is imprinted." See *PR*, *De ordinibus conferendis.*

[78] "Thus, act as though you will render an account to God for the things which are enclosed by these keys." *PR*, no. 63, 20.

> Lector: "*Accípite, et estóte verbi Dei relatóres, habitúri, si fidéliter et utíliliter impléveritis offícium vestrum, partem cum iis, qui verbum Dei bene administravérunt ab inítio*."[79]
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> Exorcist: "*Accípite, et commendáte memóriae, et habéte potestátem imponéndi manus super energúmenos, sive baptizátos, sive catechúmenos*."[80]
>
> Acolyte: "*Accípite ceroferárium, cum céreo, et sciátis vos ad accéndenda ecclésiae lumináriа mancipari, in nómine Dómini*. ℟. *Amen*."[81]

The terms *ordo* and *ordinatio* are intrinsically connected in the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. *Ordo* refers to the different ranks or groups within the Church, such as deacons, presbyters, and bishops. It signifies collective positions of honour and leadership. *Ordinatio* is the process by which individuals are appointed or consecrated into these ranks. This involves a formal rite, often including the imposition of hands, to confer spiritual authority and responsibilities.

1.3.3 – Tonsure

From the Latin *tondere* (= to shear), the tonsure is a sacred rite of shearing of the hair and the investiture with the surplice by which a layman is admitted to the clerical state.[82] This act symbolises the individual's commitment to the clerical state and his readiness for further ordination. However, the tonsure itself is not considered a full ordination or a distinct order but rather a step towards it.[83] The candidate for the priesthood rises gradually to this exalted office by those steps which are known as first

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[79] "Receive [this book] and be speaker of the Word of God, which if you faithfully and usefully fulfil your office, you will have a share with those that ministered the Word of God from the beginning." *PR*, no. 72, 22.

[80] "Receive [this book] and memorise it and receive the power to impose hands on the possessed, whether baptised or catechumens." *PR*, no. 80, 24.

[81] "Receive this candlestick with its candle and know that now you are to light the lights of the church, in the name of the Lord. *R*. Amen. *PR*, no. 88, 26.

[82] See T.J. RILEY, "Tonsure," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIV, New York, McGraw–Hill, Catholic University of America, 1967, 199.

[83] Ibid. See also J.A. ABBO AND J.D. HANNAN, *The Sacred Canons: A Concise Presentation of the Current Disciplinary Norms of the Church, Vol. II (Canons 870–2414)*, London, B. Herder Book Co., 1952, 173; H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 103–108, https://www.dominicanajournal.org/wp-content/files/old-journal-archive/vol12/no2/dominicanav12n2tonsureminororders.pdf (29 April 2024).

tonsure, porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, and deacon.[84] The 1917 Code of Canon Law states that first tonsure and orders are to be conferred only on those who are proposed for ascending to the presbyterate and who seem correctly understood as, at some point in the future, being worthy priests (c. 973, §1).[85] The first tonsure should not be conferred along with any of the minor orders.[86] It makes the candidate a cleric[87] and it implies a complete break with the world and its allurements since by it the one tonsured takes the Lord for his portion.[88]

By receiving the tonsure, a cleric shares in the privileges of his state as indicated and guaranteed by ecclesiastical law.[89] Tonsure also initiates incardination, affiliating the individual with their future diocese.[90] In the Latin Church, the tonsure became a separate ceremony around the end of the seventh century, often performed when parents dedicated their sons to the service of God. While there is no specific age requirement for receiving the tonsure, the candidate must have a basic understanding of the faith and

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[84] See *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Question XIII, XIV, in J. DONOVAN (trans.), Dublin, James Duffy and Co., Ltd., 1908, 280–281.

[85] See *Codex iuris canonici, Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus, Benedicti Papæ XV auctoritate promulgatus*, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1917, English translation E.N. PETERS (ed.), *The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2001 (=*CIC/17*), c. 978, §3. [All references to the canons of the 1917 Code will be styled "*CIC/17*, c." for canon and "*CIC/17*, cc." for canons, followed by the canon number(s)].

[86] See *CIC/17*, c. 978, §3.

[87] *CIC/17*, c. 108, §1 states: "Those who are taken into divine ministries at least by the reception of first tonsure are called clerics."

[88] See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 104.

[89] See *CIC/17*, cc. 118–123. Canon 213, §1 states: "All those who are legitimately removed or who return from the clerical state to the lay state by that fact lose all offices, benefices, clerical rights, and privileges and are prohibited from going around in ecclesiastical garb and wearing the tonsure. See also H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 104.

[90] *CIC/17*, c. 111, §1 states: "Every cleric whatsoever must be ascribed to a given diocese or religious [institute], so that wandering clerics are in no way admitted." *CIC/17*, c. 111, §2 states: "Through the reception of first tonsure a cleric is ascribed, or, as they say, incardinated, into that diocese for whose service he was promoted." The reason for the conjoining of the clerical state and attachment to a diocese was to eradicate completely the nuisance of the acephalous clergy.

be literate.[91] 1917 Code of Canon law required all clerics to wear the tonsure under certain penalties.[92] As clerical orders formed, tonsure became a rite of passage, emphasising commitment to God and the Church.

1.3.4 – The Porter (Doorkeeper)

Ostiaries, derived from the Latin terms *portarius* and *ostiarii*, meaning "gatekeeper" or "doorkeeper," were responsible for guarding the entrances to churches and monastic establishments. To the porter, especially in the early days of the Church, several important offices were entrusted. He was treasurer of the church to which he was assigned and guardian of the sacristy. The keys of the church were in his hands, and he was to guard the doors so that no prohibited person would enter. It is easy to see why there was a strong need for vigilance in these matters during the early persecutions. Not infrequently the porter was called upon to risk his life to preserve the holy things in the church from profanation. Many of them received the crown of martyrdom. Infidels, heretics, and all other unworthy persons were expelled by the porter. The catechumens, those who were not fully instructed in all the mysteries of the faith, were not allowed to remain during the whole Mass, but were required to leave before the Offertory. These too the porter dismissed. Another duty for the porter was to carry the books to the pulpit in a day when these were old manuscripts and large folio volumes

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[91] See COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter IV, "Who May Receive the First Tonsure," in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, (*Original Test with English Translation*), London, B. Herder Book Co., 1941, 167.

[92] *CIC/17*, c. 136, §3 states: "Minor clerics who, on their own authority [and] without legitimate cause, leave off the ecclesiastical habit and tonsure, [upon] having been warned by the Ordinary, unless they correct their ways within one month, fall from the clerical state by the law itself." Canon 2379 states: "Clerics who, against the prescription of Canon 136, do not wear ecclesiastical habit and clerical tonsure are to be gravely warned; but if a month passes from the warning without result, [then] as to minor clerics the prescription of the same Canon 136, § 3, is observed."

CIC/17, c. 976, §1 states: "No one, whether secular or religious, is to be promoted to first tonsure before the beginning of the theology course."

CIC/17, c. 978, §2 states: "The intervals between first tonsure and doorkeeper and the other individual minor orders are left to the prudent judgment of the bishop."

and were not handled as easily as the liturgical books of our day. Although this role may seem minor, it held significant importance, particularly during times of persecution, to ensure that only certain individuals were present during services. This practice aligned with theological principles, such as excluding catechumens and non-believers from parts of the service and communion.[93]

Bacuez outlines the responsibilities of this order as follows:

> The first minor order is the ostiariate or the order of ostiary. The duty of this order is to take care of the House of God, to summon the faithful at the hours for the holy offices and to see that modesty, silence and religion are preserved there, especially during the Divine Sacrifice; to keep away from the offices those who are unworthy of assisting at them, such as infidels, excommunicated persons and those who give scandal; finally, to guard with care the treasures of the Church both spiritual and temporal, that is to say, the Holy Eucharist, the Sacred Scriptures, the vestments, sacred vessels and the alms destined for the poor. To acquit himself of these functions as he ought, the recipient of minor orders should receive from the Holy Ghost very particular power and grace.[94]

In the ordination of ostiaries, their duties were enumerated, including ringing the bell, opening the church and sacristy, and opening the book for the preacher.[95] These duties are symbolic for the still higher duty "of closing to the devil and opening to God, by their word and example, the invisible house of God, namely, the hearts of the faithful."[96] The bishop hands the keys of the church to the candidate, emphasising accountability to God, akin to the Apostle Peter with the keys to heaven.[97] This ceremony underscores the ostiary's participation in the bishop's apostolic function who

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[93] See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 105.

[94] L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, London, B. Herder, 1912, 34–35.

[95] The porters/doorkeepers (ostiaries) are first instructed in their duties by the archdeacon; after this he brings them before the bishop who takes the keys of the church (*claves Ecclesiae*) from the altar and hands them to the candidate for ordination with the words: "Fulfil thine office to show that thou knowest that thou wilt give account to God concerning the things that are locked away under these keys." In the ordination of ostiaries their duties are thus enumerated in the Pontifical: "Ostiárium opórtet percútere cýmbalum et campánam, aperíre ecclésiam et sacrárium, et librum ei aperíre qui prædicat" (to ring the bell, to open the church and sacristy, to open the book for the preacher). *PR*, no. 62, 19.

[96] L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, 189.

[97] Ibid.

holds the keys to heaven as a successor of the Apostles.[98] The role of the porter/doorkeeper became part of the Roman Church's liturgy, symbolising the spiritual duty of opening hearts to God and closing them to the devil.

Pope Cornelius, in a letter to Bishop Fabius of Antioch in 251, mentioned the presence of 46 priests, 7 deacons, 7 subdeacons, 42 acolytes, and 52 exorcists, lectors, and ostiaries in Rome.[99] According to the statement of the *Liber Pontificalis*, an ostiary named Romanus suffered martyrdom in 258 at the same time as St. Lawrence.[100] The Codex Theodosianus (377) recognised ostiaries among the clergy with personal immunity rights.[101] Pope Gelasius, in 494, indicated that candidates for the clergy needed to be literate, or else they could only serve as ostiaries.[102]

1.3.5 – The Lector

The term "lector" derives from the Latin word *lector*, meaning "reader." In the context of the Church, a lector is an individual entrusted with the proclamation of

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[98] See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 105.

[99] See EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.43.11, in A.C. MCGIFFERT (trans.), *Eusebius: The History of the Church*, Lawrence, KS, Digireads.com Publishing, 2018, 609–610. The occasion for writing this letter was the schism within the Roman Church regarding the readmission of those who had lapsed during the persecutions of Christians. Elected Pope, Cornelius was a proponent of relatively lenient discipline and the potential readmission of the lapsed. In his struggle against the rigorist faction led by Novatian, Cornelius sought to convince the bishop of Antioch of the legitimacy of his election: "Does not this defender of the Gospel (Novatian) know that in the universal Church there must be one bishop? He could not be unaware that there are in it forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers, more than fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress supported by the grace and loving-kindness of Christ." (A.C. MCGIFFERT (trans.), *Eusebius: The History of the Church*, 609–610). See L.M.O. DUCHESNE, *Origines du Culte Chrétien*, M.L. MCCLURE (trans.), *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution; a Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne*, 5th ed., London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919, 345.

[100] See L.R. LOOMIS (trans.), *The Book of the Popes (Liber Pontificalis) I*, *To the Pontificate of Gregory I*, in J.T. SHOTWELL (ed.), *Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1916, 31.

[101] "Presbyteros diaconos subdiaconos adque exorcistas et lectores, ostiarios etiam et omnes perinde, qui primi sunt, personalium munerum expertes esse praecipimus." English translation: "We command that presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, as well as exorcists and lectors, and also doorkeepers, and all who are first, be devoid of personal duties" (*Imperatoris Theodosii Codex*, lib. 16, tit. 2, no. 24).

[102] See GELASIUS, Epistle 14, in J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, 84.798–799, Paris, 1862, English translation in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum: A Study of the Origins and Evolution of Sequential Ordination*, New York, Peter Lang, 2000, 99–100.

Scripture during liturgical services.[103] According to Harnack, the office of lector, "anciently involved not only the reading of the sacred books but also the delivery of a homily."[104] Davies suggests that if this theory were accurate, it would align closely with the practice of the synagogue, where the one invited to read might also preach upon the lesson.[105] Harnack references the Apostolic Church Ordinances, emphasising the careful selection criteria for appointing readers, including moral character and skill in narration:

> For reader, one should be appointed, after he has been carefully proved; no babbler, nor drunkard, nor jester; of good morals, submissive, of benevolent intentions, first in the assembly at the meetings on the Lord's Day, of plain utterance, skilful in narration (διηγητικός), mindful that he is executing the function of an evangelist (εὐαγγελιστοῦ τόπον ἐργάζεται).[106]

On the basis of this pericope and translating *διηγητικός* as 'capable of clearly expounding' and *εὐαγγελιστοῦ τόπον ἐργάζεται* as 'he rules in the place of an evangelist', Harnack argues that this demonstrates that the lector must be capable of explaining what he has read and that by so doing he gains for himself the rank of an evangelist.[107] This interpretation is supported by passages in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, where the reader is associated with prophetic charisma and edification of the congregation.[108]

> The prophetic spirit shall be apportioned to the reader. Give him the Holy Spirit, the prophetic spirit; you who made your servant Ezra wise so that he might read your laws to your people, now, through our prayer, make your servant wise; and grant to him that,

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[103] See T.J. RILEY and J.A. GURRIERI (eds.), "Lector," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia.*, 2nd ed., Detroit, Thomson/Gale, Catholic University of America, 2003, 442; L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, 50 ff.

[104] A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons with a Treatise on the Origin of the Readership and Other Lower Orders / With an Introduction Essay on the Organisation of the Early Church and the Evolution of the Reader by John Owen*, L.A. WHEATLEY (trans.), London, F. Norgate, 1895, 15–17, 61, 54 ff, https://archive.org/details/sourcesoftheapos00harnuoft/page/16/mode/2up?view=theater (17 April 2024).

[105] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 11.

[106] A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 15–17.

[107] See ibid., footnote no. 8, 16.

[108] See ibid., 69; see also LINDSAY, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 182.

> fulfilling in an irreproachable manner the office that has been placed in his hands, he may be recognised as worthy of a higher degree.[109]

Quoting the same passage from the *Apostolic Constitutions* Giraudo comments, while the first petition invokes on the reader the Spirit that makes him a "prophet," that is, it enables him to authoritatively proclaim the word of God before an assembly. However, the subsequent petition turns into a prayer that, taken negatively, seems to anticipate a sort of ecclesiastical careerism.[110]

In the third century one finds that the lector was still responsible for reading the Gospel,[111] but by the fourth he had lost this privilege to the deacon.[112] Later the Council of Rheims in 813 declared that the Epistle was to be read by the subdeacon (c. 4)[113] and so the lectorate became redundant. This outline of the development of this order–it would be more correct to say decline–shows that, apart from the exorcists, the order of readers did not derive from the diaconate, but in fact the reverse process is seen at work, i.e., in course of time the diaconate absorbed the functions of the lectorate.[114]

The lectorate, one of the most ancient minor orders, confers the grace to read Scripture to the faithful. The rights of this office include reading for the preacher, singing lessons, and blessing bread and fruits.[115] The ordination involves presenting the Sacred Scriptures to the cleric to be touched with the right hand, saying at the same time the words:

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[109] A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 69.

[110] See C. GIRAUDO, "The Ministry of Women in the Liturgy: 'Sound Tradition' and 'Legitimate Progress,'" in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 7 April 2021, https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-ministry-of-women-in-the-liturgy-sound-tradition-and-legitimate-progress/ (5 April 2024).

[111] See *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, 38, 39, vol. 2 (= *CYPRIAN*), English translation in G.W. CLARKE, *Ancient Christian Writers*, *No. 44*, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1997 (=*CLARKE*), 53–55.

[112] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 13.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 106.

> Receive and be reader of the word of God, destined if you faithfully and usefully fulfil your office to have a part with those who from the beginning have acquitted themselves well in the ministry of the divine Word.[116]

The duties of a lector include clear and faithful proclamation of word of God, belief in the message, and exemplary conduct. These duties aim to edify and teach the faithful.

1.3.6 – The Exorcist

The function of the exorcist is rather evident in its name. The exorcists had a spiritual gift of exorcism, that is expelling demons from those who are possessed or potentially possessed, which was probably exercised in conjunction with preparing people for being catechumens.[117] The primary function of the exorcist order appears to have been the ministry to energumens, individuals believed to be possessed by evil spirits.[118] Secondly, the exorcists were responsible for taking care of the sick, the mentally ill, and the needy approaching the Church for help, were always ranked among the clergy, although their role, which differs from that of popular imagination, may also be better scrutinised.[119]

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[116] *PR*, no. 72, 22.

[117] The ministry of exorcist was originally a function specific to the rite of baptism where minor exorcisms were performed on initiates, the idea being in the early Church that those formerly of pagan affiliation were under the possession of their former gods and goddesses which were seen as demons by the early Christians. This role of exorcist is distinct from our current understanding of the office which is held by that of a priest for the removal of demonic possession.

[118] See L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, 88–87. The office is described in the words of the ordaining bishop, "to cast out devils, to tell the people that he who does not communicate must give way to communicants, and to pour the water in the service." *PR*, no. 79, 23.

[119] See S. ADAMIAK, "Clerics in Church and Society in Late Antiquity: Between a Hierarchical Pyramid and Equality," in *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 6 (2022), 145.

The term "exorcist" originates from the Greek word εξορκιστής (*exorkistes*), which means "one who administers an oath."[120] In the ecclesiastical context, an exorcist, typically a cleric, is appointed to combat and expel demonic forces through prayer and ritual.[121] This appointment occurs as part of the third of the four minor orders, conferring supernatural power and grace to command the devil and drive him from afflicted bodies.[122]

Early Church concern for energumens, possessed individuals, led to the designation of exorcists. Davies notes that although the practice of exorcism traces its origins to apostolic times, there is no indication that it was initially limited to a particular group within the Church.[123] Tertullian[124] and Cyprian[125] suggest that every Chrisitan possessed the power of exorcism. While the power of exorcism was believed to reside in every Christian, evidence suggests the existence of a designated order of

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[120] The Greek verb εξορκίζω (*exorkízo*) means "to adjure." In Acts 19:13-16 there is a mention of "certain itinerant Jewish exorcists" at Ephesus who vainly attempted "to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits in them, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." See T.J. RELEY, "Exorcist," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, McGraw–Hill, Catholic University of America, 1967, 750.

Ancient sources generally do not refer to the personnel of exorcism as "exorcists" or any equivalent term. In cases where exorcisms were but a small part of a larger portfolio of expertise, the practitioner might have been acting in their role as a scribe, priest, teacher, or perhaps as an expert-for-hire. Indeed, most of these persons did not possess a title that made any explicit reference to the act of warding off spirits—they did exorcism as part of their broader occupation. Of all the people who we find performing exorcists, it is only possible to find Christians who were expressly hired to receive a narrowly conceived professional title as their sole concern. See H. J. KLEIN, Exorcists: The Origins, Roles, and Lives of Late Antique Exorcism Specialists, JCD thesis, Princeton University, 2020, 8.

[121] See T.J. RELEY, "Exorcist," 750.

[122] See L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, 85.

[123] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 8.

[124] "Let a person be brought before your tribunals who is plainly under demonic possession; the spirit, when commanded by any Christian whatsoever, will confess that he is a demon, just as elsewhere he will falsely declare himself to be a god." (Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 23). TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum, xxiii*, in J.P. MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, vol. 1, Paris: Garnier Frères, 1844–1864, cols. 295–345, in A. ROBERTS and J. DONALDSON (eds. and trans.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 37; TERTULLIAN, On Baptism (*De Baptismo*), chapter 5; TERTULLIAN, The Soul's Testimony (*De Testimonio Animae*), chapter 3.

[125] See *CYPRIAN*, Epistle I, *Ad Donatum*, 5, in A. ROBERTS and J. DONALDSON (eds. and trans.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 276; see also *CYPRIAN*, Epistle LXXV, *Ad Magnus*, 15, 402.

exorcists within the Church, as referenced by Cyprian[126] and Bishop Cornelius. The Synod of Laodicea restricted exorcism to those designated by a bishop, likely to ensure proper representation and prevent abuse. It stated: "They who have not been promoted [to that office] by the bishop, ought not to adjure, either in churches or in private houses."[127]

The development of the order of an exorcist stemmed from the need for organised pastoral care in expanding Christian communities.[128] Davies suggests that the ministry of the exorcist was partly a development of the priesthood and organisational needs consequent upon the rapid increase in Christian congregations, so that what had been originally the possession of all the Christians was canalised for the purposes of the ministry of the Church to the sick.[129] Besides expelling demons, exorcists were responsible for caring for the sick, mentally ill, and needy approaching the Church for help.

The Council of Trent initially confined the role of exorcists to the exorcism of catechumens during baptism,[130] leaving exorcisms of demons to priests.[131] By the

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[126] The first mention of the office of exorcist as an order bestowed by the laying on of hands occurs in a fragment of a letter of Cyprian of Carthage. See CYPRIAN, Epistle, 4, 23, 69, and 75.

[127] COUNCIL OF LAODICEA, c. 26 in P. SCHAFF and H. WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. XIV, The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, MI, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, 147. Balsamon explains this restriction in the following words: "Some were in the habit of "adjuring," that is catechising the unbelievers, who had never received the imposition of the bishop's hands for that purpose; and when they were accused of doing so, contended that as they did not do it in church but only at home, they could not be considered as deserving of any punishment. For this reason, the Fathers rule that even to "adjure" is an ecclesiastical ministry, and must not be executed by anyone who shall not have been promoted thereto by a bishop. But the "Exorcist" must be excepted who has been promoted by a Chorepiscopus, for he can indeed properly catechise although not promoted by a bishop." (P. SCHAFF and H. WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. XIV, The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, MI, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, 147).

[128] See L. BACUEZ, *Minor Orders*, 85.

[129] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 10.

[130] See *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Question XVII, in J. DONOVAN (trans.), Dublin, James Duffy and Co., Ltd., 1908, 281.

[131] See ibid., 172.

twentieth century, the role became purely ceremonial, conferred upon those with the special charism to perform its duties or studying for the priesthood. With the evolution of the Rite of Baptism, the liturgical function of exorcists ceased to exist, and the role became one assigned by the bishop to a priest designated for this unique ministry.[132]

The ordination of exorcists historically involved the bishop presenting the ordinand with the book containing exorcism formulae (Ritual, Pontifical, or Missal), granting the authority to impose hands on energumens.[133] In contemporary practice, however, the ministry of exorcist is no longer conferred through ordination. Instead, the diocesan bishop appoints a specific priest to this role, ensuring that the ministry is exercised in the name of the Church. According to the 1983 Code, an exorcism may be carried out only when the diocesan bishop grants explicit and case-specific authorisation, and he may give this mandate solely to a priest who demonstrates sound doctrine, prudent judgement, and an upright and virtuous life.[134]

1.3.7 – The Acolyte

The term "acolyte" derives from the Greek word *akolouthos*, meaning "follower" or "attendant."[135] Understanding the origins of the subdeacon is crucial for

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[132] J. HUNTZ, "The Minor Orders: Not a Major Matter," in *Pray Tell Blog*, 1 March 2021, https://praytellblog.com/index.php/2021/03/01/the-minor-orders-not-a-major-matter/#:~:text=The%20ministry%20of%20Exorcist%20was,to%20the%20rite%20of%20baptism&text=At%20the%20time%20this%20order,its%20role%20was%20later%20expanded (20 March 2026).

[133] A text from *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, prescribes in its seventh canon the rite of ordination of an exorcist: the bishop is to give him the book containing the formulae of exorcism, saying, "Receive, and commit to memory, and possess the power of imposing hands on energumens, whether baptised or catechumens." The same canons required that those preparing to be baptised (known as catechumens) were to undergo a daily imposition of hands by these exorcists. See *PR*, no. 80, 24; see also THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, c. 7, in K.J. von HEFELE, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1883, 411.

[134] See *Codex iuris canonici, auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus*, *fontium annotatione et indice analytico-alphabetico auctus*, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 1989, English translation *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition, New English Translation*, prepared under the auspices of the CANON LAW SOCIETY OF AMERICA, Washington DC, Canon Law Society of America, 2017, c. 1172. [All references to the canons of the 1983 Code will be styled "*CIC/83*, c." for canon and "*CIC/83*, cc." for canons, followed by the canon number(s)].

[135] The Greek word "ἀκόλουθος" (*akolouthos*) translates to "follower" or "attendant." In a broader sense, it can also mean "acolyte," which refers to someone who assists in religious services, particularly

grasping the emergence of the acolyte. The subdeacon, as indicated in the *Apostolic Tradition*, served as an assistant to the deacon and was subordinate to them, with functions including various tasks like informing the bishop of the sick,[136] carrying letters (especially transmitting messages during times of persecution),[137] overseeing the entrance of a church during worship services,[138] serving as the overseer and keeper of sacred vessels, bringing water for lavabo and ablutions,[139] and preparing sacred vessels and giving them to the deacon in time of divine service.[140] This suggests that the ministry of the subdeacon evolved from that of the deacon.

With the steady increase in congregations, the role of the subdeacon became insufficient, leading to the establishment of the acolyte position.[141] The first references to acolytes appear in the writings of Cyprian[142] and Cornelius around A.D. 250. Like subdeacons, functions and office of acolytes were derived from the diaconate, including carrying letters,[143] distributing alms under the direction of a bishop,[144] and ministering to confessors in prison during persecution.[145] Giraudo's interpretation of the Greek verb *akoluthein* (ἀκολουθεῖν), meaning "to follow," posits that in certain contexts within

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within the context of Christian liturgy. The term can denote a person who follows or accompanies another, often in a supportive or subordinate role.

[136] See *AT*, xxx, 57.

[137] See A. HARNACK, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, 87.

[138] See ibid., 88.

[139] See APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS, Chapter XI, ii.

[140] See THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, c. 5 in K.J. von HEFELE, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents*, 411.

[141] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 7.

[142] See *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 7.2, in G.W. CLARK, vol. 1, 67.

[143] See *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 59 in G.W. CLARK, vol. 3, 68.

[144] See *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 7.2, in G.W. CLARK, vol. 1, 67.

[145] Cyprian mentions acolytes Lucian, Maximus and Amantius supplied the necessities of those condemned to the mines of Sigus during the persecution under Valerian. See *CYPRIAN*, Epistles, 77.3; 78.1.

early Christian texts, it could be seen as referring to the act of "following the deacon." This interpretation could support the idea that the roles of "subdeacon" and "acolyte" were seen as equivalent or closely related in the early Church.[146]

During persecutions, Christians held services at night-time in subterranean catacombs, requiring lights for which certain men were appointed as "Candle-bearers" or *ceroferaii*. After persecutions, this institution was preserved due to the symbolic significance of light and its mystic connection with the Holy Sacrifice.[147] Acolytes eventually acquired liturgical functions,[148] as evidenced by the Fourth Council of Carthage (397), which states that acolytes received a candlestick and taper at their ordination.[149] Additionally, they receive an empty cruet for supplying wine and water for the Eucharist,[150] with accompanying prayers emphasising the importance of their office and exhorting them to lead a chaste life and good works.[151]

The minor orders encompass various roles that hold significance in the liturgical life of the Church. Over time, they evolved from charismatic functions to ministries

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[146] See C. GIRAUDO, "The ministry of Women in the Liturgy: 'Sound Tradition' and 'Legitimate Progress'," in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 7 April 2021, https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-ministry-of-women-in-the-liturgy-sound-tradition-and-legitimate-progress/ (5 April 2024).

[147] See "A Look at Minor Orders: The Porter, Exorcist, Lector and Acolyte…," *St. Mary's Hermitage*, December 9, 2021, https://celtichermit.com/2021/12/09/a-look-at-minor-orders-the-porter-exorcist-lector-and-acolyte/ (April 18, 2024).

[148] See J. QUINN, "Acolyte," in M. GLAZIER and M.K. HELLWIG (eds.), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2004, 9.

[149] See THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, c. 6. The canon reads: "*Acolythus cum ordinatur, accipiat de manu episcopi candelabrum cum cereo, ut sciat se ad accendenda ecclesiæ luminaria mancipari*." English translation: "When an acolyte is ordained, let him receive from the hand of the bishop a candlestick with a candle, so that he may know that he is entrusted with the lighting of the church's candles."

[150] The cruet is empty and the candle unlighted to indicate to him that he must prepare the wine and water for the Sacrifice, light the church and the altar, and show the light of a good life to the faithful. See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 107.

[151] The cleric touches with the right hand the candlestick with a candle not lighted, which the bishop presents with the words: "Receive this candlestick and candle and know that you are obligated to light the lamps of the church in the name of the Lord." He then receives the empty cruet from the bishop, whilst the latter says: "Receive this cruet for supplying wine and water for the Eucharist of the Blood of Christ in the name of the Lord." *PR*, no. 88, 26.

with a definitive structure and purpose. They also served as stepping stones towards the major orders of the priesthood.[152] Although their specific functions have evolved over time, they remain integral to the ecclesiastical structure.

Having established the relationship between charism and ministry, as well as the terminology related to minor orders, we now examine the theological-historical development of these orders. The forthcoming section will examine how minor orders were understood and evolved within the Church from the first century until the Council of Trent. This exploration will trace the theological underpinnings that shaped their role within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, highlighting their significance in the broader context of Church history.

1.4 – Historical – Theological Development of Minor Orders

This section will explore the historical and theological development of minor orders from the first century up to the time of Peter Lombard (A.D. 1155-1158). It will examine how these orders evolved within the ecclesiastical structure of the early Church, highlighting significant milestones and theological reflections that shaped their roles. By concentrating on this specific timeframe, this section will highlight the key developments and theological insights that contributed to the establishment and formalisation of minor orders, thereby illuminating their role within the evolving framework of Church governance and liturgical practice.

1.4.1 – The First Century of Christianity

There are varying perspectives on the origins of the Christian liturgy of the Word, with some suggesting it evolved from the practices of synagogues where the

[152] See H. MULCAHY, "Tonsure and Minor Orders," 104.

Torah was read,[153] while others propose it may have been influenced by the Mediterranean tradition of reading aloud during gatherings.[154] It is likely that individuals reading during Christian gatherings were either converts to Christianity, educated individuals from higher social classes, or slaves owned by community members.[155] According to Davies the choice of readers must have been severely limited by the fact that only a minority of the members of the early Christian congregations would be capable of the difficult task of deciphering the *scriptio continua* in which the books were then written. This limitation would inevitable give those who did possess this ability a position of some importance.[156]

"The oldest writings – the New Testament included (see, e.g. Rev 1:3) – refer to the reader using a participle form, i.e. not as lector but "the one who reads" (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων)."[157] This is important proof that readers, rather than being officially appointed in the sense of later Church ministry, were persons deemed appropriate *ad hoc*.[158] An example illustrating this can be found in the works of St. Justin Martyr. In the description of Sunday Worship, St. Justin in his *First Apology* (ca. 155) mentions those who have the office of reading Sacred Scripture in the eucharistic liturgy. He does not use the noun lector or reader.[159]

> On the day called Sunday we have all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the one who reads [τοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος] has

[153] According to this, those in charge of services could invite whosoever they wished to read the lessons. See Lk 4:16, 17.

[154] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 10.

[155] See D. NÄSSELQVIST, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1–4*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, 96.

[156] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 10.

[157] R. TICHY, "Liturgical Ministries of Men and Women: Lectorate and Acolytate Then and Now," in *Theologica*, 12 (2022), 44.

[158] Ibid.

[159] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 11.

> finished, the Ruler in a discourse instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.[160]

1.4.2 – The 2nd and 3rd Century

In the beginning of the 2nd century, the situation changed, and instead of "the one who reads" ancient texts started using a noun: lector or reader (ἀναγνώστης).[161] The following quotation from the *Adversus haereses* (ca. 180) of St. Irenaeus[162] may prove that some Christian communities struggled due to a lack of qualified readers:

> So, if one would not pay attention to the reading and indicate the breathing pause in that which is read, there would not only arise incongruences, but the reader would even blaspheme.[163]

The ministry of lector becomes a permanent office as documented by Tertullian in his critique of various services among heretics. In *De praescriptione haereticorum* (ca. 198-200), Tertullian mentions lectors:

> Their ordinations are reckless, superficial, and inconsistent. Now they appoint neophytes, now those bound by the world, now our apostates, to bind them with glory, because they cannot with truth. Nowhere is progress easier than in the camps of rebels, where merely being there is considered meritorious. Therefore, one today is a bishop, tomorrow another; today a deacon who tomorrow is a reader; today a presbyter who tomorrow is a lay person. For even lay people are given priestly duties.[164]

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[160] ST. JUSTIN MARTYR, *The First and Second Apologies*, 67:2 and 3, in W.J. BURGHARDT, J.J. DILLON, and D.D. MCMANUS (eds.), *The Works of the Fathers, No. 56*, in L.W. BARNARD (trans.), *Ancient Christian Writers*, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1997, 71.

[161] See R. TICHY, "Liturgical Ministries of Men and Women: Lectorate and Acolytate Then and Now," 44.

[162] The *Adversus haereses* (ca. 180) of Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130–ca 200) is an extremely valuable late-second-century source for the history of ordered ministry. *Adversus haereses* reveals that by ca. 180 the names of Christian ministers, specifically bishops, presbyters, and deacons, had become stabilised. It also revels a close relationship between bishop and presbyter. Irenaeus often seems to use the terms "bishop" and "presbyter" interchangeably. For instance, He speaks of the apostolic tradition which is guarded by presbyteral succession. See ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against the Heresies (Book 3)*, 3.2.2, in D.J. UNGER (trans.), *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 64, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1992, 42.

[163] ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against the Heresies (Book 3)*, 3.7.2, in D.J. UNGER (trans.), *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 64, 42.

[164] TERTULLIAN, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 41.6: "Ordinationes eorum temerariae, leves, inconstantes. Nunc neophytos conlocant, nunc saeculo obstrictos, nunc apostatas nostros, ut gloria eos obligent, quia veritate non possunt. Nusquam facilius proficitur quam in castris rebellium, ubi ipsum esse illic promereri est. Itaque alius hodie espiscopus, cras alius, hodie diaconus qui cras lector, hodie presbyter qui cras laicus. Nam et laicus sacerdotalia munera iniungunt."

In this section, which is most likely directed against the Marcionites, Tertullian complains that the ordination performed by the heretics are hasty, irresponsible, and unstable. He complains that in the "rebels' camp" efforts to win believers are made by promotions: neophytes, those "bound to the world," and Catholic apostates are appointed to ministries.[165] Furthermore, appointment to ministries among the heretics was erratic. Tertullian relates that "today one person is bishop, the next day another is bishop instead; an individual is a deacon one day and a lector on the next; one is a presbyter today and a lay person tomorrow."[166] Lastly, he complains sacerdotal functions are imposed on lay people.[167] Commenting on above mentioned passage from Tertullian, M. Bévenot writes: "This public attack on the goings on of heretics would have been impossible if the same practices were current in the Church which he himself was defending."[168] According to Osborne, in above mentioned passage, Tertullian is not advocating a mix-up of duties; rather, he is taking to task the heretics for creating this kind of ministerial situation. In all other places, Tertullian mentions only: episkopos, presbyter, and deacon. Consequently, it seems unlikely that Tertullian considers the lector part of the "clerical state."[169] According to Faivre, Tertullian seems to have regarded readers as laymen rather than as members of the clergy.[170] The lectorate was often presented as a temporary function for young men who were capable of reaching the higher grades of the clergy.[171] *De praescriptione haereticorum* is an example of the

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[165] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum: A Study of the Origins and Evolution of Sequential Ordination*, New York, Peter Lang, 2000, 32.

[166] TERTULLIAN, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 41.6

[167] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 32.

[168] M. BÉVENOT, "Tertullian's Thought about Priesthood," in *Corona Gratiarum*, vol. 1, Brugges, Sint Pietersabdj, 1975, 130.

[169] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 195.

[170] See A. FAIVRE, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, 114.

[171] Ibid.

extent to which words such as *neophytus*, *laicus*, *lector*, *diaconus*, *presbyter*, and *episcopus* had assumed a technical sense in the Church.

From the time of Cyprian onward, readers were certainly members of the clergy. Cyprian himself informed his clergy that he had to go ahead with the installation of a reader and a subdeacon to remedy a shortage of clergy.[172] In the same letter, however, he also wrote that it was possible to exercise the functions of reader without necessarily belonging to the clergy. That was so in the case of Saturus. Cyprian refers to Saturus, who has been made a reader, as "having been made next to the clergy (*clero proximus*),"[173] and he also mentions another, Celerinus, as "having been added to our clergy (*clero nostro coniunctum*),"[174] and might advance to a "further degree (*ulterior gradus*)."[175] He mentions Aurelius, another confessor made reader, might "merit higher degrees of clerical ordination (*merebatur talis clericae ordinationis ulteriores gradus*)," but, he adds, "for the time being, that he begin with the duties of reader."[176] Clearly Cyprian intended to promote Aurelius to the "higher ranks" at a later date. Cyprian's use of language is noteworthy, in particular, his use of the term "grade" (*gradus*) to describe ecclesiastical ministry. The term *gradus* is associated with the civil and miliary *cursus honorum*.[177] It conveys a sense of movement through the grades. While the term *gradus* would appear with greater frequency from the fourth century, it is significant that a mid-third-century Chrisitan writer would employ it as well.[178]

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[172] See *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 29, in G.W. CLARK, vol. 2, 25.

[173] Ibid.

[174] ST. *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 38, in G.W. CLARKE, vol. 2, 177.

[175] Ibid., 186. Cyprian ordained Celerinus who was a confessor. Cyprian said of him that he had been associated with the "ministries of the Church," and claimed that it was not right for a confessor of his kind to remain "without Church honour." See ibid., 186.

[176] ST. *CYPRIAN*, Epistle, 38, in G.W. CLARKE, vol. 2, 177.

[177] See D. POWER, *Ministers of Christ and His Church*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1963, 63–64.

[178] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 35.

The lectorate appears not so much as a ministry with an integrity of its own, but rather served as the initial stage in a hierarchical progression. One ministry is in fact being used as a preparatory and probationary stage before promotion to another.[179] "The role of lector initially served as an entry point to the ministry within the early Christian Church, as indicated by Cyprian's references."[180] Henceforth this was the custom and so c. 24 of the Synod of Laodicea refers to readers as being "in the ecclesiastical order." Davies notes that this custom also served as a pathway towards higher ranks in the ecclesiastical hierarchy:

> This, indeed, became the normal way of entering the ministry, so Proclus started as a reader at a very early age and was later promoted to the diaconate and then to the presbyterate prior to consecration as bishop of Constantinople in 433. A great number of ecclesiastics began their careers in this way by serving a probationary period in the lectorate, e.g. St. Felix of Nola, Eusebius of Vercelli, Popes Liberius and Siricius and many others.[181]

This progression from lector to higher clerical ordinations highlights the hierarchical nature of the ministry within the early Christian Church. The ministry gained in reputation and authority, as one can read in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.[182] It mentions subdeacon and lector.

> We assert that everyone shall stand and confess and believe in what has been allotted to him by God; that is to say, the Bishop as a shepherd; the Elders as teachers; the Deacons as ministers; the Subdeacons as helpers; the Lectors as readers; the singers as psalmists with intelligence and with constancy; and that the rest of the populace should be hearers of the words of the Gospel according to discipline.[183]
>
> Let a Reader be appointed, having first been proved by many probations, not a talkative man, not a drunkard, not a speaker of laughable things; of good manner, of good

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[179] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 35.

[180] "Even when there was no doubt that the reader was a member of the clergy, Cyprian still found it necessary to make a distinction between the status and the honour of the function in the strict sense of the word. On the subject of the confessors Saturus and Celerinus, he had, for example, this to say: "Know, however, that we have established them as readers only while we look forward to something better. […]. We have, moreover, nominated them for the honour of the presbyterium (*CYPRIAN*, 39.5.2)" (A. FAIVRE, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, 115).

[181] J. G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 11.

[182] The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a Northern Syrian document, ca. 230 discusses the ordained ministry at great length, offering a valuable Eastern testimony to the ordered ministry. See *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in M.D. GIBSON (trans.), London, C. J. Clay and Sons Cambridge University Press, 1903.

[183] *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in M.D. GIBSON, 1.

> disposition, persuadable, of good will; who in the Lord's congregations on Sundays runs first, good at hearing, and as a maker of narratives; who knows that he takes the place of an Evangelist.[184]
>
> The bishop taketh to himself from the people, those whom he considereth and knoweth to be worthy of him and of his office, and maketh them elders and counsellers, members of his session, deacons and subdeacons, all as he requireth according to the service of a house.[185]

In those places where a special building, as distinct from a private house, was used for the Church's liturgy, the lector ascended into a pulpit for the reading.[186] So Cyprian states that "Aurelius has come to the desk (*ad pulpitum*)"[187] and that "Celerinus has been 'placed on the desk,' i.e. the tribunal of the church."[188] As the ambo was usually connected directly with the sanctuary, we have a further indication of the later clerical character of this order.[189] The lector was at first responsible for all the lessons which formed part of the liturgy.

1.4.2.1 – The Apostolic Tradition

In almost the same period as that of Tertullian, Hippolytus in the *Apostolic Tradition* mentions lector[190] and subdeacon.[191] *AT* contains a number of liturgical rites, including the earliest known ordination rites extant.[192] While the *AT* claims to describe the rites known in Rome in the early third century,[193] it remains the only account of any

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[184] See *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in M.D. GIBSON, 12.

[185] See ibid., 51.

[186] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 13.

[187] *CYPRIAN*, 38.2, in G.W. CLARKE, vol. 2, 177.

[188] See ibid.,187.

[189] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 13.

[190] See *AT*, xii, 21.

[191] See ibid., xiv, 22.

[192] See ibid., Part I, "Of the Clergy," ii–xv, 2–22.

[193] For the discussion of the liturgical tradition represented in the document, see BALDOVIN, "Hippolytus and the Apostolic Tradition: Recent Research and Commentary," 532–535.

ordination rite prior to the fourth century.[194] The ritual of the *Apostolic Tradition* mentions the reader, specifying that "he is instituted when the bishop hands him the book, since the hand is not imposed on him."[195] Further it provides with an indication of the nature of subdeacon's office, as it states: "Hands shall not be laid upon a subdeacon, but his name shall be mentioned that he may serve the deacons."[196] The subdeacon, therefore, was an assistant to the deacon and in complete accord with this is c. 20 of the Synod of Laodicea which affirms the subordination of the one to the other.[197] "We should expect, then, to find that the subdeacon exercised some at least of the functions of deacon and this is indeed the case."[198] From the *Apostolic Tradition* we understand that "both deacon and subdeacon are to be 'alert on the bishop's behalf' to inform him of any that are sick."[199]

According to the reconstructed text and to the Arabic and Ethiopic version of the *AT* the ministries are treated in the descending sequence of bishop, presbyter, deacon, confessor, widow, lector, virgin, subdeacon and one with the gifts of healing. In the Sahidic text the minor ministries appear in a different sequence, that is lector, subdeacon, widow, virgin, one with the gifts of healing.[200] There is no mention of the

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[194] See P. BRADSHAW, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Church of East and West*, New York, Pueblo, 1990, 3. "The *Apostolic Tradition* treats the ordinations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons separately, since only these three receive appointment through the imposition of hands" (J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 40).

[195] *AT*, xii. "The translations vary slightly but convey similar meanings regarding the appointment or establishment of a reader within the Church. The Sahidic translation reads, "the reader shall be appointed by the bishop," the Arabic translation states: "When a reader is established," and the Ethiopic translation says, "As for a reader who is to be ordained." These translations all refer to the process by which a reader is officially recognised or appointed within the Church, typically by a higher authority such as a bishop" (P.F. BRADSHAW, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary, Hermeneia–A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 2002, 74).

[196] P.F. BRADSHAW, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, 78.

[197] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 6.

[198] Ibid., 7.

[199] P.F. BRADSHAW, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, 176.

[200] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 40.

ministries of acolyte and doorkeeper which appear in the mid-third century letter of Pope Cornelius addressed to Fabius. This letter provided a list of the clergy then serving in the imperial capital.[201] This list is said to describe the organisation of the Church of Rome in the mid-third century.[202] Cornelius lists the ordered ministries of the Roman Church in the descending sequence of bishop, presbyter, deacon, subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, lector, and doorkeeper. There is nothing, however, to suggest prescribed sequential promotion through the orders of ministers mentioned by Cornelius.[203]

It is worth noting the remarkable consistency of the Roman Church: it is in this order (subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, reader, doorkeeper) that minor orders survived until the reforms of Vatican II in the 20th century.[204] The beginnings of a hierarchical model are present. Thus, it is not coincidental that the number of subdeacons corresponds to the number of deacons.[205] It can be presumed that the subdeacon here assists the deacon and is the first among the acolytes. Consequently, just as a bishop has seven deacons under his authority, each deacon also has seven acolytes under his authority, with the subdeacon being the first (the combined number of subdeacons and acolytes gives us precisely 49).[206] It should be noted that the overall number of Roman clergy is relatively small (probably still quite numerous compared to other Churches). With Rome's conversion to Christianity in the post-Constantinian era, and the increase in congregations, the size and significance of this group changed, and questions of the

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[201] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 6.

[202] See A. FAIVRE, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie: les premières étapes du cursus clérical*, Théologie historique, no. 40, Paris, Éditions Beauchesne, 1977, 301.

[203] See ANIKIEV and FADEYEV, "The Minor Orders in the Roman Church of the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries According to Papal Epistles," 27.

[204] Ibid.

[205] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 6.

[206] See ANIKIEV and FADEYEV, "The Minor Orders in the Roman Church of the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries According to Papal Epistles," 27. See also FAIVRE, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie*, 304–309.

clergy hierarchy gained particular importance.[207] This was probably the reason why candidates for ordination as deacons, priests, or bishops were required to gain experience as lectors or by performing other lower-ranking functions in the Church.

1.4.2.2 – The Council of Sardica (A.D. 343)

The Council of Sardica in 343 stipulates that the role of lector must be fulfilled as a prerequisite for ordination to the diaconate. The first canonical requirement for sequential ordination comes from c. 13 of this council. It prescribed that bishops could not be ordained until they have served sequentially as lectors, deacons, and presbyters.

> The canon rules that if a wealthy man, a public advocate, or a civil official be desired as bishop he shall not be ordained to that high office until he has passed through three successive grades of the ministry–reader, deacon, and presbyter–and has been found worthy. In this way his faith, restraint, gravity, and modesty may be tested and his merit proved; for, Hosius states, it is forbidden by the Apostle [I Timothy iii. 6], and custom does not allow, that a novice should be rashly ordained bishop, priest, or deacon.[208]

The canon decreed that if a rich man, public advocate, or civil official aspired to be a bishop, he shall not be ordained until he has served sequentially in the offices of lector, deacon, and presbyter. This ensured his faith and character were tested, proving he was worthy of holy orders and motivated by the love of God rather than status and power.[209] This canon marks the first instance where progression through the orders was mandated.

As the fourth century witnessed a period of rapid growth and expansion for the Church, Gibaut asserts that sequential ordination became an effective means by which the Church could test and train its leaders. The *cursus honorum* thus evolved and

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[207] See ANIKIEV and FADEYEV, "The Minor Orders in the Roman Church of the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries According to Papal Epistles," 27.

[208] SYNOD OF SARDICA, c. 13, in H. HESS, *The Canons of the Council of Sardica, A.D. 343: A Landmark in the Early Development of Canon Law*, Oxford Theological Monographs, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1958, 103–104.

[209] In the third century there were notable examples of bishops being chosen from among the ranks of the laity, such as Fabian of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage. Candidates for the episcopate commonly arose from the ranks of the presbyterate. There is also evidence of at least one bishop who proceeded through all the grades: Cornelius of Rome. See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 68.

became the preferred means by which the Church could best select, prepare, prove, and promote candidates to higher office. This approach was both practical and pastoral, aiming to avoid appointing incapable or unworthy individuals to higher office.[210]

1.4.2.3 – The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363)

Canon 20 of the Synod of Laodicea establishes the hierarchy where the subdeacon is subordinate to the deacon.

> It is not right for a deacon to sit in the presence of a presbyter, unless he be bidden by the presbyter to sit down. Likewise, the deacons shall have worship of the sub-deacons and all the [inferior] clergy.[211]

Here it should be noted, by the way, that in this canon there is presented a hierarchy consisting of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and other inferior ministers, each with their mutual subordination one to the other.[212] Canon 26 reinforces the authority of bishops by prohibiting individuals from performing exorcisms in churches or private houses unless designated by a bishop.[213] This prohibition is highlighted due to the prevailing belief in the early 4th century that every Christian had the power of exorcism. This view was particularly endorsed by influential figures like Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian.[214] Canons 20 and 26 implicitly acknowledged the existence and

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[210] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, esp. 331–334. Although it was preferred, Gibaut argues that the *cursus honorum* was not completely standardised in the immediate post-Nicene period and that bishops continued to be selected from variety of states of life including neophytes, the laity, minor orders, and the diaconate. Many of the bishops of Rome continued to be drawn from the diaconate, and in two famous examples, Ambrose was ordained directly to the episcopate as a neophyte, and Augustine was ordained directly to the presbyterate as a layperson. Although the *cursus honorum* served a pastoral role to ensure that candidates for ecclesiastical grades were properly trained, *per saltum* (omission of lower orders) ordinations to the episcopate nevertheless continued, and although the promoted candidate might be seen as unsuited or ill prepared for the position, he was still regarded as bishop and there was no question about the sacramental validity of the ordination. See ibid., 332.

[211] SYNOD OF LAODICEA, c. 20, in P. SCHAFF and H. WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 140.

[212] See P. SCHAFF and H. WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 140.

[213] See SYNOD OF LAODICEA, c. 26.

[214] See J.G. DAVIES, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," 8.

roles of minor orders such as acolytes, readers, exorcists, and porters within the ecclesiastical structure delineated by the Council of Laodicea.

The emergence of minor orders within the Church towards the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century lacked a clear, uniform pattern. These roles, while serving as lesser ministries within the Church, do not distinctly conform to what might traditionally be defined as "orders." The designation of these roles as "orders" at this early stage is somewhat ambiguous and not readily evident.[215] Osborne highlights the varied and informal nature of these early minor orders, suggesting that there is no clear pattern in their development. He questions whether it is appropriate to label them as "orders" at this early stage, noting that while they were indeed lesser ministries within the Church, their classification as "orders" is not obviously apparent.[216]

Nonetheless, pastoral ministry was developing in a more complex fashion, and this complexity necessitated the proliferation of various auxiliary ministries. The point that should be noted here is this: the pastoral needs of the local Churches were the bases for the development of such ministries. There was no established, centralised program for this kind of ministerial development: each local or regional Church provided for its own needs. This response to local needs seems the better way to account for the diversity of these lesser ministries in this early Church period.[217]

In many ways, these minor ministries, which in their beginnings seem to shoot up with a great deal of strength, gradually lost their very meaning. The task of porters was frequently turned over to lay people from the fifth century onward. Even at an earlier date, namely from the fourth century onward, the office of lector was given to

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[215] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 196.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

lay people, provided they could read publicly. Little by little, the presbyters took over the tasks of the exorcists. As one moves into the fourth and fifth centuries, a clearer picture of these minor ministries begins to take shape.

1.4.3 – The 4–5th Century[218]

In the post-apostolic era, the Church had developed a structured hierarchy with three degrees of holy orders: bishops, presbyters, and deacons,[219] which were considered to be the original and apostolic establishment.[220] This structure evolved into a clerical *cursus honorum*, influenced by political, social, and religious considerations, emphasising a probationary period in minor offices before becoming a bishop. Minor orders varied among Churches, arising due to growing congregations.[221]

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[218] For the history of the Roman Church in the 4th and 5th centuries, it was a period of gradual Christianisation of the city of Rome and the increasing role of the bishop. It was during this era that the foundations of the doctrine of papal primacy were developed. One contributing factor to this was the fact that Rome, being the formal capital of the empire, was not the real centre of power (the Western Empire was governed from Milan or Ravenna). The weakening of the political significance of the Senate in the empire also contributed to the increasing autonomy of the Roman bishop. One of the main tasks facing the papacy during these centuries was to make Rome fully Christian, uniting the citizens into a single community under the leadership of the bishop. The policy of gradual Christianisation was expressed both in the construction of cult buildings and in the issuance of canonical papal decrees. This process also affected the evolution of the Roman clergy–their self-identification and identification by the ecclesiastical authorities. When studying the development of minor orders, it seems logical to turn to the practice of the Roman Church, as its customs and regulations influenced other Churches of the Latin West already in the late Antiquity period. In many matters, other bishops of the West turned to the authority of Roman bishops. By the 4th to 5th centuries, the ranks of the clergy in the Roman Church were structured into a hierarchy, according to which a cleric ideally had to ascend to reach the episcopate: a kind of *cursus honorum*, with its gradual rise through the ranks of political power (quaestorship, aedileship, praetorship, consulship). This process of complicating the Church hierarchy can be seen in the letters of the Roman Popes from the 4th to 5th centuries, responding to inquiries from other bishops of the West about the organisation of the clergy. See ANIKIEV and FADEYEV, "The Minor Orders in the Roman Church of the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries According to Papal Epistles," 22–23.

[219] Bishops (from Greek ἐπισκοπέω (*episkopeo*) – "to oversee") already in the 2nd - 3rd centuries concentrated in their hands the full authority in Christian communities, claiming apostolic succession. Deacons (Greek διάκονος (*diakonos*) – servant) primarily performed administrative and managerial functions, which in many Churches made this position quite influential. The spread of the institution of presbyters (from Greek πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*) – elder) was associated with the expansion of Christian communities and the need to delegate some powers (primarily liturgical) of the bishop, who could not oversee the entire community alone. See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 44–160.

[220] See ANIKIEV and FADEYEV, "The Minor Orders in the Roman Church of the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries According to Papal Epistles," 22–23.

[221] See G.D. DUNN, "The Clerical *Cursus honorum* in the Late Antique Roman Church," 121.

1.4.3.1 – Pope Siricius (A.D. 384–399)

The question of how clergy ranks are structured is discussed in a papal decree written by Pope Siricius (384–399).[222] Pope Siricius, addressing the norms of clergy behaviour, proposes a different *cursus honorum* for three groups: those who consecrated themselves to the Church from childhood, those who entered the service in adulthood, and monks.[223] For those initiated in infancy, advancement from lector to bishop was possible, with strict marital norms. They would become lectors at puberty, acolytes and subdeacons in adolescence, deacons after five years of commendable service, and priests after ten years. The second group, those who entered the service in adulthood, had a similar *cursus honorum*, albeit shorter, aimed at addressing the issue of men with multiple marriages becoming bishops. They could become lectors or exorcists immediately after baptism, then acolytes and subdeacons after two years, deacons after five years, and eventually priests or bishops based on merit. Monks could also progress through the minor orders, gradually rising to deacon or presbyter before potentially reaching the episcopate, adhering to established timeframes.[224]

1.4.3.2 – Pope Innocent I (A.D. 402–417)

In a letter to Bishop Felix of Nocera, Pope Innocent I emphasised the importance of a gradual ascent through minor offices for clergy candidates, referencing 1 Timothy 5:22.[225] He stressed that advancement should not be hasty, listing the

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[222] See SIRICIUS, Epistola no. 1, in J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 13, cols. 1132–1147, Paris, 1843, English translation in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 82–84. This papal decree was written in response to a letter from Himerius, Bishop of Tarragona, who sent his query to the by then deceased Pope Damasus (366–384). Apparently, Himerius was concerned about priests who were married for the second time, as well as those who had children after being ordained. See G.D. DUNN, "The Clerical *Cursus Honorum* in the Late Antique Roman Church," 121.

[223] See G.D. DUNN, "The Clerical Cursus Honorum in the Late Antique Roman Church," 121.

[224] See SIRICIUS, Epistola no. 1, in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 82–84.

[225] See INNOCENT I, Epistola no. 37, in J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, 176, Paris, 1880, English translation in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 86–87.

sequence: reader, acolyte, deacon, and presbyter, though exorcists and subdeacons were likely considered equivalent to readers and acolytes.[226] In this same letter, Pope Innocent I lists the qualities that lay people must possess to be admitted to the ranks of the clergy, i.e., he obviously speaks of the second type of *cursus*:

> Lay people who were married at the time of baptism and proved the firmness of their decisions: they either joined the clergy or, from the moment of baptism, were associated with monasteries, did not have concubines or prostitutes, if they were diligent in every good deed, then they are not prohibited from being admitted to the inheritance of the clergy. Let this happen so that the time limits established by our predecessors are observed in their case. Let no one of them become a reader, an acolyte, a deacon, or a presbyter in a short time. For if they diligently perform minor services for a long time, their life and obedience will be visible, so that they will pass to the priesthood according to the merits of their service and will not anticipate what is deserved by a worthy life.[227]

It is evident that the Pope was concerned that the degrees of priesthood should not be attained *per saltum*, and he emphasised a more detailed progression of orders: reader, acolyte, deacon, and presbyter. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of exorcists and subdeacons here, who are likely considered equal to readers and acolytes, respectively. Even more evident is the tendency to turn these minor orders into steps of testing suitable candidates. However, their transformation into such probationary (and therefore temporary) positions did not mean that they lost their immediate functions, which primarily related to liturgical action. Pope Innocent I highlighted the liturgical function of minor orders, such as acolytes distributing the Eucharistic bread to signify unity with the bishop.[228]

1.4.3.3 – Pope Zosimus (417–418)

Pope Zosimus reiterated the inadmissibility of skipping ranks (*per saltum*) in letters to bishops Patroclus and Hesychius.[229] His letter to Hesychius of Salonika is

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[226] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 86–87.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] See ZOSIMI, EPISTOLA, no. 7, in J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, 20, Paris, 1845, English translation in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 87–91. "This decretal provides an insight into the state

specifically devoted to the issue of lay people aspiring to ecclesiastical ranks. He emphasised the need for education and training,[230] proposing specific terms for passing through ranks: readers until age 20 for those consecrated from childhood, and a similar sequence for adults starting from baptism, with four years each as acolyte or subdeacon, and five years as deacon before priesthood.[231]

Despite variations, the Roman bishops of the 4th to early 5th centuries agreed on a gradual ascent through hierarchical ranks, modelled after the civil *cursus honorum*. The focus was on ensuring proper selection, probation, and preparation of ordained leadership, often more than marital status.[232] Minor orders served as probationary stages for assessing suitability of candidates for higher offices.

These minor offices evolved in function: the lectorate transitioned from a liturgical role to a training ground for future clergy, and the exorcistate became a preparatory stage for adult candidates for holy orders.[233] This structured progression aimed to better prepare and select candidates for higher ecclesiastical roles, enhancing the calibre of the clergy. In short, even though *cursus honorum* was neither uniform nor universal, the primary impetus behind it in the patristic period was a pastoral concern,

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of ecclesiastical life in Gaul in the early fifth century. Zosimus complains that members of the laity, in this case soldiers, have been ordained directly to the episcopate and states that such people have immediately seized by a certain leap the highest place in religion. Such offices, he says, ought to be conferred on those who have come through the ecclesiastical service step by step, by careful examination." (J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 87).

[230] See ZOSIMI, EPISTOLA, no. 7, in J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 87.

[231] Ibid.

[232] However, this slow ascent through the ranks remained more of a desire, as evidenced by the elections of Siricius and Innocent I themselves as Popes from the diaconate with a bypass of the presbyteral rank. "Some of the more "deplorable" reasons for the perpetuation of *per saltum* ordinations have been noted. There were, however, more positive reasons why the practice continued. After the Decian persecution, the numbers of the clergy were seriously depleted. Likewise, the barbarian invasions depleted the numbers of clergy. Due to the scarcity of Catholic clergy in some places, such as at Milan at the time of Ambrose's election, it was necessary to choose episcopal candidates from even the catechumenate." (J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 156).

[233] Ibid.

rather than theological, namely the calibre of the clergy. It is argued that the *cursus honorum* was responsible for the decline of the diaconate in the patristic period. According to Barnett, "The decline of the diaconate springs more from the development of the idea of the *cursus honorum* than from any other single factor."[234] Gibaut along with Turner notes "It is just as possible that it was neither the *clerical cursus* nor the presbyterate which threatened the position of the diaconate, but the minor orders of acolyte and subdeacon, which assumed more and more of the deacons' functions."[235] In addition, Duchesne argues that the ministries of subdeacon and acolyte are a development of that of the deacon.[236]

1.4.3.4 – *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*

According to the ritual given in the *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua* (*SEA*), minor orders are conferred upon candidates by presenting them with the appropriate instruments. Many of the ordination rubrics of the *SEA* reflect those of the *Apostolic Tradition* and other sources.[237] It offers a ranking of ministries, a description which eventually influenced the Western Church's program of intervals.[238] One finds in this document the following ministries which are ranked in an ascending order: psalmist, porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter, and bishop.[239] One cannot, however, conclude that this ranking and naming was common throughout

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[234] J. BARNETT, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, New York, Seabury, 1981, 106.

[235] J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 156; C.H. TURNER, "The Organization of the Church," in P. FOURACRE (ed.), *The Cambridge Medieval History, c. 500- c. 700*, vol. 1, Cambridge, The University Press, 2008, 152.

[236] See L.M.O. DUCHESNE, *Origines du Culte Chrétien*, M.L. MCCLURE (trans.), *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution; a Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne*, 5th ed., London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919, 345.

[237] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 118.

[238] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 198.

[239] Ibid.

southern Gaul, the place of origin for this document. Other documents from the same time and place indicate variation.[240] Still, in time, this listing, with the exception of psalmist became the standard ranking and naming for the minor orders in the Western Church.[241]

1.4.4 – The Post–Patristic Church

In the post-patristic Church, minor orders often referred to ranks of clergy below the diaconate, such as acolytes and exorcists. These roles, though less significant than major orders, played crucial liturgical and administrative functions within the Church hierarchy.

1.4.4.1 – Isidore of Seville (A.D. 636)

Isidore of Seville (636),[242] influenced by the *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, addresses ordered ministries in his work *De ecclesiasticis officiis* (*DEO*), listing minor orders including sacristans, subdeacons, lectors, psalmists, exorcists, and doorkeepers.[243] With the inclusion of the sacristans (*custodes sacraria*), the number of ecclesiastical grades in the *DEO* is nine. The unusual sequence is typical of the Hispanic *cursus* in which the lector was superior to the exorcist.[244] In another work, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, he deals with the Church's ordered ministry. Here he lists the grades as doorkeeper, psalmist, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon,

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[240] See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 198. Those other documents mentioned by Gibaut are: The *Breviatio canonum*, The *Concordia canonum*, The *Collectio vetus gallica*, The Leonine Sacramentary, The *Liber ordinum*. For their detailed study see J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 108–120.

[241] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 119.

[242] Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) is commonly regarded as the last of the patristic writers. His works are a source of knowledge for many aspects of Church life, including holy orders especially *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, a work which addresses the ordered ministries of the Church. See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 131.

[243] See ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *De ecclesiasticis officis* (=*DEO*), 2.5-14, in T.L. KNOEBEL (ed.), *Ancient Christian Writers*, *No. 61*, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2008, 80–85.

[244] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 131.

deacon, presbyter, and bishop. The position of the lector and the exorcist in the sequence, along with the inclusion of the acolyte, reflects the Gallican *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua* sequence of grades.[245]

1.4.4.2 – The *Liber Pontificalis*

The *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*) of the first half of the sixth century reflects two entries of the *cursus honorum* and the interstices canons. The first instance comes from the entry of Pope Gaius (282–295).[246] The author of the *LP* ascribes the clerical *cursus* to Gaius:

> He decreed that advancement through the orders in the Church should be as follows: anyone who might deserve to be a bishop should be doorkeeper, reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest, and then be ordained bishop.[247]

The sequence of the *cursus* here is doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter, and bishop. Except for the lack of a psalmist, the sequence is identical to that of the *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*. The second example in the *LP*, which includes both the interstices and the clerical *cursus*, comes from the entry on the life of Pope Silvester (314–335).[248] Silvester is said to have decreed:

> If anyone wished to undertake service in the Church or be given preferment, he should be a reader 30 years, an exorcist 30 days, an acolyte 5 years, a subdeacon 5 years, a guardian of the martyrs 5 years, a deacon 7 years, a priest 3 years before ordination to the episcopate.[249]

The doorkeeper and the psalmist are missing from this *cursus*; the office of *custos martyrum* has been added to the list. These entries indicate that the *Liber*

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[245] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 131.

[246] See ibid., 133.

[247] *Liber Pontificalis*, 29.2, in R. DAVIS (ed. and trans.), *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2010, 11.

[248] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 131.

[249] *Liber Pontificalis*, 34.8, in R. DAVIS, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 15.

Pontificalis acknowledges the existence and significance of minor orders within the Church's hierarchical structure during the time periods of these Popes.

1.4.4.3 – The Council of Aachen (A.D. 816)

The council of Aachen, held in 816, is significant for the development of the sequence of grades in the Western Church. Canons 2-8 describe the grades of ministry according to the Romano-Gallican sequence (i.e., doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter, and bishop).[250] According to Gibaut, the compiler(s) of the above-mentioned canons of the Council of Aachen used material from Isidore's *DEO*, but rearranged Isidore's sequence (doorkeeper, exorcist psalmist, lector, subdeacon, sacristan, deacon, presbyter, bishop) to conform to Frankish usage. Material for the acolyte (c. 5), absent in the *DEO*, is taken from Isidore's *Etymologiae*.[251] The Council of Aachen did much to strengthen and secure the Romano-Gallican sequence of grades in the Western Church.

1.4.4.4 – The Council of Rome (A.D. 769)[252]

During the Third Session on April 14th, the Council revised papal election rules, limiting eligibility to cardinal deacons or priests who had undergone consecration and minor orders progression. "It was constituted by the holy synod under the interdict of *anathema*, that no longer shall anyone presume to accede to the pontificate except a cardinal presbyter or deacon, having risen through the distinct grades."[253] The *cursus*

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[250] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 161.

[251] Ibid.

[252] The purpose of the Council of Rome, held in April, 769, was to restore canonical order to the Church of Rome after the usurpation of the papacy by the antiPope Constantine II (767–768), and to prevent another seizure of the papacy by a lay man. Called by Pope Stephen III, the council legislated that bishops of Rome must be chosen only from among the cardinal presbyters and deacons of the Roman Church. Laypersons were excluded henceforth. For detailed study on the Council of Rome (769), see J.H. GIBAUT, 163–169.

[253] J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 168.

through the minor ministries to either the diaconate or to the presbyterate is requisite for promotion to the episcopate. Promotion to the pontificate from the laity, or from the minor order, is prohibited.[254] "Promotion in this sense probably means election."[255] This development cannot be regarded as new; it simply gives canonical authority to the traditional Roman practice of electing either a deacon or a presbyter as a bishop.[256]

1.4.4.5 – Gratian

In Gratian's *Decretum,* D. 61, Pars 1 is part of a larger section that deals with ecclesiastical hierarchy and the proper ordination of clergy. Here he discusses the requirements and qualifications for ordination, particularly focusing on the suitability and prior service of candidates for higher ecclesiastical offices. He emphasises the importance of progressing through the various clerical orders, such as lector, deacon, and presbyter, before one can be considered for the office of bishop. The principle is that only those who have demonstrated their capability and worthiness in these lower offices should be elevated to higher positions within the Church. This reflects the *cursus honorum*, the traditional path of clerical advancement in the medieval Church.[257] Gratian acknowledged instances of laity elected as bishops but emphasised the necessity of progressing through ecclesiastical grades for proper reverence.[258]

He cited c. 13 of the Council of Sardica, supporting sequential ordination: "that no one be put forward and ordained as a bishop, except those who have served as

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[254] J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 168.

[255] Ibid.

[256] See ibid.

[257] See A. FRIEDBERG (ed.), *Decretum Magistri Gratiani*, Leipzig, Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879 (=*FRIEDBERG1*), cols. 227-230.

[258] In D. 61, Pars 2, Gratian acknowledges the examples of a bishop Nicholas, an archbishop Severus, and Ambrose of Milan, who were elected to the episcopate from the laity. Gratian posits that the reason such elections are prohibited is the fact that a layperson who has not been instructed through the ecclesiastical grades cannot by experience demonstrate an example of reverence. See *FRIEDBERG1*, cols. 230–231.

lectors, deacons, or presbyters."[259] In D. 77, Gratian takes up questions about the *cursus honorum*, the interstices, and the ages of clerics. "No monk or lay person is to be a bishop except one who has passed through each of the grades."[260]

1.4.4.6 – Peter Lombard (A.D. 1155–1158)

Peter Lombard in *Sententiarum libri quattuor* (1155–1158) detailed the seven ecclesiastical orders and their functions, linking them to the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit, reinforcing the theological and sequential importance of the *cursus honorum*.

> The o*stiarii* […] are so called because they oversee the doors of the temple […], welcome the worthy and repel the unworthy; therefore, when ordained, they receive from the bishop the keys of the church […]. The Lord personally exercised this office when, having made himself a whip out of cords, he drove sellers and buyers out from the temple […]. The second rank is that of the r*eaders*, so called because they must read […], even if some readers pronounce in such a miserable way as to force some to complain and lament. They are also called 'pronouncers,' because they proclaim from the front, so that their voice must be so clear that it reaches the ears of those who are positioned far away. It is the task of the reader to proclaim the readings, and to preach to the people what the prophets have foretold: he in fact reads the prophecies and the readings *ex officio*. For this reason, before the people, the bishop hands him the book of divine readings […]. Whoever is promoted to this rank must be instructed in the letters, to understand the meaning of the words, to know the force of the accents, to read distinctly, so as not to deprive his hearers of understanding by a confused pronunciation. They are to pay attention to what is to be read as an affirmation or as a question, where distinction must be made in reading. These things, if not observed, disturb the intellect and provoke others to laughter. The reader's voice must consult with the ears and the heart. Christ exercised this office when, in the midst of the elders, having opened the book of Isaiah, he read distinctly so that they might understand, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, etc.' (*Isa* 61:1-2) […]. The third is the order of the e*xorcists* […]; they invoke the name of the Lord on the catechumens and on those who have an unclean spirit, begging him to come out of them […]. He must therefore have a pure spirit who commands unclean spirits […], lest, since the medicine he gives to others does not help him, he be told: 'Physician, heal yourself' (*Luke* 4:23). These, when ordained, receive from the bishop the book of exorcisms […]. Christ exercised this office […] when he healed many possessed […]. In fourth place follow a*colytes*, so called in Greek, but called in Latin *ceroferari* because they carry the candles at the reading of the Gospel or in the offering of the sacrifice. It is then that they light and carry the lamps, not to chase away the darkness of the air, since at that moment the sun is already shining, but to show a sign of joy, so that through the image of bodily light that light of which we read in *John* 1:9 may be manifested: 'The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.' It is the task of the acolyte to prepare the lamps in the sacristy, to carry the candle, and to prepare for the subdeacons the small vials containing wine and water for the Eucharist. These, when they are ordained […], receive from the archdeacon the candlestick with the candle and the empty cruet. The Lord exercised this office when he said, 'I am the light of the world, etc.' (*John* 8:12) […]. The fifth is the order of the s*ubdeacons* […], so called because they are subject to the orders and offices of the Levites […]. It is the duty of the subdeacon

[259] D. 61, c. 10, in *FRIEDBERG1*, cols. 230–231.

[260] "Ex monachis autem vel laicis nullus nisi per gradus ecclesiae ad summum sacerdotium debet pervenire" (D. 77, d.a.c. 1, in *FRIEDBERG1*, col. 272).

> to bring the chalice and the paten to the altar of Christ, to hand them over to the Levites and to be at their service. They also keep the jug, tray, and towel for the bishop, presbyters, and Levites to wash their hands at the altar […]. The Lord exercised this office when he girded himself with a towel, put water in the basin, and washed and dried the feet of the disciples.[261]

From this presentation by Peter Lombard, it appears that the orders mentioned are now reserved for clerics preparing for the priesthood and involve exclusively liturgical functions. It is with this configuration that minor orders are dealt with by the Council of Trent.

By the eleventh century the hierarchical sequence of the clerical grades in the Western Church had reached a settled form. The reform movements of that period insisted on sequential ordination, proper observance of the interstices, and the restoration of grades that in some regions had fallen into disuse, particularly the subdiaconate. This consolidation effectively fixed the *cursus honorum*, which thereafter experienced relatively little doctrinal or structural development. Between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, theological attention was directed chiefly toward scholastic synthesis and sacramental theology, while liturgical practice remained largely stable. As a result, the minor orders continued in the form established by the eleventh-century reforms until the Reformation challenged their value and ecclesial necessity. It is within this long-stabilised medieval framework that the Council of Trent took up the question of the minor orders and reaffirmed their place within the ecclesiastical and sacramental structure of the Church.[262]

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[261] P. LOMBARD, *Sententiarum libri quatuor*, lib. 4, dist. 24, in *PL* 192, 901–902. Here Lombard cites texts of Isidore of Seville, which he draws from *Etymologiarum libri*, lib. 7, ch. 12 (*PL,* 82, 292–293) and from *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, lib. 2, ch. 10–15 (*PL,* 83, 790–794).

[262] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 314–315.

1.5 – The Council of Trent[263]

The Council in the second doctrinal chapter of Session XXIII discussed the minor orders.

> But since the ministry of so holy a priesthood is something divine, that it might be exercised in a more worthy manner and with greater veneration, it was consistent that in the most well-ordered arrangement of the Church there should be several distinct orders of ministers, who by virtue of their office should minister to the priesthood, so distributed that already having the clerical tonsure should ascend through the minor to the major orders. For the Sacred Scriptures mention unmistakably not only the priests but also the deacons (Acts 6:5; 21:8; I Tim 3:8, 12), and teach in the most definite words what is especially to be observed in their ordination; and from the very beginning of the Church the names of the following orders and the duties proper to each one are known to have been in use, namely, those of the subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, lector and porter, though these were not of equal rank; for the subdiaconate is classed among the major orders by the Fathers and holy councils, in which we also read very often of other inferior orders.[264]

The Council of Trent defended both major and minor orders, affirming sequential ordination and the traditional ecclesiastical structure.[265] The canons on the sacrament of order[266] promulgated by the same session affirm and strengthen the inherited pattern in response to the challenges posed by the Reformation and the need

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[263] In the face of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and the need for internal reform, the Council of Trent sought to confirm and defend what was traditional in Catholic teaching and structure. The XXIII session of the Council of Trent dealt with question around the sacrament of order and promulgated the final decree on 15 July 1563. This session is remembered particularly for its treatment of the relationship of the bishop to both the presbyterate and to the papacy, as well as its theology of "priesthood." See H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Original Text with English Translation,* London, B. Herder Book Co., 1941.

[264] COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter II, "Seven Orders," in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* 160–161.

[265] The Council of Trent did not introduce the distinction between major and minor orders but rather reaffirmed a long-established ecclesiastical tradition. The differentiation had developed gradually in the early Middle Ages and was canonically recognised by the twelfth century, notably in Gratian's *Decretum* and the Decretals of Gregory IX. By that time, the subdiaconate had come to be regarded as the first of the major orders, owing to its close association with the altar and its obligations of celibacy and the recitation of the Divine Office. In response to the challenges of the Reformation, Trent defended both the major and minor orders, confirming the traditional sevenfold structure of holy orders and the principle of sequential ordination within the hierarchical framework of the Church. Osborne notes that the refutation of Calvin's writings on the minor orders are the focus of the second chapter of Session 23. See K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 255.

[266] See COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter IV, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Ordination, Canons on the Sacrament of Order (Canons 1–8), in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 162–163.

for reform within the Roman Catholic Church itself. For example, against the Reformers who abolished the minor orders and the major orders, canon 2 says,

> If anyone says that besides the priesthood there are not in the Catholic Church other orders, both major and minor, by which, as by certain steps, advance is made to the priesthood, let him be anathema.[267]

Chapters 11–14 emphasised proper preparation and probation through minor orders before reaching the presbyterate,[268] aligning with the Council's broader reforms, including the establishment of seminaries.[269] Until well into the 1960s, the conferral of the lower ministries followed the seminary timetable of theology studies: tonsure after the first year, the minor orders from doorkeeper to acolyte at the end of the second year, the subdiaconate at the end of the third year, the diaconate during the autumn of the fourth year, and the presbyterate at the end of the fourth year.[270] Osborne has observed: "Only with Vatican II has there been any substantial change to the thrust which Trent gave to these preparatory orders."[271] The Romano-Gallican sequence of grades was maintained in the Roman Catholic Church until 1972. According to Gibaut "following the teaching of the late medieval theologians, reception of the lower ministries appears to be a canonical rather than a sacramental necessity for ordination to the presbyterate."[272]

The Council also allowed for married men of exemplary life to serve in minor orders if celibate clerics were unavailable.

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[267] See COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter IV, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Ordination, Canons on the Sacrament of Order (Canons 1–8), c. 2, 163.

[268] See ibid., 171–173.

[269] See ibid., Chapter XVIII, Directions for Establishing Seminaries for Clerics, in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 175; J.T. EILLIS, "A Short History of Seminary Education: I–The Apostolic Church of Trent," in J.M. LEE and L.J. PUTZ (eds.), *Seminary Education in a Time of Crisis*, Notre Dame, Indiana, Fides, 1965, 1–29.

[270] See J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 329.

[271] K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 255.

[272] J.H. GIBAUT, *The Cursus Honorum*, 329.

> That the functions of holy orders from the deacon to the porter, which have been laudably received in the Church from the times of the Apostles, and which have been for some time discontinued in many localities, may again be restored to use in accordance with the canons and may not be derided by the heretics as useless, the holy council, burning with the desire to restore the ancient usage, decrees that in the future such functions shall not be exercised except by those constituted in these orders. […]. In case there should not be at hand unmarried clerics to exercise the functions of the four minor orders, their place may be supplied by married clerics of approved life, provided they have not married a second time, are competent to discharge the duties, and wear the tonsure and the clerical garb in church.[273]

Although destined to remain a dead letter, one cannot fail to notice the bold opening of this decree that admitted married men to minor orders.[274]

Despite some transitional phases where duties overlapped, the minor orders functioned as a filter for examining candidates for higher clerical roles, contributing to the consolidation of the Roman urban clergy and the evolution of the Roman rite.

1.6 – The 1917 Code

The 1917 Code of Canon Law reflects the perennial doctrine of the Church as solemnly expressed in her ecumenical councils. It embodies the juridical ecclesiology that characterised the Church's self-understanding prior to Vatican II.[275] In keeping with the ecclesiology of the time, Book II of the 1917 Code, *De personis*, begins with the major heading *De clericis*,[276] under which the entire organisational structure of the

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[273] COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session XXIII, Chapter XVII, In What Manner the Exercise of the Minor Orders is to be Restored, in H.J. SCHROEDER, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 174–175.

[274] Before Vatican II, the exercise of minor orders was confined, for the duration of the academic year, within the walls of the seminaries.

[275] "The ecclesiology underlying the *Pio-Benedictine* Code was that the Church was seen as a perfect society. It was comprised of complementary parts; the members of the Church were divided into two groups – the active and the passive, the teachers and those who were taught and the pastors and the sheep. The lines of division were very neatly and completely drawn (with the exception of religious who blur the otherwise clear distinction between clerics and the laity by forming a third part in Book II)." (A.P. WINTERS, "Who is a Lay Person," 54). Similarly, Provost also notes that underlying the 1917 Code is an understanding of the Church as composed of two fundamentally distinct and unequal groups – clergy and the laity. The laity were supposed to support the work of the clergy, receive their ministrations, and obey their orders, and lay people were subjects, lacking participation in jurisdiction and Orders. See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in J.A. CORIDEN, T.J. GREEN, and D.E. HEINTSCHEL (eds.), *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1985 (=*CLSA Comm1*), 131.

[276] It must be remembered that for the 1917 Code and even until Paul VI's motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam*, the word "cleric" included those with first tonsure and those in minor orders.

Church, from universal Church to the parish, is presented. Within this framework, the Church was seen as a perfect society, whose members were divided into two groups: clerics and lay people.[277] Consequently, the first part of the Book II is dedicated to clerics. It defines the clerical state, outlines distinct degrees, and establishes a hierarchical order. The major source of understanding the theological foundation and pastoral context of the 1917 Code is the Code itself, in particular the introductory canons on clerics and orders.[278] As Gilbert notes, "the 1917 legislation was not very new; it simply organised an enormous amount of material on clerics and orders into a code format."[279] Two major premises emerge from these two sections, flowing from the Code's theological foundations and its perception of ministry: (1) The Church is hierarchical in nature and only clerics can obtain jurisdiction;[280] (2) Ministry is viewed as fundamentally sacramental and clerical. The role of non-clerics including religious is to assist the cleric in fulfilling the responsibilities of ministry.[281]

> Accepting these premises in the much broader context that everything must be understood in its proper history, it must be concluded that the 1917 Code was a remarkable document which simply communicated the unchallenged ecclesiology of the time. The vertical lines of jurisdiction, whether ordinary or delegated, became the means of perceiving and implementing ministry "in the name of the Church.[282]

Canon 108, §1 defined a cleric as one who had been bound to divine ministry by at least the reception of first tonsure.[283] The hierarchical principle contained in this

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[277] See J.H. PROVOST, "The People of God," in *CLSA Comm1*, 117; see also J. CIOPPA, "A New Understanding of the Laity and Mission in the Church," in *Tripod*, 42 (1987), 50; J. FORNÉS, "People of God Part I, Christ's Faithful, Introduction," in Á. MARZOA, J. MIRAS, R. RODRÍGUEZ-OCAÑA (eds.) and E. CAPARROS (gen. ed. of English translation), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur, 2004, 2–3.

[278] See *CIC/17*, cc. 108–109, 948–950.

[279] E.J. GILBERT, "Orders [1008–1054]," in *CLSA Comm1*, 713.

[280] See *CIC/17*, c. 118.

[281] See E.J. GILBERT, "Orders [1008–1054]," in *CLSA Comm1*, 713.

[282] Ibid.

[283] See *CIC/17*, c. 108. It states: "§1. Those who are taken into divine ministries at least by the reception of first tonsure are called clerics. §2. [Clerics] are not all of the same rank, but among them there is a sacred hierarchy in which some are subordinated to others. §3. By divine institution, the sacred

canon was applied to the varied grades of orders which are conferred by ordination. The law distinguished the hierarchy of orders and jurisdiction from the viewpoint of divine and ecclesiastical institution. By divine institution the hierarchy of jurisdiction consisted in the supreme pontificate and a subordinate episcopacy. All other levels of orders and jurisdiction were of ecclesiastical institution and by implication could be changed by the Church.[284] The introduction to the law on orders reflected even more intensely the theological foundation and perception of ministry of the 1917 Code.[285] It stated that the sacrament of orders distinguishes clerics from the laity for the purposes of governing the faithful and for the ministry of divine cult.[286]

Title VI of the Code regulated the minor orders, including acolyte, exorcist, lector, and doorkeeper,[287] considering them part of the traditional hierarchical structure of the Church.[288] These minor orders were seen as steps toward major orders, conferred on seminarians as they progressed in their formation for the priesthood.[289] The Code specified that nobody was to be given clerical tonsure, which had to be received

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hierarchy in respect of orders consists of Bishops, priests, and ministers; by reason of jurisdiction, [it consists of] the supreme pontificate and the subordinate episcopate; by institution of the Church other grades can also be added."

[284] See E.J. GILBERT, "Orders [1008–1054]," in *CLSA Comm1*, 713.

[285] Ibid.

[286] See *CIC/17*, c. 948. It states: "Ordination, by the institution of Christ, distinguishes clerics from laity for the governance of the faithful and the ministry of divine cult."

[287] See *CIC/17*, c. 949. It states: "In the canons that follow, by the name of major orders or sacred orders are understood presbyterate, diaconate, and subdiaconate; while minor orders are acolyte, exorcist, lector, and doorkeeper."

[288] See *CIC/17*, c. 978, §2. It states: "The intervals between first tonsure and doorkeeper and the other individual minor orders are left to the prudent judgment of the Bishop; but between acolyte and subdeacon, subdeacon and deacon, and deacon to presbyter, there shall be no promotions before acolyte [has been exercised] at least one year, [and for] subdeacon and deacon [there need to be] at least three months in which one so ordained can function therein, unless necessity or utility of the Church in the judgment of the Bishop shows otherwise."

[289] See *CIC/17*, c. 973, §1. It states: "First tonsure and orders are to be conferred only on those who are proposed for ascending to the presbyterate and who seem correctly understood as, at some point in the future, being worthy priests.

before minor orders, before beginning the regular course of theological studies.[290] The Code also restricted conferral of tonsure and any order below that of the presbyterate to those who intended to become priests and who were judged likely to be worthy priests.[291] Within this juridical framework, minor orders represent the final stage of incorporation into the clerical state following first tonsure. Although they confer clerical status and its associated privileges, such as the *privilegium fori*[292] and the *privilegium canonis*,[293] they do not impose the obligations of celibacy[294] or the recitation of the Divine Office.[295] Consequently, the juridical bond to the clerical state at this level remains limited and allows for relatively simple forms of cessation.

The 1917 Code provides that loss of clerical status for those in minor orders may occur through voluntary renunciation, automatic loss, or dismissal by competent authority (cc. 211–214). A cleric in minor orders may freely return to the lay state by declaring his intention to the competent Ordinary.[296] Unlike the case of major orders (c.

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[290] See *CIC/17*, cc. 976.

[291] See *CIC/17*, c. 973. Previously, there were lay cardinals and others who received minor orders alone. They could even marry and remain clerics, the status of belonging to the clergy being at that time conferred through clerical tonsure, provided that they married only once and that to a virgin; but by the early 20th century a cleric who married was considered to have forfeited his clerical status. See "Cardinal," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., no. 3, Detroit, Thomson/Gale, Catholic University of America, 2003, 103–108. According to the 1917 Code a man must be first ordained at least a priest in order to be considered for appointment as a cardinal. See *CIC/17*, c. 273. In the current canonical order, the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, which replaced the former minor orders, do not confer clerical status, since clerical status is conferred only upon ordination to the diaconate. See *CIC/83*, c. 266.

[292] See *CIC/17*, c. 120.

[293] See *CIC/17*, c. 2343, §1, 3˚.

[294] *CIC/17*, c. 132 states: "§ 1. Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligation of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are sacrilegious, with due regard for the prescription of Canon 214, § 1. § 2. Minor clerics can enter marriage, but, unless the marriage was null because of inflicted force and fear, they drop from the clerical state by the law itself."

[295] See *CIC/17*, c. 135.

[296] *CIC/17*, c. 211, §2 states: "A minor cleric can be returned to the lay state not only automatically as a result of the causes described in law but also upon his own will, having informed the local Ordinary, or by a decree of the same Ordinary given for a just cause, if namely the Ordinary, all things considered, prudently judges that the cleric is not [sufficiently] consistent with the decorum of the clerical state to be promoted to sacred orders."

211, §1), this does not require a papal rescript, since the individual has not yet assumed the more stringent obligations associated with higher orders.

Certain acts entail the automatic loss of clerical status. Entry into marriage results in the forfeiture of clerical status and its associated privileges. Likewise, the abandonment of ecclesiastical dress and tonsure for a prolonged period without just cause, especially after canonical warning, is regarded as a tacit renunciation of the clerical state. Voluntary enlistment in military service without the permission of the Ordinary similarly leads to loss of clerical status.[297] In addition to voluntary and automatic modes of cessation, the diocesan bishop retains the authority to dismiss a cleric in minor orders if he is judged unsuitable for the priesthood or if he commits an offence warranting such a measure, including public scandal or persistent disobedience.[298] These provisions demonstrate the provisional and preparatory nature of minor orders within the canonical structure of the time. At the same time, their liturgical and juridical significance within ecclesial life remains clearly affirmed.

The Code underscores the importance of minor orders in liturgical celebrations and the life of the Church, considering them belonging to the clerical state and to the sacrament of orders. In the section on the ordinations of lector and acolyte, c. 948 emphasises that ordination distinguishes clerics from laity for governance and ministry.[299]

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[297] See *CIC/17*, cc. 132, §2, 136, §3, 141, §2, 648, 669, §2. See also J.A. ABBO and J.D. HANNAN, *The Sacred Canons: A Concise Presentation of the Current Disciplinary Norms of the Church, Vol. I (Canons 1-2869)*, London, B. Herder Book Co., 1952, 269.

[298] See J.A. ABBO and J.D. HANNAN, *The Sacred Canons: A Concise Presentation of the Current Disciplinary Norms of the Church*, 269–270.

[299] See *CIC/17*, c. 948.

With regard to sacramentals, ordained lectors and deacons are held to the same standard, imparting only blessings expressly permitted by law (c. 1147, §4).[300] The Code also designates the legitimate minister of sacramentals as a cleric empowered by ecclesiastical authority. It recognises the spiritual power conferred through ordination, allowing lectors to act as ministers of sacramentals.[301] In so doing, it recognises that they have some sort of spiritual power (*potestas*) that they did not have prior to their ordination to the lectorate. Thus, 1917 Code recognises that lectors "validly and licitly" act as ministers of sacramentals in blessing certain objects. Canon 1151, §1 prohibited anyone, even those ordained as exorcists, from performing exorcisms without explicit and specific authorisation from the Ordinary.[302] This role is always entrusted to an experienced priest (c. 1151, §2).

In the 1917 Code, the term ordination was applied to episcopal consecration, the three major orders, the four minor orders and also to first tonsure.[303] This usage further reflects the integrated and hierarchical conception of ministry characteristic of the period.

Finally, the 1917 Code does not articulate a theology or juridical structure of lay liturgical ministry, since the liturgy is understood as a clerical function carried out for the faithful.[304] Canon 813 does refer to a minister serving at Mass, but this role is

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[300] See *CIC/17*, c. 1147 §4. It states: "Deacons and lectors can validly and licitly impart only those blessings which are expressly permitted to them in the law."

[301] *CIC/17*, c. 1146 states: "The legitimate minister of sacramentals is a cleric to whom the required power has been given by the competent ecclesiastical authority and [provided the cleric] is not prohibited from exercising it."

[302] *CIC/17*, c. 1146 states: "No one, even if endowed with the power of exorcism, can legitimately perform an exorcism over the [possessed] unless he has obtained express and specific authorization from the Ordinary."

[303] *CIC/17*, c. 950 states: "In law the words: to ordain, order, ordination, [and] sacred ordination encompass, besides episcopal consecration, those orders enumerated in Canon 949 and first tonsure, unless it can be established otherwise by the nature of the thing or the context of the words."

[304] See T. RICHSTATTER, "Instituted Lay Ministry: The History and Future of Canon 230," in *CLSAP*, 49 (1987), 38.

restricted to males.[305] Glendinning, commenting much later on the earlier canonical situation, observes that "the canon distinguishes the responsibilities of a server, who both assists the priest at the altar and makes response. If a male server is unavailable, a female may respond from outside the sanctuary, but she may not assist the priest at the altar, that is, from within the sanctuary."[306] These prohibitions were disciplinary laws rather than the specific directives or rubrics guiding ministers in the celebration of the liturgy which concern the celebration of the Mass. This provision illustrates the strictly clerical configuration of liturgical ministry within the canonical system of 1917. No such prohibitions are contained in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, although the use of female altar servers remained a disputed point even after its promulgation.[307]

1.7 – Vatican II

Vatican II marked a significant shift in the Church's approach to the laity, breaking new ground by including explicit teachings on their role and status. For the first time in history, the Council gave serious attention to the laity, which is why it is sometimes called a "Council of the laity."[308] Tomko mentions that "the situation of the lay people in the Church and in the world had for a long time been somewhat in the

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[305] *CIC/17*, c. 813, §1 states: "A priest should not celebrate Mass without a minister who assists him and responds. § 2. The minister serving at Mass should not be a woman unless, in the absence of a man, for a just cause, it is so arranged that the woman respond from afar and by no means approach the altar." The Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments' instruction *Quam plurimum* warned that "all the authors teach unanimously that it is forbidden under pain of mortal sin for women, even nuns to serve *at the altar*." (SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Instruction on Asking Indults for: Private Oratories, Portable Altars, Mass without Servers, and Keeping the Blessed Sacrament in Private Chapels *Quam plurimum*, in *AAS*, 41 [1949], 493–511, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 3, 335).

[306] C.J. GLENDINNING, "The Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist: The Diversification of Ministry and Opportunities for Greater Co-responsibility of the Laity in Church Governance," in *Studia canonica*, 58 (2024), 282.

[307] An examination of this issue before the authentic interpretation of c. 230, §2 is found in J.M. HUELS, *Disputed Questions in the Liturgy Today*, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, 27–37.

[308] Y. CONGAR, *The Laity in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, J.H. MILLER (ed.), Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, 239. It is described so because "from the second session on, not only were there lay auditors of both sexes who were heard, and who collaborated effectively on several commissions, but the Council gave the laity an important place in its teaching" (Ibid.).

dark; a real change in the understanding of the lay people and their mission was brought only by Vatican II."[309]

Vatican II promoted greater lay participation in the life and mission of the Church through documents like *Lumen gentium*,[310] *Apostolicam actuositatem*,[311] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,[312] *Ad gentes*.[313] The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* encouraged active involvement of the faithful in the liturgy. The Council simplified liturgical rites and allowed the use of vernacular languages.[314] The reforms emphasised the universal priesthood of all believers, symbolising a shift towards inclusivity and collaboration within the Church. This shift reflected a deeper theological understanding of the Church as the "People of God," where all members, regardless of status, have an active role in worship and mission.[315] The understanding of "People of God" sets the "requirement for conscious participation, for community

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[309] J. TOMKO, "The 1987 Synod of Bishops. Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World. Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council," in *Omnis Terra*, English Version, 171 (1986), 418.

[310] See *LG*, nos. 31, 33, 37, in *AAS*, 57 (1965), 37, 39, 42–43.

[311] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 18 November 1965 (=*AA*), in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 837–864, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 766–798.

[312] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963 (=*SC*), in *AAS*, 56 (1964), 97–134, nos. 14, 19, 21, 48, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 1–36.

[313] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, 7 December 1965 (=*AG*), in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 947–990, nos. 21, 36, 41, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 813–856.

[314] See *SC*, no. 36.

[315] The rich theological data on the People of God, their call in Christ, their adoption as sons of God, their incorporation into Christ, their sanctification through the Word and the Sacraments and their sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ offer a sublime understanding of the laity in the Church and put an end to the purely negative, passive, and marginal conception of the laity. This is the basis of the vocation of the laity. Together with the sacred ministers, the lay people are called to share in the office and mission of Christ, the Priest, Prophet, and King. The vocation is one for all, but it is exercised in different manners depending on one's charism and status. See KLOPPENBURG, B., *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II,* Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974, 313; *LG*, nos. 13, 11, 12. Vatican II was conservative in withholding participation in the kingly function from the whole People of God.

organisation for a common purpose, for equality among all, for unity in difference and communion of all with all and with God."[316]

In speaking of the hierarchical structure of the Church, the Council mentioned only three orders, namely episcopate,[317] presbyterate,[318] and diaconate,[319] not minor orders or subdiaconate. Before Vatican II, minor orders were steps towards priesthood, conferring specific liturgical functions mainly on those preparing for ordination. This practice reinforced a hierarchical understanding of the Church, with the clergy as primary liturgical actors and the laity in more passive roles.

Vatican II taught that ministry has its roots in the mission and consecration of Jesus, and all members of the Church share in His mission, each according to their role (*LG*, 28). While ecclesiastical ministry is exercised by bishops, priests, and deacons the Council recognised the ministerial roles of lay people.[320] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, acknowledged lay people as true liturgical ministers in roles such as servers, lectors, commentators, and choir members.[321] Later in the Constitution, in the sixth chapter, the term "ministry" is applied to musicians (*SC*, 112) and artists (*SC*, 122) who devote their gifts to the sacred liturgy.[322] These applications of "ministry" to lay activity elicited no

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[316] See B. KLOPPENBURG, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974, 313.

[317] See *LG*, nos. 18–29.

[318] See ibid., 10, 20, 41.

[319] See ibid., 20, 29.

[320] See O. O'BRIEN, "The Theology of Lay Ministry: 'Developments' Since Vatican II," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 72 (2007), 89.

[321] See *SC*, no. 29.

[322] See E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 205.

debate or discussion among Council members[323] illustrating the Council's intention to integrate lay participation into the liturgical life of the Church.[324]

Vatican II's emphasis on the laity and the subsequent liturgical reforms transformed the Church's understanding and practice of lay ministry, promoting greater inclusivity and active participation. By removing barriers to involvement and encouraging a wider distribution of roles in liturgical celebrations, the Church aimed to foster a stronger sense of belonging among the laity. Post-Vatican II, lay ministries such as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, lectors, and altar servers became more prominent, allowing lay people to take on active roles in their communities' liturgical life. This shift reflects a deeper theological understanding of the Church as the "People of God," where all members, regardless of status, contribute to worship and mission.

1.8 – *Ministeria quaedam*

Ministeria quaedam (*MQ*) was a motu proprio issued by Pope Paul VI in 1972, which reformed the minor orders and the subdiaconate in the Latin Church. This document marked a significant step in the implementation of the liturgical reforms mandated by Vatican II. *MQ* aimed to adapt the ministerial roles of the Church to contemporary needs while reaffirming the principle of the common priesthood of all believers. This subsection explores the implications of *MQ* within the broader context of Vatican II's vision for the active participation of the laity in the liturgy.

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[323] For some historical notes and references, see E. RINERE, The Term "Ministry" as Applied to the Laity in the Documents of Vatican II, Post-Conciliar Documents of the Apostolic See, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, JCD thesis, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America, 1986, 1–15.

[324] See E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 207.

1.8.1 – Background

In 1963, Pope John XXIII established the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code. The Commission began its formal work in 1965.[325] Gilbert noted that "The law on orders–probably more than any other sacrament–had already been significantly changed due to legislation promulgated by Pope Paul VI. In part, the work of the Commission was to incorporate this material into the revised law in the form of canons."[326]

In a motu proprio *Sacram liturgiam* of 25 January 1964, Pope Paul VI issued directives for the implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II.[327] Its Introduction announced the establishment of a special Commission tasked with revising the liturgical rites and preparing the new liturgical books. This body became the Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, later formally designated as the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de sacra liturgia*, the Latin term *consilium* signifying "counsel," "advice," or a group of advisers.[328] Under the leadership of Dom Bernard Botte, one working group focused on revising the first book of the Roman Pontifical, which included ordinations, solemn blessings, and the consecration of persons.[329] The revision of minor orders was also part of this group's work, although the initial intent was not to abolish these orders.[330]

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[325] The work of the study group which revised the law on the sacrament of Orders can be found in the 1978 edition of *Communicationes*. See *Communicationes*, 10 (1978), 178–208.

[326] E.J. GILBERT, "Orders [1008–1054]," in *CLSA Comm1*, 716.

[327] See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacram liturgiam*, in *AAS*, 56 (1964), 139–144, English translation in *FLANNERY 1*, 41–44.

[328] See ibid., footnote b, in *FLANNERY 1*, 42. See also T. RICHSTATTER, *The Liturgical Law Today: New Style, New Spirit*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1977, 89–91.

[329] See P. JOUNEL, "Les ministères non ordonnés dans l'Église," in *Notitiae*, 28 (1982), 144.

[330] Ibid.

Toward the end of 1966, the secretariat of the *Consilium* formulated a proposal to present to Paul VI:

> 1. The Pope would be asked to suppress the four minor orders.
> 2. The subdiaconate would become the only remaining minor order and it would be open not only to candidates for the diaconate, but to others as well; indeed, the subdiaconate would no longer be an obligatory step before being ordained deacon.
> 3. That the rite of entrance into the clerical state would be separate from ordinations.
> 4. A special blessing would be established to dedicate lay persons to permanent liturgical service as lectors, acolytes, or special ministers of Communion, or to dedicate them to non-liturgical ministries, for example, catechist.[331]

The proposal met with much criticism; so much criticism that it had to be abandoned.[332] Meanwhile, the working group completed the revised ordination rites, introduced by the apostolic constitution *Pontificalis Romani recognitio* on 18 June 1968, and approved on 15 August 1968.[333] The rites of ordination were to be revised so that "they express more clearly the holy things they signify and that the Christian people, as far as possible, are able to understand them with ease and to take part in the rites fully, actively, and as befits a community."[334] One of the general liturgical principles operative in the revision of the ordination rites was the principle of "authenticity:" things should be what they seem. For example, a night watch (vigil, Easter vigil) should be at night; morning prayer (*laudes*) should be in the morning. Ministries or orders that will never be used (e.g. exorcist) should not be given.[335]

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[331] See P. JOUNEL, "Les ministères non ordonnés dans l'Église," 145.

[332] Ibid.

[333] By the Apostolic Constitution *Pontificalis Romani recognitio* of 18 June 1968, the Supreme Pontiff Pope Paul VI approved a new rite for the conferral of the sacred orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopate. He further decreed that henceforth this rite, revised by the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy with the advice of experts and after consultation with bishops from different parts of the world, should replace the rite for the conferral of these Orders which is now found in the Roman Pontifical. See PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Pontificalis Romani recognitio*, 18 June 1968, in *AAS*, 60 (1968), 569–573, in *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, 3 (1969), 193–232, https://www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/026-The-Ordination-of-Deacons-Priests-and-Bishops.pdf (20 August 2024).

[334] *SC*, no. 21.

[335] See T. RICHSTATTER, "Instituted Lay Ministry," 40.

Following upon the publication of the new rites for ordinations in 1969, the French and German bishops (each independently) asked the Holy see for permission to suppress tonsure, the four minor orders, and the subdiaconate and to replace them by a rite of admission to candidacy for diaconate or presbyterate, two blessings for lectors and acolytes, and a formula for the promise of celibacy in the ordination of unmarried deacons.[336]

Towards the end of 1970, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship presented a similar proposal which called for the suppression of tonsure, porter, exorcist and the subdiaconate but preserved the minor orders of lector and acolyte as necessary steps to the reception of the diaconate. Before the reception of the diaconate there was to be a rite of admission to the clerical state.[337] "The careful historian can see the great differences between these two similar proposals."[338] The remarks of Monsignor Jounel are pertinent here:

> Despite the similarity with the project of the transalpine bishops, the project of the Congregation evidences a totally different mentality. The Congregation for Divine Worship had to ratify the remarks of the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments which considered it essential to retain the two minor orders as well as the notion of the clerical state.[339]

Meeting in plenary session, the members of the Congregation for Divine Worship rejected the project and sent the following project to the Pope:

> 1. The word "cleric" would be preserved only for those in sacred orders; and the notion of "privilege" that had become attached to the word is no longer appropriate after the Council. Orders are a ministry within the Church and a service to the people of God.
> 2. Incardination would be operative with the reception of the diaconate.
> 3. The word "ordination" would be reserved for sacred orders, those conferred by imposition of hands.
> 4. The rite of admission to candidacy for orders should have a spiritual rather than a juridic thrust. Such a rite would be superfluous for religious.

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[336] See P. JOUNEL, "Les ministères non ordonnés dans l'Église," 145.

[337] See SACRED CONGREGATION OF DIVINE WORSHIP, Third Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Liturgicae instaurationes*, 5 September 1970, in *FLANNERY1*, 209–224.

[338] T. RICHSTATTER, "Instituted Lay Ministry," 40.

[339] P. JOUNEL, "Les ministères non ordonnés dans l'Église," 146.

> 5. Faculties would be given to the various episcopal conferences for determining and arranging rites which would sanctify other liturgical and non-liturgical ministries.[340]

The details for this proposal were to be worked out by representatives of the various Congregations concerned: Sacraments, Divine Worship and Catholic Education (Seminaries).[341] Pope Paul VI considered these proposals for over a year, ultimately responding with the motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam*. It is this motu proprio which is parent of the legislation in the current Code.

1.8.2 – Minor Orders to Instituted Ministries

Ministeria quaedam marked a significant milestone in the evolution of the Church's ministries, redefining the roles of acolytes and lectors. By addressing the need for adaptation to contemporary realities, *MQ* sought to foster a more inclusive and participatory approach to ministry, emphasising the vital role of the laity. *MQ* invoked *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, underscoring the centrality of liturgical ministries.[342]

MQ directed its focus towards the existing "orders" that traditionally served as preparatory stages for holy orders. It recognised and affirmed the principles outlined in the Council, acknowledging that the *raison d'etre* of these ministries was "[...] for the proper ordering of worship and for the service of God's people as the need arose."[343] Historically, these ministries were viewed as preparatory stages for sacred orders,[344] but *MQ* acknowledged their current exercise by laity.[345] The document aimed to adapt these

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[340] See P. JOUNEL, "Les ministères non ordonnés dans l'Église," 146.

[341] Ibid.

[342] See J.M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 63 (1998), 273.

[343] *MQ* Preamble, in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 529, in *FLANNERY1*, 427.

[344] See *MQ*, no. 3, in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 530, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[344] Ibid.

[345] See ibid., no. 4, in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 530, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

functions to contemporary needs while setting requirements for candidates for holy orders.[346]

MQ aligned with the Council's teachings on the centrality of liturgy and the laity's active participation.[347] *MQ* also saw the functions of lector and acolyte as particularly appropriate liturgical ministries.[348] For this reason, it retained various functions of the old "orders" of lector, acolyte, and subdeacon, dividing them among the new "ministries" of lector and acolyte.[349]

> Only those who have received the diaconate, however, will be clerics in the true sense and will be so regarded. This arrangement will bring out more clearly the distinction between clergy and laity, between what is proper and reserved to the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity. This will also bring out more clearly that mutuality by which "the universal priesthood of believers and the ministerial or hierarchic priesthood, though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, are nonetheless interrelated: each of these in its own special way is a sharing in the one priesthood of Christ" (*LG*, 10).[350]

The replacement of the terms "orders" and "ordination" with "ministries" and "institution" (*MQ*, 2, 3) indicated a desire to declericalise these roles.[351] The other two "minor orders," porter and exorcist, were abolished. However, episcopal conferences could petition for additional ministries specific to their dioceses, such as porter, exorcist, and catechist.[352] *MQ* suggested that porter and exorcist were less likely to be adaptable ministries in today's universal Church.[353]

MQ expressed a firm belief that its reforms, especially the separation of lector and acolyte roles from direct preparation for priesthood and their reassignment to lay

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[346] See *MQ*, no. 4, in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 530, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[347] See *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 427; cf. *SC*, nos. 28.

[348] Ibid.

[349] See *MQ*, no. 2, in *AAS*, 64 (1972), 530, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[350] *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 427.

[351] See JOHN M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," 273; *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 428.

[352] *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 427.

[353] See JOHN M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," 273.

persons, would help clarify the distinction between clergy and laity. This would make it clearer what duties are reserved for the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity.[354] It detailed the tasks of lectors (*MQ*, 5) and acolytes (*MQ*, 6), specifying their duties in liturgical and non-liturgical contexts.[355] Lectors proclaim the Scriptures (the Gospel excluded); read the prayer of the faithful; lead congregational singing; instruct the faithful in "the worthy reception of the sacraments; prepare the faithful who are temporarily appointed to read the scriptures in liturgical celebrations, and meditate upon the Word."[356] The acolyte should assist the deacon and priest at Mass and in other liturgical celebrations; "train, as need requires, the faithful who are temporarily appointed to assist the priest and deacon by carrying the missal, the cross or the candles or by performing other similar duties at liturgical celebrations; and meditate on the Eucharist."[357] Where circumstances require it and other canonically designated ministers are unavailable, the acolyte may also serve as an "extraordinary minister" of the Eucharist to the homebound or ill; distribute Communion at Mass when the number of communicants would otherwise result in Mass being prolonged "unduly"; and expose the Blessed Sacrament.[358]

MQ reserved the positions of lector and acolyte specifically for men,[359] outlined the requirements for individuals to qualify for these roles,[360] and established certain

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[354] See *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 428.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid.

[357] See *MQ* Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[358] Ibid.

[359] See ibid., no. 7, in *FLANNERY1*, 431.

[360] Qualifications such as presenting a signed petition, age, and firm intention of serving God and the Christian people, see *MQ*, no. 8, in *FLANNERY1*, 431.

criteria for their appointment and installation.[361] While lay people could serve in these roles, seminarians were required to be installed and exercise these ministries during priestly formation. Only Rome could dispense from that requirement.[362] Provost notes that by eliminating the minor orders with *Ministeria quaedam* in the Latin Church Pope Paul VI provided for a new recognition of lay ministry in the Church.[363] He further states that

> Pope Paul VI intentionally took this step to emphasise that ministry is not just ordained or sacred ministry. All participate in the mission of the Church. "Ministry is one way of carrying out that mission; the Code also speaks elsewhere of the "apostolate" and of "service" by lay persons. Formal recognition of lay ministry was made in terms of the key elements of the Church's mission: word (lector or "reader") and sacrament (acolyte, focusing on the central sacrament-the Eucharist.[364]

Since its issuance, *MQ* has influenced ministerial formation and deployment, fostering a dynamic framework for the laity's role in the Church. It remains a cornerstone for discussions on lay roles, ministry structures, and the Church's adaptability to modern circumstances. By redefining sacred ministries, *MQ* has contributed to the Church's ongoing journey, inviting all members to participate in spreading the Gospel and building the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the historical and theological evolution of the minor orders, demonstrating how their origins, development, and eventual transformation reveal the dynamic interplay between charism, ministry, and ecclesial structure within the life of the Church. Beginning with the early Christian community, where ministries arose organically from charismatic gifts and pastoral needs, we observed how roles such

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[361] See *MQ*, nos. 9, 10, 12, 13, in *FLANNERY1*, 431.

[362] See Ibid., nos. 11, in *FLANNERY1*, 431–432.

[363] See J.H. PROVOST, in *CLSA Comm1*, 167.

[364] Ibid.

as readers, exorcists, acolytes, and porters gradually took on greater definition and stability. The transition from informal, charism-based services to established ecclesiastical ranks illustrates the Church's movement toward an increasingly ordered pastoral and liturgical life.

The influence of Roman societal structures became especially evident as the Church adopted and adapted elements of civic and cultic organisation. Scholars such as Harnack and Lindsay have highlighted how certain minor orders, particularly the porter and acolyte, emerged from practical necessities and cultural models present in Roman religious life. Yet the Church did not imitate these structures uncritically; rather, she transformed them, integrating them into a Christian ecclesial vision in which all ministries serve the mission of the Gospel. What began as functions rooted in civil models became paths of ecclesial service, forming a graded *cursus honorum* that nurtured candidates for higher orders while affirming the dignity of service at every level.

The chapter also examined how charism and institution coexisted and eventually converged. While the Pauline communities recognised a diversity of gifts freely bestowed by the Spirit, the emerging ecclesial order progressively required discernment, authorisation, and liturgical rites. This development contributed to the stabilisation of ministry, ensuring unity of faith, coherence of practice, and accountability within the expanding Christian community.

By the time of the great councils and canonical legislation of the fourth century, the minor orders had become firmly embedded in the Church's hierarchical structure. They served both practical and symbolic roles, supporting the major orders while expressing the Church's understanding of ministry as participation in Christ's service. The codification of these offices, culminating later in the 1917 Code and ultimately in

the reforms of *Ministeria quaedam*, reveals a continuous effort to articulate ministries that respond faithfully to the pastoral demands of each era.

Through this historical-theological investigation, the chapter has shown that minor orders are best understood not as static remnants of the past but as evolving expressions of the Church's ministry in service of her communion and mission. Their development reflects the Church's capacity to integrate charisms, pastoral needs, and cultural contexts into a coherent ecclesial structure ordered toward sanctification and service.

This historical foundation sets the stage for the next chapter, which turns to the instituted ministries as articulated in c. 230 of the 1983 Code. Building upon the heritage of minor orders, Chapter Two will explore how the contemporary canonical framework reinterprets these ministries within the post–conciliar ecclesiology of lay participation, co-responsibility, and the Church's mission in the modern world.

CHAPTER TWO
INSTITUTED MINISTRIES IN CANON 230 OF THE 1983 CODE

Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of instituted ministries within the framework of c. 230 of the 1983 Code, focusing on their historical development, theological significance, and practical implications. Instituted ministries, as articulated in this canon, reflect the Church's evolving understanding of lay participation in its mission and the relationship between the ordained and the laity. This chapter begins by briefly exploring the term "ministry," tracing its etymological and theological roots to highlight its historical association with hierarchical offices, while also recognising its broader application in the life and mission of the Church following Vatican II. Canon 230, which underwent significant revisions during the drafting of the 1983 Code, embodies a shift in ecclesiological perspectives. It highlights three distinct provisions: the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, temporary ministries conferred *ad hoc*, and extraordinary ministries exercised in cases of pastoral necessity. By examining these provisions in detail, the chapter underscores their theological and canonical foundations, particularly the contributions of documents such as *Ministeria quaedam* and the schemas of 1977 and 1980. These insights provide essential context for understanding how c. 230 serves as a cornerstone for the inclusion of lay faithful in specific liturgical and pastoral roles.

The chapter also evaluates the relationship between the common and ministerial priesthoods, as articulated by the Vatican II. It explores the theological relationship between these priesthoods, demonstrating how instituted ministries, rooted in baptism, affirm the dignity and co-responsibility of all the faithful in the mission of the Church. In addressing contemporary challenges, this chapter critically analyses the exclusion of

women from the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, juxtaposing this restriction against the broader participation granted in temporary and extraordinary ministries. It also reflects on the need for consistent application of conciliar principles regarding the dignity and mission of the laity.

Through this comprehensive investigation, the chapter aims to elucidate the role of instituted ministries as integral to the mission of the Church, offering a framework for a renewed understanding of lay participation that honours tradition and addresses contemporary pastoral needs.

2.1 – Understanding of Ministry

The notion of "ministry" forms a foundational element of the Church's identity and is therefore essential for understanding the theological and canonical questions surrounding instituted ministries. Before examining the developments that frame c. 230 and the broader participation of the laity, it is necessary to clarify how the Church has traditionally conceived ministry. For many centuries, the term possessed a specific and restricted meaning, closely tied to the sacramental and hierarchical actions of those who had received holy orders. This conception shaped both ecclesial praxis and canonical discipline, creating a clear distinction between ordained ministers and the rest of the faithful.

Only in the twentieth century, most significantly through the ecclesiology articulated at Vatican II, did the Church begin to develop a more participatory vision of ministry grounded in baptism and the common dignity of all the faithful. The following section traces this development by outlining the pre-conciliar understanding, the conciliar expansion of ministerial participation, and the subsequent Magisterial efforts to define the relationship between ordained and non-ordained forms of ministry.

The Catholic Church prior to the Vatican II predominantly reserved the term "ministry" for ordained roles. Ministry was understood to pertain exclusively to the sacred hierarchy of bishop, priest, and deacon,[1] a view formalised by Gratian's distinction between clerical and lay states.[2] Without ordination, true sacramental ministry was deemed impossible. This understanding was reinforced by documents such as *Lumen gentium* no. 32, which articulated "the distinction" between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God,[3] and *Presbyterorum ordinis* no. 2, which described ordained ministers as specially appointed by the Lord.[4] However, the Council expanded ministry beyond clerical roles, presenting the Church as the People of God,[5]

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[1] See R. HICKEY, "Ministry in Parallel Lines," in *AFER*, 23 (1981), 163. For reflections on the notion of "ministry," see E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985, passim, especially, 63–66, 121–123; R.G. CUNNINGHAM, "The Laity in the Revised Code," in J.H. PROVOST (ed.), *Code, Community, Ministry: Selected Studies for the Parish Minister Introducing the Revised Code of Canon Law*, Washington, DC, Canon Law Society of America, 1983, 32–37; C. CHAMPAGNE, "Diversité et unité des ministères," in *Kerygma*, 12 (1978), 141–157; J.H. PROVOST, *Official Ministry in a New Age*, Washington, DC, Canon Law Society of America, 1981, passim, especially, 89–116; C.F. STARKLOFF, "Introduction: A Brief Definition of Ministry," in *Kerygma*, 23 (1989), 7–12; E. RINERE, The Term "Ministry" as Applied to the Laity in the Documents of Vatican II, Post-Conciliar Documents of the Apostolic See, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law

[2] In the juridical world, a well-known statement reads: *Duo sunt genera Christianorum*. See GRATIAN, *Decretum*, C. 12, q. 1, c. 7, in A. WINROTH (ed.), first recension ed., 2019, http://gratian.org (17 November 2024). This was the standard position of canonists until the Second Vatican Council. See J. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of All the Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 140. According to this axiom, there are two types of Christians. The first type comprises clerics, who devote their lives to divine worship, and monks, who focus solely on improving their spiritual lives (monks are included with the clerics). The second type consists of laypeople. "There are other sorts of Christians who are called lay folk. *Laos* means people. These are allowed to possess temporal goods, but only what they need for use, for nothing is more wretched than to set God at nought for the sake of money. They are allowed to marry, to till the earth, to pronounce judgement on men's disputes and plead in court, to lay their offerings on the altar, to pay their tithes, and thus they can be saved if they do good and avoid evil." C. 12, q. 1, c. 7: "[...] Aliud vero est genus christianorum, ut sunt laici. *Λᾱός* enim est populus. His licet temporalia possidere, sed non nisi ad usum. Nihil enim miserius est quam propter nummum Deum contemnere. His concessum est uxorem ducere, terram colere, inter uirum et uirum iudicare, causas agere, oblationes super altaria ponere, decimas reddere, et ita saluari poterunt, si uicia tamen benefaciendo evitaverint."

[3] See *LG*, no. 32. A common theme in *Lumen gentium* is the idea that all the People of God carry on Jesus' mission according to their role in the Church. Ecclesiastical ministry, however, is exercised by bishops, priests, and deacons (*LG*, no. 28). See E. RINERE, The Term "Ministry" as Applied to the Laity, ix.

[4] *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 2 states: "The Lord also appointed certain men as minsters […] These men were to hold in the community of the faithful the sacred power of Order." See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 7 December 1965 (=*PO*), in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 991–1024, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 864.

[5] The second chapter of *Lumen gentium* is entitled "The People of God." The term "People of God" sets the "requirement for conscious participation, for community organisation for a common purpose, for

where all baptised members, not just the ordained, share in the mission of the Church as the People of God. While ministry remained primarily associated with ordained roles, Vatican II recognised lay participation in teaching, sanctifying, and governing.[6]

Building on the ecclesiological developments of Vatican II, Paul VI's 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* further underscored the role of non-ordained ministries in providing particular service to the Church, alongside ordained ministries.

> It is certain that side by side with the ordained ministries, whereby certain people are appointed pastors and consecrate themselves in a special way to the service of the community, the Church recognises the place of non-ordained ministries which are able to offer a particular service to the Church.[7]

In *Christifideles laici*, Pope John Paul II cautions against the indiscriminate use of the term "ministry," insisting on a clear distinction between ministries rooted in holy orders and those deriving from baptism and confirmation.[8] He highlights that the

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equality among all, for unity in difference and communion of all with all and with God." (L. BOFF, "The Uncompleted Vision of Vatican II: The Church-Hierarchy or People of God?" in *Concilium*, 3 [1999], 32). It was decided that the doctrine of the "People of God" should precede the treatment of the hierarchy. This reorganisation of the document reflected the position that the Church is primarily the People of God, which includes all the baptised. This same theology motivated the revised organisation of Book II in the 1983 Code. See J. HERRANZ, "The Juridical Status of the Laity: The Contribution of the Conciliar Documents and the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *Communicationes*, 17 (1985), 294.

[6] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* acknowledges lay ministers such as lectors, servers, and choir members. See *SC*, nos. 29, 35, 112, 122. Similarly, *Ad Gentes* highlights the ministry of catechists in mission territories, some of whom govern communities in the bishop's name. See *AG*, nos. 15, 16, 17. *Apostolicam actuositatem* acknowledges lay involvement in the ministry of the Word and sacraments. See *AA*, nos. 6, 22. In *Gaudium et spes*, the Council extends "ministry" to ordinary life activities, encompassing actions by both the baptised and those led by the Holy Spirit. See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965 (=*GS*), nos. 38, 51, 79, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 1025–1115, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 903–1001. The term "ministry" is also applied to laypeople appointed to specific ecclesiastical roles. See *LG*, no. 37. *Christus Dominus* highlights the laity's participation in the ministry of governance alongside bishops. See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 28 October 1965 (=*CD*), no. 27, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 673–696, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 564–590. Rinere points out that although the primary concern of article 27 is the position of vicar general and episcopal vicar, the article states in part: "Priests and laypeople who are part of the diocesan curia should be aware that they are acting as assistants in the pastoral ministry of the bishop." (E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 205). *Gravissimum educationis* emphasises the shared responsibility of clergy and laypeople in providing moral education as part of the Church's teaching mission. See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis*, 28 October 1965 (=*GE*), nos. 7, 8, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 728–739 English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 725–737.

[7] *EN*, no. 73.

[8] See JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988 (=*CL*), no. 23, in *AAS*, 81 (1989), 393–521, English translation in *Origins*, 18 (1989), 561–595.

ministries of the lay faithful find their foundation in baptism and confirmation and should be exercised in accordance with their secular character.[9] Through baptism, the faithful are incorporated into Christ and His Body, the Church,[10] and share in His threefold office as priest, prophet, and king (*LG*, 31).[11] This co-responsibility, grounded in baptism, finds canonical expression in the fundamental rights and duties of all the faithful (cc. 208–223). These rights and duties are to be exercised with fidelity to the charisms received, which are always given for the building up of the Church and the good of all people.[12]

In 1997, eight Vatican dicasteries jointly issued an Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, approved *in forma specifica* by Pope John Paul II, to promote greater precision in the use of the term *ministry*, particularly concerning lay collaboration with priests.[13] Article 1 underscores that "ministry," in its original sense, refers to the mission of the Church and the ministry of Christ.[14] The Instruction recognises the complexity of the expression "lay ministry" (art. 1, §1) and reaffirms that *ministerium* traditionally denotes the service exercised by those in sacred orders. Nevertheless, in exceptional circumstances, laypeople may be deputed by competent authority to fulfil certain offices. In such cases, the designation "extraordinary minister" properly reflects their substitutive role, distinct from that of ordained ministers.[15]

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[9] See *CL*, no. 36.

[10] See ibid., nos. 9, 12.

[11] See ibid., no. 9.

[12] See ibid., no. 24.

[13] See CONGREGATION FOR CLERGY et al., Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding Collaboration of Non-ordained Faithful in Sacred Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, 15 August 1997 (=*EDM*), in *AAS*, 89 (1997), 852–877, English translation in *Origins*, 27 (1997), 399, 400–409.

[14] See *EDM*, art. 1, no. 2.

[15] See *EDM*, art. 1, nos. 2–3. Extraordinary ministers, such as catechists, acolytes, and lectors, are deputed under the provisions of c. 230 of 1983 Code and other canons (e.g., cc. 943, 1112).

The developments outlined above reveal that the term "ministry" is neither static nor univocal. Its meaning has evolved in response to ecclesial, theological, and pastoral contexts, gradually broadening from a strictly hierarchical understanding to a more participatory and baptismally grounded concept. To grasp this evolution more deeply, it is necessary to examine the theological foundations that underpin ministry in the life of the Church. These theological perspectives not only illuminate the diversity of ministerial expressions but also provide the conceptual framework within which instituted ministries and their canonical regulation are situated. The following section therefore explores the principal theological interpretations of ministry, highlighting how they inform both the Church's self-understanding and the practical exercise of ministerial roles.

2.1.1 – Theology of Ministry

The theological perspectives on ministry have developed in tandem with the Church's evolving self-understanding, shaped not only by doctrinal reflection but also by the concrete historical and pastoral circumstances in which the Church has lived out its mission. Dulles notes that throughout history the Church has continually adapted its structures and offices to the social and cultural environments of each period.[16] In a similar vein, Küng observes that ecclesiology does not remain static but responds dynamically to changing historical contexts, with ministry evolving accordingly: "Ecclesiology is a response and call to constantly changing historical situation. […] The Church itself is necessarily subject to continual change and must constantly be undertaken anew."[17]

[16] See A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, New York, Image Books, 1987, 162.

[17] H. KÙNG, *The Church*, RAY and R. OCKENDEM (trans.), London, Search Press, 1973, 13.

Schillebeeckx adds a distinct dimension to this development by emphasising that ministry is fundamentally a service within the community of faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit and oriented towards the common good, rather than a status or rank.[18] This broader understanding prepares the ground for O'Meara's influential contribution, which shifts the discourse beyond ordained office and highlights the ministerial identity of the whole Christian community. For O'Meara, ministry is the "public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness, to serve and realise the kingdom of God."[19]

O'Meara identifies six essential characteristics of ministry: it is

> (1) doing something; (2) for the advent of the kingdom; (3) in public; (4) on behalf of a Christian community; (5) which is a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination; and which is (6) an activity with its own limits and identity within a diversity of ministerial actions.[20]

These criteria underscore that ministry is not primarily about status or office but about service in continuity with the mission of Christ. Accordingly, when O'Meara states that ministry "is doing something," this indicates that ministry is not first a position within the community, but an activity undertaken for the good of others, transcending ethnic, cultural, and social boundaries. Ministry is oriented toward the "common good," manifesting God's presence and furthering the values of the Kingdom. However, he is equally clear that not every action performed by Christians constitutes ministry. There remains a necessary distinction between Christian ministry and the various professions or moral actions of believers. As he explains:

> Activities such as teaching French, being a book-keeper and farming are not Christian ministry. They are the vocations and professions of Christians and as such are good

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[18] See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, J. BOWDEN (trans.), New York, Crossroad, 1981, 37.

[19] T. O'MEARA, *Theology of Ministry*, New York, Paulist Press, 1983, 142. See also *LG*, no. 12.

[20] See ibid., 136.

> and holy. We cannot continue a universalist theology of ministry in which every legitimate and moral human enterprise is ministry.[21]

Thus, the theology of ministry emerging from these authors reflects a significant broadening of the concept without collapsing it into a generic form of Christian activity. Ministry remains a Spirit-empowered service for the Church and the world, rooted in baptism, oriented toward the Kingdom, and exercised within the ecclesial community. This theological foundation provides an essential framework for understanding the diversity of ministerial forms recognised by the Church today, including those of instituted, temporary, and extraordinary lay ministries.

2.1.2 – Lay Apostolate

The notion of ministry in the Catholic tradition has historically been associated with the hierarchy, which exercised the apostolic mission of the Church and delegated certain aspects of its ministry to others. This understanding forms the background against which the concepts of the lay apostolate and Catholic Action developed. Pope Pius XI, in his 1931 encyclical letter *Non abbiamo bisogno*, emphasised that Catholic Action refers to the participation of the laity in the apostolic works of the hierarchy, always under ecclesial mandate and direction.[22] Similarly, Pope Pius XII defined the lay apostolate as the involvement of laypeople in activities that arise from the mission entrusted by Christ to His Church. This apostolate, while valuable and necessary, remained distinct from the hierarchical apostolate and did not confer clerical powers or responsibilities.[23] Lay collaboration thus contributed meaningfully to the Church's

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[21] T. O'MEARA, *Theology of Ministry*, 159.

[22] See PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Catholic Action in Italy *Non abbiamo bisogno*, 29 June 1931, in *AAS*, 23 (1931), 311 ff.

[23] See PIUS XII, Address to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, 5–13 October 1957, no. 12, in NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE, *Guiding Principles of The Lay Apostolate*, Washington, DC, 1957, 3. See also PIUS XII, Radio address *Dum Gravissimum*, 3 March 1939, in *AAS*, 31 (1939), 86–87, 86. Here, he describes Catholic Action as encompassing both male and female religious, alongside lay groups, who assist the hierarchy in its mission.

salvific mission,[24] yet always in a subordinate relationship to ordained ministers.[25] As Pius XII clarified:

> The layman's acceptance of a particular mission, of a mandate of the hierarchy, may associate him more closely with the spiritual conquest of the world being conducted by the Church under the direction of her pastors, but this does not make him a member of the hierarchy or give him the powers of Holy Orders or of jurisdiction that remain strictly bound to reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in its various degrees.[26]

This subordination contributed to a pronounced distinction between clergy and laity, relegating the majority of the Church's members to a lower, largely passive status. Pope Pius X had earlier characterised the laity as "the multitude" whose duty was to "allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors."[27] Consequently, Catholic Action came to refer to lay apostolic initiatives that operated explicitly under hierarchical mandate.[28]

Jeremiah Newman summarised this pre-conciliar approach with notable clarity:

> The lay apostolate is of service to the apostolate of the bishops, having no independent *raison d'être* of its own. […] The apostolate of the bishops is the perfect and primary type, while that of the laity is essentially subordinate.[29]

Yet this strong separation between clergy and laity began to be challenged by the theological developments of the twentieth century. A more inclusive ecclesiology emerged, emphasising the co-responsibility of all the baptised for the mission of the Church. Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens famously compared the Church to an army that

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[24] See PIUS XII, Speech *Se a temperare – ad orantibus in Actione Catholica*, addressed to Italian bishops and clergy, 4 September 1940, in *AAS*, 32 (1940), 362.

[25] See J. CARDIJN, *Laymen into Action*, Melbourne, Y. C. W., 1964, 40.

[26] PIUS XII, Address to the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, no. 12.

[27] PIUS X, Encyclical Letter on the French Law of Separation *Vehementer nos*, 11 February 1906, no. 8, in *ASS*, 39 (1906), 9, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html (7 March 2025); R. MCCORD JR., "Lay Ministry: Living Its Question," in *Origins*, 19 (1990), 759.

[28] "This view, partly integrated into the conciliar texts as only one of several possibilities (*LG*, no. 33; *AA*, no. 20, 24), ultimately influenced the new Code of Canon Law as well (see cc. 298–300)." (J. NEWMAN, *What is Catholic Action? An Introduction to the Lay Apostolate* Dublin, Gill, 1959, 37).

[29] J. NEWMAN, *What is Catholic Action?* 3-4.

requires the active involvement of every member, both clergy and laity, to accomplish its mission.[30]

Vatican II articulated this renewed vision decisively. Rooting the lay apostolate in baptism and the universal call to holiness, Vatican II shifted the focus from hierarchical delegation to the inherent dignity and missionary responsibility of all the faithful. *Apostolicam actuositatem* taught that laypeople possess a proper and irreplaceable role in transforming society according to Gospel values.[31] Their apostolate is not merely auxiliary but integral to the Church's life and mission. While collaboration with the hierarchy remains essential, the Council affirmed the laity's freedom, initiative, and co-responsibility. Ann Prew-Winters notes that, despite this empowerment, hierarchical oversight continues in areas such as doctrine, liturgy, and pastoral care, ensuring unity while honouring lay autonomy.[32]

Osborne highlights the terminological distinction maintained at Vatican II: the word "ministry" is consistently applied to ordained offices, while the term "apostolate" is used for the activity of laypeople. This deliberate linguistic choice was intended to underline the "essential difference" between ordained and unordained forms of service in the Church (cf. *LG* 10). Osborne remarks:

> This distinction of term– "ministry" = ordained; "apostolate" = unordained–was deliberately done to indicate the "essential difference" between the ordained and unordained ministries in the Church. However, after the Council closed, this distinction in naming has not been followed, even by documents which have come from the Roman curia itself. Today official Church statements, liturgical ritual, theological discussions, religious education at all levels, and pastoral directives speak of ministry for both the ordained and the non-ordained. The term apostolate for lay ministry has not been carried through. The documents of Vatican II, however, teach that there is an essential difference between the ordained minister and the unordained minister; cf. LG, 10. Nowhere do the documents attempt to give a theological description or definition of this essential difference; such a description or definition is left to the theologians to elaborate in accord with Christian tradition.[33]

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[30] See The Preface to JEREMIAH NEWMAN, *What Is Catholic Action?* vi.

[31] See *AA*, no. 3.

[32] See A. PREW-WINTERS, "Who Is a Lay Person?" 57.

[33] K. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 324.

In contemporary usage, whether in pastoral directives, theological literature, or liturgical texts, the term "ministry" is now frequently applied to both ordained and lay forms of service. Nonetheless, the conciliar distinction remains significant for understanding the unique sacramental identity of ordained ministry and the baptismal foundation of the lay apostolate.

2.1.3 – Baptism as the Basis for Ministry and Apostolate

The developments outlined in the preceding sections, both in the theology of ministry and in the understanding of the lay apostolate, ultimately converge on the foundational role of baptism. Vatican II emphasised baptism as the sacrament that grounds all Christian participation in the life and mission of the Church. Through baptism, the faithful are united with Christ and called to share in His priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices.[34] This sacrament bestows a shared dignity upon all the faithful and equips them to participate actively in the mission of the Church.[35] Ministry and apostolate both arise from a common baptismal identity, and their interrelationship reflects the collaborative nature of the People of God.[36]

Before the Council, this baptismal foundation was not fully reflected in canonical terminology. The 1917 Code closely linked ministry with ecclesiastical office and restricted it to clerics who exercised the powers of orders and jurisdiction.[37] The Code's teaching that the clergy formed, by divine institution, a distinct class from the

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[34] See *LG*, no. 10.

[35] See A. PORTILLO, *Faithful and Laity in the Church: The Bases of Their Legal Status*, L. HICKY (trans.), Shannon, Ireland, Ecclesia Press, 1972, 62.

[36] See R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion," 27.

[37] See J.H. PROVOST, "Toward a Renewed Canonical Understanding of Official Ministry," in J.H. PROVOST (ed.), *Official Ministry in a New Age*, Washington, DC, 1981, 197. See also M.D. PLACE, "Ordination and Emerging Ministries," in Canon Law Society of America Proceedings (=*CLSAP*), 46 (1984), 163.

laity reinforced the understanding that official ministry belonged to bishops and priests,[38] while the laity were primarily recipients of their ministry.[39] Lay participation was largely administrative or auxiliary, and terms such as *diakonia* were preferred over *ministerium* to describe lay functions.[40]

The 1983 Code reflects the theological developments of Vatican II more clearly by acknowledging specific forms of lay involvement in ministry. It permits lay persons to serve as lectors, acolytes, and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, provided they are deputed by competent ecclesiastical authority in accordance with c. 230. Even so, the Code maintains the essential distinction between ordained and lay forms of service, and it emphasises that these roles, while important for the life of the Church, remain different in nature from the ministry conferred through holy orders. Canon 204, §1 of the 1983 Code reinforces this baptismal vision by affirming that all the faithful participate in Christ's offices and are called to fulfil the Church's mission. The canon states:

> Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason, they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world.[41]

This participation is not limited to ordained roles but extends to all charisms and functions that build up the Church and advance the Kingdom of God. Vatican II teaches

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[38] See J.H. PROVOST, "Toward a Renewed Canonical Understanding of Official Ministry," 197.

[39] See M. COLLINS, "The Public Language of Ministry," in *Official Ministry in a New Age*, 37. On page 37, she cites a quotation by Pius X, which summarises this perspective: "In the hierarchy alone reside the power and authority necessary to move and direct all the members of the society to its end. As for the many, they have no right other than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastors in docility."

[40] Rinere notes that the 1917 Code employs *diakonia* instead of *ministerium* for tribunal personnel, underscoring the administrative rather than ministerial nature of these services (for example, cc. 1655, §3, 1706, 1903, and 1989). See E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 219.

[41] *CIC/83*, c. 204; *LG*, no. 31.

that the laity's participation in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry entails a responsibility to continue Christ's mission until the Kingdom reaches its fulfilment.[42]

Within this theological framework, ministry and apostolate are distinct yet complementary expressions of the Church's mission. Ministry is formally recognised and structured, and it encompasses specific ecclesial functions that support the community's liturgical and pastoral life. The lay apostolate emphasises the transformative presence of the faithful in society, where they bear witness to the Gospel through their daily lives.[43] Contemporary ecclesiology, therefore, presents a dynamic pattern that combines continuity with renewal. Ministry remains rooted in hierarchical structures, while the lay apostolate highlights the active involvement of all the baptised in promoting the mission of the Church.

Both ministry and apostolate arise from the baptismal identity that unites all the faithful in a shared call to service, discipleship, and witness. Vatican II's renewed ecclesiology and the 1983 Code reflect this participatory vision. The next section considers how this baptismal foundation expresses itself in the common and ministerial priesthood, a distinction that is essential for understanding the forms of ministry later addressed in the canonical analysis.

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[42] See *AA*, nos. 2–3.

[43] See *LG*, nos. 31, 33. The secular character determines the specific purpose of the lay apostolate, that is, their vocational gift and their unique way of participating in the mission of the Church. *Lumen gentium* expounds the *secular character* as a theological principle concerning the identity and mission of the laity. No specific area is mentioned for the exercise of this mission; rather, it is a broad mission to the world through the witness of life. *Lumen gentium* highlights key areas for the laity's apostolate. See *LG*, no. 36. Through their work in the world, the laity are called to participate in the mission of the Church by bringing the spirit of the Gospel into the world and striving to perfect the temporal order. This is, in itself, a "witness to Christ" and thus an apostolate that promotes the salvation of all. See F. KLOSTERMANN, "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," in H. VORGRIMLER (gen. ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, New York, Herder and Herder, 1969, 309. See also M. PLACE, "In the Manner of a Leaven: The Lay Mission to the Secular World," in *The Jurist*, 47 (1987), 102; A.A. HAGSTROM, "The Secular Character of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry," in S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 152–174.

2.1.4 – Common and Ministerial Priesthood

The distinction between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood arises directly from the baptismal foundation outlined in the previous section. The doctrine of the priesthood of the baptised is deeply rooted in Scripture, as seen in 1 Peter 2:4–10, where the faithful are described as being built into "a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The Fathers of the Vatican II Council revisited this scriptural and patristic tradition and reaffirmed the priestly identity of all the baptised. *Lumen gentium* teaches:

> Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men (cf. Heb. 5:1-5), made the new people "a kingdom of priests to God his Father" (Apoc. 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). The baptised, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all those works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet 2:4-10).[44]

The Council further affirms the unity of the People of God. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5), and therefore one people with a common dignity derived from rebirth in Christ. Although some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries, and pastors, there remains a true equality with regard to the dignity and activity that all the faithful share in the building up of the Body of Christ.[45]

At the same time, the Council maintained that the ministerial priesthood exists alongside the common priesthood. *Lumen gentium* explains their relationship:

> Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the

[44] *LG*, no. 10.

[45] See ibid., 32.

> sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.[46]

This distinction does not create division, since the Holy Spirit constitutes the Church as one communion and distributes diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts for its service.[47] Vatican II thus enabled a deeper awareness among the laity of their priestly identity and encouraged them to live this identity in daily life. This is expressed clearly in *Apostolicam actuositatem*:

> The apostolate in one's social environment endeavours to infuse the Christian spirit into the mentality and behaviour, laws and structures of the community in which one lives. To such a degree is it the special work and responsibility of laypeople, that no one else can ever properly supply for them. In this area the laymen can conduct the apostolate of like towards like. There the witness of their life is completed by the witness of their word. It is amid the surroundings of their work that they are best qualified to be of help to their brothers, in the surroundings of their profession, of their study, residence, leisure or local group.[48]

The post–conciliar Magisterium continued to clarify this relationship. In *Christifideles laici*, Pope John Paul II taught that all vocations in the Church are interrelated within the communion of the Church:

> The states of life, by being ordered one to the other, are bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being *the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love.* They are *different yet complementary,* in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service. […] All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.[49]

This complementarity is also reflected in *Pastores dabo vobis*, where John Paul II emphasises that the ministry of the ordained priest exists entirely for the service of the baptismal priesthood of the faithful:

> […] because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire people of God, leading it to its full ecclesial

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[46] *LG*, no. 10.

[47] See ibid., no. 4.

[48] *AA*, no. 13.

[49] *CL*, no. 55.

> realisation, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognise and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church's mission. The ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or "royal" priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, are ordered one to the other—each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the people of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received.[50]

He further clarifies that the ministerial priesthood is distinct in essence from the common priesthood because it is rooted in sacramental ordination and confers a sacred power for service. Although ordained ministers are not holier than the laity, they are configured in their very being to Christ the Head and are endowed with a particular gift that enables them to foster the unfolding of baptismal grace in all the faithful.[51]

To avoid misunderstanding, *Christifideles laici* also addresses concerns about equating the common and ministerial priesthood or creating structures that parallel ordained ministry. The Synod Fathers stressed the need for clear distinctions between ministries and insisted that lay tasks must be grounded in their baptismal identity rather than in a confusion of roles.[52] Pope John Paul II cautioned against the "clericalisation" of the laity and the "laicisation" of the clergy,[53] noting that ministry is defined not by activity alone but by sacramental ordination, which gives it a hierarchical and sacramental character.[54]

The 1997 Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* summarised the characteristics of the ministerial priesthood. It highlighted, first, its foundation in apostolic succession

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[50] JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Present Circumstances *Pastores dabo vobis*, 25 March 1992, no. 12, in *AAS*, 84 (1992), 675–804, English translation in *The Pope Speaks*, 37 (1992), 329–363.

[51] See *CL*, no. 23.

[52] Ibid.

[53] See JOHN PAUL II, Address on the Participation of the Laity in the Priestly Ministry, 22 April 1994, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 May 1994, 2, 5.

[54] See *CL*, no. 23.

and the possession of *potestas sacra*, which enables the ordained to act in the person of Christ the Head. Second, it emphasised that the ordained priesthood renders its ministers servants of Christ and the Church through the authoritative proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and pastoral governance.[55]

Nevertheless, the identity of the baptised as a priestly people does not diminish the essence of the ministerial priesthood. Miller suggests that the essence of the baptismal priesthood lies in the "integral nature of the human person and humanity's place within creation,"[56] while the ministerial priesthood is defined primarily by its function within the Church. The ordained priest leads the faithful in offering spiritual sacrifices. It is through both the common and ordained priesthood, "in different ways and to different degrees, that Christ offers spiritual worship to the Father."[57]

Having established the theological foundations of ministry in baptism and in the complementary relationship between the common and ministerial priesthood, it is now possible to examine how these principles inform the Church's canonical regulation of lay ministry. The developments in conciliar and post-conciliar teaching provide the theological context in which the revision of c. 230 of the 1983 Code must be understood. This canon reflects a significant shift in the Church's understanding of the participation of the laity in liturgical and pastoral functions. The following section

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[55] See *EDM*, Theological Principles, "The Common Priesthood of the Faithful and the Ministerial Priesthood."

[56] J.P. MILLER, *Members of One Body; Prophets, Priests and Kings: An Ecclesiology of Mission*, New York, Alba House, 1999, 126.

[57] See ibid., 136. For the "common priesthood of all the faithful," refer to *LG*, nos. 10, 11; *PO*, no. 2; *AA*, no. 2. For commentary on this notion, see P. ROSATO, "Priesthood of the Baptised and Priesthood of the Ordained," in *Gregorianum*, 68 (1987), 215–266; J. CREHAN, "Priesthood, Kingship and Prophecy," in *Theological studies*, 42 (1981), 216; K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*; D. COFFEY, "The Common and the Ordained Priesthood," in *Theological Studies*, 58 (1997), 209–236; M. DOWNEY, "Ministerial Identity: A Question of Common Foundations," in S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 25; D.N. POWER, "Priesthood Revisited: Mission and Ministries in the Royal Priesthood," in S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 87–120.

therefore traces the evolution of c. 230 in order to situate instituted lay ministries within the broader framework of ecclesiology and canon law.

2.2 – The Evolution of Canon 230

Canon 230 of the 1983 Code specifically addresses liturgical lay ministries, which are distinct from other forms of lay ministry discussed elsewhere in the Code.[58] By transferring these ministries from the section on clerics in the 1917 Code to the laity in the 1983 Code, the Church indicated a shift not only in liturgical practice but also in ecclesiological understanding of ministry as participation in the mission of the Church.[59] Ministry is no longer viewed as exclusively tied to the ordained state.[60] Instead, certain lay ministries, particularly those of lector and acolyte, are formally recognised as integral to the mission of the Church. These ministries embody important dimensions of that mission. The lector participates in the proclamation of the Word of God, and the acolyte assists at the altar and supports the celebration of the Eucharist.[61] Pope Paul VI's *Ministeria quaedam* already opened the possibility for episcopal conferences to request the institution of other ministries, and the 1983 Code maintains this provision.[62] The Code therefore provides a juridical framework within which

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[58] See F. MORRISEY, "The Laity in the New Code of Canon Law," in *Studia canonica*, 17 (1983), 135–148, for an outline of the various ways by which the laity participate in the threefold mission of the Church, e.g., the diocesan bishop can delegate laypersons to assist at marriage (c. 1112), lay preaching (c. 766), catechist (c. 785), and offices in the procedural law, including notary (c. 1437), defender of the bond (c. 1435), promotor of justice (c. 1435), and judge (c. 1421).

[59] See T. RICHSTATTER, "Instituted Lay Ministry: The History and Future of Canon 230," in *CLSAP*, 49 (1987), 37.

[60] See F.X. AMHERDT, "The Instituted Ministries of Readers and Acolytes: A Kairos for the Synodality of the Liturgy," in *The Person and the Challenges*, 13 (2023), 217.

[61] See F.X. AMHERDT, "The Instituted Ministries of Readers and Acolytes," 217.

[62] See *MQ*, Introduction, in *FLANNERY1*, 428–429. In this regard, a private letter from the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship speaks of the possibility of instituting new ministries: "[…] since not even one episcopal conference has asked the Holy See to institute other ministries in accord with the faculties granted in the above-mentioned papal document, the Supreme Pontiff has stipulated that the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship draw up a plan of new ministries to be instituted outside the Sacrament of Orders, which could be introduced into the practice of the Latin Church with the power granted to confer the same on women, especially women religious. […] In view of all this and after the consideration of the provisions in the motu proprio

additional instituted ministries may be discerned and recognised, in accordance with pastoral needs and ecclesial discernment.

The evolution of lay ministries in canon law parallels the broader development of the Church's understanding of the distinction between the clergy and the laity.[63] The teaching of Vatican II emphasised the unity of the Church and the shared responsibility of all its members in the mission of the Church.[64] This contributed to what may be described as the declericalisation of ministry,[65] understood here not as diminishing ordained ministry, but as acknowledging the baptismal foundation of all ecclesial service. The shift reflected in c. 230 is therefore both pastoral and theological in nature. It recognises the legitimate place of lay ministries within the life of the Church and integrates them into the wider ecclesial framework without obscuring the essential difference between the ordained ministry and the tasks entrusted to the laity.

2.2.1 – The Revision Process

The revision of what would become c. 230 took place within the wider reform of Book II of the revised Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983, a project that sought

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Ministeria quaedam, our Holy Father has decided to grant to episcopal conferences which request the faculty from the Apostolic See, to institute new ministries which they shall have judged to be truly necessary or very useful in their region. Wherefore, the episcopal conferences which find themselves in these circumstances, will be able to send a petition to this Dicastery. In it they should set forth the reasons for the petition together with the statutes which should contain individual and distinct norms concerning the selection, the spiritual and cultural formation, and the duties and activities of the new ministries as well as the method of pastorally following up on them and assisting them in the exercise of their proper ministry. It seems superfluous to note that these new ministries can also be conferred on women." (SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS AND DIVINE WORSHIP, Letter on Institution of Ministries Over and Above Those of Acolyte and Lector, 27 October 1977, prot. no. 1837/77, in *CLD*, vol. 9, 603–604).

[63] See UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, no. 25, Washington, DC, USCCB Publishing, 2005.

[64] See *LG*, nos. 9, 33, 39-42; *GS*, no. 43; *AA*, no. 2.

[65] Despite this emphasis from Vatican II, K. Walf still considers that the tension between the clergy and the laity is the characteristic of the new Code: "Das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Klerikern und Laien ist vielleicht die Eigentümlichkeit des katholischen Kirchenrechts [author's emphasis]" (K. WALF, "Der Laie im Neuen Kirchenrecht," in *Revue de droit canonique*, 37 [1987], 3).

to bring the 1917 Code into harmony with the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Vatican II's renewed vision of the Church as the People of God, grounded in the common dignity of all the baptised, required a thorough reconsideration of how the new Code should present ministries, rights, and responsibilities within the Church. The drafting process, which unfolded over several years and involved multiple *coetus* and international consultations, attempted to integrate these conciliar insights while remaining faithful to canonical tradition.[66] Particular attention was given to clarifying the distinction between clerical and lay ministries, recognising the baptismal foundation of ecclesial participation, and addressing the pastoral realities that had developed rapidly since the Council. The evolution of the provisions concerning the ministries of lector and acolyte illustrates how theological reflection, pastoral experience, and juridical precision converged in shaping the final formulation of c. 230.[67] The following subsections trace the principal stages of this development in the 1977 and 1980 Schemas of Book II, *De Populo Dei*.

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[66] See The Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law was established by Pope John XXIII on 20 March 1963. See in *AAS*, 55 (1963), 363. However, it began to function only after the Council, since a principal aspect of its mandate was to reform the Code in light of conciliar principles. Only then could the Code become an instrument finely adapted to the life and mission of the Church. See PAUL VI, "The Goals of Canon Law," in *Origins*, 6 (1977), 602–605; F. MORRISEY, "The Spirit of Canon Law/Teachings of Pope Paul VI," in *Origins*, 8 (1978), 33, 35–40; T. GREEN, "The Revision of Canon Law: Theological Implications," in *Theological Studies*, 40 (1979), 593–594.

[67] See J. ALESANDRO, "Law and Renewal: A Canon Lawyer's Analysis of the Revised Code," in *CLSAP*, 44 (1982), 1–40; T. GREEN, "Critical Reflections on the Schema on the People of God," in *Studia Canonica*, 14 (1980), 235–315; T. GREEN, "Reflections on the People of God Schema," in *CLSA*, 40 (1978), 13–33; T. GREEN, "The Revision of Canon Law: Theological Implications," in *Theological Studies*, 40 (1979), 593–679; T. GREEN et al., "Initial Report of the Task Force Committee on the Draft of the Canons of Book Two: The People of God," 13 June 1978, 55, in CLSA. Task Force for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, *Task Force Critiques of the Initial Schemata for the Revision of the Code*, compilation of the photocopied reports, 1978? various pagings; T. GREEN, et al., "Second Report of the Canon Law Society of America Task Force Committee on the *Schema canonum libri II de populo Dei*, 15 December 1978, 79, in CLSA. Task Force for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, *Task Force Critiques of the Initial Schemata for the Revision of the Code*, compilation of photocopied reports, 1978? various pagings; H. RIKHOF, "The Ecclesiologies of *Lumen gentium*, the *Lex Ecclesiae fundamentalis* and the Draft Code," in *Concilium*, 147 (1981), 54–63.

2.2.1.1 – 1977 Schema *De Populo Dei*

The 1977 *Schema De Populo Dei* addressed the ministries of lector and acolyte within Part II, "On Specific Persons," under Section IV, "The Christian Lay Faithful," as part of Chapter I on the obligations and rights of lay persons. Its treatment drew substantially from Paul VI's *Ministeria quaedam*, which had suppressed the minor orders and introduced the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte.[68] Canon 529 of the Schema articulated the juridical structure for these ministries:

> Canon 529, §1. Lay men who, by a decree established by the Episcopal Conference according to age and qualifications, can be permanently entrusted with the ministries of lector and acolyte in accordance with the liturgical rite; however, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to receive support or remuneration from the Church.
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> §2. Laypeople, to whom the ministries mentioned in §1 have not been conferred, whether men or women, can fulfill the role of lector through temporary appointment in liturgical actions; likewise, all laypeople have the faculty to serve as commentators, cantors, or in other functions according to the norms of the law.
>
> §3. Where the needs or utility of the Church suggest it, certain offices of sacred ministers, lectors, and acolytes may also be filled by laypeople, namely, exercising the ministry of the word, presiding over liturgical prayers, administering baptism, and distributing Holy Communion, according to the prescriptions of universal and particular law.[69]

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[68] See T. GREEN, "The Revision of Canon Law: Theological Implications," in *Theological Studies*, 40 (1979), 619–622.

[69] Canon 529, §1. Viri laici, qui aetate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum Conferentiae decreto statutis, ritu liturgico praescripto ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quae tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemve ab Ecclesia praestandas.

§2. Laici, quibus ministeria de quibus in § 1 non sunt collata, et quidem sive viri sive mulieres, ex temporanea deputatione in actionibus liturgicis munus lectoris implere possunt; item omnes laici facultate gaudent ut muneribus commentatoris, cantoris aliisve ad normam iuris fungantur.

§3. Ubi Ecclesiae necessitas aut utilitas id suadeat, possunt etiam, deficientibus sacris ministris necnon lectoribus et acolythīs, quaedam eorundem officia supplere, videlicet ministerium verbi exercere, precibus liturgicis praeesse, baptismum conferre atque Sacram Communionem distribuere, iuxta iuris universalis et particularis praescripta.

The translation of c. 529 is found in *Codex recognitus (Schema): Liber II de populo Dei: Draft of the Canons of Book Two: The People of God*, Rome, Vatican Polyglot Press, 1977, 145. It was translated under the auspices of the Canon Law Society of America by a translation team under the direction of William Schumacher. See T. GREEN, et al., "Initial Report of the Task Force Committee on the Draft of the Canons of Book Two: The People of God," 13 June 1978, 55, in CLSA. Task Force for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, *Task Force Critiques of the Initial Schemata for the Revision of the Code*, (Compilation of the photocopied reports, 1978?), various pagings; T. GREEN et al., "Second Report of the Canon Law Society of America Task Force Committee on the *Schema canonum libri II de populo Dei*, 15 December 1978, 79, in CLSA. Task Force for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, *Task*

In January 1978, the draft *Schema Canonum Libri II De Populo Dei* was circulated more widely.[70] Its structure placed the laity at the end of Book II, following sections on clerics, hierarchical structures, and consecrated life (cc. 1–533).[71] This arrangement, although an improvement upon the 1917 Code,[72] generated significant discussion. Critics argued that the organisation continued to reflect a clerical paradigm by presenting the Church first as a hierarchy rather than as a communion of believers.[73] As a result, the rights and responsibilities of lay persons were perceived as insufficiently expressed, and the sacramental dignity conferred in baptism was not yet adequately integrated into the canonical framework.[74] The Ottawa consultation of 1978 brought these concerns sharply into focus, highlighting the need for a structure that more clearly reflected the equality of all the baptised and their shared participation in the Church's mission (cf. *LG* 10).[75]

Several issues specific to c. 529 were raised. First, the exclusion of women from instituted ministries as lectors and acolytes, retained from *Ministeria quaedam*, was strongly criticised, especially given the widespread and growing involvement of women in these ministries in practice.[76] Second, some argued that the wording of §3 required clarification, particularly concerning the conditions under which lay persons

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Force Critiques of the Initial Schemata for the Revision of the Code, compilation of photocopied reports, 1978? various pagings. See Appendix I and II for this alternate version.

[70] See T. GREEN et al., "Initial Report of the Task Force Committee on the Draft of the Canons of Book Two: The People of God"; T. GREEN, et al., "Second Report of the Canon Law Society of America Task Force Committee on the *Schema canonum libri II de populo Dei*"; H. RIKHOF, "The Ecclesiologies of *Lumen gentium*, the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* and the Draft Code," in *Concilium*, 147 (1981), 54–63.

[71] See T. GREEN, "The Revision of Canon Law: Theological Implications," 619–622.

[72] See H. RIKHOF, "The Ecclesiologies of *Lumen gentium*," 56.

[73] See T. GREEN, "Critical Reflections on the Schema on the People of God," in *Studia canonica*, 14 (1980), 237.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] T. GREEN, "The Revision of Canon Law: Theological Implications," 634. *Ministeria quaedam*, norm 7, states: "The offices of lector and acolyte are reserved to men, in keeping with the venerable tradition of the Church." See in *FLANNERY1*, 431.

could supply for absent ministers.[77] Third, critics emphasised the necessity of formation for lay persons serving in ecclesial ministries and urged an approach that recognised the diversity of ministries in the post-conciliar Church.[78] Finally, the pastoral reality that lay persons worldwide were already carrying out many of the functions described in c. 529 led several consultants to question whether the canon, in its existing form, would be adequate or relevant by the time the Code was promulgated.[79]

These critiques led to proposals for amendments, including incorporating material from *Ministeria quaedam* to clarify the nature of instituted ministries, opening access to these ministries without sex-based discrimination, and providing a more flexible framework for episcopal conferences to request or develop new ministries. Suggestions were also made to integrate the canons on the laity more directly into the general section on the rights and responsibilities of all the faithful, thereby foregrounding the baptismal foundation of ecclesial participation.[80] While many of these proposals were not adopted immediately, they influenced subsequent revisions, particularly in the 1980 Schema.

2.2.1.2 – 1980 Schema

The Code Commission met from 8 to 16 May 1980 to consider the results of the international consultation on the 1977 Schema.[81] At this stage, the Commission accepted in principle the widespread recommendation that Book II should be reordered in accordance with the ecclesiology of Vatican II. This restructuring was implemented

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[77] See T. GREEN et. al., "Second Report," 15.

[78] See T. GREEN, "Critical Reflections," 269. It is interesting to note that this same call is found in the *Lineamenta* for the 1990 Synod. See SYNOD OF BISHOPS, "Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," in *Origins*, 19 (1989-1990), 35–36.

[79] See T. GREEN et. al., "Second Report," 3–4.

[80] See T. GREEN, "Critical Reflections," 237.

[81] See *Communicationes*, 13 (1981), 271–324. For the discussion on the systematic order of Book II, see ibid., 298–302.

at the plenary sessions of October 1981. The rights and obligations drawn from the proposed *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* were placed at the beginning of Book II, thereby underscoring the equality of all Christians rooted in baptism. As a result, the obligations and rights of the laity were presented immediately after the basic rights and responsibilities of all the faithful and before the sections on clerics. This ordering reflected the conciliar vision articulated in *Lumen gentium*, where the Church is first described as the People of God (Chapter II) before its hierarchical constitution (Chapter III). Consequently, the laity were no longer portrayed as peripheral to the Church's structure but as integral to its very constitution.[82]

The revision process also revisited Canon 529 of the 1977 Schema, which appeared as Canon 275 in the 1980 Schema under Part II, "On the Lay Christian Faithful" (cc. 269–276). As with the earlier draft, the question of admitting women to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte re-emerged as a central concern. Critics noted that the canon addressed lay ministry yet continued to restrict access to instituted ministry to men, thereby retaining the limitations set by *Ministeria quaedam* (n. VII). In response, the Commission affirmed that the instituted ministries remained reserved to lay men, while temporary deputation for liturgical functions, including those exercised by women, was handled in the subsequent paragraphs of the canon.[83]

Several specific observations were raised regarding the wording and scope of the canon, and the Commission's responses illustrate the considerations guiding the revision.

1. In §1, delete the words "viri" and "stabiliter" (Exc. Coffy).

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[82] See *Communicationes*, 13 (1981), 298–302.

[83] For the discussion on c. 529, see *Communicationes*, 13 (1981), 320–321; for the discussion on c. 275, see *Communicationes*, 14 (1982), 177–178; see also J. HERRANZ, "The Juridical Status of the Laity: The Contribution of the Conciliar Documents and the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *Communicationes*, 17 (1985), 287–315; J. HERRANZ, "Le statut juridique des laïcs: L'apport des documents conciliaires et du Code de droit canonique," in *Studia canonica*, 19 (1985), 229–258.

R. The observation cannot be accepted, because this § deals with the conferral of the ministries of lector and acolyte, which are reserved for men (cf. M.P. *Ministeria quaedam*, n. VII), and indeed these ministries, by their very nature, are conferred permanently. The temporary deputation or *ad hoc* appointment is addressed in §§2-3 of this canon.

2. It should be said in §2, last line, instead of the word "fungatur": "may serve under the direction of the pastor of the Church" (Card. Bafile).

R. The proposed addition does not seem necessary.

3. It should be said in §3, to guard against arbitrary interpretations: "... ministry of the word outside of Mass" (Card. Bafile).

R. Provision is already made in Can. 722 §1, where it is stated that the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself, is reserved for a priest or deacon.

4. Are acolytes and lectors to be counted among the laypeople mentioned in Can. 276? (Card. Willebrands).

R. Absolutely not (cf. response to observation no. 2 of Can. 276).

5. In §§2-3, it should be said that "laypersons are capable" rather than "laypersons can," and some form of deputation should always be required to maintain proper order (Exc. Stewart). Contrary to Exc. Coffy, who wants the words 'by temporary deputation' to be deleted in §2.

R. It does not seem necessary to change the text of these §§; because explicit deputation is required in §2 for the office of lector (but not for the office of commentator or cantor); and deputation by law or by human authority is also required in §3 under the phrase "according to the prescriptions of law," that is, as necessary in each individual case.

6. In §3, add the words "with the consent of legitimate authority" (Card. Siri).

R. The addition does not seem necessary, as it is adequately provided for by the phrase "according to the prescriptions of law," which can also include particular law.

7. In §3, add: "... to distribute, preside at funerals, and administer certain sacramentals, according to the prescriptions of law" (Exc. Coffy).

R. The addition does not seem necessary, lest the text of the canon become overly burdened. Sufficient discussion of these possibilities for the laity has already taken place elsewhere: regarding funerals (cf. "Ordo exsequiarum," n. 19 §2; regarding sacramentals, cf. Can. 1122).

(By authority: For the sake of clarity, the text of §3 is hereby amended at the beginning as follows: "Where the needs of the Church suggest it, and if ministers are lacking, laypeople, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, may also...").[84]

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[84] For reference, see the original Latin text of the observations and responses in PONTIFICIA COMMISSIO CODICI IURIS CANONICI RECOGNOSCENDO RELATIO COMPLECTENS SYNTHESIM ANIMADVERSIONUM AB EM.MIS ATQUE EXC.MIS PATRIBUS COMMISSIONIS AD NOVISSIMUM SCHEMA CODICIS IURIS CANONICI EXHIBITARUM, CUM RESPONSIONIBUS A SECRETARIA ET CONSULTORIBUS DATIS, (Patribus Commissionis stricte Reservata), Vaticanis, Typis Polyglottis, 1981, 73–74. The original Latin text is as follows:

Ad can. 275

1. In § 1 deleantur verba "Viri" et "stabiliter" (Exc. Coffy).

R. Animadversio recipi non potest, quia in hac § agitur de collatione ministeriorum lector is et acolythi, quae viris reservatur (M.P. Ministeria quaedam, n. VII), et quidem ministeria, ex ipsa natura sua, stabiliter conferuntur. De deputatione temporanea vel ad casum agitur in §§ 2-3 huius canonis.

2. Dicatur, in § 2, ultima linea, loco verbi "fungatur": "fungi sub regimine rectoris ecclesiae possint" (Card. Bafile).

R. Additio proposita non videtur necessaria.

3. Dicatur in § 3, ad praecavendas arbitrarias interpretationes: "... ministerium verbi extra Missam" (Card. Bafile).

R. lam provisum est in can. 722 § 1, ubi statuitur homiliam, quae est pars ipsius liturgiae, sacerdoti aut diacono reservatam esse.

4. Suntne acolythi et lectores adnumerandi inter laicos de quibus in can. 276? (Card. Willebrands).

Other observations addressed linguistic and juridical precision. Several consultants suggested replacing the phrase *laici possunt* with *laici habiles esse*, as this would have highlighted the legal capacity of lay persons to carry out the ministries mentioned. However, the Commission judged that the existing terminology sufficiently conveyed the required deputation and the norms governing temporary service.[85] Similarly, proposals to add clarifying expressions such as "outside Mass" for the ministry of the word or "with the consent of legitimate authority" were considered unnecessary in light of existing legislation, including norms already contained in the Schema itself.[86]

R. Minime (cfr. resp. ad animad. n. 2 can 276).

5. In §§ 2-3 dicatur "laicos habiles esse" potius quam "laicos posse" et requiratur semper aliqua deputatio, ut rectus ordo servetur (Exc. Stewart). Contra Exc. Coffy, qui vult ut in § 2 deleantur verba "ex temporanea deputatione."

R. Non videtur necessarium mutare textum harum §§; quia expressa deputatio requiritur in § 2 pro munere lectoris (non autem pro munere commentatoris neque pro munere cantoris); et deputatio a iure vel ab homine requiritur etiam in § 3 sub formula "iuxta iuris praescripta," id est quatenus singulis in casibus necessaria sit.

6. In § 3 addantur verba "consentiente legitima auctoritate" (Card. Siri).

R. Additio non videtur necessaria, quia satis providetur per verba "iuxta iuris praescripta," quod ius potest etiam esse particulare.

7. In § 3 addatur: "... distribuere, exsequiis praeesse et quaedam sacramentalia administrare, iuxta iuris praescripta" (Exc. Coffy).

R. Additio non videtur necessaria, ne textus canonis nimis oneretur. De his enim laicorum possibilitatibus iam satis alibi agitur: quoad exsequias (cfr. "Ordo exsequiarum," n. 19 § 2; de sacramentalibus vero, cfr. can. 1122). (Ex officio: Claritatis causa textus § 3 ita emendatur in initio: "Ubi Ecclesiae necessitas id suadeat, deficientibus ministris, possunt etiam laici, et si non sint lector es vel acolythi, quaedam …"

[85] When speaking of cc. 228–231, J. Herranz remarked that "these canons are characterised as faculties and juridical capacities rather that rights." (HERRANZ, "The Juridical Status of the Laity," 308). This observation may apply to c. 228, which speaks of legal capacity, but the Code Commission discussion avoided the phrase *habiles esse* for c. 230.

[86] When discussing the homily at Mass, the Code Commission reiterated that the homily, in the technical sense, must be reserved for ordained persons. See SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, Response to the President of the Episcopal Conference of Germany on Preaching by Lay Persons, 20 November 1973, in *CLD*, vol. 8, 941–944, where the Congregation permitted the episcopal conference of Germany to allow laypersons to preach for a four-year experimental period. This permission was extended on 1 June 1977 for an additional four-year period. See J.M. HUELS, "Lay Preaching," in *Disputed Questions in the Liturgy Today*, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, 17–26, for an analysis of the legal precedent that is involved in these experiments.

Further suggestions concerned the addition of particular functions, such as distributing Holy Communion, presiding at funerals, or administering certain sacramentals. While recognising that lay persons could carry out these tasks under specific conditions, the Commission preferred not to expand the text of the canon, noting that the relevant norms were already addressed in other liturgical and canonical sources. A modification was introduced at the beginning of §3 to improve clarity: "Where the needs of the Church suggest it, and if ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, may also…"[87]

By the conclusion of the 1980 consultation, it was evident that relatively few substantive changes had been introduced into the successive drafts of the canon. Persistent discussion focused on three issues: the reservation of the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to lay men, the juridical vocabulary surrounding lay capacity and deputation, and the pastoral circumstances under which lay persons could supply for absent ministers. These issues demonstrate the tensions inherent in aligning the canonical expression of ministry with the conciliar principles of baptismal dignity, ecclesial participation, and the evolving pastoral needs of the Church. The final formulation of c. 230 would eventually synthesise these elements, preserving the essential distinction between stable instituted ministries and temporary deputation while acknowledging the significant contribution of the lay faithful to the Church's mission.

2.2.2 – Instituted Ministries of Lector and Acolyte (c. 230, §1)

Canon 230, §1 states:

> Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these

[87] See footnote no. 84.

> ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.[88]

Under this norm, the ministries of lector and acolyte are entrusted to lay men who fulfil the requirements established by the episcopal conference. In the absence of detailed universal regulations, episcopal conferences determine the age, qualifications, and modalities of preparation. These diverse approaches will be examined in greater detail below. *Ministeria quaedam* identifies the Ordinary as the minister of institution, meaning a bishop or, in clerical institutes of consecrated life, the major superior.[89] The Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts later confirmed that the act of instituting lectors and acolytes is an exercise of governance, normally carried out by the Ordinary but delegable to another suitable priest (*sacerdos idoneus*).[90]

Unlike the pre-conciliar discipline, these ministries are no longer reserved to candidates for holy orders.[91] Their conferral does not take place through the laying on of hands but through a specific liturgical rite of installation approved by the Holy See.[92]

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[88] This *CIC/83*, c. 230, predates the changes made by motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* of Pope Francis.

[89] See *MQ*, no. 9, in *FLANNERY1*, 431.

[90] "Il n. IX del motu proprio Ministeria quaedam, ripreso poi nelle rubriche del De institutione Lectorum et Acolytorum al n. 1, prevede che "ministeria conferuntur ab Ordinario (Episcopo et, in institutis perfectionis clericalibus, Superiore Maiore) ritu liturgico «de institutione Lectores» et «de institutione Acolythi» a Sede Apostolica recognoscendo": trattandosi di atto inerente alla potestà di governo o giurisdizione, il Vescovo o il Superiore Maggiore possono delegare tale istituzione ad altro sacerdote idoneo." (PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR LEGISLATIVE TEXTS, Response, prot. n. 17234/2020, 10 December 2020, https://www.delegumtextibus.va/content/dam/testilegislativi/CHIARIMENTI%20NORMATIVI/Ch%20Normativi%20Risp%20Particolari/Chiar%20normativi%20CIC/Circa%20la%20delega%20dell%27istituzione%20dei%20ministeri%20di%20accolito%20e%20lettore.pdf [15 April 2026]).

[91] See *MQ*, no. 3, in *FLANNERY1*, 429. The provision remains in force that all those preparing to be promoted to the permanent or transitional diaconate must receive the ministries of lector and acolyte and must exercise them for a certain period to better prepare for future ministries of the word and altar. See *MQ*, no. 9; *CIC/83*, c. 1035, §1.

[92] See *MQ*, no. 9; PONTIFICALE ROMANUM, *De institutione lectorum et acolythorum*, editio typica, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972, English translation "On the Rite of Institution of Readers and Acolytes," in *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*, translated by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, New York, Pueblo, 1976, 740–745. The bishop hands the candidate for the ministry of lector the Sacred Scriptures, saying: "Receive the book of Sacred Scripture and faithfully hand on the Word of God, that it may grow strong in the human heart." See *Roman Pontifical*, Installation of Lectors, no. 7. The bishop gives the candidate for the ministry of acolyte the bread and wine prepared

This rite marks the juridical moment in which the Church recognises and assigns the individual to the ministry.

This installation does not impart a sacramental character. It therefore does not modify the fundamental dispositions already received in baptism and confirmation, nor does it introduce the individual into the clerical state (c. 266, §1). What the rite does effect is a stable juridical designation to exercise the ministry. The stability implied in the term *stabiliter* refers to an ongoing and recognised entrustment, distinguishing these ministries from temporary deputation under c. 230, §2 and from the extraordinary exercise of functions in the absence of ministers under c. 230, §3. This stability concerns the assignment to ministry, not the ontological or canonical condition of the person.[93]

> Permanence is logically connected with the dignity of the ministry, which requires a lasting dedication of the chosen and prepared person. Stability may be lost by the removal of the ministry or the exclusion of the lector or acolyte from exercising the ministry under conditions set in local law, which differs from Holy Orders, where the conditions are determined by universal law.[94]

Although these ministries are stable, they are not irrevocable. The competent Ordinary may restrict or revoke their exercise for a just and proportionate cause, according to the norms of particular law.[95] A more detailed analysis of this issue will be offered in the subsequent discussion.

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for consecration, the chalice, and paten to indicate his role and ministry in the celebration of the Eucharist. See *Roman Pontifical*, Installation of Acolytes, no. 7.

[93] See J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," in *Bogoslovska smotra*, 74 (2004), 270.

[94] "Stalnost je logično povezana s dostojanstvom službe koja traži trajno posvećivanje u vremenu izabrane i pripravljene osobe. Stabilnost je moguće izgubiti oduzećem službe ili isključenjem čitača ili akolita iz vršenja službe, prema uvjetima postavljenima u krajevnom pravu, što ukazuje na različitost od sakramenta svetoga reda, gdje su uvjeti postavljeni po općem pravu." (J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 270).

[95] Ibid.

The lector has responsibilities that include proclaiming Scripture during liturgical assemblies, except for the Gospel.[96] In the absence of a deacon or cantor, the lector may lead the intercessions, direct singing, guide the participation of the faithful, and assist in preparing them for the reception of the sacraments.[97] When no psalmist is available, the lector may recite the psalm between the readings.[98] The lector's ministry is integral to the eucharistic celebration and should be exercised even when higher-ranking ministers are present.[99] The role extends beyond the liturgy, especially in communities where Sunday celebrations of the Word take place in the absence of a priest.[100]

The acolyte is appointed for the service of the altar and assists the priest and deacon in their ministry.[101] The acolyte prepares the altar and sacred vessels and carries out particular liturgical duties that belong to the ministry of service at the altar.[102] The acolyte may serve as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion,[103] and may expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament without giving a blessing.[104] In case of need, they may bring communion to the sick with the permission of the parish priest, parish vicar,

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[96] CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 3rd Typical Edition, Ottawa, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011(=*GIRM*), no. 99.

[97] See ibid., no. 99; *MQ*, no. 5, in *FLANNERY1*, 430.

[98] See ibid., nos. 99, 194–198.

[99] He may be entrusted with catechetical duties, instructing the faithful on the worthy reception of the sacraments, and the formation of other lectors not yet instituted. See C. IZZI, *La partecipazione del fedele laico al munus sanctificandi: i ministeri liturgici laicali*, Rome, Pontificia Università Lateranense 2001, 103.

[100] See CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest *Christi Ecclesia*, 2 June 1988 (=*Christi Ecclesia*), no. 30, in *Origins*, 18 (1988), 301–307.

[101] See *MQ*, no. 5; *GIRM*, no. 98.

[102] See *GIRM*, nos. 98, 99, 187–193.

[103] See *CIC/83*, c. 910, §1; see also *EDM*, art. 8.

[104] See *CIC/83*, c. 943.

chaplain, or superior.[105] The ministry also involves forming others in liturgical service and fostering a eucharistic spirituality expressed through prayer, service, and charity.[106] Like lectors, acolytes may preside at Sunday celebrations in the absence of priest.[107]

2.2.3 – Temporary Ministries (c. 230, §2)

Canon 230, §2 states that "lay persons can fulfil the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation. All lay persons can also perform the functions of commentator or cantor, or other functions, according to the norm of law." This paragraph establishes the juridical framework for entrusting various liturgical roles to the lay faithful on a non-stable and occasional basis. These ministries differ from the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte described in §1 because they are not conferred through a liturgical rite and do not create a stable relationship between the minister and the Church.[108]

The canon names the temporary lector first, thereby underlining the importance of this function even when it is exercised without formal installation. Temporary designation allows lay persons to carry out the responsibilities associated with the reading of Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel, whenever pastoral need requires. Similar temporary entrustment applies to the ministries of commentator[109] and cantor.[110] The enumerated ministries are not exhaustive, since the canon also permits other liturgical functions to be entrusted to lay persons in accordance with the law. This reflects the flexibility needed in local communities, where a variety of roles may be necessary for the orderly celebration of the liturgy.

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[105] See *CIC/83*, c. 911, §2.

[106] See *MQ*, no. 5.

[107] See *Christi Ecclesia*, no. 30.

[108] See D.L. BARR, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful [cc. 224–231]," in *CLSA Comm2*, 300.

[109] See *GIRM*, no. 104.

[110] See ibid., no. 105b.

The term "temporary designation" indicates that these ministries are not stable in the manner of those described in c. 230, §1. Their duration depends on pastoral necessity rather than on a permanent liturgical mandate. A lay person may therefore be appointed for a single celebration or for a limited period, and the appointment ceases once the need has passed. This arrangement enables the Church to respond to the immediate needs of a community while maintaining a clear distinction between instituted and non-instituted ministries.[111] The legislator intentionally preserves this distinction to avoid confusion between a lector stably instituted through a liturgical rite and a lector appointed *ad actum* for a particular occasion.[112]

These ministries may be entrusted to both men and women, and the canon imposes no age requirements. Historically, certain liturgical functions were restricted; for example, altar serving was traditionally limited to boys and men, whether or not they were installed as acolytes, as reflected in c. 813 of the 1917 Code.[113] A significant shift began with the authentic interpretation issued in 1992 by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. In response to a *dubium* concerning "whether service at the altar also be counted among the liturgical functions that lay people, either men or women, may fulfil according to Canon 230.2 of the Code of Canon Law?"[114] The Pontifical Council answered in the affirmative, "in accord with the instructions to be given by the Apostolic See."[115] These clarification were subsequently developed by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1994

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[111] See D.L. BARR, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful [cc. 224–231]," in *CLSA Comm2*, 300.

[112] See J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 270.

[113] *CIC/17*, c. 813 states: "§ 1. A priest should not celebrate Mass without a minister who assists him and responds. § 2. The minister serving at Mass should not be a woman unless, in the absence of a man, for a just cause, it is so arranged that the woman respond from afar and by no means approach the altar."

[114] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF LEGISLATIVE TEXTS, Response to a Proposed *Dubium*, 30 June 1992, in *AAS,* 86 (1994), 541, English translation in *Origins*, 23 (1994), 777–779.

[115] Ibid.

circular letter, which noted that the ministries of lector and acolyte may be conferred on a temporary basis to women.[116] In the same letter, the Holy See authorised the use of female altar servers, subject to the diocesan bishop's judgement and local pastoral circumstances.[117]

Canon 230, §2 permits lay persons to undertake a range of liturgical functions. Alongside lector, commentator, and cantor, these include ministries identified in the liturgical books, such as psalmist, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, servers who carry the cross, candles, bread, wine, water, or censer, those who collect offerings, ushers who maintain order during processions, sacristans, and masters of ceremonies.[118] These roles support the liturgical celebration and require suitability, good conduct, and appropriate formation, even if they do not require the stability of instituted ministry.

The deputation of ministries under c. 230, §2, like the conferral of instituted ministries under §1, does not give rise to any right to remuneration or financial support from the Church. Temporary ministers exercise their service for the good of the community, under the direction of competent ecclesiastical authority responsible and according to the norms of liturgical and canonical law.[119] Their capacity to serve arises from baptismal dignity; for certain roles, such as the proclamation of Scripture, it is advisable that they have also received confirmation.[120]

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[116] See CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Circular Letter on the Use of Female Altar Servers *Credo doveroso*, 15 March 1994, no. 1 in *AAS*, 86 (1994), 541–542, English translation in *Origins*, 23 (1994), 777. In no. 2 of the circular letter, emphasis is placed on the importance of not abolishing the custom of appointing boys for service at the altar, since this practice forms part of the Church's pastoral care for vocations. In no. 3, the instruction stresses the obligation is given to bishops to educate the faithful when appointing women for altar service on a temporary basis, so they adequately understand the meaning of such service. See ibid.

[117] See ibid., 777.

[118] See *GIRM*, nos. 100, 105 a–d, 106. The Council Fathers highlighted that: "even servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir perform a genuine liturgical ministry" (*SC*, 29).

[119] See D.L. BARR, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful [cc. 224–231]," in *CLSA Comm2*, 300.

[120] See J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 270.

The essential distinction between the permanent ministries of c. 230, §1 and the temporary ministries of c. 230, §2 lies in the stability conferred by the liturgical rite of installation. Temporary ministries do not create a stable juridical relationship with the Church, nor do they carry the prerogatives associated with instituted ministry. Nevertheless, they remain an important expression of lay participation in the liturgy, allowing the faithful to contribute actively to the Church's worship according to their baptismal vocation and the pastoral needs of the community.

2.2.4 – Extraordinary or Substitute Ministries (c. 230, §3)

230, §3 states: "Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, laypeople, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism and distribute Holy Communion, in accordance with the provisions of the law." This canon addresses exceptional circumstances in which lay persons may supply for functions ordinarily entrusted to sacred ministers, particularly when ordained clergy or instituted lectors and acolytes are unavailable.[121] In such situations, where the needs of the Church require[122] and ministers are lacking, lay persons may exercise certain functions, such as the ministry of the word (c. 759), presiding over liturgical

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[121] Among the authentic sources of c. 230, §3, the only document of Vatican II mentioned is the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* in its no. 24, without further precision. It is probably more accurate to refer to *AA* 24f.

Legally speaking, a substitution could be defined as a "temporary replacement of a hindered or absent agent by another (in the exercise of their functions) which occurs automatically by virtue of statutory provisions that provide for it." (A. BORRAS, "Les laïcs: Suppléance ou partenariat?" 323). In canonical language, the verb "supplere" is familiar to us in the adage "Ecclesia supplet" of the traditional norm stated in c. 144, but it is also found in cc. 155, 230, §3, 405, §2, 477, §2, 539, 649, §1, 1057, §1, and 1452, §2. In cc. 155, 405, §2, 477, §2, and 539, the concept has the same meaning as in the aforementioned definition. In cc. 649, §1 and 1452, §2, it means "to remedy (a deficiency) by compensating for it"; in c. 1057, §1, it means "to remedy (a lack) by substituting for it." See A. BORRAS, "Les laïcs: Suppléance ou Partenariat?" 323.

[122] Pastoral need is a rather broad concept, and thus it is the duty of competent ecclesiastical authorities to credibly interpret and apply it in practice. The judgment regarding pastoral need must be made by the diocesan bishop. See *CIC/83*, c. 368.

prayers (c. 1248, §2), administering baptism (c. 861, §2), or distributing Holy Communion (c. 910, §2),[123] in accordance with the prescriptions (*iuxta iuris praescripta*) of universal and particular law.[124] The possibility of lay persons celebrating certain sacramentals is also foreseen where the law permits, provided the individual possesses the requisite qualities (c. 1168, cf. *SC*, 79).

This paragraph reflects a long-standing pastoral reality, particularly in regions where the number of ordained ministers is limited or where geographical and social conditions render their regular presence difficult.[125] In such situations of genuine necessity, the lay faithful, by virtue of their baptismal dignity, may collaborate in the Church's liturgical and pastoral life in a participatory and supportive role. These functions are not exercised by right; they require a legitimate mandate, the actual absence or impediment of the appropriate minister, and a discernment of the concrete pastoral needs of the community.[126]

The provision preserves the hierarchical constitution of the Church by emphasising that these functions pertain properly to ordained ministry and are entrusted

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[123] See *CIC/83*, c. 861, §2 with its formula "aut impedito ministro ordinario" and c. 910, §2 citing c. 230, §3 for extraordinary ministers.

[124] The expression *iuxta iuris praescripta* (c. 230, §3) is equivalent to the expression *ad normam iuris* (c. 230, §2).

[125] See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 169.

[126] Apart from the case of danger of death, the mandate of the diocesan bishop is required to baptise (c. 861, §2), his delegation to assist at marriage (subject to the prerequisites of c. 1112), his authorisation or that of the priest delegated by him for extraordinary ministers of communion (c. 910, cf. Instruction *Immensae caritatis*, no. I). As for non-eucharistic Sunday assemblies, it is not required for the bishop to specifically designate the persons in charge of such celebrations; it is up to the pastor to designate them, usually for a specific duration. See *Christi Ecclesia*, no. 30b. No authorisation is required to lead the liturgy of the hours. See J.H. Provost, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 169.

It is indeed the bishop who regulates the liturgical life in the diocese. See *CIC/83*, c. 835, §1. "The diocesan Bishop, the first steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to him, is the moderator, promoter and guardian of her whole liturgical life." (CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENT, Instruction on Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist *Redemptionis Sacramentum [=RS]*, in *AAS*, 96 [2004], 549–601, English translation in *Origins*, 33 [2003–2004], 801–822, no. 19); CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum successores*, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2004, no. 142.

to lay persons only in extraordinary circumstances.[127] The regulation prevents any blurring of the essential distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, while at the same time affirming the real participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. In this sense, c. 230, §3 embodies the conciliar principle that the laity may be called upon to cooperate more fully in pastoral activity when necessity or genuine pastoral benefit requires it, always in harmony with the nature of each function and with respect for ecclesial order.

Canon 230, §3 thus complements the preceding paragraphs: §1 concerns stable instituted ministries, §2 regulates temporary deputation for certain liturgical roles, and §3 addresses extraordinary circumstances in which lay persons may supply for absent ministers. This threefold structure illustrates the careful juridical balance achieved by the legislator in recognising lay collaboration while safeguarding the sacramental and hierarchical framework of ecclesial ministry. It also provides an important canonical foundation for the developments explored in the following section.

2.2.5 – Particular Legislation of Episcopal Conferences (Pre-2021 Praxis)

Canon 230 exhibits a notable openness to particular law. While it establishes the fundamental juridical framework for instituted, temporary, and extraordinary ministries, it deliberately leaves considerable scope for concrete implementation by competent ecclesiastical authorities. In particular, c. 230, §1 entrusts episcopal conferences with determining the age and other qualifications required for admission to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte. In the absence of more detailed universal norms, this delegation gave rise, prior to the promulgation of *Spiritus Domini*

[127] See *AA*, no. 24: "The hierarchy also entrusts to laypersons some duties that are more closely connected to the service of pastors, such as the exposition of Christian doctrine, certain liturgical acts, and the care of souls. By virtue of this mission, laypersons are fully subordinate to higher ecclesiastical leadership in the performance of these tasks."

and *Antiquum ministerium*, to a rich and diverse body of particular legislation across the Church.

This legislative diversity reflects both the flexibility of the canonical system and the varied pastoral needs of different ecclesial contexts. Much of this material has been systematically collected and organised in José Martín de Agar and Luis Navarro's *Legislazione delle Conferenze Episcopali*, which remains an indispensable instrument for comparative study.[128]

2.2.5.1 – Age and Basic Qualifications

A clear point of convergence among episcopal conferences concerns the establishment of minimum age requirements for admission to instituted ministries. Although universal law does not prescribe a specific age, most conferences determine a minimum threshold. The most common minimum age is 18,[129] corresponding to canonical adulthood.[130]

Some conferences, such as those of Colombia and the Netherlands, require candidates to have completed 20 years of age,[131] while others, reflecting a more traditional understanding of maturity, set the minimum at 21.[132] Japan, somewhat unusually, requires candidates to be 22. A significant number of conferences adopt 25 as the minimum age, thereby underscoring the seriousness and stability associated with

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[128] See J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali Complementare al C.I.C.*, Seconda Edizione Aggiornata, Roma, Coletti A San Pietro, 2009.

[129] Brazil, Ecuador, Kenya, Mexico, North Africa, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 169, 317, 685, 757, 33, 897, 961, 1329.

[130] See *CIC/83*, c. 97, §1.

[131] See J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 267.

[132] Albania, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, India, Korea, Malta, Philippines, Scandinavia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, USA, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 39, 59, 149, 193, 559, 305, 698, 339, 1085, 1111, 1177, 1258, 1186.

these ministries.[133] Namibia and Botswana establish an even higher threshold at 26, whereas Bolivia, following the model of the permanent diaconate,[134] distinguishes between minimum ages for single and married candidates. Other conferences avoid fixed numerical thresholds altogether, referring instead to the requirement of sufficient human and Christian maturity.[135]

In addition to age, several conferences impose further conditions. Married candidates are required to obtain the consent of their wives, reflecting a parallel with the discipline governing sacred orders.[136] While baptism is implicitly presumed, some conferences explicitly require confirmation.[137] In certain contexts, such as the Philippines and Ghana, the ability to read competently in the vernacular is also mandated.

Several conferences also introduce complementary requirements: some mandate a period of probation prior to institution;[138] others require a letter of recommendation from a priest or parish priest, or consultation with the parish council.[139] In missionary territories, where converts are numerous, some conferences

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[133] Austria, Benin, Bosnia, China, Dominican Republic, France, Gambia& Sierra Leone, Ghana, Guatemala, Italy, Paraguay, Spain, Zimbabwe, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 99, 139, 163, 259, 1045, 357, 401, 457, 496, 605, 813, 933, 1120, 1347.

[134] See *CIC/83*, c. 1050, 3°.

[135] Chile, Germany, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 221, 415.

[136] Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 149, 169, 222, 757.

[137] Argentina, Korea, Venezuela, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 59, 305, 1329.

[138] Gambia& Sierra Leone, Malta, Panama, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 401, 700, 897.

[139] Ecuador, Gambia& Sierra Leone, Italy, Kenya, Paraguay see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 317, 401, 606, 685, 934.

require a minimum number of years since baptism,[140] echoing the traditional impediment of *neophytatus* for holy orders.[141]

Certain conferences also regulate the internal ordering of ministries. In some cases, the acolytate must follow the lectorate, and candidates are expected to undergo practical training through the temporary exercise of these functions (*ad temporanea deputatione*, c. 230, §2).[142] In other instances, members of religious institutes may be required to have reached perpetual profession prior to institution.[143]

2.2.5.2 – Formation and the Process of Discernment

Formation is widely regarded as an essential component of preparation for instituted ministry. Many episcopal conferences require structured programmes encompassing theological, liturgical, and pastoral formation,[144] mandate a period of supervised practice of the relevant functions prior to institution.[145] This probationary exercise (*ad temporanea deputatio*) ensures that institution corresponds to demonstrated aptitude and ecclesial readiness rather than merely theoretical competence.

In several contexts, formation is conceived as progressive, with stages of preparation corresponding to the distinct ministries. This may include defined periods of study or ministerial practice prior to admission, reflecting an understanding of these

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[140] Japan, Korea, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 483, 305.

[141] See *CIC/83*, c. 1042, 3°.

[142] New Zealand, Nigeria, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 845, 813.

[143] Chile, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 222.

[144] Germany, Guatemala, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Nigeria, Portugal, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 416, 496, 606, 699, 757, 814-815, 987.

[145] Gambia& Sierra Leone, Philippines, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 401, 339.

ministries as stable ecclesial functions requiring competence, reliability, and pastoral maturity. New Zealand, for instance, requires one year of theological study prior to the lectorate and two years prior to the acolytate.

2.2.5.3 – Regulation of Ministry: Mandates, Documentation, and Ecclesial Context

A further area of legislative development concerns the regulation of the ongoing exercise of ministry. In some regions, episcopal conferences or diocesan bishops have introduced systems of mandates or faculties.[146] While the institution itself is conferred once for all through a liturgical act, its concrete exercise may be subject to renewal or periodic authorisation.

Many conferences also require formal documentation of institution. For example, some provide for the drafting and preservation of official acts within diocesan archives, thereby ensuring juridical certainty and facilitating recognition across dioceses.[147]

In addition, certain conferences link the exercise of ministry to concrete ecclesial belonging, requiring that ministers be attached to a specific parish or community.[148] These norms underscore the ecclesial and pastoral character of instituted ministries, situating them firmly within the life of the local Church.

2.2.5.4 – Suspension or Removal from Ministry

Several episcopal conferences include provisions for the suspension or cessation of the exercise of instituted ministries.[149] Although universal law does not

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[146] El Salvador, Gambia& Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Italy, Philippines, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 1065, 401, 496, 605, 339.

[147] Colombia, Guatemala, Malta, Mexico, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 268, 496, 698, 758.

[148] India, Guatemala, Kenya, Nigeria, North Africa, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 560, 496, 685, 813, 33.

[149] For example, The Philippines adopts an annual renewable mandate, with automatic cessation if not renewed, and possible revocation for lack of qualifications or failure to attend formation. According to German Episcopal Conference, a candidate for the diaconate or priesthood who leaves the preparation

explicitly regulate such situations, these norms clarify an important distinction: while the institution itself is stable, the exercise of ministry remains subject to the prudent judgement of ecclesiastical authority and must always be ordered to the good of the Christian community.

In practice, suspension or removal may occur for reasons such as loss of good standing, failure to fulfil required duties or formation, or the incurring of canonical penalties. These provisions reflect the ecclesial nature of ministry, which presupposes not only juridical appointment but also continued suitability and fidelity.

This body of particular legislation, though diverse and at times inconsistent, demonstrates both the vitality and the fragmentation of instituted ministry prior to 2021. Episcopal conferences responded creatively and pastorally to the lacunae of universal law, albeit often with a predominantly functional or minimally developed theological framework. The result was a patchwork of practices, some highly developed and others comparatively rudimentary.

It is noteworthy that some of the concerns addressed by episcopal conferences in the pre-2021 period echo, at least structurally, earlier canonical approaches found in the 1917 Code concerning the cessation of minor orders. While instituted ministries are not clerical orders and do not share the juridical status of the former minor orders, the 1917 Code nevertheless provided a coherent framework for voluntary renunciation, automatic loss, and dismissal by competent authority. The absence of comparable universal norms for instituted ministries meant that episcopal conferences were required to develop their own criteria and procedures, often resulting in diverse and

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for the reception of holy orders can only continue to exercise the service of lector and/or acolyte entrusted to him if the diocesan bishop who made the appointment has not revoked it and the local Ordinary of the respective place of residence has given express permission. Nigerian legislation provides for dismissal in cases of scandal, loss of moral standing, see J.M. DE AGAR, L. NAVARRO, *Legislazione Delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 339, 416, 816.

sometimes fragmentary local solutions. This historical contrast highlights the need, already perceived before 2021, for clearer universal guidance on the cessation of the exercise of instituted ministries.

These varied approaches provide the necessary context for interpreting the reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. The developments of 2021 do not emerge in isolation; rather, they engage with, and in certain respects reorient, decades of local praxis. Their renewed emphasis on baptismal dignity, co-responsibility, and the synodal character of ecclesial ministry calls for a critical re-reading, and, where appropriate, a reconfiguration, of earlier particular legislation.

2.3 – Liturgical Functions in Canon 230

Building on the threefold structure outlined above, this section examines how c. 230 situates lay participation within the wider canonical regulation of liturgical life. While §1, §2, and §3 establish a spectrum of possibilities for lay involvement, they do not stand alone. Their interpretation depends on a broader network of related canons that clarify how lay persons may contribute to the Church's worship in harmony with ordained ministry.

For this reason, the following subsections examine the principal liturgical functions connected with c. 230 in a synthetic manner. The aim is not to offer a comprehensive commentary on every canonical provision touching upon lay participation, but rather to highlight those norms that illuminate the scope, limits, and pastoral significance of the ministries referenced in this canon. These include regulations concerning the ministry of the word, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, the extraordinary minister of baptism, and the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.

This contextual overview enables a clearer understanding of how c. 230 operates within the wider canonical and theological vision of lay collaboration in the Church's liturgical and pastoral life.

2.3.1 – The Ministry of the Word (cc. 211, 759, 766, 767, §1)

The 1983 Code affirms the universal responsibility of all the Christian faithful to work for the spread of the Gospel (c. 211), a duty that rests with particular weight upon the laity, who in many contexts are the only effective witnesses to Christ (c. 225, §1). This foundational principle frames the canonical norms governing the ministry of the word. The Church understands this ministry broadly, encompassing pastoral preaching, catechesis, mystagogical instruction, evangelisation, and all forms of Christian teaching, among which the liturgical homily holds a pre-eminent place.[150]

Within this framework, the ministry of the word includes pastoral preaching (c. 766),[151] catechetical instruction (c. 774, §1),[152] missionary activity (c. 784),[153] Catholic

[150] See *EDM*, art. 2, §1; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965 (=*DV*), no. 24, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 817–836, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 750–765.

[151] "*Evangelii nuntiandi* defined preaching as "the spoken proclamation of the message of God." This generic definition comprises all ministries of the word such as evangelisation, catechesis, mystagogia, exhortations, retreat-conferences and the liturgical homily." (NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, "Guidelines for Lay Preaching," in *Origins*, 18 [1988], 402).

[152] Canons 1329–1336 of the 1917 Code reserved the catechetical task mainly to clerics. It should be noted, however, that *CIC/17*, c. 1333 provided for a parish priest to be assisted by pious laymen in the teaching of catechesis, and c. 1335 reminded parents or guardians, masters and godfathers of their duty to ensure the religious education of children. *Catechesi tradendae* extends care for catechesis to all faithful, especially to parents with regard to their children. See JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time *Catechesi tradendae*, 16 October 1979 (=*CT*), no. 16, in *AAS*, 71 (1979), 1277–1340, English translation in *Origins*, 9 (1979), 329–346. See also PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELISATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 125, London, The Catholic Truth Society, 2020, 180–183.

[153] The missionary activity of the Church is the responsibility of all the faithful. See *AG*, no. 2, 23, 35.

education (cc. 793–800),[154] and the use of social communication (c. 747; c. 822).[155] In each of these areas, the lay faithful share specific responsibilities, grounded in baptism and confirmation and oriented toward the Church's evangelising mission.

Canon 759 articulates two distinct yet related dimensions of lay involvement in the Church's teaching mission. First, lay persons are witnesses to the Gospel "by word and by the example of a Christian life" by virtue of their reception of the sacraments of initiation. Secondly, they "can also be called upon (*vocari*)" to cooperate with bishops and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word, that is, to carry out certain ecclesial tasks of evangelisation in the name of the Church.[156] This cooperation requires an invitation or admittance by competent authority (c. 756; c. 766),[157] because preaching and catechetical instruction conducted *nomine Ecclesiae* constitute public ecclesial acts that demand discernment, oversight, and accountability.[158]

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[154] The understanding of the Catholic teaching on education was published in the Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* of Vatican II, which explains the right of every person to education and emphasises the obligation of parents in raising children. See *GE*, nos. 1, 3, 6, 7.

[155] The Church recognises that media, if properly utilised, can be of excellent service to humanity since they greatly contribute to people's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter mirifica*, 4 December 1963 (=*IM*), no. 2, in *AAS*, 57 (1963), 145–153, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 293–348. The decree *Inter mirifica*, in addition to the duties of pastors, speaks of the duties of lay faithful: "The laity, too, who have something to do with the use of these media, should endeavour to bear witness to Christ, first of all by carrying out their individual duties or office expertly and with an apostolic spirit, and, further, by being of direct help in the pastoral activity of the Church to the best of their ability–through their technical, economic, cultural and artistic talents" (*IM*, no. 13).

[156] *CIC/83*, c. 759 states: "By virtue of baptism and confirmation, lay members of the Christian faithful are witnesses of the gospel message by word and the example of a Christian life; they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the Word." "Two quite distinct modes of lay activity are seen in this canon (1) the witness which laypersons give to the gospel message by their words and the example of their lives. This has the larger scope: how Christian men and women embody their faith, hope and love as they go about their family lives, their work, and their social and political involvements. They are empowered to do this effectively by their baptism and confirmation, by their ongoing nourishment at the tables of the Word and Eucharist, and by the enlivening action of the Spirit; (2) their exercise of the ministry of the word for which they are 'called upon (*vocari*) to cooperate' with the bishop and presbyters" (J.A. CORIDEN, "The Teaching Function of the Church [cc. 747–833]," in J.P. BEAL, J.A. CORIDEN, and T.J. GREEN (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, commissioned by the CANON LAW SOCIETY OF AMERICA, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2000 (=*CLSA Comm2*), 922–923.

[157] See E. RINERE, "Conciliar and Canonical Applications of 'Ministry' to the Laity," 217.

[158] See J.M. HUELS, *The Teaching Office of the Catholic Church*, 81.

In the proclamation of the word, the laity may serve as lectors, commentators, and cantors (c. 230, §§1–2), and may, in specific circumstances, preach in churches or oratories according to the provisions of c. 766.[159] Canon 766 provides a broad warrant for lay preaching, acknowledging that, in certain circumstances, necessity (*necessitas*) may require it,[160] or, in particular cases, it may be pastorally advantageous (*utilitas*),[161] always according to the prescripts of episcopal conferences.[162] This permission may be explicit, presumed, or implicit in pastoral appointment, and may be granted for a particular occasion or for a fixed period.[163]

Universal law already envisions several situations in which the laity may preach, including during Masses with children,[164] during Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest (c. 230, §3; 1248, §2), at baptisms, marriages, or other liturgical rites

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[159] *CIC/83*, c. 766 states: "Laypersons can be permitted to preach in a church or oratory, if necessity requires it in certain circumstances or it seems advantageous in particular cases, according to the prescripts of the conference of bishops and without prejudice to c. 767, §1." Provost identifies four types of preaching in the Code: evangelisation, catechising, preaching in the Church (whether in the liturgy or apart from it), and the homily. See J.H. PROVOST, "Lay Preaching and Canon Law in a Time of Transition," in N. FOLEY (ed.), *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1983, 134-158.

[160] Preaching by a layperson in a church (c. 1214) or an oratory (c. 1223) may be admissible when the need of the Church warrants it. In cases of need, lay preaching is an extraordinary ministry (c. 230, §3). Such need may be temporary, for example, when the pastor is on vacation, or ongoing, as in the case of a parish without a pastor whose pastoral care has largely been entrusted to a lay minister (c. 517, §2) or when the priest is able to read the Mass texts in a foreign language but cannot preach to the people in their language. See J.M. HUELS, *The Teaching Office of the Catholic Church*, 83.

[161] Perhaps the persons concerned are specialists in doctrine or have the esteem and admiration of the people, known for their impeccable character. A lay theologian may be invited to preach not because the pastor is impeded, but because of the depth of the theologian's knowledge of Scripture and Church doctrine and his/her ability to communicate the divine word effectively. Another example is the case of seminarians in preparation for diaconate ordination. It would be useful to the seminarian's formation to have the experience of preaching to the faithful in a church. In canon law, "particular cases" usually refer, as it does here, not only to individual cases (*ad casum*) but also to cases with a continuing application, as with a seminarian assigned to a parish for a pastoral year. See J.M. HUELS, *The Teaching Office of the Catholic Church*, 83.

[162] See *CIC/83*, c. 766.

[163] See J.A. CORIDEN, "The Teaching Function of the Church," in *CLSA Comm2*, 927.

[164] See SACRED CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, *Directory for Masses with Children*, 1 November 1972 (= *DMC*), no. 24, in *AAS*, 66 (1974), 30–46; *Masses with Children*, Washington, USCC, 1996.

at which they preside, or in parishes entrusted to lay ecclesial ministers under c. 517, §2.[165] Where permanent or objective conditions of necessity exist, such as a sustained shortage of ordained ministers, lay persons may be permitted to preach more regularly. Even in such circumstances, the Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* makes clear that lay preaching remains an exceptional provision, never a normative practice, and must always respect the sacramental structure of ministry and the primacy of sacred ministers.[166] Lay preaching must also observe the limits established by c. 767, §1, which reserves the homily to priests and deacons.[167] "Because the homily is an integral part of the liturgical action, it is more than fitting that it should be preached by the one leading that celebration. The unity between word and sacrament is more clearly seen that way. The identity of the chief celebrant and homilist is a liturgical norm and preference."[168] The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* reinforces this reservation, stating explicitly that the homily is never to be given by a lay person.

> The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself, or be entrusted by him to a concelebrating priest, or from time-to-time, and, if appropriate, to the deacon, but never to a lay person. In particular cases and for a just cause, the homily may even be given by a bishop or a presbyter who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate.[169]

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[165] See *SC*, nos. 26–28. For the laity to act in this way, the Church must require such actions, and clerical ministers must be truly physically or morally unavailable for the exercise of the function. See *EDM*, arts. 8 (Eucharist) and 11 (baptism). One example of the regulated exercise of such extraordinary ministry is the Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. On 9 July 1991, the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy issued the statement "Gathered in Steadfast Faith: Statement on Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest." See BISHOPS' COMMITTEE ON THE LITURGY, *Gathered in Steadfast Faith: Statement on Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest*, Washington, DC, USCC, 1991. See also M. HENCHAL, "A Ministry for Gathering in Steadfast Faith: Lay Presiding," in *CLSAP*, 54 (1992), 130 146; *EDM*, art. 7.

[166] See *EDM*, art. 2, §4.

[167] Although the law provides for the laity to lead liturgical prayers and to preach, it restricts the giving of a homily to ordained ministers. *CIC/83*, c. 767, §1 states: "Among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or deacon, is preeminent; in the homily, the mysteries of faith and the norms of Christian life are to be explained from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year."

[168] J.A. CORIDEN, "The Teaching Function of the Church," in *CLSA Comm2*, 929.

[169] *GIRM*, no. 66.

Canonical discussion over the decades has attempted to clarify the juridical nature of c. 767, §1. While some argue that it is a disciplinary norm from which a bishop could dispense,[170] the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation issued a negative response to such an interpretation in 1987.[171] Many canonists therefore interpret this reservation as constitutive of the homily itself, such that any preaching by a lay person during Mass cannot be considered a homily in the canonical sense.[172] Others consider that such strict interpretation restricts the diocesan bishop's normal power of dispensation (c. 87), though some maintain that such a dispensation would fall to the Holy See.[173]

Canons 756, §2, and 772, §1 allow diocesan bishops to issue norms or guidelines for preaching by lay persons and ordained persons for their diocesan churches.[174] In practice, episcopal conferences have developed varying policies to

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[170] Normally, a diocesan bishop can dispense from a disciplinary law for the spiritual good of his people (c. 87). Coriden argues: "This is a disciplinary law, and hence, the interpretation is enigmatic as well as laconic." (J.A. CORIDEN, "The Teaching Function of the Church," in *CLSA Comm2*, 929).

[171] The reservation was further emphasised by a one-word negative response, given without explanation in 1987 by the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code, to the question: "Whether the diocesan bishop can dispense from the norm of c. 767, §1, which reserves the homily to a priest or deacon?" See PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE AUTHENTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CODE, Reply, 26 May 1987, in *AAS*, 79 (1987), 1249, English translation in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004, 1627.

[172] Some canonists, such as Provost, Huels, Fox, and Fuentes, argue that c. 767, §1 is a constitutive law (one that contains the essential components of an institute), and thus is beyond the bishop's dispensing power for that reason (c. 86). They assert that this is what is implied in the Commission's response. They affirm, in other words, that the reservation to a priest or deacon is of the essence of a homily; if anyone else delivers it, it simply is not a homily, regardless of the context or content. For their arguments, see J.H. PROVOST, "Brought Together by the Word of the Living God (Canons 762–772)," in *Studia canonica*, 23 (1989), 345–371; J.M. HUELS, "The Law of Lay Preaching: Interpretation and Implementation," in *CLSAP*, 52 (1990), 61–79; J.M. HUELS, "Constitutive Law and Juridic Institutes," in *Ius Ecclesiae*, 16 (2004), 711–739. J. FOX, "The Homily and the Authentic Interpretation of Canon 761, §1," in *Apollinaris*, 62 (1989), 123–169; J. FUENTES, "Del Ministerio de la Palabra Divina," in A. MARZOA, J. MIRAS, R. RODRÍGUEZ-OCAÑA (eds.), *Commentario Exegetico al Codigo de Derecho Canonico*, 2nd ed., 5 vols., Pamplona, EUNSA, 1997, III/1, 74–158.

[173] Urrutia, and Wrenn consider that the commission's restrictive response, denying the bishop's ability to dispense, was its way of reserving the dispensation to the Apostolic See (c. 87, §1). See F.J. URRUTIA, "Responsa Pontificiae Commissionis Codicis Iuris Canonici authentice interpretando (cc. 767, §1, 830, §3)," in *Periodica*, 77 (1988), 613–628; L. WRENN, *Authentic Interpretations on the 1983 Code*, Washington, DC, CLSA, 1993, 41–43.

[174] See Appendix V on Lay Preaching.

distinguish between the homily reserved to clergy and lay preaching during the Eucharist. Some conferences require that lay preaching occur at the beginning or end of Mass; others determine that it take place after the post-Communion prayer,[175] as affirmed by *Redemptionis Sacramentum*.[176] These attempts, however, are pastorally and liturgically imperfect insofar as they separate the ministry of the word from the liturgy of the word.

Recent magisterial interventions continue to reaffirm the canonical norm. In 2023, Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, warned the German Episcopal Conference against practices approved by the Synodal Path that conflict with current doctrine or canon law, especially concerning lay preaching of the homily.[177] He reiterated that "It is not a question of an exclusion of the laity nor of a negation of the right and the duty of all baptised people to announce the Gospel, but rather of a confirmation of the specificity of this form of preaching which is the homily."[178] He further states: "It is not a question of creating inequalities between the baptised, but of recognising that there are distinctions made by the Spirit, which engender different, distinct and complementary

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[175] Some conferences of bishops, while allowing this, have specified that it take place not after the Gospel, but at some other stage in the course of the Mass. Significant examples are the Conferences of England and Wales, and of Nigeria, see in *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 1336, 1377. Some conferences of bishops have tried to distinguish the homily reserved to clerics from lay preaching at the Eucharist by requiring the latter to be done at the beginning or end of Mass rather than after the gospel. See, for e.g., the policy of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, in *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 1676. However, most conferences have not taken either approach, which is liturgically and pastorally dubious since it separates the ministry of the word from the liturgy of the word. See, for e.g., the policy of the USCCB excludes lay preaching at Mass "at the moment reserved for the homily," in *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 1694.

[176] The 2004 Instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, which says that lay preaching at Mass should occur after the post–Communion prayer. See *RS*, no. 74.

[177] See "Synodal path: Vatican Rejects Baptism and Preaching by Laypeople," in *The katholische.de*, 30 March 2023, https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/44342-synodaler-weg-vatikan-erteilt-taufe-und-predigt-durch-laien-absage (23 October 2024).

[178] Ibid.

charisms."[179] By virtue of the sacrament of orders, the ordained minister is responsible for the proclamation of the Word as well as for the consecration. He concludes, "The Word and the sacrament are inseparable realities and, insofar as they are not only the formal expression of the exercise of the *sacra potestas* [sacred power], they are not separable and cannot be delegated."[180] He suggests that the skills acquired by the laity be used for catechism and other forms of preaching outside the liturgical celebration.[181]

Despite these limits, the overall canonical framework presents a rich and demanding vision of lay engagement in the ministry of the word. Grounded in baptism, strengthened by confirmation, and shaped by ecclesial communion, the lay faithful contribute indispensably to evangelisation through witness, teaching, catechesis, and participation in the Church's pastoral ministry. This theological-canonical foundation guides the subsequent treatment of catechesis, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, and other forms of lay leadership in the ministry of the word.

2.3.2 – Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Gatherings (c. 1248, §2)

Canon 1248, §2 recognises that in some communities the Eucharist cannot always be celebrated due to the absence of a priest or other serious reasons.[182] In such circumstances, the faithful can be supported through a Liturgy of the Word or other forms of communal prayer, as directed by the diocesan bishop. These gatherings provide the community with opportunities to hear Scripture, offer intercessory prayer,

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[179] See "Synodal path: Vatican Rejects Baptism and Preaching by Laypeople."

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid.

[182] *CIC/83*, c. 1248, §2 states: " If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families."

and sustain its spiritual life,[183] in accordance with the canonical principle that no one is bound to the impossible (*nemo potest ad impossibile obligare*).[184]

Canon 230, §3 provides the juridical basis for lay persons to preside at these celebrations, while c. 1248, §2 emphasises their extraordinary and supplementary nature. Episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops regulate who may preside, the structure of the celebrations, and how the faithful remain connected with their parish priest and the wider community.[185] The Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest *Christi Ecclesia*, "envisions the collaboration of the laity in the cases in question; this is an example of responsibilities that parish priests (pastors) can entrust to lay members of their community."[186] Preference is given to instituted lectors and acolytes, although other suitably trained lay persons may be entrusted with this ministry.[187] Bishops ensure that those deputed are properly prepared and that the faithful understand that these gatherings differ fundamentally from the Eucharist.[188]

These celebrations do not replace the Eucharist and are not a substitute for Sunday Mass.[189] Rather, they enable the faithful to participate in the Lord's Day as fully as their circumstances allow, while safeguarding the primacy and irreplaceable role of the Eucharistic celebration in the life of the Church.

Through their ministry, lay persons play a vital role in sustaining faith life and communal cohesion, fostering engagement with Scripture and prayer, and helping the

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[183] See *Christi Ecclesia*, no. 19–20.

[184] *RJ 6 in VI°*, in A. FRIEDBERG (ed.), *Decretalium collectiones*, Leipzig, Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879 (=*FRIEDBERG2*), col. 1122.

[185] See *Christi Ecclesia*, no. 7, 24, 26. See also *EDM*, art. 7, §1.

[186] *Christi Ecclesia*, *CLD*, vol. 12, 730.

[187] See *Christi Ecclesia*, no. 30–31, 39–40.

[188] Ibid., no. 26–27

[189] Ibid., no. 21. See also *EDM*, art. 7, §2; J.M. HUELS, "Sunday Liturgies without a Priest, in *Worship*, 64 (1990), 452.

community observe the Lord's Day meaningfully, even when the Eucharist cannot be celebrated.

2.3.3 – Extraordinary Minister of Baptism (c. 861, §2)

Canon 861, §2 regulates the circumstances in which lay persons may serve as extraordinary ministers of baptism (c. 230, §3). When the ordinary minister, a bishop, presbyter or deacon,[190] is absent or impeded, a catechist or another person designated for this function by the local ordinary may licitly confer baptism. Separately, in a case of necessity, any person who has the requisite intention may confer baptism licitly.[191] This represents a significant development from earlier canonical legislation and reflects both the pastoral concern of the Church for the salvation of souls and the practical realities of many ecclesial contexts.[192]

Compared with the 1917 Code, the 1983 Code exhibits noteworthy progress. The 1917 Code restricted the extraordinary minister of baptism to the deacon,[193] although it acknowledged that, in cases of necessity, anyone could baptise "with the

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[190] *CIC/83*, c. 861, §1 states: "The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, a presbyter, or a deacon, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 530, n. 1."

[191] *CIC/83*, c. 861, §2 states: "When an ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or another person designated for this function by the local ordinary, or in a case of necessity any person with the right intention, confers baptism licitly. Pastors of souls, especially the pastor of a parish, are to be concerned that the Christian faithful are taught the correct way to baptise." See UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *The Order of Baptism of Children*, English translation of *Ordo baptismi parvulorum, editio typica altera (Second Edition)*, prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Washington, DC, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020, General Introduction, II. Duties and Ministries in the Celebration of Baptism, nos. 16–17; "Chapter IV, Order of Baptism of Children to Be Used by Catechists in the Absence of a Priest or Deacon." For the one who has been given the pastoral care of the parish (*CIC/83*, c. 517, § 2), to be allowed to baptise, authorisation from the local ordinary is required.

[192] See R. SMITH, *Laypersons and the Munus Sanctificandi: Legal Developments from the Second Vatican Council to the Revised Code of Canon Law*, Canon Law Studies, no. 512, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1984, 182.

[193] The 1917 Code had mentioned only the priest as the ordinary minister of the sacrament, see *CIC/17*, c. 741. Deacons were not included among the ordinary ministers of baptism; they were considered extraordinary ministers of baptism who needed a justifying reason to baptise, as well as the permission of the local ordinary or pastor.

right intention"[194] and using the proper matter and form. Nevertheless, the earlier legislation displayed a clear preference for clerics over lay persons and for males over females, except when modesty or competence suggested otherwise.

> If there is a priest present, he is preferred to a deacon, a deacon to a subdeacon, a cleric to a layman, and a man to a woman, unless, for the sake of modesty, it is more becoming that a woman baptises instead of a man, or unless a woman knows the form and manner of baptism better than does a man.[195]

Although the 1917 Code allowed non-solemn baptism (c. 742, §1) to be conferred by anyone in necessity, it did not encourage this practice. As Smith observes, the regulation of lay ministers of baptism in the 1917 Code was grounded more in necessity than in a theological conviction about lay participation in sacramental ministry.[196]

The revised legislation reflects Vatican II's pastoral vision. In line with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 68,[197] the 1983 Code explicitly provides for catechists, especially in mission territories or regions with few priests or deacons, to be deputed as extraordinary ministers of baptism when the ordinary minister is absent or impeded. The Code similarly permits another suitably designated person to fulfil this role, indicating that the ministry is not reserved to catechists alone.[198]

During the final revision of the 1980 Schema, some members of the Commission proposed that, if catechists were mentioned explicitly, lectors and acolytes

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[194] *CIC/17*, c. 742, §1 states: "non-solemn baptism, discussed in canon 759, §1, can be administered by anyone, preserving the required matter, form, and intention; when it can be done this way, two witnesses, or at least one, should be used, by which the conferral of the baptism can be proved."

[195] *CIC/17*, c. 742, §2.

[196] See R. SMITH, *Laypersons and the Munus Sanctificandi*, 168.

[197] *SC*, no. 68 states: "The baptismal rite should contain variants, to be used at the discretion of the local ordinary, for occasions when a very large number are to be baptised together. Moreover, a shorter rite is to be drawn up, especially for mission lands, to be used by catechists, but also by the faithful in general when there is a danger of death, and neither priest nor deacon is available."

[198] See *CIC/83*, c. 861 §2. A simpler rite is provided for such circumstances when a priest or deacon is unavailable. See *The Order of Baptism of Children*, "Chapter IV, Order of Baptism of Children to Be Used by Catechists in the Absence of a Priest or Deacon."

should also be included, since they hold instituted ministries. The suggestion was rejected because the role of catechists as extraordinary ministers of baptism had already been envisaged by the Council.[199]

Canon 861, §2 identifies two distinct situations. In the first, an extraordinary minister may be designated by the local ordinary when the bishop, priest, or deacon is absent or impeded. Absence refers to a minister not being physically present, while impediment indicates that a cleric may be present but is prevented morally or legally from exercising his ministry.[200] The second situation concerns cases of necessity, generally understood as danger of death. The *Order of Baptism of Children* specifies that in such circumstances any person,[201] baptised or not,[202] may baptise provided the correct matter and form are used and the minister intends to do what the Church does

[199] See *Communicationes*, 15 (1983), 180.

[200] K.T. Hart explains the canonical meaning of these terms as follows: "The term "absent" means that a cleric is not physically present. The term "impeded" suggests that a minister may be present or could easily be present but is physically or morally prevented from exercising his function. For example, a laicised priest, or a priest under suspension, or some other censure is impeded from administering baptism. In these cases, a layperson previously deputed by the local ordinary is the extraordinary minister" (K.T. HART, "Baptism," in *CLSA Comm2*, 1049–1050).

[201] See *CIC/83*, c. 861, §2. The same canon adds that "in a case of necessity, any person with the right intention confers it licitly." This provision is based on the Church's longstanding pastoral concern for the salvation of souls (cf. c. 1752), especially in danger of death. See *The Order of Baptism of Children*, "Chapter V Order of Baptism of Children in Danger of Death, or at the Point of Death, to Be Used in the Absence of a Priest or Deacon." The expression "*any person*" includes laypersons and, remarkably, even those who are not baptised themselves, provided they have the proper intention, namely, to do what the Church does when she baptises. This intention does not require full theological understanding, but rather a desire to perform a true Christian baptism using the correct matter (water) and form (the Trinitarian formula: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"). The Church understands baptism as the gateway to the other sacraments, conferring the remission of sins and incorporation into the Body of Christ (cf. *CCC*, nos. 1213–1270). Hence, in situations of urgent necessity, the validity of baptism is upheld even when administered by a non-Christian, so long as this intention and form are respected. See F.R. MCMANUS, "The Sacraments," in *CLSA Comm1*, 623.

[202] The reasons for this are theological: the Church teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation and is the gateway to the other sacraments (c. 849).

when she baptises. This intention does not require extensive theological understanding but a genuine desire to perform a true Christian baptism.[203]

Cardinal Arthur Roche has reaffirmed that current liturgical law permits baptism by lay persons only when a cleric is absent or impeded, a condition met when a priest or deacon cannot be contacted within a reasonable period, which he clarifies as one month.[204]

The 1983 Code thus expands the possibilities for lay persons to serve as extraordinary ministers of baptism in comparison with the 1917 Code. While maintaining that the ordinary ministers are the bishop, priest, and deacon, it acknowledges that their absence may occur in diverse circumstances, not only in mission territories or emergencies. The overarching pastoral concern is that the sacrament be available to all who seek it. The lay minister's role remains extraordinary and always subordinate to the ordinary ministers; its purpose is not to supplant ordained ministry but to ensure the fulfilment of the Church's salvific mission in times of genuine need.[205]

2.3.4 – Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (cc. 910, §2, 907, 911, §2)

The contemporary role of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion emerged primarily due to practical needs. Historically, laypeople occasionally brought Holy Communion to the sick in exceptional cases, but by the Middle Ages, this responsibility became restricted to bishops and priests. Over time, deacons were also allowed to assist,

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[203] "The proper intention of the minister is to do what the Church does when it baptises." (J.M. HUELS, *The Pastoral Companion A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry*, 5th ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2016, 53).

[204] See "Synodal path: Vatican Rejects Baptism and Preaching by Lay people."

[205] See R. SMITH, *Lay Persons and the Munus Sanctificandi*, 182.

particularly with distributing the Blood of Christ. However, the practice of lay involvement in distributing Communion was largely unknown until the 20th century.[206] Vatican II emphasised the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy, grounded in their baptismal dignity (*SC*, 14). This participation, however, is broader than the performance of a particular liturgical function. It concerns the active and conscious engagement of the whole assembly in the Church's liturgical celebration, while particular functions are exercised according to the role and competence assigned to each person (cf. *SC*, nos. 28–29). Within this broader understanding, the exercise of certain liturgical functions by laypersons constitutes one concrete expression of their service to the ecclesial community.[207] The faculty granted to laypersons to distribute Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers, under the conditions established by law, is one such expression (cf. cc. 230, §3; 910, §2).[208] An acolyte or other deputed lay person is eligible to serve as the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (c. 910, §2). This extraordinary deputation must nevertheless be distinguished from the stable institution into the ministry of acolyte under canon 230, §1. Although both forms of service contribute to the liturgical life of the Church, they differ in their juridical character and conditions of exercise.

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[206] See C. LAUGHLIN, K.A. RILEY, and P. TURNER (eds.), *Guide for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, The Liturgical Ministry Series*, Third Edition, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 2020, 12.

[207] Participation in the liturgy is first and foremost participation in the liturgical action of Christ and the Church. It is not synonymous with: "doing something during Mass." A person can participate deeply without having a liturgical role. Conversely, a person can perform a liturgical function without necessarily participating deeply. Active participation is much broader than liturgical ministry. Every baptised person participates according to his or her vocation and state of life. Liturgical ministries are one expression of that participation, but they do not exhaust it. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14 provides an important theological and liturgical foundation for the participation of the faithful, while the development of specific lay ministries requires further canonical and liturgical norms.

[208] See Letter from Congregation for the Sacraments to papal representatives, 11 September 1987, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 12, 644–645; Appendix VI on Extraordinary Ministers.

The 1917 Code termed the ordained priest as the ordinary minister of Holy Communion and the deacon as the extraordinary minister (*minister extraordinarius*).[209] On 30 April 1969, the Sacred Congregation for Sacraments permitted the local ordinaries to ask the Apostolic See for a three-year faculty to appoint qualified religious men and women and qualified laymen to distribute Holy Communion.[210] The principal condition for granting this faculty was that there be just cause, such as the scarcity of priests in mission lands.[211]

Fidei custos provided several reasons for expanding Communion ministry to the laity:

> Outside the Mass, people needed access to holy communion when an ordinary minister was not available.
> The usual minister was sometimes impeded by poor health, advanced age, or the demands of the pastoral ministry.
> Sometimes the number of faithful wishing to receive holy Communion at Mass was so great that the celebration was taking too long.[212]

The reasons all pertained to the increasing demand of Holy Communion. The shortage of priests was not yet a significant problem. Before the twentieth century, very few people received Holy communion at a typical Sunday Mass. However, Pope Pius

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[209] Deacons could exercise this ministry only with the permission of the local ordinary or the pastor, and for a grave reason. See *CIC/17*, c. 845. In 1967, when the permanent diaconate was restored, the deacons were made ordinary ministers of the Eucharist. See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*, no. V, 3°, 18 June 1967, in *AAS*, 59 (1967), 702, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 6, 577. Initially, the term *minister extraordinarius* was generally translated as "extraordinary minister." However, since the publication of the *Rite of Commissioning Special Ministers of the Eucharist* by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy in 1978, the term "special minister" has gained more usage. This change not only represents a more nuanced rendering of the Latin term but also acknowledges that these ministers typically function on a regular and therefore, non-extraordinary basis. This avoids the connotation of the English word "extraordinary" as meaning "unusual." See J.M. HUELS, "The Most Holy Eucharist," in *CLSA Comm2*, 1105.

[210] In 1966, extraordinary Eucharistic ministers were first provided for when Paul VI derogated from c. 845 of the 1917 Code by enabling heads of local Churches to petition the Apostolic See for a three-year faculty allowing them to mandate qualified religious men and women, as well as qualified laymen, to distribute the Eucharist. See SACRED CONGREGATION FOR SACRAMENTS, Letter on the Minister of Eucharistic Communion When Priest and Deacon are Absent *Fidei custos*, 10 March 1966 (=*Fidei custos*), English translation in *CLD*, vol. 7, 645–648.

[211] During the next few years, numerous indults were granted to individual bishops and to entire Conferences of Bishops, including the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States. See *Fidei Custos* in *CLD*, vol. 7, 648–652.

[212] *Fidei custos*, no. 1.

X's promotion of frequent and daily Holy Communion in 1905 led to an increase in the faithful's desire for the sacrament, which necessitated extraordinary ministers of Communion.[213]

Bishops could now appoint ministers to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion from among the laity, provided that they were "outstanding in Christian life, in faith, and in morals, and […] trained to carry out so exalted a function."[214] At first, it was thought that persons of a "mature age," would be ideal, and men more so than women, but these qualifiers were soon lifted.[215] From the beginning, this ministry was not limited to distributing Holy Communion during Mass but also outside of Mass.[216] When the rites for anointing the sick were revised in 1972, the ritual text specified that those who were dying could receive Holy Communion from lay minister.

In 1972, Pope Paul VI abolished the minor orders and created the new ministry of acolyte who has the duty to distribute Holy Communion whenever ordinary ministers are not available or the number of communicants are sizable, larger for the ordinary minister. The Instruction *Immensae caritatis* granted local ordinaries the permanent faculty to enable special lay ministers of Communion:

> To give Communion to themselves and others of the faithful and to carry it to the sick residing at home:
> Whenever no priest, deacon, or acolyte is available;
> Whenever the same ministers are impeded from administering Communion because of another pastoral duty, ill health, or old age;
> Whenever the number of faithful wishing to receive Communion is so great that the celebration of Mass or the giving of Communion outside Mass would take too long.[217]

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[213] See C. LAUGHLIN, *Guide for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*, 13.

[214] *Fidei custos*, no. 5.

[215] See C. LAUGHLIN, *Guide for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*, 13.

[216] Ibid.

[217] SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Instruction on Facilitating Reception of Communion in Certain Circumstance *Immensae caritatis*, 29 January 1973, no. 1, in *AAS*, 65 (1973), 264–271, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 8, 479. The Instruction also stipulated the qualities required for these ministers. It did not specify a minimum age for candidates, nor did it explicitly require the sacrament of confirmation as a prerequisite. Instead, it states that candidates must be "fit persons, each chosen by name as a special minister, in a given instance or for a set period or even permanently." (no. 1). These "fit persons" may include seminarians, religious, catechists, or "one of the faithful–man

A brief rite was developed to appoint persons to this ministry. In many regions, this was supplied by the *Book of Blessings* (*De benedictionibus*), which includes formularies for the blessing of lay liturgical ministers.[218]

As Huels observes, even though the Instruction *Immensae caritatis* does not explicitly state this, "another appropriate reason for the use of special ministers is to promote a more active role by the laity in the liturgy as desired by Vatican II."[219] Thus, a ministry born of practical necessity became, overtime, an expression of the gifts of the Spirit, illustrating the variety of ministries in the Church and providing laypeople opportunities for participating actively in the liturgy.

The 1983 Code permits laypeople to serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.[220] This ministry is supplementary and extraordinary, intended to address situations of genuine need when ordained ministers are unavailable or insufficient in

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or a woman." (no. 4). They "must be persons whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office, foster their own devotion to the Eucharist, and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their devotion and reverence toward the most august sacrament of the altar. No one is to be chosen whose appointment the faithful might find disgusting." (no. 6).

While the Instruction does not specify the age requirement for candidates or include reception of the sacrament of confirmation as mandatory, it is evident that the rite used to depute such ministers envisions the ministry being given to mature Catholics in good standing with the Church. Each local bishop is free to establish additional requirements to ensure that this vision is upheld. In many regions, this means that only those who have been confirmed are deputed as extraordinary ministers. See C. LAUGHLIN, *Guide for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*, 48.

[218] The priest or a deacon introduces the candidates to the community. He explains the purpose of their service. Then he asks them these questions: "Are you resolved to undertake the office of giving the body and blood of the Lord to your brothers and sisters and so serve to build up the Church?" "Are you resolved to administer the Holy Eucharist with the utmost care and reverence?" CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, *Rituale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Ioannis Pauli II promulgatum: De Benedictionibus, editio typica*, Vatican City, Typis Vaticanis, 1984.

[219] J.M. HUELS, "The Most Holy Eucharist," in *CLSA Comm1*, 650.

[220] See *CIC/83*, c. 910, §1. It states: "The ordinary minister of holy communion is a bishop, a priest or a deacon." §2 "The extraordinary minister of holy communion is an acolyte, or another of Christ's faithful deputed in accordance with can. 230, §3."

number.[221] Laypeople may be appointed by local ordinaries or their delegates, either on a temporary or permanent basis (c. 230, §3).[222] Diocesan bishops also have the faculty to permit individual priests to appoint a qualified person to distribute Communion for a single occasion when there is a genuine need.[223] When appointing a candidate, the local ordinary has broad discretion to assess the pastoral necessity and the availability of clerics. Those chosen must receive proper authorisation and be adequately instructed about the Eucharist, the nature of service, the rubrics they must follow, and the discipline required in distributing Communion.[224] Canon 230, §3 does not specify the age or qualifications for extraordinary minister, leaving these matters to particular law.

The Congregation for the Sacraments requested from the Code Commission a response to the question:

> Whether the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, deputed in accordance with canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, can exercise his or her supplementary function even when ordinary ministers, who are not in any way impeded, are present in the church though not taking part in the Eucharistic celebration.[225]

On 20 February 1987, the Plenary Commission responded negatively, a response approved by the Holy Father on 5 June 1987.[226]

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[221] For an extraordinary minister to distribute Communion during Mass, ordinary ministers must be unavailable, or the number of communicants must be exceptionally large, which would unduly prolong the eucharistic celebration due to a lack of ordinary ministers. See *EDM*, art. 8, §2.

[222] If a justified need arises, the diocesan bishop can authorise a layperson as an extraordinary minister to distribute Holy Communion during and outside the celebration of the Eucharist, *ad actum vel ad tempus*, or as a regular minister, applying the prescribed liturgical blessing formula. See *Roman Missal*, Appendix, Rite for Appointing Ministers of Holy Communion *ad actum*. In exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, the priest presiding at the Eucharist may grant authorisation *ad actum* for the distribution of Holy Communion. See Instruction *Immensae caritatis*, no. II, in *CLD*, vol. 8, 479.

[223] See Instruction *Immensae caritatis*, no. 2, in *CLD*, vol. 8, 479.

[224] See *CIC/83*, cc. 213, 528, §2, 529, §1, 530, 3°, 844, §3, 911, §1.

[225] PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE AUTHENTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CANONS OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW, "Authentic Interpretation: Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, 1 June 1988," in *AAS*, 80 (1988), 1373, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 12, 642.

[226] Although this response was initially sent to various Conferences of Bishops, it was not promulgated in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* until later. Despite a letter to the Conferences of Bishops of France referring to this as an *interprétation authentique*, it remained a private response until it was duly promulgated. See M. BONNET, "Interprétation authentique ou privée?" in *Les cahiers du droit ecclésial*, 4 (1987), 149–150. The response was published in *L'Osservatore Romano* in July 1988 and promulgated

> This faculty has indeed constituted from one viewpoint a real help for the celebrant as well as for the laity on the occasion of great numbers at the time of Holy Communion. It has given way, on the other hand, in some instances, to substantial abuses, often by leading to forgetfulness of the extraordinary character of this ministry, if one considers this to be of ordinary administration or as a type of reward with which one repays the collaboration of the laity. We are treating of abuses which are verified if: – the extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist ordinarily distribute Holy Communion together with the celebrant, whether this happens when the small number of those who desire to receive the Sacrament do not constitute a real necessity, or whether it happens in the presence of other concelebrants or other ordinary ministers who are available even if not celebrating – the extraordinary ministers, at the moment of Holy Communion, distribute it to themselves and to the faithful while the ordinary minister and the concelebrants, if there are any, remain inactive. In light of numerous indications of such abuses, this Dicastery has requested from the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law an exact interpretation of canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, regarding precisely the extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. The doubt was formulated in this manner: "Whether the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, appointed according to canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, may exercise his supplementary task when there are present in the church, even if they are not participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, unimpeded ordinary ministers.[227]

The subsequent authentic interpretation made clear that whenever unimpeded ordinary ministers (bishop, priest, deacon; cf., c. 910, §1), are present in sufficient number, extraordinary ministers may not distribute Communion, whether to themselves or to the faithful.[228]

Woestman explains the principle succinctly:

> Just as a man is not ordained bishop, priest, or deacon for his personal honour or as a reward, but for the service of the Church, a lay person is not called to ministry for his or her personal honour or as a reward but to serve. So extraordinary ministers should not be assigned to distribute Communion when it is foreseen that unimpeded ordinary ministers will be present and available. What is to be done if an extraordinary minister has been assigned to aid in administering Communion and an ordinary minister just happens to be present and available? The usual rules for applying positive laws should be followed.[229]

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in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* the following September. See *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 July 1988, no. 30, 8; in *AAS*, 80 (1988), 1273.

[227] PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE AUTHENTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CANONS OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW, "Authentic Interpretation: Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, 1 June 1988," in *AAS*, 80 (1988), 1373, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 12, 642.

[228] Ibid.

[229] W.H. WOESTMAN, *Sacraments Initiation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Commentary on Canons 840–1007*, Ottawa, Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, 1992, 121.

Lay persons may also administer *Viaticum* in cases of necessity, such as danger of death or when no ordinary minister is available.[230] "Since the administration of *Viaticum* is a canonical duty of the ordinary minister he should be notified when this duty is fulfilled by them."[231] A trained lay person may assist a blind or infirm priest in celebrating the Eucharistic Sacrifice.[232] An acolyte, extraordinary minister, or any lay person designated by the local ordinary may also expose and repose the Eucharist for public adoration, though not give the blessing, which remains reserved to the ordained.[233] Such permissions expanded significantly from the 1917 Code, which limited exposition and reposition to clerics.[234] *Ministeria quaedam* later extended this faculty to acolytes.[235]

These developments reveal a significant shift from the 1917 Code to the 1983 Code regarding the role of laypeople in the liturgical functions.

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[230] See *CIC/83*, c. 911, §2. Huels states: "One can always presume the permission of the ordinary minister in such cases because the faithful's right to receive the last sacrament supersedes the right of the ordinary minister to give it." (J.M. HUELS, "The Most Holy Eucharist," in *CLSA Comm2*, 1107); cf. *CIC/83*, c. 213. See also W.H. WOESTMAN, *Sacraments Initiation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick*, 122.

[231] J.M. HUELS, "The Most Holy Eucharist," in *CLSA Comm2*, 1107. Lay ministers follow the Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass. See INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ENGLISH IN THE LITURGY, *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1983, no. 29, 112.

[232] See *CIC/83*, c. 930, §2. The prior law required the permission of the priest's bishop or general superior before using provisions similar to those, which this canon grants outright to the priests in question. See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on the Powers and Privileges Granted to Bishops *Pastorale munus*, 30 November 1963, no. I, 5°, 6°, 10°, in *AAS*, 56 (1964), 5–12, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 6, 146–147; SECRETARY OF STATE, rescript *Cum admotae*, 6 November 1964, no. I, 2°, 3°, 5°, in *AAS*, 59 (1967), 374–375, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 6, 147.

[233] See *CIC/83*, c. 943. The blessing remains reserved for the ordained minister, either a priest or deacon. See L. CHIAPPETA, *Il Codice di diritto canonico. Commento giuridico-pastorale*, vol. II, Rome, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996, 162–163.

[234] See *CIC/17*, 1274, §2.

[235] See *MQ*, no. 6.

2.4 – Exclusion of Women from Instituted Ministries of Lector and Acolyte

In the 1917 Code, several canons contained distinctions based on sex that limited the participation of women in certain ecclesiastical functions;[236] these provisions must also be interpreted within the legislator's intention to offer particular legal protections for women.[237] The 1983 Code removes the canons of the 1917 Code that introduced such limitations, thereby opening the way for the gradual inclusion of women in the mission and life of the Church.[238] The most notable development in this regard is the reception of the conciliar principle expressed in c. 208, which affirms that "the Christian faithful, by virtue of their rebirth in Christ, have equality in dignity and action." This equality, however, is concretised according to each person's position and specific function within the Church.

Within the general obligations and rights of the faithful (cc. 208–223) and those proper to the laity (cc. 224–231), c. 230, §1 remains an outlier in that it maintains a canonical distinction: it restricts access to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to men alone. This creates a tension with the broader affirmation of equality in dignity and action. All the baptised, irrespective of sex, race, age, or social condition, are integrated into the Church as children of God; in legal terms, equality between men and women is formally recognised in the identical foundational status of the baptised and

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[236] See *CIC/17*, cc. 742, §2; 910, §2; 909, §§1 and 2; 813; 1520, §1; 1521, §1; 2004, §1; 709, §2; 2147, §2, 3°; 2218; 1262, §§1 and 2; 1979, §2; 133, §1.

[237] See *CIC/17*, c. 1020. For a detailed overview of the position of women in the previous and current Codes, see S. EURAT, "Women and the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *Origins*, 20, (1990), 452–456; R.H. LESSER, "Women in the New Canon Code," in *The Emerging Christian Woman: Church and Society Perspectives*, Ishvani, India, 1984, 263–266; R. MCDERMOTT, "Women in the New Code," in *The Way. Supplement*, 50 (1984), 27–37; J.M. HUELS, "Women's Role in Church Law: Past and Present," in *New Theology Review*, 6 (1993), 19–31; J. PORTER, "New Options for Women in Ministry: A Look at the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *The Priest*, 46 (1990), 15–19.

[238] According to R. Anić, "this opening of the Church is, however, slow, forced, and incomplete." (R. ANIĆ, "Otvorenost Crkve za poslanje žene," in *Bogoslovska smotra*, 72 [2002], 387).

confirmed within the ecclesial community.[239] Moreover, the legal status of the laity (cc. 224–231) explicitly allows both men and women to: a) be appointed to ecclesiastical functions and offices for which they are qualified (c. 228, §1); b) teach sacred doctrine (c. 229, §3); c) carry out certain liturgical functions, including the ministry of the word, leading liturgical prayer, baptising, and distributing Holy Communion, when deputed according to law (c. 230, §3); d) participate in the pastoral care of a community without a pastor (c. 517, §2); e) collaborate with bishops and priests in the ministry of the word (c. 759); f) serve as judges (c. 1421, §2) and auditors (c. 1428, §2) in ecclesiastical tribunals.[240]

Against this background, the continued exclusion of women from the stable instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, which are both conferred through a formal liturgical rite, does not appear to have sufficient theological or juridical foundation.[241] These ministries do not have a divine institution in the way that the sacrament of holy orders does, which remains reserved to men alone (c. 1024). Furthermore, women may perform the very same functions through temporary deputation (c. 230, §2). Hence, neither the permanence of the ministry nor its liturgical conferral sufficiently justifies limiting these ministries to men and thereby excluding women.[242]

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[239] See *LG*, no. 32. See also F. KLOSTERMANN, "The Laity," in VORGRIMLER, H. (gen. ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. III, New York, Herder and Herder, 1969, 5 vols., 234; S. HOLLAND, "Equality, Dignity and Rights of the Laity," in *The Jurist*, 47 (1987), 103–128.

[240] In addition to these canons, many other provisions of the Code indicate that a lay person can undertake certain ecclesiastical ministries or tasks, which naturally applies to women as well. See *CIC/83*, cc. 230, §§2–3; 296; 298; 317, §3; 377, §3; 443; 460; 463; 482–483; 492; 494; 512; 519; 524; 528, §1; 776; 810; 822, §§2–3; 830; 843, §2; 910, §2; 930, §2; 943; 1112, §1; 1168; 1279; 1421; 1424; 1428, §2; 1435; 1483; 1528.

[241] See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 168; J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 286.

[242] See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," *CLSA Comm1*, 168; J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 286.

In exploring possible justifications for the legislator's choice, some authors point to historical patterns within the Church's life, where women's involvement in ecclesial service often lacked stable institutional form.[243] Thus, the exclusion from stable instituted ministries is occasionally explained as a continuation of this historical instability. Other scholars emphasise the traditional connection between instituted ministries and preparation for the sacrament of holy orders, noting that lector and acolyte were historically received by those advancing toward ordination (c. 1035).[244] Yet this rationale is weakened by the fact that §§2 and 3 of the same canon affirm that women may perform the identical ministries in a temporary or deputed capacity, including in contexts of genuine pastoral need.[245]

The disparity created by c. 230, §1 has since been substantially resolved through later magisterial action, most notably *Spiritus Domini*, which amended the canon to permit women to be instituted as lectors and acolytes. This development, treated in detail in Chapter Three, reflects the Church's ongoing commitment to applying conciliar principles on the equal dignity of women in a more consistent and concrete manner.

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[243] See C. IZZI, "La partecipazione del fedele laico," 173; S. RECCHI, "I ministeri dell'accolitato e del lettorato riservati agli uomini. Il ruolo della donna nei ministeri laicali," in ITALIAN GROUP OF CANON LAW TEACHERS (ed.), *I laici nella ministerialità della Chiesa*, Milan 2000, 299; D.L. BARR, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm2*, 299. See also J.M. HUELS, "Female Altar Servers," in J.M. HUELS, *Disputed Questions in the Liturgy Today*, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, 27–38.

[244] See G.D. TORRE, *Considerazioni preliminari sui laici in diritto canonico*, Modena, Mucchi, 1983, 73; C.P. GARCÍA, "Reforma del c. 230,1 CIC: el acceso de la mujer a los ministerios instituidos de lectorado y acolitado," 30 September 2022, https://blogs.comillas.edu/canonico/2021/01/12/reforma-del-c-2301-cic-el-acceso-de-la-mujer-a-los-ministerios-instituidos-de-lectorado-y-acolitado/ (6 November 2024); T. RINCÓN-PÉREZ, "El servicio al altar de las mujeres a tenor del c. 230 § 2," in *Ius canonicum*, 35 (1995), 251–264;

[245] See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," *CLSA Comm1*, 168; J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 286.

2.5 – Instituted Ministries and Other Forms of Ministry in the Church

In *Christifideles laici*, Pope John Paul II distinguishes between ministries, offices, and functions that arise from the sacrament of holy orders and those that originate from the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. This distinction reflects the broader ecclesial understanding that ministry is both rooted in the sacramental life of the Church and diversified according to the condition and vocation of the faithful.

Writing shortly before the promulgation of the 1983 Code, Huels anticipated the expansion and clarification of ministries within the Church. His analysis has proven remarkably prescient. He identifies four fundamental types of ministry: common, public, jurisdictional, and ordained.[246] The first type, *common ministry*, pertains to all the baptised, who share in Christ's mission to serve, love their neighbour, and evangelise according to their gifts and state of life. As Huels notes, "This is authentic ministry performed by dedicated persons who are called by Christ to serve in manifold ways. They do not serve as authorised ministers of the Church, but their ministry is valid nonetheless."[247] This form of ministry arises directly from baptism and is exercised in daily life, often without formal ecclesial mandate.

The second type, *public ministry*, is more visible and structured. In such cases, "the minister is designated by legitimate ecclesiastical authority and recognised by the community."[248] Public ministries include roles such as teacher of religion, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, lector, music minister, financial advisor,

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[246] See J.M. HUELS, "Another Look at Lay Jurisdiction," in *The Jurist*, 41 (1981), 74–78; See also J.M. HUELS, *Empowerment for Ministry: A Complete Manuel on Diocesan Faculties for Priests, Deacons, and Lay Ministers*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2003.

[247] J.M. HUELS, "Another Look at Lay Jurisdiction," 74.

[248] Ibid. See also J.M. HUELS, *Empowerment for Ministry*, xv.

parish council president, or youth minister. Although these ministries do not require ordination, they involve a formal ecclesial designation for the good of the community.

The third type, *jurisdictional ministry*, requires a specific canonical mandate. Huels describes these ministries as those that depend upon explicit juridical determination or authorisation in the law.[249] Examples include preaching in certain liturgical contexts, acting as a qualified witness at marriages where this is authorised, or exercising roles that require ecclesiastical approval.[250]

The fourth type of ministry is reserved to the ordained and arises directly from the power of orders. This includes presiding at the Eucharist, absolving sins, anointing the sick, and ordaining clergy. According to Huels, "Of the four basic types of ministries in the Church, only one should be exclusively restricted to the ordained. Theoretically, there is no convincing reason why lay persons cannot exercise any of the others, including jurisdictional ministries not dependent on the power of orders."[251]

Thus, Huels concludes that lay Christians have a broad scope for ministerial participation, while only those ministries intrinsically connected to the power of orders are exclusive to clerics. Instituted ministries and other specific roles, however, require the intervention of competent ecclesiastical authority.

Within this broader framework, instituted ministries occupy a particular place. Although rooted in baptism and distinct from sacred orders, they are nevertheless conferred through a liturgical act and are intended to provide stable service to the Church. The following subsection will briefly examine how instituted ministries relate to these various forms of ministry.

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[249] See J.M. HUELS, *Empowerment for Ministry*, xv.
[250] See J.M. HUELS, "Another Look at Lay Jurisdiction," 77.
[251] J.M. HUELS, "Another Look at Lay Jurisdiction," 78.

2.5.1 – Ordained Ministry

The 1983 Code defines the Christian faithful as

> those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason, they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world. (c. 204, §1).

The Code further clarifies the fundamental distinction within the Church: "By divine institution, there are in the Church sacred ministers who in law are also called clerics; the other members of the Christian faithful are called lay persons" (c. 207, §1).[252] Ordained ministry, identified as *ministerium sacrum* in the 1983 Code is conferred through the sacrament of holy orders (c. 233, §1).[253]

> By divine institution, some of the Christian faithful are marked with an indelible character and constituted as sacred ministers by the sacrament of holy orders. They are thus consecrated and deputed so that, each according to his own grade, they may serve the People of God by a new and specific title.[254]

As the *Catechism* states, "Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus, it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry."[255] This ministry is exercised in three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate[256] for the purpose of

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[252] The term "minister" appears 71 times in the 1983 Code, referring to either the holder of a liturgical function or an ordained baptised person (deacon, priest, or bishop, that is, a "cleric," c. 207, §1). In certain contexts, it may also refer to non-Catholic ministers (c. 463, §3, c. 844, §2, c. 1127, §2). See A. BORRAS, "Petite grammaire canonique des nouveaux ministères," in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 245.

[253] See *CIC/83*, c. 233.

[254] *CIC/83*, c. 1008. The term *ministerium* when used without qualification, it can refer to the ministry of Christ (c. 519*)*, the Church (c. 618)*,* an instituted layperson (c. 230, §1), or an ordained cleric (c. 245, §1). Expressions like *ministerium ecclesiasticum* or *sacrum* unambiguously designate the ordained ministry of clerics, while *ministerium pastorale* more specifically concerns the formation of clerics (cc. c. 245, §1; c. 249; c. 276, §2, 1°; c. 279, §3) or the office of pastor or vicar (cc. 545, §§1 and 2, 551). Only once is the expression related to religious in the context of pastoral participation (c. 647), See A. BORRAS, "Petite grammaire canonique des nouveaux ministères," 246.

[255] *CCC*, no. 1536.

[256] See ibid., no. 1536. See also *LG*, no. 28.

"service."[257] Bishops,[258] with priests[259] and deacons[260] as their collaborators, exercise the threefold office of, teaching, sanctifying, and governing in their service of the community "presiding in the place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship and ministers of government."[261] The episcopate and presbyterate share in the ministerial priesthood of Christ, while the diaconate, though distinct, constitutes "a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy,"[262] oriented toward service. All three degrees are conferred through a sacramental act called "ordination," that is, by the sacrament of orders.[263] This ministry is "hierarchical and sacramental, with bishops and presbyters acting *in persona Christi Capitis* (in the person of Christ the Head), and deacons serving in the *diakonia* of liturgy, the Word, and charity."[264] This ministry arises from within the Church and reflects its hierarchical structure,[265] serving as a visible sign of Christ as Head and

[257] See *LG*, no. 18.

[258] The bishop is seen by Vatican II as teacher, sanctifier, leader. See *LG*, nos. 6, 12, 21, 26; *PO*, no. 12; *AG*, nos. 16, 22; *CD*, no. 11.

[259] When the Council considered the ministry of the priests, the same threefold mission and ministry was expressed: "Priests represent Christ and are the collaborators of the order of bishops in that three-fold sacred duty which, of its nature, pertains to the mission of the Church." (*AG*, no. 39); see also *PO*, no. 1, *LG*, no. 28.

[260] The documents of Vatican II refer to the diaconate only briefly, yet they acknowledge the three-fold ministry: "At the lower grade of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands 'not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry.' For, strengthened by sacramental grace, they are dedicated to the people of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity." (*LG*, no. 29).

[261] *LG*, no. 20; *CD*, nos. 2, 11. See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers: Reflections on Ministry and *potestas* in the Horizon of Pluri-Ministeriality," in *Studia canonica*, 58 (2024), 269–270.

[262] *LG* no. 29.

[263] See *CCC*, no. 1554.

[264] BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter on Several Amendments to the Code of Canon Law *Omnium in mentem*, 26 October 2009, art. no. 2, in *Communicationes*, 41 (2009), 260–265; in *Notitiae*, 46, (2009), 577–580; see also K.B. OSBORNE, *Priesthood*, 318–321.

[265] See S.K. WOOD, *Sacramental Orders*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2000, 1.

Shepherd.[266] As such, it is a sacramental expression of service to the entire Church. Pope John Paul II emphasises this ecclesial significance in *Christifideles laici*, noting that ordained ministries, beyond the persons who receive them, are a grace for the whole Church. These ministries "express and realise 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."[267] Yet, he also stresses that the ministerial priesthood is intrinsically ordered to the royal priesthood of the faithful (*LG* 10) and must always be exercised in service of the entire People of God. Conversely, the faithful must recognise the essential role of ordained ministry for the Church's mission.[268]

Schmaus highlights the distinctiveness of ordained ministry by describing ordination as the "sacrament of differentiation within the people of God,"[269] by which the priest is set apart for his priestly duties.[270] and is set apart by ordination for his priestly duties. However, Pope John Paul II carefully situates this differentiation within the framework of communion. The priesthood is not "alongside" or "above" the laity; rather, bishops, priests, and deacons exercise a ministry *for* the laity, precisely because it is a ministry of service. The ministerial priesthood highlights and supports the baptismal priesthood, enabling the faithful to live their ecclesial vocation more fully.[271]

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[266] See *CCC*, no. 1548. In the Latin Church, the word "consecration" is also used to refer to the ordination of bishops. However, the post-conciliar Rite of Ordination no longer speaks of consecration of the bishops but rather of their ordination, although the 1983 Code in many instances, anachronistically refers to episcopal "consecration." See *CIC/83*, cc. 1012–1014.

[267] *CL*, no. 22.

[268] See ibid., no. 22.

[269] M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma 5: The Church as Sacrament*, London, Sheed and Ward Inc., 1975, 185.

[270] Ibid.

[271] See JOHN PAUL II, "Holy Thursday Letter to Priests," no. 3, in *Origins*, 18 (1988), 729–730. For a succinct and contemporary engagement of this theme see P.J. PHILIBERT, *Stewards of God's Mysteries: Priestly Spirituality in a Changing Church*, Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 2004, 23–26; S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, 26–51; J.

Thus, the priesthood of the ordained and the priesthood of the faithful are intrinsically related. They cannot be understood in isolation, either theologically or pastorally. Their relationship is not one of simple juxtaposition but of mutual complementarity within the Church's structure of communion.[272]

A clear distinction must therefore be made between ordained and instituted ministries. Ordained ministries derive their authority from the sacrament of holy orders and express the hierarchical and sacramental dimension of the Church. Instituted ministries, by contrast, are rooted in baptism and confirmation[273] and are conferred through a rite of institution. They provide stable and meaningful opportunities for lay participation in the liturgical and pastoral mission of the Church without conferring a participation in the ministerial priesthood.

Instituted ministers represent a new and significant development in the Church's history. They are lay persons who, through their presence and ministry, embody foundational dimensions of ecclesial life. Their ministry constitutes a distinctive and irreplaceable contribution that shapes the life of the community. The "power" they receive is a form of ministerial *facultas*, expressed symbolically, verbally, and through action, and is rooted in their baptism and activated through the rite of institution. Their faculties are not delegated by the bishop or parish priest but belong to their ministerial identity; the bishop regulates their concrete exercise through a juridical act (mandate, *missio*, or letter of appointment). These faculties pertain solely to the specific sphere of ministry (liturgical or catechetical) for which they have been instituted as lectors,

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THORNHILL, "The Role of the Ordained Minister within the Chrisitan Community," in *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 67 (1990), 187.

[272] See JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 17. S.K. Wood also alludes to this relationship of mutual interiority, citing Cyprian, who taught that "the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop." See S.K. WOOD, *Sacramental Orders*, 134.

[273] See *CL*, no. 22.

acolytes, or catechists. As lay persons, their ministry is not intrinsically linked to the *ecclesial we* constituted by orders; rather, they realise the prophetic, priestly, and royal *munera* received through baptism in a particular ministerial form. They act with genuine autonomy in carrying out their liturgical or catechetical responsibilities, yet remain integrated within a system of ministerial cooperation under the direction of the bishop.[274]

As Betti notes, ministerial identity is sacramentally rooted in baptism, which makes a person capable of assuming ecclesial office. One is then effectively called and deputed through the Church's juridical act, though the concrete exercise of instituted ministry depends on the bishop's authority and *iurisdictio*.[275]

The following section will consider more closely the concept of ecclesiastical office and its relationship to both ordained and instituted forms of ministry.

2.5.2 – Ecclesiastical Office

According to *Lumen gentium* 5, the Church received from Jesus Christ the mission of proclaiming and inaugurating the Kingdom of God among all peoples.[276] One of the primary means by which the Church accomplishes this mission is through the ecclesiastical office. Although the concept of ecclesiastical office has existed since the earliest days of the Church, its understanding has undergone significant development, particularly in light of the theological and ecclesiological insights introduced by Vatican II. These developments have enabled a more inclusive participation in the Church's mission by all the faithful, whether ordained or lay.

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[274] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 273.

[275] See U. BETTI, "In margine al nuovo *Codice di diritto canonico*," in *Antonianum*, 58 (1983), 642.

[276] See *LG*, no. 5.

The 1917 Code provided a definition of ecclesiastical office in both a broad and a strict sense. In the broad sense, it referred to any responsibility legitimately exercised for a spiritual purpose. In the strict sense, it denoted a stable responsibility constituted by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance, conferred according to canonical norms, and involving some participation in ecclesiastical power, whether of orders or of jurisdiction (c. 145, §§1–2).[277] Read together with c. 118, the strict definition effectively restricted ecclesiastical offices to clerics, since the exercise of sacred power and jurisdiction was understood to belong to them alone.[278]

According to Provost, c. 145, §1 of the 1917 Code allows for a broad understanding of ecclesiastical office, namely, any function legitimately carried out for a spiritual purpose. Nevertheless, the Code typically employs a more restrictive interpretation, referring chiefly to stable roles involving the exercise of sacred power, particularly by clerics.[279] Charles Bachofen similarly distinguished between *munus* (function) and *officium* (office). The former referred to an ontological function, whereas the latter was a juridical reality established by divine or ecclesiastical law.[280] Bachofen observed that in the broader sense, certain roles not exclusively clerical could be considered ecclesiastical offices if exercised with a spiritual intention. He cites grave–diggers, interpreters, cantors, sacristans, organists, janitors, choir boys, spiritual

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[277] *CIC/17*, c. 145, §1 states: "Ecclesiastical office in the wide sense is any responsibility exercised legitimately for a spiritual end; in the strict sense, however, it is a divinely or ecclesiastically ordered responsibility, constituted in a stable manner, conferred according to the norms of the sacred canons, entailing at least some participation in ecclesiastical power, whether of orders or of jurisdiction. §2 In law, the ecclesiastical office is taken in the strict sense unless it appears otherwise from the context of the words."

[278] *CIC/17*, c. 118 states: "Only clerics can obtain powers, whether of orders or of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and benefices or ecclesiastical pension."

[279] See J.H. PROVOST, "Toward a Renewed Canonical Understanding of Official Ministry," in *The Jurist*, 41 (1981), 451.

[280] See C.A. BACHOFEN, *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, vol. 2, 6th ed., St. Louis, MO, B. Herder Book Co., 1936, 101.

directors, and bishop's secretaries as examples.[281] Cappello affirms this broad understanding, noting that an ecclesiastical office may exist without involving any special power of order or governance. In its strict sense, however, an office entails a specific power, whether the power of orders (e.g., reciting the Divine Office), the power of jurisdiction (e.g., the office of a parish priest), or delegated administrative authority (e.g., a vicar forane).[282]

Vatican II introduced an important shift. *Presbyterorum ordinis* 20 defined an ecclesiastical office as "any function (*munus*) conferred in a stable manner for a spiritual purpose."[283] This conciliar description broadened the conception of office by avoiding explicit reference to ecclesiastical power and clerical exclusivity. Although the decree is directed primarily to priests, its formulation set a theological trajectory consistent with *Lumen gentium* 33 and 37. *Lumen gentium* affirms that lay persons may be deputed by the hierarchy to certain *munera* for a spiritual purpose,[284] and encourages bishops to entrust appropriate ecclesiastical offices and responsibilities to the laity.[285]

Robleda argued that the placement of this definition within a decree addressed to priests could suggest an implicit association between ecclesiastical office and sacred power, thereby restricting such offices to clerics.[286] Nevertheless, the drafting commissions of the 1983 Code affirmed that ecclesiastical offices may indeed be conferred on lay persons whenever the office does not require the power of orders or

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[281] See C.A. BACHOFEN, *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, 101.

[282] See F.M. CAPPELLO, *Summa iuris canonici*, vol. I, 4th ed., Rome, Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1945, 240.

[283] *PO*, no. 20.

[284] See *LG*, no. 33.

[285] See ibid., no. 37.

[286] See O. ROBLEDA, "Innovationes Concilii Vaticani in theoria et disciplina de officiis et beneficiis (III–IV)," in *Periodica*, 58 (1969), 168.

the power of governance.[287] This interpretation corresponds to the Council's broader ecclesiology of the People of God, in which all the baptised share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices, and are therefore capable of assuming responsibilities within the Church according to their condition.

The 1983 Code incorporates these conciliar developments directly into its general norms. Canon 145, §1 defines an ecclesiastical office as "any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose." Four essential elements emerge from this definition: the office is a function; it is constituted by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance; it is constituted in a stable manner; and it is directed toward a spiritual purpose.[288] The relocation of the treatment of ecclesiastical office from the section on clergy in the 1917 Code to the general norms of the 1983 Code marks a clear shift away from clerical exclusivity.[289]

Herranz observes that ecclesiastical offices today may involve consultative, judicial, administrative, or pastoral tasks, with or without direct involvement in governance.[290] This reflects the broader variety of ecclesial functions envisioned after the Council.

Canon 228 articulates the capacity of lay persons to hold ecclesiastical offices. Laypeople who are "suitable" may be admitted by pastors to those offices and functions they are capable of exercising according to law.[291] As Caparros explains, the canon concerns capacity rather than rights; suitability for admission must be established by

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[287] See S.K. GILLESPIE, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power*, Rome, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2017, 15–16.

[288] See *CIC/83*, c. 145, §1.

[289] See J.H. PROVOST, "Ecclesiastical Offices (cc. 145–196)," in *CLSA Comm2*, 196.

[290] See J. HERRANZ, "The Juridical Status of the Laity," 312.

[291] *CIC/83*, c. 228, §1 states: "Laypeople who are found to be suitable are capable of being admitted by the sacred Pastors to those ecclesiastical offices and functions which, in accordance with the provisions of law, they can discharge." §2 "Laypersons who excel in necessary knowledge, prudence, and integrity are qualified to assist the pastors of the Church as experts and advisors, even in councils according to the norm of law."

the law or by competent authority. Ghirlanda emphasises first that all the Christian faithful share equally in the Church's mission by virtue of baptism, even though they participate in its exercise in different ways. Clerics are able to exercise ecclesiastical governance in their own right because this capacity is conferred through sacred ordination (c. 129, §1). For this reason, only clerics may hold those ecclesiastical offices that intrinsically require the power of orders or the power of governance (c. 274, §1). Lay persons, however, possess by baptism the genuine capacity to be entrusted with many ecclesiastical offices that do not require sacred power (c. 228, §1). Moreover, the law explicitly provides for the cooperation of lay persons in the exercise of ecclesiastical governance, whenever the law permits it (c. 129, §2). This cooperation does not constitute an inherent right, but it represents a meaningful and necessary participation in the ministries proper to the pastors and reflects the wider vision of Vatican II in which lay persons contribute indispensably to the life and mission of the Church.[292]

While ecclesiastical offices requiring the power of orders or governance remain restricted to clerics,[293] many offices are open to appropriately qualified lay persons.

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[292] See G. GHIRLANDA, *Potestà sacra*, in C.C. SALVADOR, V. DE PAOLIS, and G. GHIRLANDA (a cura di), *Nuovo dizionario di diritto canonico*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, 1993, 811.

[293] This topic is beyond the scope of this study. For a thorough examination of complex canonical dimensions of lay jurisdiction, see A. VIANA, "Power of Governance," in Á. MARZOA, J. MIRAS, R. RODRÍGUEZ OCAÑA (eds.) and E. CAPARROS (gen. ed. of English translation), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur, 2004, 819; B. CUSACK, "Power of Governance: Theoretical and Practical Considerations," in *CLSAP*, 52 (1990), 187–205; D.M. JAEGER, "The Relationship of Holy Orders and the Power of Governance According to the Revised Code of Canon Law or: Are the Laity Capable of the Power of Governance?" in *CLSGBI Newsletter*, 62 (1984), 20–38; DE PAOLIS, "La potestá di governo nella Chiesa. Gli uffici ecclesiastici (libro I, cann. 129-196)," in *I Religiosi e il Nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, SEGRETARIA CISM (ed.), Rome, Pontificia Universitá Gregoriana Editrice, 1984, 38–54; F. HANSEN, "The Threefold Power of Governance," in *Studia canonica*, 48, (2014), 373–410; F. MCMANUS, "Laity in Church Law: New Code, New Focus," in *The Jurist*, 47 (1987), 11–31; F.J. URRUTIA, "Delegation of the Executive Power of Governance," in *Studia canonica*, 19 (1985), 339–355; G. GHIRLANDA, "De natura, origine et exercitio potestatis regiminis iuxta novum Codicem," in *Periodica*, 74 (1985), 109–164; J. MYRES, "Ecclesial Ministries for Lay Persons Within the Diocese: Development and Integration," in *CLSAP*, (1985), 66–85; J.A. CORIDEN, "Lay Persons and the Power of Governance," in *The Jurist*, 59 (1999), 335–347; J.H. PROVOST, "The Participation of the Laity in the Governance of the Church," in *Studia canonica*, 17 (1983), 417–448; J.M. HUELS, "The Power of Governance and Its Exercise by Laypersons: A Juridical Approach," in *Studia Canonica*, 35 (2001), 59–96; J.P. BEAL, "Lay People and Church Governance: Oxymoron or

These include roles such as chancellor (c. 482), diocesan finance officer (c. 494, §1), censor (c. 830, §1), assessor (c. 1424), auditor (c. 1428, §2), judges in ecclesiastical tribunals (c. 1421, §2), and the defender of the bond or promoter of justice (c. 1435). At the diocesan or parish level, offices such as director of liturgy or director of religious education may also be established for lay persons. Candidates must meet the canonical requirements for provision (cc. 146–183) and for loss of office (cc. 184–196), and their suitability must be assessed. Canon 145, §2 provides two ways in which an ecclesiastical office may be established. A general decree may constitute the office for future provision, or a singular decree may constitute and confer the office simultaneously. In each case, the officeholder must receive clarity regarding the duties and responsibilities associated with the office.[294]

Clear distinctions exist between ecclesiastical offices and instituted ministries. Offices often involve administrative or governance-related responsibilities and are embedded within the juridical structure of the Church. Instituted ministries, on the other hand, are ordered toward specific liturgical and pastoral service and confer no power of orders or governance. Their stability lies in their pastoral and liturgical purpose rather

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Opportunity," in *Together in God's service: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry*, 103–129; J.P. BEAL, "The Exercise of the Power of Governance by Lay People: State of the Question," in *The Jurist*, 55 (1995), 1–92; M. WIJLENS, "Lay Persons in Leadership and Governance in a Synodal Church: Canonical Developments Calling for Theological Reflections and a Paradigm Shift," in *Studia canonica*, 58 (2024), 53–77; M. WIJLENS, "The Power of Governance [cc. 129–144]," in *CLSA Comm2*, 183–194; R.A. HILL, "The Power of Governance," in *CLSA Comm1*, 89–112; S.J. POPE, *Common Calling: The Laity and Governance of the Catholic Church*, Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 2004.

[294] Canon 145, §2 specifies the two ways in which an ecclesiastical office may be established. The first is through a general decree issued by the diocesan bishop, constituting the office. This decree defines the office, along with the obligations and rights proper to it. Once the office is constituted, it may be conferred upon a suitably qualified person. When that person leaves the office, it becomes vacant, allowing another person to be appointed. The second method is through a singular decree, which both constitutes and confers the office. In this way, an office may be constituted for a specific purpose and person. Once the purpose is fulfilled, or the person's term is finished, the office would then cease. However, once appointed, the office holder is entitled to know what the specific responsibilities and duties involved in exercising the office. See S.K. GILLESPIE, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power*, Rome, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2017, 15–16.

than in any juridical status. While ecclesiastical offices may vary in scope, including pastoral, judicial, administrative, and consultative functions, instituted ministries remain focused on particular forms of service such as the proclamation of the Word or assistance at the altar.

A ministry also differs from an ecclesiastical office established according to c. 145. A minister may function across various parishes or communities without the need for additional institution ceremonies, whereas an officeholder exercises responsibilities only within the specific jurisdiction for which he or she has been duly appointed. For example, a pastor cannot exercise the responsibilities of that office in another parish without proper appointment.[295]

Both ecclesiastical offices and instituted ministries contribute in meaningful ways to the life and mission of the Church. Their differences in purpose, jurisdiction, and canonical status reflect the diverse ways in which the Christian faithful, ordained and lay, collaborate in the Church's mission according to their gifts, vocation, and ecclesial designation.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a comprehensive examination of instituted ministries as articulated in c. 230 of the 1983 Code, situating them within the broader ecclesiological, theological, and canonical developments of the Church, particularly those inaugurated by Vatican II. Instituted ministries, though distinct from the sacramental and hierarchical structure of ordained ministry, constitute an essential expression of the laity's participation in the Church's sanctifying office. Grounded in baptism and strengthened by confirmation, these ministries embody the call of all the

[295] See D.L. BARR, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm2*, 300.

faithful to share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices, thereby contributing in concrete ways to the Church's liturgical and pastoral mission.

Across the chapter, the distinctions among instituted, temporary, and extraordinary ministries have been clarified, demonstrating how the canonical framework accommodates both stability and flexibility. This structure allows the Church to respond pastorally to diverse contexts while preserving the hierarchical nature of ministry rooted in the sacrament of orders. The treatment of preaching, catechesis, service at the altar, distribution of Holy Communion, and the emergency administration of baptism illustrates the many ways in which the laity, under the direction of sacred ministers, participate meaningfully in the Church's life and worship.

The chapter has also highlighted how the Code's initial reservation of instituted ministries to men, as found in c. 230, §1, created a tension within the wider canonical system and with the conciliar principles of dignity, equality, and co-responsibility. Subsequent developments, particularly *Spiritus Domini*, have resolved this disparity by formally opening the ministries of lector and acolyte to women. While this represents a significant step forward in the coherent application of Vatican II's ecclesiology, its reception remains varied across local contexts, inviting continued pastoral and juridical reflection.

By integrating theological foundations, historical developments, and canonical analysis, this chapter has shown that instituted ministries function as an important bridge between tradition and renewal. They offer a stable and meaningful form of lay participation that respects the sacramental distinctiveness of ordained ministry while expanding the scope of the laity's recognised service in the Church. In this way, instituted ministries contribute to a more collaborative and co-responsible ecclesial life,

strengthening communion within the People of God and fostering a shared mission to witness to the Gospel.

Building upon these foundational insights, Chapter Three will examine the implications of recent reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. These motu proprios represent significant milestones in the Church's evolving understanding of ministry: *Spiritus Domini* extends the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women, reaffirming the baptismal equality of all the faithful, while *Antiquum ministerium* establishes the instituted ministry of catechist, recognising its enduring importance in evangelisation. Chapter Three will analyse the theological, pastoral, and juridical significance of these developments and assess how they contribute to a more participatory, inclusive, and synodal Church.

CHAPTER THREE
THE 2021 AMENDMENTS TO THE INSTITUTED MINISTRIES BY POPE FRANCIS

Introduction

The year 2021 marked a pivotal moment in the ongoing development of the Catholic Church's theology of ministry, particularly in relation to lay participation. The promulgation of the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* by Pope Francis marks a significant milestone in the ongoing reform of ecclesial ministry and lay participation in the Church. These legislative texts are not merely juridical interventions; they are the fruit of an ecclesiological vision rooted in Vatican II, particularly its affirmation of the baptismal dignity of all the faithful and the corresponding call to active participation in the life and mission of the Church (*LG*, 10–12; *AA*, 3). The 2021 amendments represent a continuation of the conciliar impulse, affirming the co-responsibility of the laity in the Church's evangelising mission, and deepening the theological and canonical foundations of instituted ministries.

This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of these reforms, beginning with an exposition of Pope Francis' theological and pastoral understanding of the laity and their ministerial roles. It then contextualises the development of *Spiritus Domini* by examining its connection to preceding ecclesial events, particularly the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God (2008) and the Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region (2019), both of which highlighted the urgent need for greater recognition of lay ministries, including those exercised by women, in the life of the Church.

A juridical analysis of the modification to c. 230, §1 follows, with attention to the historical, theological, and pastoral criteria articulated in Pope Francis' accompanying letter to Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria. The reception of this amendment is then assessed through the evaluations offered by contemporary theologians and

canonists, whose perspectives shed light on both the novelty and continuity represented by these changes.

The chapter then turns to the ministry of catechist, newly instituted as a stable ministry in the Church through *Antiquum ministerium*. A diachronic study of its development is undertaken, drawing upon magisterial sources such as *Catechesi tradendae*, *Christifideles laici*, *Redemptoris missio*, and the 2020 *Directory for Catechesis*. This section highlights the gradual maturation of the catechist's role, culminating in its formal recognition as an instituted lay ministry.

Finally, the chapter reflects on the broader theological and canonical implications of these reforms within the synodal journey initiated by Pope Francis. The documents of the Synod on Synodality, from the *Preparatory Document* to the *Final Report*, are examined in order to situate instituted ministries within a renewed ecclesiology of communion, participation, and mission.

3.1 – Pope Francis' Understanding of Laypeople and Ministeriality

Pope Francis has consistently emphasised the importance of lay participation in the life and mission of the Church. In his address to the Second Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, the Pope outlined a comprehensive vision of lay ministeriality rooted in baptism, charisms, and service.[1] His reflections draw from key ecclesial documents, underscoring the theological foundations and practical implications of lay involvement in the Church's mission.

Pope Francis identifies two primary foundations for lay ministeriality: baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Baptism confers on all the faithful a share in the common priesthood, which, in turn, is expressed in various forms of ministry. Lay

[1] See FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, 22 April 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/april/documents/20230422-plenaria-laicifamigliavita.html (1 February 2025).

ministeriality, therefore, is not derived from the sacrament of ordination but emerges from the baptismal dignity that unites all believers as *Christifideles*.[2] This understanding aligns with Vatican II's teaching in *Lumen gentium*, which affirms that all the baptised share in Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission (*LG*, 31). In a 2016 letter to Cardinal Ouellet, the Pope wrote:

> Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter the Church as laypeople. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is baptism. Through baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, (the faithful) "are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 10). Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our baptism. No one has been baptised a priest or a bishop. They baptised us as laypeople and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase. It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God.[3]

According to Gaillardetz, in the eyes of the Pope, "laicity" is not a negative term for the non-ordained, but "rather it identifies the fundamental status conferred upon us in baptism."[4] All other relational configurations in the Church must in some way point back to and serve the vocation of the baptised.[5] A failure to acknowledge the priority of baptism has led to the "evils of clericalism and a ubiquitous clerical culture."[6]

The second foundation identified by Pope Francis is the role of the Holy Spirit, who distributes charisms for the building up of the Church. The Pope highlights a threefold process in the development of these charisms into ministries: first, the emergence of a charism inspired by the Holy Spirit; second, the Church's recognition

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[2] See FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

[3] FRANCIS, Letter to Cardinal Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, 19 March 2016, https://www-vatican-va.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html. (1 February 2025).

[4] R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "Synodality and the Francis Pontificate: A Fresh Reception of Vatican II," in *Theological studies*, 84 (2023), 47.

[5] See ibid., 45.

[6] See ibid., 46.

of this charism as a valuable service; and third, its institutionalisation as a specific ministry.[7] This process underscores the organic relationship between charismatic gifts and the Church's discernment, ensuring that ministries remain rooted in the Spirit's work.

Pope Francis' vision of lay ministeriality reflects a renewed ecclesiology grounded in the teachings of Vatican II and enriched by his own emphasis on mission, service, and humility. His insistence on baptism as the primary foundation for lay ministries underscores the universal call to holiness and service challenging the Church to foster a ministerial culture that is inclusive, mission-oriented, and deeply rooted in the transforming power of the Gospel.

3.2 – Contextual Overview of *Spiritus Domini*

Until the promulgation of the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, the legislation of the Church permitted only lay men to be instituted as lectors and acolytes without requiring them to be clerics (c. 230, §1). However, in practice, these ministries largely remained preparatory steps for those pursuing ordination to the diaconate or priesthood. Canon 230, §1 was the only provision within the section on the obligations and rights of lay members of Christ's faithful (cc. 224-231) that differentiated between men and women. As a result, women were unable to be instituted in these ministries on a stable basis, even though they often exercised them temporarily in circumstances where pastoral necessity arose, and no instituted ministers were available (c. 230, §§2, 3).

Recognising the gifts of all the baptised, regardless of sex, Pope Francis ordered a revision of canon law to permit the formal institution of women as lectors and acolytes. This change represents an official acknowledgement of the ministry of women

[7] See FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

within the Church and grants them access to roles previously reserved for men. The amendment to c. 230, §1 not only legitimises the participation of women in these stable ministries but also provides them with greater opportunities to serve the Church. This development is a significant and commendable step forward in the Church's recognition of lay ministry.

This papal intervention in the area of liturgical ministries can be said to have been prompted, in an immediate sense, by two synodal assemblies.

3.2.1 – Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church

In 2008, 55 propositions were brought forward to be taken up in the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Proposition 17 received the most attention with its call to allow women to be installed officially in the ministry of lector. The last sentence of the proposition reads: "It is hoped that the ministry of lector be opened also to women, so that their role as proclaimers of the Word may be recognised in the Christian communities."[8] This proposition had 191 supporters, and 45 dissenters, with 3 abstentions, representing the highest number of dissenters of any other proposition. "One must note, however, that some dissenters may well have thought the proposition unacceptable because of particular wording, or because it did not go far enough."[9] However, the proposition found its way into the working paper of the Synod. Women may legitimately dispense the role of lector but still fell short of formal institution, which remained exclusively a male prerogative.[10] The post-synodal exhortation *Verbum*

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[8] SYNOD OF BISHOPS, "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," 5–26 October 2008, Proposition, no. 17, 38 (2008), 341.

[9] B. LUCAS, "Commentary on the Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini* of Pope Francis Modifying Canon 230, §1 *CIC* Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte," in *The Canonist*, 12 (2021), 17.

[10] "This request went unheeded until 2021, when Pope Francis modified c. 230, removing the restriction of women to receive the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte." (C. GLENDINNING, "The

Domini, which came out two and a half years after the synod, did not propose that women be included in the formal ministry of lector but clearly accepted the place of women as lectors.[11] It states: "While the Gospel is proclaimed by a priest or deacon, in the Latin tradition the first and second readings are proclaimed by an appointed reader, whether a man or a woman."[12] *Verbum Domini* went on to acknowledge the special place of women in evangelisation:

> The *laity* are called to exercise their own prophetic role, which derives directly from their baptism, and to bear witness to the Gospel in daily life, wherever they find themselves. In this regard, the Synod Fathers expressed "the greatest esteem, gratitude, and encouragement for the service to evangelisation which so many of the lay faithful, and women in particular, provide with generosity and commitment in their communities throughout the world, following the example of Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the joy of Easter.[13]

3.2.2 – The Synod of Bishops for the Pan–Amazon region

Building upon the affirmations of *Verbum Domini*, which recognised the valued role of women in the proclamation of the Word and in the wider mission of evangelisation, the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region (6–27 October 2019)[14] advanced this conversation by responding to pastoral realities unique to the Amazon. The Synod Fathers acknowledged that in many of these communities, women serve as the primary leaders and sustainers of ecclesial life. In view of this, they proposed:

Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist: The Diversification of Ministry and Opportunities for Greater Co-responsibility of the Laity in the Church Governance," in *Studia canonica*, 58 [2024], 291).

[11] Ibid.

[12] BENEDICT XVI, Post–Synodal apostolic exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010 (=*VD*), no 58, in *AAS*, 102 (2010), 681–787, English translation in *Origins*, 40 (2010), 437.

[13] *VD*, no. 94.

[14] See SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, *Final Document of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan–Amazon Region*, 26 October 2019, Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20191026_sinodo-amazzonia_en.html (14 February 2025).

> We ask that the motu proprio of St. Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* (1972) be revised, so that women who have been properly trained and prepared can receive the ministries of lector and acolyte, among others to be developed. In the new contexts of evangelisation and pastoral ministry in the Amazon, where the majority of Catholic communities are led by women, we ask that an instituted ministry of "women community leadership" be created and recognised as part of meeting the changing demands of evangelisation and care for communities.[15]

This proposal was not limited to the Amazonian context but was framed within a broader ecclesial vision. Echoing the post-conciliar call for a renewed understanding of co-responsibility among all the baptised,[16] the Synod stressed that the promotion and conferral of ministries for both men and women is not merely contextual, but a universal ecclesial necessity.[17] As such, the Church must foster an awareness of baptismal dignity and encourage diverse forms of ministry rooted in this fundamental identity.[18]

While the modification of c. 230, §1 through *Spiritus Domini* has a universal scope and cannot be seen as exclusive to the Amazonian context, it clearly resonates with the concerns expressed during this Synod. The desire to acknowledge ministries already exercised *de facto* by women, such as reading the Scriptures and distributing Holy Communion, found new momentum in these discussions. In this light, Pope Francis' emphasis on the co-responsibility of all the baptised, along with the pastoral insights of the Pan-Amazonian Synod and the apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia*,[19] laid essential groundwork for the juridical revision that finally opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women, marking a significant development in the Church's canonical and pastoral practice.

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[15] SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Amazonia*: *Final Document*, no. 102.

[16] See ibid., no. 94.

[17] See ibid., no. 95.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See FRANCIS, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation to the People of God and All People of Good Will *Querida Amazonia*, 2 February 2020 (=*QA*), in *AAS*, 112 (2020), 167–229, English translation in *Origins*, 49 (2020), 618.

3.2.3 – A Change Made to Canon 230, §1 by motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*

In light of the theological and pastoral reflections from the Pan-Amazonian Synod, alongside Pope Francis' emphasis on the co-responsibility of all the baptised, the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* formally amended c. 230, §1.

Canon 230, §1 now reads as follows:

> Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.[20]

The motu proprio acknowledges the historical and theological basis of this change, firmly rooting it in the theology of baptism:

> A number of Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops have highlighted the need to deepen the subject doctrinally, so that it may respond to the nature of the aforementioned charisms and the needs of the times, offering appropriate support to the role of evangelisation that is incumbent upon the ecclesial community.
> Accepting these recommendations, a doctrinal development has taken place in recent years which has highlighted how certain ministries instituted by the Church are based on the common condition of being baptised and the royal priesthood received in the sacrament of baptism; they are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders. A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has also confirmed, in fact, that these lay ministries, since they are based on the sacrament of baptism, may be entrusted to all suitable faithful, whether male or female, in accordance with what is already implicitly provided for by canon 230, § 2.[21]

Recognising these developments, Pope Francis, in *Spiritus Domini*, formalised this doctrinal evolution by modifying c. 230, §1, thereby removing the restriction that limited the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to men. This change represents not only a juridical adjustment but also a deepening of the Church's theological and pastoral vision, affirming the essential role of the laity in the mission of the Church.

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[20] *CIC/83*, c. 230, §1. The revised wording according to motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*.

[21] *SD*.

The motu proprio was accompanied by a letter addressed to Cardinal Luis Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,[22] in which Pope Francis elaborated on the historical, theological, and pastoral motivations behind this decision. He highlighted the need to recognise and promote the ministerial gifts of all the baptised, ensuring that the Church's structures and norms reflect the richness of its sacramental foundation.

3.2.4 – Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Criteria for the Modification Introduced in Canon 230, §1 in Light of Pope Francis' Letter to Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria

The change to c. 230, §1 through *Spiritus Domini* concerns the replacement of the term *viri laici* ("lay men"), which appeared in the previous version of this canon, with *laici* ("lay persons").[23] "Although the textual modification is minor, involving only the deletion of one word (*viri*) from the canon itself, the legislative change is nonetheless significant."[24] Pope Francis explains this modification in the universal law of the Church from historical, theological, and pastoral perspectives.

In his Letter, Pope Francis first clarifies that when charisms take on a concrete and stable form within the Church and are publicly acknowledged in service of the community, they become ministries.[25] He references St. Paul's distinction between gifts of grace (*charismata*) and ministries (*diakoniai*) (cf. Rom 12:4ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff).[26] Over time, the Church has recognised that charisms, when institutionalised, contribute to its

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[22] See FRANCIS, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Regarding the Admission of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte, 10 January 2021, in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 85 (2021), 153–158.

[23] See W. BARTOCHA, "Prawno-liturgiczne konsekwencje zmiany brzmienia kan. 230, §1 Kodeksu Prawa Kanonicznego z 1983 r. Geneza dopuszczenia kobiet do podjęcia na stałe posługi lektoratu i akolitatu w świetle motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*," in *Liturgia Sacra*, 28 (2022), 63.

[24] C. GLENDINNING, "The Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist," 280.

[25] See FRANCIS, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[26] Ibid.

mission.[27] Secondly, Pope Francis reiterates the distinction between ordained ministry and lay ministries. While lay ministries are expressions of the priestly and royal condition of all the baptised (cf. 1 Pt 2:9), ordained ministries involve acting *in persona Christi Capitis*. The Pope cites *Omnium in mentem* (2009) to reaffirm this distinction.[28] Further, he argues for granting lay persons of both sexes access to the ministries of lector and acolyte based on their participation in the baptismal priesthood. He states, "Ecclesial life is nourished by this reciprocal reference and is fostered by the fruitful tension of these two poles of the priesthood, ministerial and baptismal, which despite the distinction are rooted in the one priesthood of Christ."[29]

The change acknowledges the long-standing contribution of women in these roles and clarifies that the ministries of lector and acolyte are not steps toward ordination but part of the common baptismal vocation. He emphasises that these changes are not merely cultural adaptations but are rooted in the need to enable local Churches, in communion with Rome, to serve the liturgy, the poor, and evangelisation more effectively. He calls upon Church leaders to recognise the gifts of each baptised person and guide them toward specific ministries.[30]

A key theological argument supporting this change is the principle of reciprocity and co-responsibility. Since both men and women share the baptismal call and its charisms, they should be able to participate fully in non-ordained ministries. Pope Francis states:

> To offer laypeople of both sexes the opportunity to enter the ministries of acolyte and lector, by virtue of their participation in the baptismal priesthood, will increase recognition, also through a liturgical act (institution), of the precious contribution that

[27] See FRANCIS, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

> for a long time many, many laypeople, including women, have offered to the life and mission of the Church.[31]

Another argument continues for this change based on evangelical responsibility of both sexes in this area of Church life, not simply men:

> The choice to confer also to women these offices, which entail stability, public recognition, and a mandate on the part of the bishop, renders more effective in the Church everyone's participation in the work of evangelisation. "This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organisation, the most important decisions, and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood" (Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, n. 103). The "baptismal priesthood" and "service to the community" thus represent the two pillars on which the institution of the ministries is founded.[32]

It is noteworthy that in this passage Pope Francis refers to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte as "offices." This terminology is striking, given the clear canonical distinction between *officium*, which denotes a stable ecclesiastical function established by competent authority and involving juridical rights and obligations (cf. cc. 145–196), and *ministerium*, which refers more broadly to forms of ecclesial service rooted in the baptismal vocation.[33] Earlier chapters of this thesis have highlighted this distinction and argued that instituted ministries, as configured in *Ministeria quaedam* and c. 230, do not constitute ecclesiastical offices in the strict juridical sense.[34] By calling these ministries "offices," the Pope underscores their stability, public character, and ecclesial mandate, qualities traditionally associated with *officium*. Yet he does so without altering their canonical nature. The terminology thus signals a pastoral and theological emphasis on their seriousness, visibility, and co-responsible participation in

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[31] See FRANCIS, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[32] Ibid.

[33] See *CIC/83*, c. 145 states: "§1. An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose. §2. The obligations and rights proper to individual ecclesiastical offices are defined either in the law by which the office is constituted or in the decree of the competent authority by which the office is at the same time constituted and conferred."; cf. chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis for the distinction between *officium* and *ministerium*.

[34] *Ministeria quaedam* avoided the juridical language of orders or offices, opting instead for "instituted ministries," signalling a theological-pastoral rather than juridical category.

the Church's mission, even as their juridical classification remains that of non-ordained instituted ministries rather than true ecclesiastical offices.

To fully grasp the legal significance of this change, *Spiritus Domini* must be read in conjunction with the letter to Cardinal Ladaria. The latter presents a broader perspective, including adjustments in liturgical legislation necessitated by the modification of c. 230, §1.[35] Since this change pertains directly to the liturgy, Pope Francis entrusts its implementation to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments:

> The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments shall provide for the implementation of the aforementioned reform with the amendment of the *Editio typica* of the *Pontificale Romanum* or of the "*De Institutione Lectorum et Acolythorum.*[36]

Although the modification has significant theological and liturgical implications, the letter from the Prefect to the presidents of episcopal conferences dated 24 May 2022 stated that "the *Editio typica altera* will not be published for the time being."[37] Consequently, the current rite of institution, promulgated under Pope Paul VI in 1972 and approved by episcopal conferences with adaptations, remains in force.[38]

Pope Francis frames this change within the conciliar ecclesiology of communion and lay responsibility, rooted in baptism and confirmation.[39] He sees this

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[35] See W. BARTOCHA, "Prawno-liturgiczne konsekwencje zmiany brzmienia kan. 230 §1," 63.

[36] Ibid.

[37] CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Letter to the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops Regarding Certain Clarifications Concerning the Rites of Institution of Lectors, Acolytes, and Catechists, 24 May 2021, in *Origins*, 50 (2021), 571.

[38] The *Rite for the Institution of Lectors and Acolytes* is found in the *Pontificale Romanum*, revised in light of the Second Vatican Council (*Pontificale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instaurati*) and promulgated under the authority of Pope Paul VI on 3 December 1972. Individual episcopal conferences may publish their own editions, approved by the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, as adaptations of the *editio typica*. For instance, the *Rite of Institution of Readers and Acolytes* is included in *The Roman Pontifical*, English translation prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (*ICEL*), approved by the relevant episcopal conferences and confirmed by the Holy See.

[39] See W. BARTOCHA, "Prawno-liturgiczne konsekwencje zmiany brzmienia kan. 230 §1," 67.

reform as a response to the "signs of the times," particularly the increasing role of women in the Church. Their participation, guided by the Holy Spirit, strengthens the ecclesial community and the mission of evangelisation.[40]

Furthermore, Pope Francis presents the admission of women to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte as a logical consequence of the Church's evolving doctrine and liturgical practice. He notes that calls to remove the previous restriction in c. 230, §1 had been made long before. For example, during the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (5–26 October 2008), which examined the role of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church, there were explicit proposals advocating for the inclusion of women in the ministry of lector (Proposal 17). Similarly, the Synod on the Amazon reiterated these calls, culminating in the post-synodal document *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*.[41]

Notably, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, during the 2019 Synod, proposed the removal of the clause introduced under Pope Paul VI, asserting that it had become redundant. He later reaffirmed this position in an interview with Vatican Radio on 11 January 2021, following the promulgation of *Spiritus Domini*. His statements highlight the sustained and dynamic engagement with this issue at the synodal level, positioning Pope Francis' motu proprio as the realisation of a request repeatedly made during previous Synods.[42]

The implications of these synodal discussions are further evidenced in post-synodal apostolic exhortations. In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that

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[40] See W. BARTOCHA, "Prawno-liturgiczne konsekwencje zmiany brzmienia kan. 230 §1," 67.

[41] See FRANCIS, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[42] See C. SCHÖNBORN, "Comments on the Official Opening of Liturgical Services for Women," 12 January 2021, https://www.ekai.pl/kard-schonborn-komentuje-oficjalne-otwarcie-poslug-liturgicznych-dla-kobiet/ (16 February 2025).

the exercise of the function (*munus*) of lector in liturgical celebration, particularly in the Latin rite, is a ministry of a lay character.[43] Pope Francis, in *Querida Amazonia*, underscored the significant role of women within the synodal Church, advocating for their access to ecclesial functions and ministries that do not require sacramental ordination. He stressed that such participation would allow women to more fully express their role within the ecclesial structure.[44] Instituted ministries provide stability, public recognition, and a direct link to the episcopal mandate. Consequently, Pope Francis argues that women's participation in these ministries should enable them to have "a real and effective impact on the organisation, the most important decisions, and the governance of communities."[45] Furthermore, their service as lectors and acolytes during eucharistic celebration, as delineated in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, allows for a distinctive and complementary contribution to the liturgy, reinforcing the ministry of priests.[46]

Cardinal Schönborn further observes that, in many regions of the universal Church, both men and women have already been exercising the functions associated with the ministries of lector and acolyte. The motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, therefore, provides a formal canonical framework for a practice that had long been in place. In the context of the Amazon, where priestly vocations are scarce and many small, remote communities rely on women for pastoral leadership, this canonical modification does not represent a rupture but rather an affirmation of existing liturgical practice. For other local Churches, this legislative change serves as both an invitation and an

[43] See *VD,* no. 58.

[44] See *QA*, no. 103.

[45] Ibid.

[46] For further guidance on the roles and functions of instituted ministers, see *GIRM*, nos. 98–99.

encouragement for episcopal conferences to expand these ministries where they have not yet been implemented.[47]

It is essential to acknowledge, however, that this modification does not, in itself, immediately alter the liturgical practice of the Church. Rather, it initiates a period of ecclesial adaptation, during which episcopal conferences must establish appropriate criteria for the admission of women to these ministries. This includes the development of structured formation programmes and the preparation of suitable instructional materials. This transitional phase presents a significant opportunity for theological reflection on the role of women in the liturgy across diverse ecclesial contexts.[48] Moreover, it allows for a comprehensive pastoral and evangelising assessment of the canonical revision, with the aim of "broadening our perspective, so that we do not limit our understanding of the Church merely to functional structures."[49]

The revision of c. 230, §1 brings several important clarifications and developments regarding the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte. Firstly, the change reinforces the distinction between the clerical state and instituted ministries. By emphasising the lay nature of the lector and acolyte, the law makes it clear that only those who have received the sacrament of holy orders, beginning with the diaconate, are considered clerics. This distinction ensures that these ministries remain within the lay state and are not confused with ordained ministry. Secondly, the revision definitively states that lector and acolyte are not part of holy orders.[50] In the past, these ministries were steps toward priesthood, but the change confirms that they are separate

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[47] See C. SCHÖNBORN, "Comments on the Official Opening of Liturgical Services for Women."

[48] See W. BARTOCHA, "Prawno-liturgiczne konsekwencje zmiany brzmienia kan. 230, §1," 69.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Although men destined for the sacrament of orders are even now to be instituted to the ministries of lector and acolyte before they are admitted candidates for the diaconate (c. 1035).

from the sacrament of holy orders and do not constitute an ordained ministry. Thirdly, the foundation of these ministries is explicitly placed in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. This theological grounding highlights that they are not reserved for men alone but are, by their nature, open to both men and women. By recognising that these ministries belong to the common priesthood of the faithful, the Church affirms their accessibility to all the baptised. Finally, the revision maintains continuity with tradition by acknowledging that, while lector and acolyte were once associated with preparation for ordained ministry, they still participate in Christ's priesthood, specifically the common priesthood shared by all the faithful, rather than the ministerial priesthood reserved for the ordained.

This juridical and theological development, however, was met with criticism, as it represented a shift from long-standing customs.

3.3 – The Evaluation of Theologians and Canonists

The modification of the wording of c. 230, §1 in the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* represents a significant step forward in relation to previous legislation on this matter. The reform, introduced by Pope Francis, has sparked extensive theological and canonical debate, highlighting differing views on its implications for the dignity of women, the nature of ecclesial ministry, and the distinction between ordained and lay roles.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, has acknowledged the significance of the motu proprio for enhancing the dignity and mission of women in the Church. In an interview, he stated:

> In addition to overcoming a discrimination that had no theological justification, this measure, desired by Pope Francis, calls attention to the appreciation of women in the Church—not as substitutes to carry out certain tasks, but as bearers, themselves, of

> their own ecclesial vocation by virtue of baptism and according to the gifts that make them apostles in the ecclesial and non-ecclesial contexts in which they live and work.[51]

One of the primary concerns raised by critics is that it blurs the distinction between clergy and laity. Traditionally, the ordained clergy, including deacons, priests, and bishops, have held a unique role in the Church, while laypeople have had their own separate mission. By officially allowing women to be instituted as lectors and acolytes, some fear that this clear distinction is being eroded, leading to confusion about the respective roles of clergy and laity.

> With the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, Pope Francis modified the Code of Canon Law to open the ministries of lector and acolyte to women. Those who think "it's not a big deal, it just formalises what we've already been doing for decades!" underestimate the difference between custom (which can include bad custom) and legal formalisation, and more to the point, between substitution (women filling in for certain functions) and institution (women being installed in ministry by episcopal action).[52]

The admission of women to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte is undeniably an innovation, yet it follows logically from the definition of the sacrament of holy orders, which comprises only the diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate. By contrast, the ministries of lector and acolyte are now explicitly rooted in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. Kwasniewski highlights the distinction between *ex ordine* (c. 230, §1) and *ex temporanea deputatione* (c. 230, §2), pinpointing the core of this innovation: by altering a single word, women have been granted access to legally recognised and stable liturgical ministries.[53]

Spiritus Domini has been criticised for conflating the dignity of the baptised with that of active liturgical ministry.[54] Critics of *Spiritus Domini* use the idiom "a

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[51] A.D. CAROLIS, "A Vatican Office Rallies the Strength of the Laity," 14 June 2021, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-06/a-vatican-office-rallies-the-strength-of-the-laity.html (21 February 2025).

[52] P. KWASNIEWSKI, *Ministers of Christ Recovering the Roles of Clergy and the Laity in an Age of Confusion*, Manchester, Crisis Publications, 2021, 116.

[53] See ibid.

[54] See ibid., 119.

rabbit being pulled out of a hat"[55] to suggest that the distinction between ordained and lay ministries has been introduced in a sudden, artificial manner, as if it were an unexpected or unexplained trick rather than a natural development. The primary concern underlying these criticisms is the belief that clergy are called to serve actively in liturgical functions, while the faithful participate primarily by "being" present and receiving the Word and Sacrament.[56]

> The motu proprio once again raises the question of the vocation of the laity. What are laypeople supposed to be doing? Have they a proper work of their own, or do they just collect scraps that fall from the clergy's table – or better yet, climb up and jostle elbows?[57]

Critics of the admission of women to these ministries argue that they are inherently clerical roles. The clergy, as stewards of the mysteries of Christ, have specific responsibilities within the Mystical Body,[58] while the laity are meant to bring Christ to the world. The proper place of the priest, they argue, is within the sanctuary, while the laity's primary role is in the wider world.

A further argument against the change draws upon the Thomistic theory that the minor orders developed as a subdivision of the diaconate. According to this view, as the Church grew, the diaconate expanded and gave rise to the subdiaconate and other minor orders.[59] While this theory remains respected, Pope Francis has justified his reform by asserting that the ministries of lector and acolyte are founded not on the sacrament of holy orders, nor on any specific order within it, but on baptism and confirmation, effectively dismissing the argument. Whether this theory will regain prominence should

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[55] P. KWASNIEWSKI, *Ministers of Christ Recovering the Roles of Clergy and the Laity in an Age of Confusion*, 120.

[56] See ibid., 119.

[57] See ibid., 123.

[58] See ibid., 128.

[59] See ibid., 89.

women ever be admitted to the diaconate remains to be seen. For some, the inclusion of women in these ministries marks the definitive break between the minor orders of the past and the new ministries established after Vatican II.

While Pope Francis's motu proprio may appear to be a mere technical adjustment and may not significantly alter practices in places where women already play a prominent role in liturgical functions, it represents a profound shift both theologically and practically. For the first time in its history, the Catholic Church is officially instituting women as liturgical ministers, not as substitutes for clerics, but as ministers in their own right.

Carmen Peña García, commenting on the modification introduced by *Spiritus Domini*, observes that "the only discrimination between lay men and women in the Code of Canon Law has been eliminated."[60] Expanding on this thesis, she states that the restriction contained in c. 230, §1 was considered by most canonical doctrine to be unjustified, as it contradicted the radical equality recognised in the Code, which exists between men and women in the secular sphere. According to her, the admission of women to the ministries of lector and acolyte may serve as "an impetus for greater lay involvement in ecclesial life and mission, in line with the rediscovery of synodality characteristic of this pontificate."[61]

Similar comments can be found in the works of other canonists who had previously addressed this issue when interpreting the norm in c. 230, §1, when it still applied the restriction that only men could be stably instituted as lectors and acolytes. Tomás Rincón-Pérez speculated, based on the premise that this restriction did not stem

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[60] C. PEÑA GARCÍA, "Reforma del c. 230,1 *CIC*: el acceso de la mujer a los ministerios instituidos de lectorado y accolitado," 30 September 2022,https://blogs.comillas.edu/canonico/2021/01/12/reforma-del-c-2301-cic-el-acceso-de-la-mujer-a-los-ministerios-instituidos-de-lectorado-y-acolitado/ (6 February 2025).

[61] Ibid.

from divine law, that in the future, this "legal discrimination" would be rectified by clarifying misunderstandings concerning the concept of "ministry." In the context of entrusting various ministries to lay persons, this concept, in his opinion, requires more precise definition so that functions based on baptism, or the common priesthood, can be clearly distinguished from those that remain in a strict intrinsic relationship with the sacrament of holy orders.[62]

Glendinning views the evolution of instituted ministries as a significant step towards greater lay participation in the Church's life and mission. He sees Pope Francis' reforms, such as opening the ministries of lector and acolyte to women and broadening lay involvement in governance, as part of a broader shift away from clerical exclusivity. Glendinning interprets these changes as affirming the dignity and co-responsibility of all the baptised, aligning with synodality and the Church's evolving understanding of ministry. He also challenges the outdated notion that lay ministry is merely a substitute for clerical shortages, emphasising instead the unique competencies and contributions of lay persons in ecclesial service.[63]

For Noceti, "the existence of instituted ministers entails an overall revision within the horizon of constitutive 'pluri-ministeriality.'"[64] "It becomes necessary to a *systemic and organic vision* of ministries, like that in the Church of the first four centuries."[65] First, with the creation of instituted ministries, the clergy-laity binomial

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[62] See T.R. PÉREZ, *Liturgies and Sacraments in the Law of the Church*, Subsidia Canonica Series, 12, Rome, EDUSC, 2015, 251. See also T.R. PÉREZ, "El servicio al altar de las mujeres a tenor del c. 230 § 2," in *Ius canonicum*, 35 (1995), 251–264.

[63] See C. GLENDINNING, "The Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist, 277–303.

[64] S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 263.

[65] Ibid.

around which intra-ecclesial relations between *Ecclesia docens*[66] and *discens*[67] had been codified for centuries is overcome.[68] "Instituted ministries are conferred only once in a lifetime, thus defining *stabiliter* the baptismal identity of those who exercise them, with a pluralisation of ministerial figures who are at the stable service of the Church."[69] Secondly, a ministerial synergy of men and women is envisaged, which is not limited to *de facto* ministries, based on a temporary and removable mandate by the clergy. What is most relevant is the deconstruction of the vertical, linear, priesthood-oriented *cursus honorum*, which is the qualifying element of the revision underway, because it involves laypeople becoming lectors/acolytes. The liturgical tasks and functions of both lay ministers and the ordained are brought back into the complex of ecclesial life.[70]

Anna Słowikowska takes a more moderate stance compared to the other canonists critical of the previous wording of c. 230, §1. She rightly points out that this provision (in its former wording) was the only one in the entire title dealing with the obligations and rights of the lay faithful that introduced a distinction between men and women. However, she also notes that this did not diminish the role of women in the Church, as they play a significant role in the animation of the liturgy. Although they could not be instituted for liturgical ministries, this did not negate the fact that they actively participated in the ministry of the word of God and the altar. In this

[66] *Ecclesia docens* (the teaching Church) refers to the Church's magisterium, primarily the Pope and bishops, who have the authority to teach doctrine. See *LG*, no. 25; *CCC*, no. 85–87; *CIC/83*, c. 749 §1.

[67] *Ecclesia discens* (the learning Church) traditionally refers to the faithful who receive and respond to this teaching. See *LG*, no. 12; *CCC*, nos. 168, 871; *EG*, no. 24, *RM*, no. 53.

[68] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 263.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 263–264

collaboration of women with the priest and other faithful, she perceives "a reflection of the cooperation of the Virgin Mary with Christ in the Incarnation and Redemption."[71]

According to Gonzalo Guzmán Karadima, *Spiritus Domini* seeks in some way to overcome the clergy–laity dialectic and the previous understanding of ministries solely as steps toward ministerial priesthood. He suggests that urgent work should be undertaken towards a true paradigm shift, one demanded by the "outgoing" and synodal Church.[72]

The modification of the wording of c. 230, §1 through *Spiritus Domini* marks an important canonical and theological development in the Church's understanding of ministry. While some view this change as merely an overdue correction of an inconsistency in the Code, its significance extends far beyond the removal of a legal distinction between men and women. The reform affirms that instituted ministries, though distinct from ordained ministry, belong properly to the baptismal identity of the laity and are not simply preparatory steps toward holy orders.

The debates surrounding *Spiritus Domini* reveal broader tensions in the Church's evolving understanding of ministry. Concerns about the lack of formal consultation, the centralisation of papal authority, and the potential clericalisation of the laity highlight the complexities involved in any substantial reform. However, these critiques must be weighed against the Church's ongoing commitment to synodality. The opening of instituted ministries to women does not merely respond to a practical need but reinforces the co-responsibility of all the baptised in the Church's mission, aligning with Vatican II's vision of the laity's role in the sanctifying office of the Church.

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[71] A. SŁOWIKOWSKA, *Uczestnictwo wiernych świeckich w liturgii Kościoła katolickiego*, Prace Wydziału Nauk Prawnych, 54, Lublin, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2014, 177.

[72] See G.G. KARADIMA, "*Spiritus Domini*: desafíos teológicos pastorales," in *Phase*, 62 (2022), 75–76.

This development also raises deeper ecclesiological and canonical questions: How should the Church further clarify the relationship between instituted ministries and ordained ministry? To what extent does this reform challenge traditional categories of ecclesial service?

3.4 – The Ministry of Catechist

This section aims to trace the development of the ministry of catechist by identifying key milestones along the way.

3.4.1 – The 1917 Code

The 1917 Code does not explicitly mention the term catechist (*catechista*). However, while it does not provide for a distinct role of catechist, it does address catechetical instruction, primarily in diocesan and parochial contexts. The foundational canon with respect to catechesis in the 1917 Code was c. 1327, §1, which entrusted bishops, under the authority of the Roman Pontiff,[73] with ensuring that the laws governing catechetical instruction were properly observed.[74] The Code allowed pastors to enlist the assistance of clerics and even laypeople, particularly in the religious instruction of children.[75] Canon 1333 provides the closest reference to individuals who

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[73] See *CIC/17*, c. 1327, §1. It states: "The responsibility of preaching the Catholic Faith is committed especially to the Roman Pontiff for the universal Church [and to] Bishops for their dioceses. § 2. Bishops are bound by the office of personally preaching the Gospel, unless they are prohibited by a legitimate impediment; and moreover, besides pastors, they should also take help from other suitable men in pursuing the correct fulfillment of these duties in this sort of teaching." This canon primarily addressed preaching rather than catechetical instruction. This highlights the close relationship between preaching and catechesis, making it unsurprising that the pastor (*parochus*) was given particular importance in catechetical instruction.

[74] See R.J. JANSEN, *Canonical Provisions for Catechetical Instruction: An Historical Synopsis and Commentary*, Canon Law Studies, no. 107, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America, 1937, 39.

[75] *CIC/17*, c. 1333, §1. It states: "A pastor can, in the religious instruction of children, and indeed must if he is legitimately impeded, enlist the help of clerics present in his territory and even, if it is necessary, pious laymen, particularly those who are enrolled in a pious sodality of Christian teaching or something similar erected in the parish. § 2. Priests and other clerics who are not detained by legitimate impediment should be helpers to their pastor in this most holy work, even under penalties to be inflicted by the Ordinary." The inclusion of penalties for failure to assist highlights the gravity with which catechesis was regarded.

could be considered catechists. It states: "...si necesse sit, piorum laicorum, potissimum illorum qui in pium sodalitium doctrinae Christianae aliudive simile in paroecia erectum adscripti sunt." This indicates that *piorum laicorum* (pious laypeople) could assist in catechesis if deemed necessary by the pastor. However, the decision to involve them rested solely with the pastor, who retained full discretion over catechetical instruction in his parish. If he considered his own instruction sufficient, he was under no obligation to employ lay catechists. Notably, the Latin term used in the canon is *laicorum*, indicating that laypeople in general, not just men, could be involved. This is particularly significant given the presence of female religious and lay teaching groups at the time.

Furthermore, the 1917 Code required the establishment of Confraternities of Christian Doctrine in every parish to ensure that catechesis was effectively carried out. Canon 711, §2, mandated: "Local ordinaries shall take care that in every parish there are instituted confraternities of the most holy Sacrament and of Christian doctrine." These confraternities, linked to the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine in Rome, provided a means for lay participation in catechetical instruction at the parochial level. Membership in the Confraternity was open to all qualified individuals capable of teaching catechism, including schoolteachers whose training made them particularly suited to this role.[76] Women were explicitly included, as demonstrated by the statutes of the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine, which granted them "an active membership, i.e., with a right to participate in the meetings, the vote, to hold office, as well as engage in the work of the Confraternity."[77] No distinction was made between

[76] See R.J. JANSEN, *Canonical Provisions for Catechetical Instruction*, 84.

[77] *Statuto della Venerabile Arciconfraternita della Dottrina Cristiana*, Rome, 1928, art. 35. It states: "Essa si compone di tutti coloro che con l'opera e con i mezzi coadiuvano il parroco per l'insegnamento della Dottrina cristiana," quoted in R.J. JANSEN, *Canonical Provisions for Catechetical Instruction*, 86. Original source is not available.

men and women regarding membership at the parish level.[78] The governing council of the Confraternity was to be composed of the pastor as director, along with selected clerics and lay persons of both sexes.[79] However, these lay catechists were not recognised in the same way as those who later emerged in mission territories worldwide. The reference to *piorum laicorum* in c. 1333 illustrates a limited canonical recognition of lay catechists, whose role was entirely at the discretion of the pastor. Over time, the role of catechists evolved, particularly through the developments of Vatican II and subsequent legislation, which brought about significant shifts in the canonical understanding of lay catechesis.

3.4.2 – Vatican II

The Fathers of Vatican II recognised the vital role of catechists in the Church, acknowledging their presence and the work they carried out. The Council produced several documents that addressed the role of catechists, particularly as a distinct ministry for the lay faithful. The first reference to catechists appears in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The document mandates a revision of the rites of baptism for adults and children, specifying that a shorter version should be prepared for use in mission countries.[80] This revision would allow catechists and the faithful to administer the sacrament in situations where neither priest nor deacon is available, especially in cases of danger of death.[81] This early reference signifies the emerging role of lay catechists in the Church, with their involvement in administering baptism in particular contexts.

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[78] See R.J. JANSEN, *Canonical Provisions for Catechetical Instruction*, 86.

[79] Ibid.

[80] See *SC*, no. 68.

[81] *SC*, no. 68 states: "A shorter rite is to be drawn up, especially for mission countries which catechists and also the faithful in general may use when there is danger of death and neither priest nor deacon is available."

Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, further emphasises the ministry of the Word by acknowledging catechists alongside deacons and priests.[82] The Council Fathers affirmed that those engaged in the ministry of the Word, including catechists, should immerse themselves in Sacred Scriptures through constant reading and study.[83] This not only recognised the work of lay catechists but also encouraged them to deepen their understanding of the Faith[84] as they served in this essential ministry. These points from the two dogmatic constitutions of Vatican II show that catechists do not appear as those who serve merely at the discretion of a local pastor. Rather, the ministry of catechists emerges from the needs of the Church.

Ad gentes, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, provided the most extensive treatment of catechists, mentioning them eleven times. It describes the role of the catechist as a ministry and a function. It states, "Various types of ministry are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community, and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, by the divine call, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all. Among these functions are those of priests, deacons and catechists, and also that of Catholic Action."[85] *Ad gentes* outlined catechists' responsibilities in the Christian initiation process, noting that the catechumenate should not be left solely to priests and catechists but must involve the entire Christian community, particularly the sponsors of the catechumens.[86]

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[82] See *DV*, no. 25.

[83] *DV*, no. 25 states: "All clerics, particularly priests of Christ and others who, as deacons or catechists, are officially engaged in the ministry of the Word, should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study."

[84] In this text, "Faith" (capitalised) refers to the Faith handed down by the Apostles, that is, the Catholic Faith understood as the body of divinely revealed truth safeguarded by the Holy Spirit from all error. In contrast, "faith" (in lowercase) denotes the theological virtue by which one assents to the "Faith," or an individual's personal belief, which may be subject to error.

[85] *AG*, no. 15.

[86] See *AG*, no. 14. It states, "[…] Christian initiation, which takes place during the catechumenate, should not be left entirely to the priests and catechists, but should be the concern of the whole Christian

Ad gentes, situates catechists in a missionary context. The Council Fathers said, "Worthy of praise is that army of catechists, both men and women, to whom missionary work among the nations is so indebted; who, imbued with an apostolic spirit make an outstanding and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the Faith and the Church by their great word."[87] Their role was also seen as increasingly important, especially in places where there are few clerics. *Ad gentes* states, "in our days, when there are so few clerics to evangelise such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of catechists is of the highest importance."[88] Because of their great importance, the Council Fathers called for the training of catechists to be improved, so that "as true co-workers of the priestly order, they will be able to perform their task as well as possible, a task which involves new and greater burdens."[89] The description of catechists as true co-workers of the priestly order further illuminates their place in the Church. They are not mere helpers or assistants, as they might have been previously described. Rather, some bear great responsibilities in the absence of clerics. Others are not quite so burdened, because clerics are present. Nonetheless, they can still play an important role as reliable co-workers. The Council Fathers also considered the possibility of lay men and women serving as catechists on a full-time basis. In such a case, they should be "paid a just wage, of a decent standard of living and social security."[90] The Council Fathers also referred to auxiliary catechists, who "preside at prayers in their communities and also teach sacred doctrine."[91] The Council Fathers

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community, especially of the sponsors, so that from the beginning the catechumens will feel that they belong to the people of God."

[87] *AG*, no. 17.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

further specified that "wherever it seems opportune, to confer the canonical mission on properly trained catechists in the course of a public liturgical celebration, so that in the eyes of the people they might serve the cause of the Faith with greater authority."[92]

The Council's treatment of catechists represents a shift in the Church's understanding of their role. No longer mere assistants, catechists were now recognised as essential co-workers in the Church's mission, particularly in areas where priests were not readily available. They were acknowledged as fully involved in the ministry of the Word, including preaching, teaching, and administering sacraments such as baptism in certain circumstances. This understanding of catechists would eventually influence the revision of canon law, particularly in regard to their role in the Church's mission and the necessary formation to carry out their duties effectively.

Pope John XXIII's vision for the Council was to help the faithful understand their identity and role within the Church, a vision echoed by Pope Francis in *Antiquum ministerium*. The notion of catechists as a distinct and recognised ministry continues to be a central theme in the post-conciliar Church. Their vocation is seen as one of active participation in the Church's missionary and educational tasks, a vocation affirmed by both the Council and subsequent papacies.

3.4.3 – Pope Paul VI

On 6 August 1966, Pope Paul VI promulgated the motu proprio *Ecclesiae sanctae*, facilitating the implementation of four Vatican II decrees, including *Ad gentes*.[93] Paragraphs 18–19 of this document address the role of catechists. Paragraph 18 pertains to episcopal conferences overseeing mission territories, highlighting the

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[92] *AG*, no. 17.

[93] See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter on Norms for Implementing the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ecclesiae sanctae*, 6 August 1966*(=ES)*, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), 757–758, English translation in *FLANNERY1*, 857–862.

necessity of a well-distributed catechetical workforce.[94] This reflects a departure from the parochial authority model outlined in c. 1333 of the 1917 Code, as it grants bishops greater responsibility for appointing catechists within their dioceses. Catechists are not merely seen as contingently necessary but necessary in their own right, in accordance with the Church's mission, a right that derives from baptism and requires juridical protection, as affirmed in *Ecclesiae sanctae*.[95] Paragraph 19 further underscores the need for financial provisions to train both missionaries and catechists.[96] The distinction between missionaries, who establish the Faith, and catechists, who nurture it, becomes evident, with both roles being essential to the *plantatio Ecclesiae*. Notably, *Ecclesiae sanctae* does not use the term "auxiliary catechist,"[97] but refers only to catechists.

A pivotal moment for catechists came with Paul VI's *Ministeria quaedam*, which redefined minor orders that had traditionally been linked to priestly formation. Responding to requests from Council Fathers, he suppressed certain minor orders while preserving others, acknowledging their role in service and formation. In its preamble, Paul VI affirmed that "nothing prevents the episcopal conferences from requesting other ministerial forms from the Apostolic See, should they deem them necessary or beneficial for their region."[98] One such ministry was that of catechist.[99] Unlike previous classifications, *Ministeria quaedam* did not differentiate between catechists serving in missionary versus established territories. Instead, it recognised catechists as an

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[94] See *ES*, no. 18.

[95] See ibid., no. 19.

[96] Ibid.

[97] *AG*, no. 17 describes catechists in the broad sense until the last section, where a group called "auxiliary catechists" (*catechistarum auxiliarium*) is mentioned. There are catechists in the general sense, who need to be trained, but then there are auxiliary catechists, who should receive a canonical mission for their ministry. See *AG*, no. 17.

[98] *MQ*, Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[99] See Ibid.

instituted ministry rather than a step toward ordination, a distinction later reaffirmed by Pope Francis in *Antiquum ministerium*. Pope Paul VI also noted that these institutions would be particularly helpful in mission territories, citing *Ad gentes*, paragraph 15.[100] His reforms thus contributed to a broader ecclesial shift away from the pastor's exclusive authority over catechesis, as seen in c. 1333 of the 1917 Code. He affirmed that the pious lay person no longer ministers merely on behalf of a pastor but is instituted in a ministry that serves the Church's missionary nature in collaboration with both pastor and bishop.

Furthering this development, Paul VI issued the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* on 8 December 1975, reinforcing the Church's missionary nature as articulated in *AG*, 2.[101] Paragraph 73 specifically highlights catechists, defining their role within the Church's missionary framework.[102] He situates catechesis within the broader ministry of the Word,[103] linking catechists with preachers as those who proclaim the Word.[104] Without delving into historical details, he assumes readers' familiarity with catechists' longstanding role in the Church. His pontificate thus marked significant progress in recognising catechists as vital contributors to the Church's mission. He placed catechists under episcopal authority, affirming their indispensable role in evangelisation, and recognised them as lay ministers, distinct from ordained clergy. Paul VI highly valued catechists and emphasised the necessity of proper formation. In *Evangelii nuntiandi*, he identified catechetical instruction as an essential

[100] *MQ*, Preamble, in *FLANNERY1*, 429.

[101] *AG*, no. 2 states: "the Church is missionary by her nature."

[102] See *EN*, no. 73.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

means of evangelisation[105] and stressed the need for well-prepared instructors, including parochial catechists, teachers, and parents, who are committed to enhancing their skills.[106] Furthermore, he recognised catechists among the ministries essential for the Church's establishment, growth, and outreach.[107] This shift set the stage for further juridical recognition, culminating in Pope Francis' *Antiquum ministerium*. Given this recognition of catechists' rights and responsibilities, it is now appropriate to examine the 1983 Code's approach to their juridical status.

3.4.4 – The 1983 Code

The 1983 Code explicitly incorporates catechists into the Church's legal framework, reflecting the post-conciliar vision of their role. Canons 225, 776, 780, 785, and 861 define their functions, responsibilities, and formation within the Church's evangelising mission.

Canon 225 establishes that the ministry of catechesis is rooted in baptism and confirmation.[108] While laypeople have the right to participate in the apostolate, this does not automatically confer the role of catechist. Unlike the 1917 Code's c. 1333, which placed catechists under a pastor's discretion, the revised canon recognises their role as arising from sacramental initiation rather than clerical authority.[109] This represents a

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[105] See *EN*, no. 44.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] *CIC/83*, c. 225, §1 states: "Since, like all the Christian faithful, laypersons are designated by God for the apostolate through baptism and confirmation, they are bound by the general obligation and possess the right as individuals, or joined in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation is made known and accepted by all persons everywhere in the world. This obligation is even more compelling in those circumstances in which only through them can people hear the gospel and know Christ." §2 "According to each one's own condition, they are also bound by a particular duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the Spirit of the gospel and thus to give witness to Christ, especially in carrying out these same affairs and in exercising secular functions."

[109] According to *CIC/83*, c. 773, a pastor has the responsibility of overseeing the catechesis of the faithful, ensuring that their faith is both evident and active. This duty arises from his canonical office, which he receives from the bishop. Meanwhile, c. 225 provides a basis for recourse in cases where the

significant shift from reliance on the will of the pastor to a right derived from baptism and confirmation. Consequently, pastors who previously could arbitrarily block individuals from serving as catechists must now recognise that such actions can be challenged. However, it is important to note that the right of laypeople to the apostolate of the Church, including catechetical as one of its expressions, is not an absolute. Additionally, c. 225 highlights the missionary dimension of the lay apostolate, linking it to the Church's broader evangelising mission, as emphasised in *Ad gentes* 6 and *Evangelii nuntiandi* 58–59.[110] These aspects have not only influenced the life of the Church but have also been codified in its canonical framework through c. 225. Canon 225, §2 further underscores the role of the laity, specifically referencing their call to shape temporal affairs in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel. While the ministry of the catechist is fundamentally an *ad intra* ministry within the life of the Church, catechists also live in the world and are affected by its realities. Canon 225 is explicitly referenced in *Antiquum ministerium* no. 5.

Canon 776 shifts from the identity of the People of God to the Church's teaching mission, mandating that pastors oversee catechetical formation for all age groups, assisted by clerics, religious, and lay catechists.[111] Unlike the 1917 Code, which

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rights of laypeople in this regard may have been infringed, an aspect that was absent in the 1917 Code concerning catechesis.

[110] The scope of the right outlined above calls for greater emphasis on the sacramental foundation of the apostolate. As previously noted, the apostolate originates primarily from baptism and confirmation. Alongside this right, there is also a duty to engage in the apostolate, ensuring that "the divine message of salvation is made known and accepted by all persons everywhere in the world." Rooted in the sacramental life of the Church, the apostolate reflects its missionary character, which compels it to evangelise. This missionary nature of the Church and the necessity of evangelisation were affirmed by both Vatican II and Pope Paul VI. See *AG*, no. 6 and *EN*, nos. 58–59.

[111] *CIC/83*, c. 776 states: "By virtue of his office, the parish priest is bound to ensure the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children. To this end, he is to avail himself of the help of clerics attached to the parish, as well as of members of institutes of consecrated life and of societies of apostolic life, being mindful of the character of each institute; and the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, especially catechists. All of these, unless they are lawfully impeded, are not to refuse to give their labours willingly. The parish priest is also to promote and to foster the role of parents in the family catechesis mentioned in can. 774, §2."

subordinated catechists entirely to clerical authority, this canon acknowledges their essential role, reflecting Vatican II's co-responsibility model rather than mere subordination.[112] Canon 780[113] underscores the need for proper catechist formation, requiring local ordinaries to ensure that catechists receive appropriate theological instruction, pedagogical training, and ongoing formation to carry out their role effectively.[114] Canon 785 situates catechists explicitly within missionary work, describing them as lay faithful who, properly formed and exemplary in Christian life, assist in preaching, liturgical organisation, and charitable works under a missionary's direction. Their training should ideally take place in designated schools or, if unavailable, under missionary supervision. This canon provides a functional definition of a catechist in missionary contexts by addressing the who, what, where, why, and how of their role.[115] Aligning with *Ad gentes* and *Evangelii nuntiandi*, this canon affirms that catechists are not merely auxiliary to ordained ministers but integral to the Church's evangelisation efforts.

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[112] In the 1917 Code, the Latin phrase guiding the pastor was *si necesse sit*, meaning "if necessary," which assumes the pastor's own sufficiency in catechesis. However, c. 776 highlights the pastor's responsibility to involve others in the catechetical life of the parish. This duty is closely linked to c. 225, which recognises the rights of the Christian faithful and their role in the apostolates of the Church, including catechesis. The shift in language within c. 776 reflects the intention of the Code Commission to realise the ecclesial vision set forth by Vatican II. See in *Communicationes*, 29 (1997) 99–100.

[113] *CIC/83*, c. 780 states: "Local Ordinaries are to ensure that catechists are duly trained to carry out their office properly, namely, that continuing formation is available to them, that they have an appropriate knowledge of the teaching of the Church, and that they learn both the theory and the practice of the principles of pedagogy."

[114] One of the *fontes* that is the source but also the tone of this canon comes from a letter of Pope Pius XII to Samuel Cardinal Stritch. During that time, Cardinal Stritch was the head of the National Catechetical Congress in the United States of America. In this letter, Pope Pius XII clarifies the role and importance of catechists and the ministerial need to care for them; a task entrusted to a bishop. See PIUS XII, Letter, 14 September 1951, in *AAS*, 43 (1951), 778–779.

[115] *CIC/83*, c. 785, §1 states: "Catechists are to be given a role in missionary work. These are lay members of Christ's faithful who have received proper formation and are outstanding in their living of the Christian life. Under the direction of missionaries, they are to present the Gospel teaching and engage in liturgical worship and in works of charity." §2 "Catechists are to receive their formation in schools founded for this purpose. If there are no such schools, they are to be formed under the direction of the missionaries."

Canon 861, located in Book IV on the Sanctifying Function of the Church, extends the role of catechists beyond teaching by recognising their ability to administer baptism under specific conditions.[116] In the 1917 Code, the ordinary minister of baptism was simply a *sacerdos* (a priest or bishop)[117] while the extraordinary minister was a deacon. Anyone could administer non-solemn baptism;[118] however, "if there [was] a priest present, he [was] preferred to a deacon, a deacon to a subdeacon, a cleric to layman, and a man to a woman."[119] This hierarchy reflects earlier canonical priorities but was revised in light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 68, acknowledging catechists as extraordinary ministers of baptism when no ordained minister is available.[120] However, the canon also allows "some other person" who is "deputed to this office by the local ordinary" to baptise in the same circumstances, meaning that the ministry is not exclusively for catechists.[121] Additionally, in keeping with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 68, the ritual book now provides the *Rite of Baptism for Children Administered by a Catechist When No Priest or Deacon Is Available*, an abbreviated rite for baptism by an extraordinary minister when ordained ministers are absent or impeded.[122]

The inclusion of catechists in the 1983 Code marks a significant departure from the 1917 Code, which did not explicitly recognise them despite their long-standing

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[116] *CIC/83*, c. 861, §1 states: "The ordinary minister of baptism is a Bishop, a priest or a deacon, without prejudice to the provision of can. 530, n. 1." §2 "If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or some other person deputed to this office by the local Ordinary, may lawfully confer baptism; indeed, in a case of necessity, any person who has the requisite intention may do so. Pastors of souls, especially parish priests, are to be diligent in ensuring that Christ's faithful are taught the correct way to baptise."

[117] See *CIC/17*, c. 738, §1.

[118] See *CIC/17*, c. 742, §1; SC, no. 68.

[119] *CIC/17*, c. 742, §2.

[120] See K.T. HART, "The Minister of Baptism," in *CLSA Comm2*, 1050.

[121] Ibid.

[122] See "Rite of Baptism by a Lay Minister When No Priest or Deacon Is Available," in CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Order of Baptism for Children, English Translation Approved for Use in the Dioceses of Canada*, Ottawa, CCCB Publications, 2020.

presence, particularly in mission territories. The 1983 Code integrates conciliar teachings, affirming the baptismal foundation of their role, their shared responsibility with clergy in catechesis, and their indispensable contribution to missionary activity. These developments paved the way for Pope Francis' later reforms in *Antiquum ministerium*, further solidifying the role of catechists in the life of the Church.

3.4.5 – Post-1983 Documents

The post-1983 documents, including *Catechesi tradendae*, *Christifideles laici*, and *Redemptoris missio* and others, provide the foundation for subsequent ecclesial guidelines, shaping the understanding and role of lay catechists in the contemporary Church.

3.4.5.1 – *Catechesi tradendae*

Promulgated on 16 October 1979, during the early years of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, *Catechesi tradendae* significantly influenced the catechetical *fontes* of the 1983 Code. It responds to the Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 1977) and bridges prior discussions on lay catechists.[123] Paragraph 66 specifically addresses lay catechists within Section IX, "The Task Concerns Us All." Here, Pope John Paul II expresses gratitude for their contributions and distinguishes between catechists in parishes and mission territories. He uses *catecheseos institutores* to describe parish catechists but reserves *catechistarum* for those in mission lands.[124] This differentiation raises questions about whether it marks a step back from Vatican II's direction. While appearing restrictive, later documents from Pope John Paul II

[123] Paragraph 13 of *CT* highlights that among the many ministries and services through which the Church carries out her mission of evangelisation, the ministry of catechesis holds a central and essential role, vital for the growth of Faith. Paragraph 15 further emphasises the importance of prioritising catechesis in the Church, not merely as a directive from the Pope but as a fundamental necessity for the Church's life and vitality. Rooted in Christocentric foundations (pars. 1–2), catechesis strengthens the faith and aligns with the Church's missionary nature, a theme later echoed by Pope Francis.

[124] See *CT*, no. 66.

suggest a shift from this initial terminology. In the first part of paragraph 66, *catecheseos institutores* refers to lay instructors involved in generational catechesis, with no explicit reference to parishes in the Latin text. However, in mission territories, the Pope explicitly calls catechists *catechistarum*, distinguishing them as educators for newly evangelised communities.[125] The defining factor here appears to be historical continuity, with catechists in established regions inheriting a tradition, whereas those in mission territories engage in foundational evangelisation. This perspective aligns with c. 785, which highlights the need for catechists in missionary contexts.

3.4.5.2 – *Christifideles Laici*

Paragraphs 2 and 34 of *Christifideles laici* are particularly relevant to this study. Paragraph 2 affirms Vatican II's call for lay participation in the Church's ministry, explicitly recognising their role in catechesis.[126] Paragraph 34 highlights the urgency of re-evangelisation due to declining Faith transmission in traditionally Christian countries. Laypeople, integral to this process, are identified as *catechistae*, a term applied both to formal catechists and to parents.[127] This broader application marks a departure from *Catechesi tradendae*, suggesting a more inclusive understanding of catechists.

3.4.5.3 – *Redemptoris Missio*

Issued on 7 December 1990, to mark the 25th anniversary of *Ad gentes*, *Redemptoris missio* further develops the understanding of catechists, particularly in missionary settings.[128] Paragraph 73 acknowledges lay catechists' diverse ministries,

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[125] See *CT*, no. 66.

[126] See ibid., no. 2.

[127] See ibid., no. 34.

[128] See JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris missio*, 7 December 1990 (=*RM*), in *AAS*, 83 (1991), 320–332, English translation in *Origins*, 34 (1991), 542–566. *Redemptoris Missio* describes catechists as "specialised workers, direct witnesses, indispensable evangelisers, who represent the basic strength of Christian communities,

reaffirming their critical role in areas where the Church is still being planted (*plantatio ecclesiae*). While Pope John Paul II reiterates the primacy of catechists in missionary territories, he does not exclude their presence elsewhere.[129] The encyclical maintains the distinction introduced in *Catechesi tradendae* (*CT*, 66), but suggests a more flexible application of the term. The guides and directories issued by the Roman Curia in the following decades, as discussed in the next paragraphs, will be shaped by the influence of *Catechesi tradendae*, *Christifideles laici*, and *Redemptoris missio*.

3.4.5.4 – 1993 Guide from the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples

The *Guide for Catechists*, released in December 1993, builds upon these prior teachings. Part I, Section 1, paragraph 4, classifies catechists into two types, full-time and part-time, based on their modes of service rather than their intrinsic identity.[130] The 1992 plenary meeting of the Congregation reaffirmed that catechists in missions and established Churches have distinct roles but share a common vocation. Pope John Paul II, addressing the Congregation, stressed that any differentiation arises from functional needs rather than doctrinal distinctions.[131] This perspective ensures continuity in recognising the essential mission of catechists, regardless of location.

3.4.5.5 – 1997 General Directory of Catechesis

In 1997, the Congregation for the Clergy released a *General Directory* addressing the topic of catechesis. This is a curial document published with the permission of John Paul II. It is a guide to aid priests in the area of catechesis in their

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especially in the young Churches." See *RM*, no. 73. The 1983 Code acknowledges the tasks, qualities and qualifications of catechists. See c. 785, §1.

[129] See *RM*, no. 73.

[130] See CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists: Document of Vocational, Formative, and Promotional Orientation of Catechists in the Territories Dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples*, Washington, DC, USCCB Publishing, 1993, 11.

[131] See JOHN PAUL II, Allocution, *Ad eos qui plenario coetui Congregationes pro Gentium evangelizatione interfuerunt coram admissos*, 30 April 1992, in *AAS*, 85 (1993), 487.

ministries. This *General Directory* has no large deviations or innovations from the previous texts mentioned above (*Christifideles laici*, *Catechesi tradendae*, and *Redemptoris missio*). However, in no. 156, the role of a catechist is discussed.[132] The Congregation addresses "what a catechist is" without mentioning the mission lands. The reality of a catechist (per a vocational call of the Spirit) is something universal in this paragraph. Paragraph no. 232 lists the different types of catechists the Church needs for her current apostolate per a functionalistic mindset.[133] It is here that catechists, in the missions, are addressed and given primacy.[134] The *General Directory* notes that the title catechist is especially applied to missionaries.[135] It repeats what had been discussed in *Catechesi tradendae* no. 66. The document goes on to address catechists' responsibilities and functions to specific groups of people outside of the missions. The fundamental hardline distinction on the title of "catechist" between domestic and missionary is deeply softened in this document, while still respecting the special need for and importance of catechists in the missions.

3.4.5.6 – 2020 Directory for Catechesis

The final document addressed in this section is the *Directory for Catechesis*, published by Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation.[136] It was approved in March 2020 by Pope Francis. Many topics regarding catechesis are covered in this document, including catechists, but now they are seen through the lens of the new evangelisation. The *Directory for Catechesis* gives priority to the vocation and

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[132] See CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Washington, DC, United States Catholic Conference, 1998, no. 156, 217.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] See PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELISATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, 25 June 2020, London, The Catholic Truth Society, 2020.

formation of catechists in its third and fourth chapters.[137] The specific vocation of the catechist is grounded in the common vocation of all the faithful, that is, the entire community of the people of God. The whole Christian community bears responsibility for the ministry of catechesis. The catechist belongs to the Christian community and his or her service is lived within the community of Faith that offers accompaniment in the Faith to all.[138] "The catechist is a Christian who receives a particular calling from God that, when accepted in faith, empowers him for the service of the transmission of Faith and for the task of initiating others into the Christian life."[139] By virtue of baptism every catechist is a witness of Faith[140] and keeper of the memory of God;[141] a teacher[142] and a mystagogue;[143] an accompanier[144] and an educator[145] (:

> A witness of Faith and keeper of the memory of God; in experiencing the goodness and truth of the Gospel in his encounter with the person of Jesus, the catechist keeps, nourishes, and bears witness to the new life that stems from this, and becomes a sign for others. […] A teacher and a mystagogue who introduces others to the mystery of God, revealed in the paschal mystery of Christ; as an icon of Jesus the teacher, the catechist has the twofold task of transmitting the content of the Faith and leading others into the mystery of the Faith itself. […] An accompanier and educator of those who

[137] See *Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 112–113.

[138] See ibid., no. 111.

[139] See ibid., no. 112.

[140] See ibid., nos. 4, 34.

[141] See ibid., no. 79.

[142] See ibid., no. 164.

[143] The term 'mystagogue' originates in writings of the early Fathers of the Church, who offered ongoing formation after Christian Initiation. This is the dynamic of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults where, after an adult has celebrated the sacraments of initiation at Easter, they enter into a period of deepening their understanding of Jesus in His Church and the challenge of the Christian way of life. For all who call themselves Christian this is essentially a life-long ever-deepening journey. Often in catechesis this element is lost. Putting on the mind of Christ is a life long journey, implying a deepening of relationship. This journey of faith means that with the help of catechesis we can choose the Jesus way of living so that we begin to feel, think and act like Jesus. Catechists enable a dynamic journey that lasts a whole lifetime. See *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 18.

[144] In *Evangelli gaudium*, Pope Francis has called accompaniment both a style and an art. See *EG*, nos. 169–175. "In embracing this style, the catechist learns to adapt to each person and be flexible in approach. Practising the art of accompaniment implies growing in the ability to listen well, practising patience with the gradual growth of others, openness to the action of the Holy Spirit and commitment to the journey." (P. CARROLL, "Developing the Instituted Ministry of Catechist: Exploring Six Organising Principles," in *The Furrow*, 74 [2023], 239).

[145] See *Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 160–161.

> are entrusted to him by the Church; the catechist is an expert in the art of accompaniment (*EG*, 169-173), has educational expertise, is able to listen and enter into the dynamics of human growth, becomes a travelling companion […].[146]

In Chapter III, paragraphs 121-123 address lay catechists. Lay catechists serve the Word of God primarily through the witness of their lives.[147] The vocation to the ministry of catechesis flows from baptism and confirmation through which the lay person participates in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ.[148] The Church encourages and confers the mission of catechesis in those who respond to God's call to serve the community.[149] The vocation to be a catechist and the commission received from the Church can take different forms of commitment depending on individual circumstances. Some catechists may serve for a short time or only occasionally, yet their contribution remains valuable and "worthy collaboration." However, given the significance of the catechetical ministry, it is desirable that each diocese have a group of religious and laypeople who are officially recognised and dedicated to this mission on a permanent basis. In collaboration with priests and the bishop, they help shape catechesis in the diocese in a manner that reflects its ecclesial nature (*GDC*, 231).[150] The concept of mission lands is absent here, with emphasis instead on the catechist's vocation rooted in baptism and strengthened by confirmation. Rather than mission territories, the focus is on varying levels of participation based on the Church's local needs. Chapter IV nos. 130-156 emphasises on the formation of catechists is a process

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[146] See *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 113.

[147] See ibid., no. 121.

[148] See ibid.

[149] See ibid., no. 122.

[150] See ibid., no. 123.

that serves the transformation of a Christian who internalises the message of the Gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the community of the Church.[151]

3.5 – The Motu proprio *Antiquum Ministerium*

The apostolic letter *Antiquum ministerium* (=*AM*), issued motu proprio by Pope Francis on 10 May 2021, establishes the ministry of catechist as an instituted lay ministry in the Church. As a motu proprio, a document issued on the Pope's own initiative in light of the importance and urgency of the subject, it is brief and concise, yet its significance is manifold.[152]

Upon reading this apostolic letter, several questions naturally arise. Why was it necessary to formally institute the ministry of catechist now? After all, countless men and women already serve faithfully as catechists in parishes and educational institutions, passing on the Faith with dedication. At first glance, one might wonder what has truly changed. Has the role of the catechist not always been considered a ministry in the Church?

AM represents a significant development in the Church's understanding and recognition of lay ministry. By instituting the ministry of catechist in a formal and stable way, the Pope acknowledges not only its historical roots but also the contemporary pastoral need for such a role. This document affirms the essential role of catechists in evangelisation and faith formation and gives this service a clear ecclesial character with its own identity and mission. This official recognition marks a shift: from viewing catechists as informal collaborators or volunteers to recognising them as instituted lay ministers with a specific vocation, formation, and mandate from the Church. In doing

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[151] See *Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 131–156.

[152] See F.G. MORRISEY, "Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *The Jurist*, 50 (1990), 109; F.G. MORRISEY, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law*, Ottawa, Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, 2001, 17–18.

so, *AM* both honours the tradition and responds to the urgent demands of our time, where faith formation is increasingly vital.

3.5.1 – Presentation of the Document *Antiquum Ministerium*

AM focuses on the ministry of catechists, particularly highlighting the role of the laity in the Church's mission of evangelisation. Structurally, it can be divided into three parts. Paragraphs 1–4 provide a brief historical overview of the catechetical ministry, from the earliest days of the Church, as attested in the New Testament, to the present. Paragraphs 5–8 discuss the identity, nature, and characteristics of catechists, culminating its formal institution. Finally, paragraphs, 9–11 define the responsibilities and duties of episcopal conferences in implementing and contextualising this ministry within local Churches.

3.5.2 – The Importance of Catechists in Church History and the Understanding of the Catechetical Ministry

AM presents the ministry of catechists as both ancient and new.[153] It is ancient insofar as the history of the Church bears witness to a continual emergence of variety of ministries in response to pastoral needs.[154] It highlights the ancient roots of catechesis, grounded in the Gospel (cf. Lk 1:3–4) and in Pauline texts such as 1 Cor 12:28–31 and Gal 6:6. At the same time, it is new in light of contemporary challenges, prompting the Church to strengthen and formally institute this role.[155] The ministry of catechists is situated within the teaching office of the Church and is linked to the "teachers" mentioned among the diverse ministries and charisms within the body of Christ as listed by St. Paul: "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second

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[153] See *AM*, no. 1.

[154] Ibid.

[155] See *Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 1–5.

prophets, third teachers" (1 Cor 12:28a).[156] A similar statement is found in the Letter to the Ephesians where teachers are included among those "given" for the purpose of equipping the faithful and building up the body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:11–12). In these early communities, apostles, prophets, and teachers played vital roles. While a precise distinction between prophets and teachers is not always evident in the New Testament, scholars generally suggest that teachers were primarily concerned with doctrinal instruction, whereas prophets exercised charisms of exhortation, encouragement, and strengthening the brethren in Faith.[157] Drawing on the beginning of Luke's Gospel, where the evangelist writes to "the most excellent Theophilus" so that [he] may "realise the certainty of the teachings [he has] received" (Lk 1:3–4), *AM* underscores the catechetical ministry as "a particular form of teaching that strengthens and confirms those who are already baptised."[158] It also acknowledges the essential role of pre-baptismal catechesis in nurturing the Faith of catechumens who are preparing for full incorporation into the Church.[159]

The preamble of *AM* introduces key concepts such as *Chiesa* (Church),[160] *comunità* (community),[161] and *catechesi* (catechesis),[162] highlighting the relationship between the Church, the community, and catechesis as fundamental to the document's message. Catechists are presented as emerging from the Christian community,

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[156] A similar statement is found in the Letter to the Ephesians: "And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Eph 4:11–12).

[157] See A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, "Katehetsko-Pastoralne i Ekleziološke Perspektive Motu proprija *Antiquum ministerium* Pape Franje," in *Bogoslovska smotra*, 93 (2023), 19.

[158] *AM*, no. 1.

[159] See A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, "Katehetsko-Pastoralne i Ekleziološke Perspektive," 19.

[160] The term "the Church" is used 18 times in the document.

[161] The term "Community" is used 13 times in the document.

[162] The term "Catechesis" is used 12 times in the document.

exercising a vocation rooted in baptism and sustained by a personal charism under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[163] *AM* frames catechesis not simply as a pastoral function but as a Spirit-entrusted mission for the edification of the Church. It further affirms that this ministry is "a concrete expression of a personal charism that has greatly contributed to the fulfilment of its evangelising mission."[164] The ministry of catechists is integral to the Church's evangelising mission, in line with Vatican II's emphasis on lay participation.[165] Quoting *Dei Verbum*, the document affirms the catechist's role in preserving the Church's charismatic tradition by transmitting the Faith through culturally and pastorally adapted means.[166] The dual understanding of catechesis from the 2020 *Directory for Catechesis* is reflected: on one hand, catechesis is doctrinal teaching (cf. *AM*, 2, 4, 6); on the other, it is a dynamic, relational process of faith development (cf. *AM*, 1, 5). *AM* honours the historical role of clergy and consecrated persons in catechesis while also highlighting the indispensable contribution of lay catechists, many of whom have served heroically, some even founding ecclesial communities dedicated to catechesis or suffering martyrdom for their witness. Their witness continues to inspire catechetical work and Christian life today.[167]

Quoting *Ad gentes* (*AG*, 17), *AM* recalls the Church's renewed awareness of the participation of the lay faithful in the work of evangelisation. It affirms that this lay involvement is essential not only for evangelising efforts but also for *plantatio Ecclesiae*, the planting and development of Christian communities.[168] It further states

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[163] See *AM*, no. 2.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] See *AM*, no. 2.

[167] See ibid., no. 3.

[168] See ibid., no. 4.

that, over the past decades, the Popes, the Synod of Bishops, Episcopal Conferences, and individual bishops have made significant contributions to this renewal.[169] Documents such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, the *General Catechetical Directory*, the *General Directory for Catechesis*, including the recent *Directory for Catechesis*, together with numerous national and diocesan catechisms, testify to the Church's firm conviction regarding the central role of catechesis.[170] These resources affirm that the formation and ongoing education of the faithful must remain a pastoral priority.[171]

AM maintains that while bishops remain the primary catechists in their dioceses (cf. *CIC* c. 774 §2; *CCEO* c. 618),[172] lay catechists are integral collaborators. Their mission is rooted in baptism (cf. *CIC* c. 225; *CCEO* cc. 401, 406) and entails active service to the Church's mission.[173] It states:

> Without prejudice to the bishop's mission as the primary catechist in his diocese, one which he shares with his presbyterate, or to the particular responsibility of parents for the Christian formation of their children (cf. CIC can. 774, §2; CCEO can. 618), recognition should be given to those lay men and women who feel called by virtue of their baptism to cooperate in the work of catechesis (cf. CIC can. 225; CCEO cans. 401 and 406).[174]

The ministry requires vocational discernment and formal institution by the bishop, who determines its exercise in response to local pastoral needs (cf. *AM*, 7–8). Through the institution of the lay ministry of catechist, *AM* seeks to offer formal recognition to this vocation[175] and underline its ecclesial character and significance in the life of the Church. This is a pivotal paragraph. It implies a shift from functional

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[169] See *AM*, no. 4.

[170] Ibid.

[171] See ibid., no. 5.

[172] See *AM*, no. 5; cf. *CT*, no. 63; *CIC/83*, cc. 386, §1 and 775, §1.

[173] See *AM*, no. 5.

[174] Ibid.

[175] See ibid., nos. 3, 5, 9.

recognition to institutional ecclesial integration, giving catechists an identity within the Church's canonical and liturgical life. This corresponds with c. 230, §1, which permits lay men to be instituted as lectors and acolytes. Lay catechists are not substitutes for clergy, nor is their ministry contingent upon a shortage of ordained ministers. Rather, they represent a necessary and enduring aspect of the Church's life and mission.

AM also draws from *Lumen gentium* (*LG*, 31, 33), reaffirming the inherently secular character of the lay apostolate, which is lived out in daily life. Catechists operate in cooperation with the hierarchical apostolate, as was already evident in the early Church (cf. *LG*, 33).[176] In this light, catechesis is presented as a pastoral service aimed at transmitting the Faith throughout all stages of life, beginning with the proclamation of the kerygma, leading to catechesis for the sacraments of Christian initiation, and continuing through lifelong formation. Catechists are therefore called to be teachers, witnesses, mystagogues, companions, and pedagogues, servants of the Gospel who act in communion with the Church.[177]

AM draws a clear line of continuity with *Ministeria quaedam* of Paul VI, which reformed the minor orders and allowed episcopal conferences to promote other ministries, such as that of catechist. Pope Francis acknowledges this historical development and aligns his motu proprio with the broader ecclesial vision of Paul VI as seen in *Evangelii nuntiandi*.[178] The recognition of lay catechists is not to be seen as clericalisation, which *AM* explicitly warns against,[179] but rather as an affirmation of the lay faithful's full and active participation in the Church's evangelising mission.

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[176] See *AM*, no. 6.

[177] Ibid; cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELISATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 113

[178] *EN*, no. 73, acknowledges the enormous contribution of lay catechists, especially in mission territories. Pope Paul VI described catechists as "irreplaceable evangelisers."

[179] See *AM*, no. 7.

AM emphasises the personal qualities of lay catechists while underscoring the necessity of formation, referencing both *CIC* c. 231, §1 and *CCEO* c. 409 to show that this requirement is already established in both Eastern and Latin Codes. It highlights that catechists should be co-workers with priests and deacons, serving with apostolic zeal. Those called to this ministry should be people of deep faith, maturity, and active involvement in the Christian community. They must also receive proper biblical, theological, pastoral, and pedagogical training to effectively communicate the Faith effectively and have prior catechetical experience. Their role requires dedication and readiness to serve wherever needed.[180]

The preamble of *AM* concludes in paragraph 8, where Pope Francis reaffirms that the ministry of a lay catechist is a vocation rather than a universal calling. He also emphasises that this service is stable and necessitates proper formation. In canonical terms, "stable" is a technical term, particularly when referring to an office within the Church, as seen in cc. 145, 230, 368, and 564. However, *AM* does not clarify the precise meaning of "stable."

For instance, regarding c. 145 on canonical office, James Provost explained that stability can be understood in two ways: objectively, meaning the office itself remains in existence even when there is no officeholder, and subjectively, meaning the appointed individual holds the office for a significant period.[181] *AM* does not specify whether "stable" should be understood objectively or subjectively in the canonical sense outlined by Provost, leaving the precise juridical meaning of the term somewhat unclear.

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[180] See *AM*, no. 8.

[181] See J.H. PROVOST, "Ecclesiastical Offices," in *CLSA Comm2*, 197.

The canonical formulation of a "stable ministry of catechist" raises pertinent questions, particularly regarding the legal and theological understanding of "stability." In ecclesiastical usage, the term is frequently invoked but rarely defined with precision. Provost observed that "stability" is a concept that "lacks specific juridical content unless it is defined in context."[182] Without concrete criteria, such as duration of service, permanence of assignment, or juridical recognition within a diocesan structure, the notion of stability remains ambiguous and potentially inconsistent across episcopal conferences. This ambiguity may complicate the discernment of who may be instituted, under what conditions, and with what canonical effects.

Moreover, while *AM* rightly affirms the theological and missionary importance of catechists, it does not clarify whether this institution will entail juridical rights and obligations comparable to other instituted ministries. The document reaffirms the bishop's discretion in admitting candidates, yet leaves unresolved how this ministry will be integrated into the broader canonical framework, especially in relation to lay ecclesial ministries already active in many dioceses. There is also a need for clarity on how the formal institution of catechists will interact with existing lay apostolates, particularly to avoid the risk of clericalising lay functions or marginalising informal charisms that have long sustained catechetical work.

In this light, while the motu proprio marks a significant theological recognition of lay catechists and situates their role within the synodal vision of the Church, its implementation will require careful canonical discernment. The success of this initiative will depend not only on its theological grounding but also on the articulation of clear canonical norms that ensure both fidelity to tradition and pastoral effectiveness.

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[182] See J.H. PROVOST, "Ecclesiastical Offices," in *CLSA Comm2*, 197.

In its formal legal section, *AM* contains three paragraphs. *AM* calls upon episcopal conferences in the Latin Church to establish binding norms concerning formation, criteria for admission, and forms of service for catechists.[183] This formal legal section emphasises the need for effective implementation of the ministry of lay catechists and the creation of norms that align with the content of the document. Paragraph 10 addresses the Eastern Catholic Churches, respecting their particular law and autonomy in regulating this ministry.[184] Paragraph 11 concludes by exhorting bishops to embrace their responsibilities in forming and recognising catechists, in line with *LG* 30.[185]

3.5.3 – Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists

Following the promulgation of the motu proprio *Antiquum ministerium*, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued, on 3 December 2021, a complementary Letter addressed to the presidents of the episcopal conferences and the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches.[186] The Letter provides both interpretive guidance and practical directives for implementation within the local Churches, ensuring that the instituted ministry of catechist is well integrated into ecclesial life.

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[183] See *AM*, no. 9.

[184] See ibid., 10.

[185] See ibid., no. 11.

[186] See CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists, Prot. N. 627/21, 3 December 2021, (=Letter to the Presidents), no. 3, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20211203_lettera-rito-istituzione-catechisti_en.html (5 March 2025).

The Letter is structured in four parts: the introduction, the nature of the ministry (1–13), requirements (14–15), and the liturgical celebration (16–18). It articulates the ecclesiological vision underpinning the institution of catechists.

The introduction to the Letter situates the promulgation of the *editio typica* of the rite within the broader theological and canonical trajectory inaugurated by *Ministeria quaedam* (1972) and more recently advanced by the motu proprios *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, both issued in 2021. The Letter begins by explicitly referencing these two recent documents of Pope Francis, which mark a renewed effort to reassess the nature, scope, and institutional visibility of lay ecclesial ministries in the post–conciliar Church.[187] These developments are not merely juridical adjustments; rather, they are viewed by the Congregation as part of a theological evolution that both anticipates the future and recovers the ecclesial vision articulated by Pope Paul VI in *Ministeria quaedam*. *Ministeria quaedam* had already initiated a reform of the minor orders and the subdiaconate, replacing them with the lay ministries of lector and acolyte.[188] This Letter thus establishes a line of continuity, portraying Pope Francis's interventions as part of a broader and organic development of instituted lay ministries within a renewed ecclesiology that emphasises the baptismal dignity and co-responsibility of all the faithful. A notable point in the introduction is the call for "an organic vision of the distinct ministerial realities," which implies a shift from a fragmented and functional understanding of ministries to a more unified, sacramentally and ecclesiologically grounded framework.[189] The principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* is invoked to underline the reciprocal relationship between liturgical practice and

[187] See Letter to the Presidents, Introduction.

[188] See *MQ*.

[189] See Letter to the Presidents, Introduction.

doctrinal belief. This suggests that the liturgical institution of catechists is not merely symbolic, but expressive of deeper theological convictions about the Church's nature and mission.

The decision to release the initial *editio typica* without a *Praenotanda* is described as a pastoral necessity to respond quickly to the Church's need for the rite, while also anticipating a more complete edition, *editio typica altera*, which will include the rites of lector, acolyte, and catechist, on the fiftieth anniversary of *Ministeria quaedam* in 2022.[190] This pragmatic yet forward-looking measure reflects both urgency and continuity. Furthermore, the Letter highlights the role of episcopal conferences in the contextual adaptation of the rite. They are entrusted with clarifying the role of catechists, offering suitable formation, and ensuring the ecclesial community is properly catechised about the nature of this ministry.[191] This responsibility reflects the decentralised ecclesiological vision promoted by the motu proprio *Magnum principium*, which affirms the authority of local churches in liturgical and pastoral matters, albeit under the norms of *recognitio* and *confirmatio* by the Holy See.[192]

Thus, the introduction to the Letter underscores the *Rite of Institution of Catechists* as a significant step in the Church's ongoing reception of Vatican II's theology of ministry. It integrates recent magisterial documents into a coherent vision, reinforcing the institutional recognition of lay ecclesial roles, particularly that of the

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[190] See Letter to the Presidents, Introduction.

[191] Ibid., Introduction: "...Episcopal Conferences... have the responsibility of clarifying the description and the role of catechists, of offering them adequate formation programmes, and informing communities..."

[192] See FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter by which can. 838 of the Code of Canon Law is Modified *Magnum Principium*, 3 September 2017, in *AAS*, 109 (2017), 967–970, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20170903_magnum-principium.html (5 March 2025). This decree provides guidelines on obtaining *confirmatio* or *recognitio* from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, signifying that the work of any conference will undergo review.

catechist. It reflects a synodal, participatory ecclesiology in which the lay faithful are not only called but formally instituted to share in the Church's evangelising and catechetical mission.

The document begins by affirming the lay and stable nature of the catechist's ministry, highlighting that it is "a stable form of service rendered to the local Church... as demanded by the very nature of the ministry."[193] This represents a significant development from previous *ad hoc* pastoral roles to a formally instituted ministry. In doing so, the Letter reflects and expands upon *Ministeria quaedam* and *Spiritus Domini*, and while it canonically resonates with c. 230, §1, it moves beyond the scope of temporary authorisations under §2, envisioning a distinct and enduring ecclesial function.

It then grounds the catechist's role firmly in the sacrament of baptism, thus distinguishing it theologically and sacramentally from ordained ministry.[194] This foundational aspect draws from *LG* 10, reinforcing the doctrine of the common priesthood and countering any tendencies toward clericalisation. Baptism, therefore, is not just a prerequisite but the theological source of this ministry's identity.

The Letter proceeds to draw analogies between the ministry of catechist and the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte (cf. c. 230, §1), stressing its integration into the canonical framework of the Church.[195] The notion of "stability" as described in paragraph 3 means that, like those ministries, catechists are admitted through the rite of institution which is therefore not to be repeated, and their designation is not merely

[193] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 1.

[194] See ibid., no. 2. Cf. *Spiritus Domini*.

[195] See ibid., no. 3.

functional but ecclesially recognised.[196] However, the exercise of this ministry, including its duration, content, and practical modalities, is to be defined by each episcopal conference, taking into account local pastoral contexts.[197] Thus, while the ministry enjoys a universal character, its implementation remains flexible and subject to episcopal discernment.[198] The Letter states:

> The "stability" of the ministry of catechist is analogous to that of the other instituted ministries. This definition of stability, as well as expressing the fact that it is a "stable" ministry in the Church, also affirms that lay people who have the age and qualifications determined by decree of the Episcopal Conference, can be admitted in a stable manner (like Lectors and Acolytes, cf. c. 230, §1) into the ministry of catechist. This takes place through the rite of institution which is therefore not to be repeated. The exercise of the ministry, however, can and must be regulated by the individual Episcopal Conferences in terms of duration, content and modalities, in accordance with pastoral needs (cf. *AM*, 9).[199]

In a particularly striking passage, the Letter refers to the catechists as being "co-responsible" for the mission of the Church. It states: "Catechists, by virtue of their baptism, are called to be co-responsible in the local Church for the proclamation and transmission of the Faith, carrying out this role in collaboration with the ordained ministers and under their guidance."[200] This reflects the synodal vision of Pope Francis, where lay participation is not peripheral but constitutive of the Church's evangelising activity. The reference to *Catechesi tradendae* further elevates

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[196] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 3. The stability of the ministry, a key concept drawn from *Antiquum ministerium* (*AM*, no. 8), is presented not merely as practical continuity but as rooted in canonical tradition. Specifically, *AM* references c. 145, §1, which defines ecclesiastical office as a function established in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical disposition. While the ministry of catechist is not directly referred to as an office, the analogy with the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte under c. 230, §1 reinforces the notion of stability as juridically and pastorally significant

[197] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 3.

[198] In accordance with c. 455 and the principle of subsidiarity, episcopal conferences are entrusted with regulating the ministry contextually, ensuring fidelity to universal norms while adapting to local pastoral needs. See *CIC/83*, c. 455.

[199] Letter to the Presidents, no. 3.

[200] See ibid., no. 4.

catechesis from mere instruction to a mystagogical and ecclesial act, deepening the catechist's role as a minister of communion.[201]

Attention is also given to the contextual expression of the ministry, especially with regard to differing ecclesial realities, such as mission territories and more established Churches. This pastoral discernment, echoing *Evangelii gaudium*, calls for diverse applications while preserving the theological unity of the ministry. The document identifies two principal forms of catechists: those dedicated primarily to instruction, and those involved in wider apostolic functions.[202] This distinction mirrors the Church's understanding of the *munus docendi* and the lay apostolate, as articulated

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[201] See *CT*, no. 5.

[202] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 5. See also CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists*, no. 4 which states: "Catechists in mission territories are not only different from those in older Churches, but among themselves vary greatly in characteristics and modes of action from one young Church to another, so that it is difficult to give a single description that would apply to all.

There are two main types of catechists: full-time catechists, who devote their life completely to this service and are officially recognised as such; and part-time catechists, who offer a more limited, but still precious, collaboration. The proportion between the two categories varies from place to place, but in general there are far more part-time than full-time catechists.

Various tasks are entrusted to both types of catechist, and it is in these tasks that one can see the great diversity that exists between different areas. The following outline would seem to give a realistic summary of the main functions entrusted to catechists in Churches dependent on the CEP:

- Catechists with the specific task of catechising, which includes educating young people and adults in the Faith, preparing candidates and their families for the sacraments of Christian initiation, and helping with retreats and other meetings connected with catechesis. Catechists with these functions are more numerous in Churches that have stressed the development of lay services.

- Catechists who collaborate in different forms of apostolate with ordained ministers, whose direction they willingly accept. The tasks entrusted to them are multiple: preaching to non-Christians; catechising catechumens and those already baptised; leading community prayer, especially at the Sunday liturgy in the absence of a priest; helping the sick and presiding at funerals; training other catechists in special centres or guiding volunteer catechists in their work; taking charge of pastoral initiatives and organising parish functions; helping the poor and working for human development and justice. This type of catechist is more common in places where parishes cover a large area with scattered communities far from the centre, or where, because of a shortage of clergy, parish priests select lay leaders to help them," https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevang/documents/rc_con_cevang_doc_19971203_cath_en.html (6 March 2025). The Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples in its 1970 Plenary described the catechist as "a layperson specially appointed by the Church, in accordance with local needs, to make Christ known, loved and followed by those who do not yet know Him and by the faithful themselves."

in *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 6, and calls for careful discernment to maintain clarity between instituted and non-instituted functions.[203]

A key clarification made is that not all who engage in catechetical service need to be instituted.[204] This reaffirms that the instituted catechist must be discerned with care, avoiding honorary titles and ensuring a vocational dimension grounded in ecclesial necessity. This respects the bishop's governing authority (*potestas regiminis*)[205] and safeguards the ministry from becoming overly bureaucratised or diluted. Prudential guidelines are laid out in the Letter, notably discouraging the institution of seminarians and members of religious institutes, except in leadership roles (possibly c. 517, §2).[206] This maintains a healthy distinction between forms of consecration and lay ministry, in keeping with c. 266[207] and 207 §§1–2,[208] and affirms the specific identity of each ecclesial vocation. Teachers in Catholic schools are likewise excluded unless they undertake ecclesiastical tasks for a parish or diocese.[209] The interplay between ministries, especially that of lector and catechist, is another concern of the Letter. Those involved in the Christian initiation process must be

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[203] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 6.

[204] See ibid., no. 7.

[205] See ibid., no. 7. Cf. *AM*, no. 8.

[206] See ibid., no. 8.

[207] *CIC/83*, c. 266, §1 states: "By the reception of the diaconate a person becomes a cleric, and is incardinated in the particular Church or personal Prelature for whose service he is ordained. §2 A member who is perpetually professed in a religious institute, or who is definitively incorporated into a clerical society of apostolic life, is by the reception of the diaconate incardinated as a cleric in that institute or society unless, in the case of a society, the constitutions determine otherwise. §3 A member of a secular institute is by the reception of the diaconate incardinated into the particular Church for whose service he was ordained, unless by virtue of a concession of the Apostolic See he is incardinated into the institute itself."

[208] *CIC/83*, c. 207, §1 states: "By divine institution, among Christ's faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics- the others are called lay people. §2 Drawn from both groups are those of Christ's faithful who, professing the evangelical counsels through vows or other sacred bonds recognised and approved by the Church, are consecrated to God in their own special way and promote the salvific mission of the Church. Their state, although it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, does pertain to its life and holiness."

[209] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 8.

appropriately aligned with the functions they perform.[210] Not everyone engaged in these programs should be instituted as a catechist. It is important to assess whether the ministry of lector or catechist best suits each individual, depending on their responsibilities and the pastoral needs of the community.[211] The ministry of lector involves educating children and adults in the Faith and preparing them for the sacraments. Since ministries are traditionally linked to specific liturgical functions, the lector's role in proclaiming the Word reflects their guidance to those in the process of initiation.[212] However, the Letter states that if individuals are entrusted with broader responsibilities, such as coordinating catechetical activities or formation under the oversight of ordained ministers, the ministry of catechist may be more appropriate. The principle that ecclesial function should correspond to ministry, *lex orandi, lex credenda*, underscores this integration. The bishop, through discernment, may call some to the ministry of lector or catechist based on their abilities and pastoral needs.[213] Further significance is given to the catechist's role in the stages of Christian initiation, including the pre-catechumenate and the facilitation of minor exorcisms.[214] Though delegation for such functions aligns with c. 1172, their mention in the Letter reveals the

[210] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 9.

[211] Ibid.

[212] The Rite of Institution of Lectors states that it is their task to educate children and adults in the Faith and to guide them to receive the sacraments in a worthy manner. It states: "Lectores seu verbi Dei relatores effecti, adiutorium huic muneri praestabitis, et proinde peculiare officium in populo Dei suscipietis, et servitio fidei, quae in verbo Dei radicatur, deputabimini. Verbum enim Dei in coetu liturgico proferetis, pueros et adultos in fide et ad Sacramenta digne recipienda instituetis, nuntiumque salutis hominibus, qui adhuc illud ignorant, annuntiabitis. Hac via et vestro auxilio, homines ad cognitionem Dei Patris Filiique eius, Iesu Christi, quem ipse misit, pervenire poterunt et vitam assequi aeternam." (PONTIFICALE ROMANUM, *De institutione Lectorum et Acholytorum*, no. 4).

[213] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 9.

[214] See ibid., no. 10. Cf. RITUALE ROMANUM, *Ordo initiationis christianæ adultorum*, Prænotanda, editio typica, 1972, no. 48.

increasingly juridical visibility and spiritual weight attributed to lay ministry.[215] Beyond instruction, catechists may also lead certain liturgical celebrations in the absence of a priest (cf. c. 517, §2), minister to the sick, and coordinate lay involvement.[216] These expanded functions place the catechist at the crossroads of evangelisation and human promotion, resonating with the Church's social mission as expressed in *Gaudium et spes* and *Evangelii nuntiandi*.

The document emphatically reiterates that the catechist is not to be seen as a substitute cleric. This reinforces the concern already expressed in *Spiritus Domini* about safeguarding the identity of lay ministries.[217] Rather than replacing the ordained, catechists collaborate in the *cura pastoralis*, deepening the pastoral presence of the Church, especially where priests are few.[218] It states:

> This breadth and variety of functions should not come as a surprise: the exercise of this lay ministry fully expresses the consequences of being baptised and, in the particular situation of the lack of a stable presence of ordained ministers, it is a participation in their pastoral action. This is what the Code of Canon Law [cf. c. 517, §2] affirms when it provides for the possibility of entrusting to a non-ordained person a share in the exercise of pastoral care in a parish, always under the moderation of a priest. It is necessary, therefore, to form the community so that it does not see the catechist as a substitute for the priest or deacon, but as a member of the lay faithful who lives their baptism in fruitful collaboration and shared responsibility with the ordained ministers, so that their pastoral care may reach everyone.[219]

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[215] *CIC/83*, c. 1172, §1 states: "No one may lawfully exorcise the possessed without the special and express permission of the local Ordinary. §2 This permission is to be granted by the local Ordinary only to a priest who is endowed with piety, knowledge, prudence and integrity of life."

[216] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 10.

[217] Ibid., no. 12. Cf. *CL*, no. 15; BENEDICT XVI, Address Opening the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese Rome on the Theme: "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility," 26 May 2009, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html (7 April 2025); FRANCIS, Address to the Italian Catholic Action, 3 May 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140503_azione-cattolica-italiana.html (7 April 2025).

[218] *CIC/83*, c. 517, §2 states, "If, because of a shortage of priests, the diocesan Bishop has judged that a deacon, or some other person who is not a priest, or a community of persons, should be entrusted with a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, he is to appoint some priest who, with the powers and faculties of a parish priest, will direct the pastoral care."

[219] Letter to the Presidents, no. 12.

The Letter highlights the essential role of the episcopal conferences in drafting guidelines that include doctrinal, liturgical, pastoral, and spiritual formation.[220] It further outlines the requirements for the discernment, formation, and admission of candidates to the instituted ministry of catechist, underscoring the responsibility of the diocesan bishop as the principal moderator and judge of suitability. The bishop is tasked with discerning the needs of the ecclesial community and the personal qualifications of candidates, who must have received the sacraments of Christian initiation and submit a freely written and signed petition requesting admission to the ministry.[221]

The Letter further reaffirms and elaborates upon the dispositions articulated in *Antiquum ministerium*, stating: "It is fitting that those called to the instituted ministry of catechist be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion."[222] Beyond the spiritual and human maturity required, the document insists on a structured formation in biblical, theological, pastoral, and pedagogical disciplines, along with verified experience in catechetical activity.[223] This insistence reflects a holistic vision of ecclesial ministry, integrating competence with lived witness and apostolic zeal. The catechist, in this sense, is envisioned not as a mere transmitter of doctrine but as a "faithful co-worker with priests and deacons," whose ministry is characterised by both collaboration and evangelising fervour. In evaluating these provisions, one notes a strong continuity with the Church's long-standing emphasis on collaborative ecclesial identity. The description of the ideal catechist is not only comprehensive but also aspirational, inviting candidates to

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[220] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 13. Cf. *AM*, no. 9.

[221] See ibid., no. 14.

[222] See ibid., no. 15.

[223] Ibid.

conform their lives more deeply to the mission of the Church. At the same time, the emphasis on discernment and formation indicates a move away from informal and *ad hoc* catechetical roles towards a structured, ministerial identity rooted in ecclesial mission and communion.

As for the liturgical aspect, the conferral of the ministry is to be carried out by the diocesan bishop, or a priest delegated by him, through the approved rite, *De institutione catechistarum*, promulgated by the Apostolic See.[224] This rite may be celebrated either during Mass or during a liturgy of the Word, and its structure includes an exhortation (adaptable to local episcopal conference guidelines), an invitation to prayer, a blessing, and the handing over of a crucifix.[225] This gesture symbolically aligns the catechist's mission with the salvific work of Christ, while also affirming the ecclesial nature of the ministry received. The inclusion of this rite within the Church's liturgical framework signifies a significant canonical and theological recognition of the catechist's role as a stable, non-ordained ministry. It reflects the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which affirmed the diversity of ministries within the one mission of the Church and upheld the importance of lay involvement in the Church's sanctifying office (cf. *LG* 10, 33).

The Letter concludes with a citation from Saint Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, highlighting the ongoing prophetic character of lay involvement in evangelisation. The cited passage reaffirms that, "side by side with the ordained ministries… the Church recognises the place of non-ordained ministries which are able to offer a particular service to the Church."[226] This underscores not only the value but

[224] See Letter to the Presidents, nos. 16–18.

[225] See ibid., no. 18.

[226] *EN*, no. 73

the ecclesial necessity of lay ministries in the Church's evangelising mission. It reflects a mature reception of Vatican II's ecclesiology, wherein the roles of the baptised are ordered toward communion and mission, not hierarchical privilege.

The entrustment of this ministry to Mary, Mother of the Church, at the conclusion of the Letter is both theologically significant and pastorally evocative. It situates the ministry of catechists within the maternal solicitude and guidance of the Blessed Virgin, herself the model of both discipleship and proclamation.

3.5.4 – Ritual Text

The ritual for installing lay catechists, promulgated on 3 December 2021, and effective from 1 January 2022, consists of four parts.[227] This thesis will focus in brief on the decree's introduction and part 1, as they lay out the canonical foundation of the ritual. The introduction clarifies that the ritual was approved by Pope Francis and must be adapted and translated into the vernacular by each Conference of bishops.[228] Once approved by the conference, the translation is sent to the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for confirmation.[229]

Part 1 of the ritual outlines the necessary rubrics for the institution of a catechist, including key elements of the Mass.[230] Notably, the rubrics specify that the bishop must

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[227] The first is the decree's introduction, and then chapters 1–3 cover the institution of the lay catechist within the celebration of the Mass; the institution of catechists done during the liturgy of the word, and finally optional scriptural texts that could be used during the celebration. See CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM, *Pontificale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani ii Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli pp. vi Promulgatum Francisci pp. Cura Recognitum de Institutione Catechistarum, Editio Typica mmxxi*, *De Institutione Catechistarum*, Prot. N. 627/21, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 3 December 2021, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20211203_decreto-rito-istituzione-catechisti_la.html (7 March 2025).

[228] See *De Institutione Catechistarum*.

[229] Ibid.

[230] *CIC/83*, c. 2 states: "For the most part the Code does not determine the rites to be observed in the celebration of liturgical actions. Accordingly, liturgical laws which have been in effect hitherto retain their force, except those which may be contrary to the canons of the Code."

perform the ritual[231] and that the catechists to be instituted are to be seated in the sanctuary, where they are visible to the faithful.[232] This mandate, which shapes this liturgical act, manifests the reality of c. 204, §1, which states that those baptised share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ.[233] From this sharing, the baptised exercise the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church. Thus, the physical placement of the catechists in the ritual visually expresses the royal priesthood of the baptised as the foundation for the catechetical ministry of the candidates.

The rubric also emphasises that the bishop institutes the catechist within the parish,[234] a designation that aligns with the bishop's responsibility for providing pastoral care to each community. This section also highlights the collaborative nature of the ministry, stressing that lay catechists work in partnership with ordained ministers, teaching in the name of the Church.[235] This aligns with c. 785, which refers to catechists in mission territories, thereby broadening the understanding of missionary catechetical work within the Church.

Thus, while this ritual expands the ministry of lay catechists, it remains grounded in canonical tradition and emphasises the role of the bishop and the collaborative nature of the catechist's ministry.

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[231] "A seat for the bishop." (*De Institutione Catechistarum*, 1, d). As previously stated in the letter from the *CDWDS*, the bishop is to aid in the discernment process with people who feel called to be a lay catechist, hence, it is only fitting for the bishop to perform the ritual.

[232] "A seat for the catechists to be trained, arranged in a suitable place in the presbytery so that the liturgical action can be clearly seen by the faithful." (*De Institutione Catechistarum*, 1, e).

[233] See *CIC/83*, c. 204, §1.

[234] "At the appropriate time, the bishop will institute catechists in the very parish where they have worked persistently and are known by the faithful." (*De Institutione Catechistarum*, 2).

[235] See *De Institutione Catechistarum*, 2.

3.5.5 – Papal Message on the Fiftieth Anniversary *Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 2022

On 15 August 2022, Pope Francis addressed the universal Church to mark the 50th anniversary of *Ministeria quaedam*.[236] He emphasised that this document, written by Pope Paul VI, was a pivotal moment in the Church's reflection on and renewal of ministries. It led to significant developments and further evolution in the Church's understanding of ministries.[237] Pope Francis also referenced his two motu proprio, *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, clarifying that these do not replace *Ministeria quaedam* but rather represent a further development of it. He states:

> These two documents should not be seen as replacing the earlier teaching, but as further developing it based on the same principles—consistent with the reflection of the Second Vatican Council–that inspired *Ministeria quaedam*. The best way to celebrate this significant anniversary is precisely to continue pursuing the reflection on the ministries undertaken by Saint Paul VI.[238]

The message highlights two foundational principles: (1) every Christian community has ministries,[239] and (2) the origin of all ministries is God (cf. 1 Cor 12: 4–6), with their purpose being the common good (v. 7) and the building up of the community (cf. 1 Cor 14:12).[240] These principles are linked to the concept of *communio*, demonstrating that ministry is not for personal gain but for the collective benefit of the Church. Pope Francis underscores the importance of structure, not merely for administrative purposes but as an aid in discerning the ministries that the Spirit calls

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[236] See FRANCIS, Message to Bishops, Priest and Deacons, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Apostolic Letter Issued "Motu Proprio" *Ministeria Quaedam* of Saint Paul VI, 15 August 2022, (=FRANCIS, Message on the Fiftieth Anniversary), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2022/documents/20220815-messaggio-ministeria-quaedam.html (9 March 2025).

[237] See FRANCIS, Message on the Fiftieth Anniversary, no. 1.

[238] See ibid., no. 2.

[239] See ibid., no. 3.

[240] Ibid.

for in local communities. This discernment is vital for ensuring ministries remain dynamic and responsive to the needs of the faithful.[241]

The Pope also highlights the role of bishops in organising ministries, referencing the liturgical law of the Church, particularly the rite of episcopal ordination.[242] He points out that these reformed ministries are an expression of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which emphasises "communion, the sacramentality of the Church, the complementarity of the common and ministerial priesthood, and the liturgical visibility of each ministry."[243] Ministries, such as lay catechetical roles, manifest the baptismal priesthood (c. 204, §1) and reflect the ongoing life of the Church.[244]

Pope Francis calls for continued reflection on these points within the ongoing synodal journey,[245] urging conferences of bishops to engage with the topics discussed in *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*.[246] He concludes the message by invoking the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, as an icon of how the Church preserves and shares the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ through its diverse members.[247] This final invocation links the role of the lay catechist to the baptismal priesthood, underscoring the active participation of the laity in the Church's life and mission.

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[241] FRANCIS, Message on the Fiftieth Anniversary, nos. 4–5.

[242] "The prayer for the ordination of a bishop, in its intercessions, indicates among his principal duties that of organising ministries: "assigning offices according to your decree" (*Pontificale Romanum, De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum, Editio typical altera*, no. 47, 25: "ut distribuat munera secundum praeceptum tuum…")." (Ibid., no. 5).

[243] See ibid., no. 6.

[244] See ibid., no. 10.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Ibid.

[247] See ibid., no. 11.

3.5.6 – *Ius Vigens*

Since the promulgation of *Antiquum ministerium*, Pope Francis has twice officially installed catechists, on 23 January 2022 and 22 January 2023.[248] He chose to do so on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, which he designated as "Word of God Sunday."[249] This liturgical choice underscores the intrinsic connection between the ministry of catechists and the Word of God, which lies at the heart of the *plantatio Ecclesiae*. At the same time, it brings to light certain pastoral and theological challenges in distinguishing the role of catechists from that of lectors, since both ministries share a close relationship with the proclamation and transmission of the Word (*AM*, 5). The Pope's actions thus reaffirm that ministry is fundamentally oriented toward the Word of God, a point also reflected in the location of catechists within Book III of the 1983 Code, which addresses the "Teaching Office of the Church."[250]

The distinction between the two ministries becomes clearer when considering their respective modes of service. The lector's ministry is exercised principally within the liturgical assembly through the public proclamation of the Scriptures, apart from the Gospel, thereby serving the sacramental celebration and making the Word present within the act of worship (*GIRM*, 99). By contrast, the catechist's ministry extends beyond the liturgical context to encompass the systematic instruction and formation of the faithful in the Word of God. Catechists mediate the ongoing reception, interiorisation, and application of the Word within the life of the community, especially

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[248] See C. MARES, "Pope Francis Confers Lay Ministries upon 10 People in St. Peter's Basilica," 22 January 2023, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253425/Pope-francis-confers-lay-ministries-upon-ten-people-in-st-peter-s-basilica (10 March 2025).

[249] See FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter Instituting the Sunday of The Word of God *Aperuit illis*, 30 September 2019, in *AAS*, 111 (2019), 1495–1504, English translation in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2616 (2019), 6-8; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930_aperuit-illis.html (10 March 2025).

[250] See *CIC/83*, c. 759.

in its catechetical, pedagogical, and missionary dimensions. Thus, although both ministries are rooted in the same Word of God, they differ in scope, setting, and ecclesial function: the lector primarily serves the liturgical proclamation of the Word,[251] while the catechist is dedicated to its sustained transmission and doctrinal and spiritual formation.[252]

The installation ceremonies presided over by Pope Francis employed the officially promulgated rite. Catechists were called forward, blessed, and presented with a crucifix, a gesture long associated with the Church's missionary sending.[253] The accompanying prayer describes the crucifix as a "sign of faith,"[254] clarifying its role as a symbol of the evangelising mission entrusted to catechists.

Through these celebrations, Pope Francis has provided bishops worldwide with a model for implementing this new living law (*ius vigens*).[255] A precedent for this practice has already been seen in different parts of the world. The 1983 Code establishes that "the conference of bishops can establish a catechetical office whose primary function is to assist individual dioceses in catechetical matters,"[256] "a reality that has now been established almost everywhere."[257] The Italian Conference of bishops (CEI) has provided comprehensive guidelines for bishops to formally institute catechists

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[251] See *MQ*, no. 5.

[252] See *AM*, nos. 3–6.

[253] See CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Book of Blessings*, English translation prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1989, 161–169.

[254] "Receive this sign of our faith, chair of the truth and of the love of Christ, and proclaim it with your life, your conduct and with the word." ("Accipe hoc fidei nostrae signum, cáthedram veritátis Christi, eúmque vita, móribus et verbo annúntia." CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum*, 13 December 2021, no. 9).

[255] See P. CARROLL, "Developing the Instituted Ministry of Catechist: Exploring Six Organising Principles," in *The Furrow*, 74 (2023), 235–241.

[256] *CIC/83*, c. 775, §3.

[257] *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 412.

using the revised *Rite of Institution*. Several dioceses have incorporated structured formation programs that emphasise both pastoral skills and theological formation.[258] The Spanish conference of bishops has developed comprehensive formation programs to prepare candidates for the ministry of catechist, including spiritual, theological, and pastoral dimensions.[259] The national conference of bishops of Brazil (CNBB) has integrated *Antiquum ministerium* into their pastoral framework. They have encouraged dioceses to appoint catechists as key collaborators in evangelisation, especially in remote areas where priestly presence is limited.[260] The United States conference of Catholic bishops (USCCB) has initiated consultations and pilot programs to integrate lay ministers more formally into parish structures.[261] The Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) has actively promoted the understanding and development of lay ministries, particularly catechists, aligning with Pope Francis' emphasis on missionary discipleship.[262] The conference of Catholic bishops of India (CCBI) has published the

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[258] See ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, 5th Extraordinary General Assembly, Final Communiqué, Rome, 22–25 November 2021, "Other Items," Rome, Italian Bishops' Conference, 2021, https://www.chiesacattolica.it/documenti-segreteria/5th-extraordinary-general-assembly-of-the-italian-bishops-conference-rome-november-22-25-2021-final-communique/ (7 April 2025).

[259] See CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL ESPAÑOLA, "La Conferencia Episcopal presenta el Ritual de Institución de Catequistas." Conferencia Episcopal Española, 25 January 2022, https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.es/la-conferencia-episcopal-presenta-el-ritual-de-institucion-de-catequistas/ (12 March 2025). "This edition of the Ritual for the Institute of Catechists has been approved *ad experimentum* for the years 2024–2026 and contains translations into Spanish and the co-official languages of the State, namely Catalan, Galician, and Basque, awaiting a future definitive version." ("The Spanish Episcopal Conference publishes the 'Ritual for the Institute of Catechists,'" https://catequesisdegalicia.org/la-conferencia-episcopal-espanola-publica-el-ritual-para-instituir-catequistas/) (12 March 2025).

[260] See CONFERÊNCIA NACIONAL DOS BISPOS DO BRASIL (CNBB), "CNBB promove formação para catequistas instituídos no Brasil," *CNBB*, 29 March 2022, https://www.cnbb.org.br/cnbb-promove-formacao-para-catequistas-instituidos-no-brasil/ (12 March 2025).

[261] See "USCCB To Consider Catechist Ministry Plans," in *The Pillar*, 8 November 2023, https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/usccb-to-consider-catechist-ministry (12 March 2025); L. BROWN, "Bishops Hear Update on Plans to Implement Ministry of Lay Catechist set forth by Pope," in *Our Sunday Visitor (OSV) News*, 14 November 2024, https://catholicreview.org/bishops-hear-update-on-plans-to-implement-ministry-of-lay-catechist-set-forth-by-Pope/ (12 March 2025).

[262] See LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EPISCOPAL COUNCIL, "Document of Aparecida," May 2007. This document was the result of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean and includes strong references to the role of laypeople in the Church's mission, particularly in areas like catechesis and discipleship.

Directory for Lay Catechists.[263] The purpose of this directory is to provide directives for bishops, catechetical directors, and lay catechists to know and understand their identity and mission. It helps the parish priests in the proper selection of lay catechists, their adequate formation, and their specific roles in parishes. This directory gives a roadmap for the ministry of lay catechists in India.

3.6 – Instituted Ministries in the Context of the Synod on Synodality: A Theological and Canonical Reflection

The evolving understanding of instituted ministries has gained prominence in contemporary ecclesial discourse, particularly in the context of the Synod on Synodality. Various synodal documents, including the *Preparatory Document*, *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*, the *Instrumentum laboris*, the *Synthesis Report* (October 2023 Assembly), and the *Final Document* have addressed this theme with increasing depth and urgency. These reflections unfold against the broader horizon of a Church seeking to embrace synodality, co-responsibility, and active participation in its ministerial structures.

3.6.1 – The Preparatory Document

The *Preparatory Document* introduces several foundational questions concerning the promotion, exercise, and tasks of instituted ministries, as well as their relationship with ordained ministries. The document situates these reflections within the themes of authority, active participation,[264] and the protagonism of all believers,

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[263] See CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA, *Directory for Lay Catechists*, Bangalore, CCBI, 2023, https://ccbi.in/ccbi-publishes-a-directory-for-lay-catechists/ (12 March 2025).

[264] See SYNOD OF BISHOPS, For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission, *Preparatory Document*, *for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2021 (=*Preparatory Document*), "IV. Synodality in Action: Pathways for Consulting the People of God," no. 30; "VIII. Authority and Participation," https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/preparatory-document/pdf-21x21/en_prepa_book.pdf (18 March 2025).

particularly women[265] alongside the assumption of co-responsibility.[266] Central to this discussion is the recognition of baptism as the source and foundation for the variety of charisms and ministries within the Church.[267]

3.6.2 – Enlarge the Space of Your Tent

The Working Document for the Continental Stage *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent* presents ministries within the framework of communion, participation, and co-responsibility. It emphasises the mission of the Church as being fulfilled through the lives of all the baptised, highlighting their common dignity as the foundation for the renewal of ministries and ecclesial life.[268] The document stresses the need to affirm the value of all vocations in the Church, advocating for a model that moves away from a rigidly hierarchical, centralised power structure towards one rooted in love and service, "following the example of the Lord."[269] This shift calls for a synodal institutional model that fosters co-responsibility in mission.

In particular, the text underscores the importance of ministry as central to the Church's life. It proposes moving towards a vision of a Church that is "all ministerial," characterised by diverse yet complementary charisms and ministries. As the Italian report states:

> The experience made [...] has helped to rediscover the co-responsibility that comes from baptismal dignity and has let emerge the possibility of overcoming a vision of Church built around ordained ministry in order to move toward a Church that is 'all ministerial,' which is a communion of different charisms and ministries.[270]

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[265] See *Preparatory Document*, "V. Co-responsible in the Mission."

[266] Ibid.

[267] See ibid., no. 2.

[268] See GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, Working Document for the Continental Stage, "Enlarge the space of your tent (Is 54:2)," 27 October 2022, no. 57, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf (18 March 2025).

[269] See "Enlarge the space of your tent," no. 57.

[270] See ibid, no. 67.

The document acknowledges the practice of formally recognising and promoting ministries, particularly lay ministries.[271] Reports from various contexts highlight the election or appointment of lay people with suitable qualifications, ensuring that their roles are integrated structurally into community life. This principle is reflected in examples such as catechists in Mozambique or community leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who assume vital roles in places with limited priestly presence.[272] Finally, the document acknowledges ongoing questions regarding the precise scope of lay ministry, particularly the relationship between lay responsibilities and the parish priest's role. This reflects the broader call for clarity in defining the concrete tasks lay people can undertake in their co-responsibility for the Church's mission.[273]

3.6.3 – The *Instrumentum Laboris*

The *Instrumentum laboris* (*IL*) presents a vision of ministry that reflects the synodal call for a more inclusive, participatory, and co-responsible Church. It highlights the need to integrate ordained ministry within a broader framework of ecclesial ministeriality, rooted in the common dignity conferred by baptism. The document emphasises several key themes regarding ministries in a synodal Church.

The *IL* advocates for the Church to embrace an "all-ministerial" identity, where all the baptised actively participate in its mission. Rather than limiting ministries to ordained ministers alone, the document calls for a richer appreciation of the various ways in which laypeople exercise ministry within the Church. This vision underscores that instituted, extraordinary, and *de facto* ministries are vital in fulfilling the Church's

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[271] See "Enlarge the space of your tent," no. 68.

[272] Ibid.

[273] Ibid.

mission.[274] While acknowledging the unique role of ordained ministers, the *IL* urges a move away from a clericalist mindset that restricts active roles in the Church to bishops, priests, and deacons. Instead, it emphasises baptismal dignity as the foundational source of all ministry, fostering greater participation from the laity.[275] Drawing on *Lumen gentium* (*LG* 10), the *IL* affirms the distinct yet complementary relationship between the common priesthood of all believers and the ministerial priesthood. Both participate in the one priesthood of Christ, contributing to the Church's identity as a communion of charisms and ministries. It states:

> There is a clear call to overcome a vision that reserves any active function in the Church to ordained ministers alone (bishops, priests, deacons), reducing the participation of the baptised to a subordinated collaboration. Without diminishing appreciation for the sacrament of orders, ministries in a synodal horizon are understood from a ministerial conception of the entire Church. A serene reception of the Second Vatican Council emerges, with recognition of baptismal dignity as the foundation of everyone's participation in the life of the Church. Baptismal dignity is readily linked to a common priesthood as the root of the baptismal ministries, and the necessary relationship between common and ministerial priesthood is reaffirmed since they are 'interrelated' with each one 'in its own special way' being a 'participation in the one priesthood of Christ' (*LG* 10).[276]

The *IL* identifies the local Church as the most effective context for implementing this vision. Within local communities, the discernment of emerging charisms and ministries can be tailored to specific social, cultural, and ecclesial needs. This localised approach ensures that diverse ministries are developed to serve the common good while maintaining the unity of mission.[277] Laypeople are encouraged to assume leadership roles and participate actively in evangelisation, pastoral care, and Church governance. In response to emerging needs, the document calls for the creation

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[274] See GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission, Instrumentum laboris for the First Session, October 2023, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, Vatican City, 2023, (=*IL*), B 2.2, "What should be done so a synodal Church is also an 'all ministerial' missionary Church?" https://www.synod.va/en/synodal-process/the-universal-phase/documents.html (7 April 2025).

[275] See *IL*, B 2.2 a.

[276] See ibid., B 2.2 a.

[277] See ibid., B 2.2 b.

and promotion of new ministries, both spontaneous ministries arising from lived faith experiences and formally instituted ministries requiring specific formation, mission, and stability.[278] This flexible approach reflects the Church's openness to responding to the signs of the times.

The *IL* further emphasises the need for greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women. It highlights that all the baptised share equal dignity through their bond with Christ, which calls for relationships of mutual respect and co-operation in the Church's life.[279] It acknowledges women's significant role as evangelists, first teachers of Faith, and ministers in challenging contexts, especially in remote and marginalised areas.[280] It also acknowledges that certain structural and relational failures hinder women's full participation in the Church and calls for a process of ongoing conversion to foster improved collaboration between clergy, consecrated persons, and lay faithful.[281] It stresses the importance of integrating women into governance and decision-making roles. It encourages the Church to adopt concrete reforms that ensure women are actively involved in leadership, reflecting their baptismal dignity.[282]

Ultimately, the *IL* invites the Church to embrace practical reforms that cultivate a culture of co-responsibility. By fostering communion, mission, and shared responsibility, the Church can better reflect its identity as a fully ministerial and missionary community, rooted in the Gospel vision of equality and participation for all the baptised.

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[278] See *IL*, B 2.2 c.

[279] See ibid., B 2.3.

[280] See ibid., B 2.3 a.

[281] See ibid, B 2.3 b.

[282] See ibid., B 2.3 c.

3.6.4 – Continental Assemblies Reports

The continental assemblies expanded on the reflections initiated in the *Instrumentum laboris*, offering varied approaches to the question of ministries:

- **Europe and North America** adopt a comprehensive view of lay ministeriality, reflecting on the diversity of ministries within the Church.[283]
- **Africa and Asia** provide concise references, particularly regarding the role of catechists.[284]

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[283] The European Continental Assembly's final remarks emphasise the need for an all-ministerial Church (no. 92) rooted in the common baptismal dignity of all the faithful (no. 25). Baptism unites believers with Christ, calling each to holiness and shared responsibility in building the Church. Synodality requires recognising the diversity of charisms and ministries, ensuring the co-responsibility of all while upholding the authority of pastors and the *sensus fidei* of the faithful (nos. 72, 73, 77, 79). A key aspect is fostering lay ministries and collaboration between clergy and laity, moving beyond clericalism. See FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN EUROPE, 11 February 2023, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/final_document/en-newdoc/Europe-EN.pdf (21 March 2025).

The North American Continental Assembly emphasised the need for greater co-responsibility among the laity, clergy, and bishops, grounded in the equal dignity of baptism (nos. 13, 16). This shared mission calls for a dynamic Church, open to the Holy Spirit, where all can contribute their gifts. Delegates highlighted the essential role of women in the Church while acknowledging their marginalisation and calling for increased leadership opportunities and decision-making roles (nos. 18, 19). The Assembly also stressed the importance of empowering young people, recognising them as the present, not just the future, of the Church (no. 20). A renewed focus on baptismal co-responsibility requires clearer discernment of lay vocations, greater transparency in governance, and deeper formation for all, ensuring a more participatory and inclusive Church (no. 54. III). See NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENTAL STAGE, *Final Document of the Continental Stage in North America*, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/final_document/en-newdoc/North-America-EN.pdf (21 March 2025).

[284] The African Assembly stressed the importance of inculturated ministries, proposing roles such as catechists, family counsellors, and youth coordinators. The emphasis on lay formation and proper discernment processes was seen as crucial for strengthening these ministries, no. 2.9, See DOCUMENT OF THE AFRICAN SYNODAL CONTINENTAL ASSEMBLY ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 1–6 March 2023, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/final_document/AFRICA-EN.pdf (21 March 2025).

The Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality highlights ministry as a participatory and inclusive service rooted in baptism, yet acknowledges the challenges posed by leadership styles that hinder lay involvement. A key concern is the insufficient inclusion of women, particularly those in consecrated life, in governance and decision-making, despite their dedicated service in various ministries. The Assembly calls for an expansion of lay ministry, recognising diverse charisms such as catechesis, youth guidance, care for the sick, and education. It affirms the vital role of catechists as faith leaders and supports Pope Francis' call for episcopal conferences to strengthen the ministry of Catechist. To foster a synodal Church, the Assembly stresses the need for formation in synodal leadership, communal discernment, and decision-making among seminarians, clergy, and religious, ensuring that ministerial training is more life-ministry oriented. See FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, *Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality*, 16 March 2023, nos. 65, 87, 88, 167, https://bangkok.synod2023.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/ACAS-Final-Document-16-Mar-2023.pdf (17 March 2025).

- **Latin America** offers a detailed treatment of the theme under the heading "charisms and ministries," while Oceania similarly presents an extensive reflection.[285]

These regional differences reflect the diverse pastoral realities confronting local Churches, highlighting the need for contextual discernment in the development of new ministries.

3.6.5 – The *Synthesis Report*

The *Synthesis Report* of the October 2023 Assembly explores lay ministries within the broader context of a missionary Church (no. 8), alongside discussions on the ministerial roles of priests and deacons (no. 11) and bishops (no. 12).[286] A recurring theme of vocations, charisms, and ministries highlights the diverse identities of the

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[285] The Latin American Assembly understands ministry as a co-responsible and synodal service rooted in the baptismal vocation, rejecting clericalism and fostering active lay participation. It emphasises that ordained ministry, whether episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal, should be exercised as a generous service rather than a position of power. The Assembly calls for strengthening lay ministries, particularly that of catechists, and promoting grassroots formation for both clergy and laity to build a Church of shared responsibility. It advocates for concrete steps to create new ministries, ensuring greater inclusion of women and consecrated persons in decision-making. Ministry is seen through the lens of circularity, synodality, and the valuing of diverse charisms, affirming the dignity and equality of all the baptised while cultivating the joy of ordained service as a reflection of Christ, the Good Shepherd. See LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EPISCOPAL COUNCIL (CELAM), *Toward a Synodal Church Going Forth into the Periphery Reflections and Pastoral Proposals Drawn from the First Ecclesial Assembly for Latin America and the Caribbean*, October 2022, https://asambleaeclesial.lat/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ingles.pdf (21 March 2025).

The Final Document of the Oceania Continental Assembly understands ministry as a shared responsibility of all the baptised, rejecting clericalism and the misuse of power in favour of servant leadership. It calls for greater inclusion of all people in ministry, ensuring their active participation in the Church's life. Clericalism is seen not only among the ordained but also among laypeople who enable hierarchical dominance, which contradicts the servant leadership that people seek. The Assembly emphasises mission as a communal endeavour, not limited to clergy and religious, but a shared journey of accompanying others in their brokenness. A synodal Church requires cultural and structural changes in leadership, ensuring that decision-making does not simply shift clerical power to lay elites. True leadership in ministry must be rooted in listening, discernment, and service rather than authority, fostering openness, accountability, and mission-driven engagement within the Church. See FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF OCEANIA, *Oceania Discernment on the Working Document for the Continental Stage*, February 2023, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SXpg3hzM4ggeZVGDfcFN3Yi01tQ4BWR9/view (21 March 2025).

[286] See GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, 4–29 October 2023*, 28 October 2023 (=*Synthesis Report*), https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf (23 March 23, 2025).

faithful and their distinct contributions to ecclesial life.[287] The report also stresses co-responsibility, with the bishop identified as its primary advocate and guarantor.[288] It calls for a deeper examination of the scope, structure and implications of co-responsibility, along with further theological reflection on the relationship between the sacrament of holy orders and jurisdiction.[289] However, the document juxtaposes discussions on ordained and lay ministries without offering a unified and systematic treatment of ecclesial ministry.[290] One notable ambiguity is the phrase "all ministerial Church," found in the *Instrumentum laboris* and widely cited in the continental synthesis. This term is open to misinterpretation and requires further clarification.[291] While the report generally affirms baptism as the foundation of Christian identity for disciples in mission,[292] it provides limited theological reflection on the relationship between charisms and ministries.[293]

Instituted ministries are explicitly mentioned, particularly with regard to the lectorate.[294] Both the *Instrumentum laboris* and the *Synthesis Report* express openness to creating new ministries and expanding existing ones in order to better serve local communities.[295] One significant proposal is broadening the role of instituted lectors

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[287] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 260.

[288] The bishop's task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries sent forth by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. See *Synthesis Report*, no. 12 b.

[289] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 12 g.

[290] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 261.

[291] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 8 m.

[292] See ibid., no. 8 b.

[293] See ibid., no. 8 i.

[294] See ibid., no. 8 n.

[295] See *Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission*, 8 n. The *Instrumentum laboris*, reflecting requests found in reports of the Continental Assemblies, stated: "The experience of walking together in the local Church makes it possible to imagine new ministries at the service of a synodal Church. So often, referring to the text, vision and language of *LG* 1012, the continental Assemblies ask for greater recognition of baptismal ministries and that this be better expressed through enacting forms of subsidiarity between the different levels of the Church. In this vein, many of these questions on baptismal

beyond their strictly liturgical function toward a more comprehensive "ministry of the Word," which, in certain contexts, could include preaching. This proposal reflects the need for greater creativity in ministry development in response to contemporary pastoral needs. However, it also raises important questions regarding the proper delineation between the ministries of lector and catechist. While both ministries are rooted in the Word of God, the catechist's role is intrinsically linked to systematic instruction, evangelisation, and the formation of Christian life, whereas the lector's traditional focus is liturgical proclamation. Any expansion of the lector's scope would therefore need careful theological and canonical discernment to ensure that it complements rather than obscures the distinct identity and mission of the catechist.

The 1983 Code already allows lay people to preach outside the homily, whether or not they hold an instituted ministry (c. 766). However, the homily remains reserved for priests and deacons (c. 767, §1).[296] The *Synthesis Report* highlights the potential for lay preaching in non-liturgical settings, especially as part of an expanded ministry of the Word for instituted lectors. It encourages episcopal conferences to develop protocols to regulate lay preaching, following the broader vision presented in the report. This perspective challenges the restrictive interpretation found in *Ecclesiae de mysterio*

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ministries could be answered through more in-depth synodal work in the local Churches, where, based on the principle of differentiated participation in the triple office (*tria munera*) of Christ, it is easier to keep clear the complementarity between common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, thus identifying with discernment the baptismal ministries needed by the community" (*IL*, B. 2.2 c).

[296] "*CIC/83*, c. 767 was subject to an authentic interpretation, which clarified that a diocesan bishop could not dispense from c. 767, §1." (PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE AUTHENTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW, Response to dubium, 20 June 1987, in *AAS*, 79 [1987], 1249). For an analysis of this response, including an overview of various interpretations, see L.G. WRENN, *Authentic Interpretations on the 1983 Code*, 41–43. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 65 states: "It should be borne in mind that any previous norm that may have admitted non-ordained faithful to give the homily during the eucharistic celebration is to be considered abrogated by the norm of c. 767, §1. This practice is reprobated, so that it cannot be permitted to attain the force of custom." The instruction continues: "The prohibition of the admission of laypersons to preach within the Mass applies also to seminarians, students of theological disciplines, and those who have assumed the function of those known as "pastoral assistants"; nor is there to be any exception for any other kind of layperson, or group, or community, or association" (no. 66).

(art. 2, no. 4), which treats lay preaching in churches and oratories as an exception rather than a normative practice.[297]

The *Synthesis Report* also proposes a ministry for married couples dedicated to supporting family life and preparing others for marriage. This suggestion builds on the idea of integrating liturgical service with related pastoral activities, a perspective already reflected in *Ministeria quaedam*.[298] Given that spouses already exercise a ministry rooted in the sacrament of marriage, this proposal warrants further theological and pastoral consideration.[299]

The *Synthesis Report* addresses the role of women in the life and mission of the Church,[300] emphasising that "in Christ, women and men share the same baptismal dignity (Gal 3:28) and receive the Spirit's gifts equally."[301] The Report calls for greater collaboration at all levels of Church life, with an emphasis on co-responsibility rather than competition.[302] In response to widespread calls for greater recognition of women's contributions, the report advocates for their increased involvement in pastoral leadership across all areas of ecclesial life and mission. It raises critical questions: "How can the Church more fully integrate women into existing ministries? If new ministries are needed, who should discern them, at what levels, and by what processes?"[303] The report stresses the urgency of increasing women's participation in

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[297] "Preaching in churches or oratories by the non-ordained faithful can be permitted only as a supply for sacred ministers or for those particular reasons foreseen by the universal law of the Church or by conferences of bishops. It cannot, however, be regarded as an ordinary occurrence nor as an authentic promotion of the laity" (*EDM*, art. 2, no. 4).

[298] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 8 n.

[299] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 261.

[300] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 9.

[301] See ibid., no. 9 b.

[302] Ibid.

[303] See ibid., no. 9 i.

decision-making processes and leadership roles in pastoral care and ministry.[304] This has direct implications for instituted ministries, which are now open to both men and women, as well as for governance roles within the Church.[305]

Despite recognising the indispensable role of catechists, on whom many Christian communities rely for evangelisation and formation,[306] the Report does not provide a detailed discussion of the instituted catechist ministry or explore ways to expand its responsibilities, as it does for the lectorate. This suggests that the catechist ministry is still in its early stages of development.[307]

3.6.6 – The Final Document[308]

The *Final Document* of the Synod presents a renewed understanding of ministry in the Church, emphasising the interconnection of vocations, charisms, and ministries in shaping Christian mission. It highlights the participation of all the baptised in the life and mission of the Church, fostering a co-responsible and missionary synodal Church.

The document underscores that all baptised Christians are endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are meant for the common good (cf. 1 Cor 12:4–7).[309] These gifts, expressed through various charisms, vocations, and ministries, contribute to the unity of the Church (cf. *LG* 32) and its mission across diverse cultural and social contexts (cf. *LG* 12).[310] Charisms take the form of ministries when they receive public

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[304] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 9 m.

[305] See C. GLENDINNING, "The Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist," 296–302.

[306] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 8 e.

[307] See C. GLENDINNING, "The Instituted Ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist," 296.

[308] See GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission, Final Document, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Second Session, 2–27 October 2024*, 26 October 2024 (=*Final Document*), https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html (24 March 2025).

[309] See *Final Document*, no. 57.

[310] Ibid.

recognition from the community and its leaders. This acknowledgment enables them to be exercised in a stable and consistent manner in service of the mission.[311] Instituted ministries occupy a particular place within the Church's structure.[312] Conferred through a formal rite by a bishop, these ministries shape the identity and participation of the person within the ecclesial community.[313] The document highlights the significance of ministries such as lector, acolyte, and catechist, which have been formally instituted through *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*.[314] Instituted ministries are not mere assignments but sacramentals that integrate the person permanently into the Church's mission. Episcopal conferences are tasked with defining the personal conditions and formation requirements for those seeking to undertake these ministries.[315]

Alongside instituted ministries, the document acknowledges the existence of non-instituted ministries which "are exercised with stability as mandated by the competent authority."[316] These include leadership in small Christian communities, organising charitable initiatives, and coordinating liturgical celebrations in the absence of a priest. Furthermore, extraordinary ministries, such as the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion or lay faithful assisting in marriage celebrations, are exercised as necessary, responding to local pastoral needs.[317] Additionally, spontaneous services,

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[311] See *Final Document*, no. 75.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Ibid.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Ibid.

[316] See ibid., no. 76.

[317] Ibid.

which do not require formal recognition, express the mission of all faithful through their daily Christian witness.[318]

A significant portion of the *Final Document* is devoted to the role of women in the Church.[319] It notes their historical contributions and calls for the full implementation of canonical provisions that enable their leadership.[320]

> Women make up the majority of churchgoers and are often the first witnesses to the Faith in families. They are active in the life of small Christian communities and parishes. They run schools, hospitals and shelters. They lead initiatives for reconciliation and promoting human dignity and social justice. Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in Church institutions, in diocesan curia and the Roman Curia. There are women who hold positions of authority and are leaders of their communities. This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.[321]

Regarding the question of women and the diaconate, the *Final Document* notes that discernment must continue.[322] This synodal openness has since been further informed by the 2025 report of the Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate (the Petrocchi Commission), which concluded that, "in light of Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium, this assessment is strongly maintained, although it does not at present allow for a definitive judgment to be formulated, as is the case with priestly ordination."[323] However, the Commission emphasised that its judgment is not definitive and encouraged ongoing theological study. It also highlighted the value of developing new ministries that deepen the collaborative mission of men and women in

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[318] See *Final Document*, no. 76.

[319] See ibid., nos. 36, 60.

[320] See ibid., no. 60.

[321] Ibid.

[322] Ibid.

[323] See STUDY COMMISSION ON THE WOMEN'S DIACONATE, "Petrocchi Commission says no to female diaconate, though judgment not definitive," in *Vatican News*, 4 December 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html (26 December 2025). There is now a summary of the Commission work available https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/12/04/0950/01725.html

the Church.[324] This development represents the most up-to-date stage of the ongoing synodal discernment on this topic.

The *Final Document* thus articulates an inclusive understanding of ministry. It highlights the diverse ways in which lay and ordained members of the Church contribute to its mission, reaffirming the equal dignity of all the baptised. The *Instrumentum laboris*, *Synthesis Report* and the *Final Document* mark a clear departure from the more restrictive stance of the 1997 interdicasterial instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, which warned against the indiscriminate use of the term ministry for lay functions.[325] This earlier document reinforced the understanding that lay roles are supplementary and arise primarily out of pastoral necessity.[326] While *Ecclesiae de mysterio* sought to maintain a clear distinction between ordained and non-ordained roles, recent synodal documents emphasise a positive vision of lay ministries grounded in baptismal dignity and co-responsibility. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the potential for lay people to contribute meaningfully to the Church's mission.

Conclusion

The 2021 reforms introduced through *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* represent a decisive step in the Church's ongoing reception of Vatican II and its renewed vision of ministry. By admitting women to the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte and by establishing the instituted ministry of catechist, Pope Francis has reaffirmed the baptismal foundation of all ecclesial participation and advanced the Church's commitment to fostering a culture of co-responsibility among all the faithful. These reforms are not isolated juridical interventions. Instead, they reflect a broader

[324] See STUDY COMMISSION ON THE WOMEN'S DIACONATE, "Petrocchi Commission says no to female diaconate, though judgment not definitive."

[325] See *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, art. no. 1, §2.

[326] See ibid., art. no. 1, §1.

ecclesiological horizon in which ministries are understood as dynamic realities shaped by the Church's life, mission, and discernment in changing pastoral circumstances.

Throughout this chapter, the analysis has highlighted how these reforms illuminate several key areas: the theological grounding of instituted ministries in the baptismal dignity of the faithful; the pastoral need for stable lay ministries, particularly in missionary contexts or regions marked by limited clerical presence; and the canonical recalibration that aligns ecclesiastical structures more closely with contemporary pastoral practice. The placing of the ministry of catechist within Book III of the 1983 Code underscores its intrinsic relationship to the Church's teaching office. At the same time, it raises practical questions regarding its distinction from other instituted ministries, particularly the lectorate. The *Synthesis Report* of the 2023 Assembly similarly shows that the Church continues to explore the relationship between charisms and ministries, the evolving configuration of ministerial roles, and the potential expansion or adaptation of instituted ministries in response to emerging pastoral needs.

These developments illustrate an increasingly synodal understanding of ministry, where discernment, participation, and collaboration shape the Church's structures and pastoral strategies. The instituted ministries of lector, acolyte, and catechist now stand as concrete expressions of this synodal vision, fostering shared responsibility for evangelisation, catechesis, and the liturgical life of the community. Their reconfiguration invites further theological reflection, careful canonical development, and sustained pastoral formation to ensure that their implementation remains faithful to tradition and responsive to the diverse contexts of the Church's mission.

Building on these insights, Chapter Four will engage more deeply with the theological, canonical, and pastoral implications of the reforms introduced by *Spiritus*

Domini and *Antiquum ministerium*. It will evaluate how these developments reshape the Church's ministerial landscape, consider the opportunities and challenges they present for ecclesial governance and formation, and propose ways in which instituted lay ministries might be integrated more fully and coherently into the life of a synodal Church. Through this analysis, the chapter will contribute to a clearer understanding of how ministry, rooted in baptism and enriched by ecclesial discernment, can continue to develop in service of the Church's mission today.

CHAPTER FOUR
THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LAY INSTITUTED MINISTRIES: TOWARDS A SYNODAL VISION

Introduction

The preceding chapters have provided a comprehensive historical, theological, and canonical investigation into the development of minor orders and their subsequent transformation into instituted ministries, culminating in the reforms of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the recent interventions of Pope Francis. Chapter One traced the historical and theological evolution of minor orders, from their early consolidation in the Church through various councils and papal decrees to Paul VI's reform in *Ministeria quaedam*. Chapter Two analysed the canonical framework of c. 230 in the 1983 Code, with its tripartite structure of stably instituted, temporary, and extraordinary ministries, while highlighting theological tensions, especially the exclusion of women from instituted ministries. Chapter Three examined Pope Francis's reforms: the amendment of c. 230 §1 by *Spiritus Domini*, which opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women, and the establishment of the instituted ministry of catechist through *Antiquum ministerium*.

Building on these foundations, this final chapter seeks to move beyond historical description and canonical exposition to offer a theological-critical evaluation. It will assess whether the canonical structuring of ministries adequately embodies the ecclesiology of Vatican II, particularly its emphasis on baptismal dignity (*LG* 10–12) and the co-responsibility of all the faithful in the Church's mission (*AA* 2–3). The chapter will also consider whether c. 230 has kept pace with the theological developments it was designed to reflect, and whether Pope Francis's recent reforms genuinely resolve earlier tensions or expose deeper questions within the theology of ministry.

This discussion is framed within the broader context of synodality, described by Pope Francis as "the path which God expects of the Church in the third millennium."[1] Instituted ministries, as formal recognitions of baptismal charisms, are more than juridical provisions; they reveal how the Church understands the participation of all the faithful in its mission. Their theological and canonical development must therefore be interpreted through the lens of synodality, understood both as a principle of communion and as a praxis of shared responsibility, discernment, and mission.

The scope of this chapter is threefold. First, it will critically evaluate c. 230, identifying its achievements and unresolved ambiguities. Second, it will assess the continuity and novelty of *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* in the longer trajectory of magisterial teaching since *Ministeria quaedam*. Third, it will propose a synodal framework for instituted ministries, suggesting canonical reforms and pastoral applications while addressing questions of juridical clarity, ecclesiological coherence, and the risk of clericalising the laity. The chapter will conclude with constructive proposals, arguing that the reform of instituted ministries is not simply a canonical adjustment but a matter of profound theological significance for the Church's self-understanding as a synodal communion.

4.1 – Critical Evaluation of Canon 230 and the Historical Evolution of Lay Instituted Ministry

This section critically evaluates c. 230 of the 1983 Code in light of the historical and theological development of lay ministry. It situates the canon within its post-conciliar context, assesses its theological strengths, identifies its ecclesiological

[1] FRANCIS, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, in *AAS*, 107 (2015), 1139–1145, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (30 August 2025).

limitations, and highlights the juridical and pastoral challenges that have arisen in its application.

4.1.1 – Canon 230 in Context: Historical and Theological Background

The promulgation of the 1983 Code occurred in the wake of Vatican II, which called for a renewed ecclesiology and theology of ministry. The Council emphasised the universal call to holiness and the co-responsibility of all the baptised in the mission of the Church.[2] In the liturgical sphere, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* insisted on the "active participation" (*actuosa participatio*) of the faithful in worship, implicitly broadening the scope for lay ministerial roles.[3]

Pope Paul VI's *Ministeria quaedam* marked a decisive reform by suppressing the minor orders and the subdiaconate and transforming the functions of lector and acolyte into lay ministries permanently entrusted by the Church.[4] Yet this reform limited these instituted ministries to lay men and did not extend to other possible lay functions. Canon 230 inherited this framework and legislated three distinct realities: (1) the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, originally reserved to lay men (§1); (2) the temporary deputation of lay men and women for certain liturgical functions, such as lector (§2); and (3) the extraordinary deputation of lay persons, when pastoral necessity requires and sacred ministers are lacking, to perform specific liturgical and sacramental functions ordinarily entrusted to ordained ministers, including the distribution of Holy Communion (§3).[5] In pastoral practice, however, this third category has frequently been reduced to the role of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, a narrowing that

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[2] See *LG*, nos. 10–11.

[3] See *SC*, no. 14.

[4] See *MQ*.

[5] See *CIC/83*, c. 230.

obscures the broader juridical scope of c. 230, §3 and contributes to ongoing ambiguities in the distinction between instituted and deputed ministries.

Placed in historical perspective, c. 230 represents both continuity with *Ministeria quaedam* and an initial juridical attempt to embody the broader ecclesiological principles of Vatican II. At the same time, its formulation left significant theological and canonical questions unresolved, which later developments would bring into sharper relief.

4.1.2 – Theological Strengths of Canon 230

Canon 230 manifests important theological strengths. Above all, it affirms that liturgical ministry is not the exclusive domain of the ordained but can be entrusted to the laity. This reflects the teaching of *Lumen gentium*, which underscores that all the baptised share in the threefold office of Christ and are called to active participation in the sanctifying, prophetic, and pastoral mission of the Church.[6] By providing juridical recognition for lay participation in liturgical functions, c. 230 concretised this conciliar principle.

Secondly, by allowing women to serve in extraordinary ministries, the canon expanded possibilities for liturgical service beyond what *Ministeria quaedam* had envisaged. Although these roles were temporary or delegated, they anticipated the magisterial development culminating in *Spiritus Domini*, which opened instituted ministries to women.[7] This shift reflects a gradual but decisive movement towards rooting ministry in baptismal dignity rather than clerical proximity.[8]

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[6] See *LG*, no. 31; see also *SC*, no. 14.

[7] See *SD*.

[8] See *CL*, no. 23.

Finally, c. 230 reinforced the Council's insistence on *actuosa participatio*. By permitting lay persons to serve as lectors and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, among other liturgical functions, the canon embodied in practice the principle that the liturgy is the action of the whole People of God.[9] As Pope John Paul II later observed, the ministerial activity of the laity "finds its foundation in baptism and confirmation" and is indispensable for the Church's mission.[10] In this sense, c. 230 offered an important canonical basis for the continuing theological reflection on lay ministry.

4.1.3 – Theological and Ecclesiological Limitations

Despite these achievements, c. 230 also reveals notable limitations. First, it restricts instituted ministries to lector and acolyte, roles historically linked with the *cursus honorum*, the traditional sequence of minor orders leading to priestly ordination. This narrow vision did not adequately reflect Vatican II's teaching on the diversity of charisms and ministries within the Church, as emphasised in *Apostolicam actuositatem*.[11]

Secondly, by reserving instituted ministries exclusively to men until 2021, the canon perpetuated a clericalising tendency that associated stable lay ministries too closely with ordination. This exclusion reinforced the perception that instituted ministries were "quasi-clerical" rather than authentic lay services in their own right.[12] Congar and other theologians have cautioned that such approaches risk defining the

[9] See *SC*, no. 26; *CIC/83*, c. 837, §1.

[10] See *CL*, no. 23.

[11] See *AA*, no. 3.

[12] See *MQ*.

laity merely in contrast to the clergy, rather than affirming their positive identity as baptised members of the Body of Christ.[13]

Thirdly, c. 230 primarily conceives lay ministry in liturgical terms, giving limited juridical expression to other ecclesial services such as catechesis, evangelisation, and pastoral accompaniment. While these roles were already central in many local Churches, particularly in missionary contexts, they lacked universal and stable juridical recognition, even though *Ministeria quaedam* had already acknowledged the possibility for episcopal conferences to propose other instituted ministries adapted to pastoral needs. This possibility remained in principle after the promulgation of the 1983 Code, yet it does not appear to have been exercised at the level of episcopal conferences. Only with Pope Francis's *Antiquum ministerium* did the instituted ministry of catechist receive explicit and universal canonical establishment.[14] This lacuna in effective juridical recognition highlights how the operative theological horizon of c. 230 remained narrower in practice than the conciliar vision of the laity's diverse ministries within both Church and world.

4.1.4 – Juridical Challenges and Pastoral Ambiguities

Canon 230 also presents juridical and pastoral challenges. The distinction between instituted ministries and extraordinary functions has often been blurred in practice. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, for example, frequently serve for many years in stable roles, despite the canon's intention that their functions remain temporary.[15] This intention was later reaffirmed by the instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, which emphasised that extraordinary ministries must retain their exceptional

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[13] See Y. CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1965, 300–305.

[14] See *AM*.

[15] See *CIC/83*, c. 230, §2.

character and be exercised only when true pastoral necessity requires it.[16] These developments raise questions about whether the current legislation sufficiently distinguishes between instituted and delegated ministries or adequately addresses the pastoral realities of parish life.

Another difficulty concerns the recognition of new instituted ministries. While *Ministeria quaedam* envisaged that episcopal conferences might propose additional ministries with papal approval,[17] the 1983 Code did not incorporate this provision explicitly. As a result, the juridical framework for expanding lay instituted ministries remained underdeveloped until *Antiquum ministerium*, which provided a universal basis for catechists and authorised episcopal conferences to establish norms for their exercise.[18]

Finally, c. 230 contains no explicit reference to synodal principles in the discernment of ministries. Recent ecclesial reflection, particularly in the Synod on Synodality, has emphasised co-responsibility, discernment, and collaboration as essential to the Church's life and mission.[19] Yet the canon offers no structural means for lay participation in the discernment or creation of new ministries. This highlights the ongoing challenge of ensuring that canonical norms develop in a way that remains consistent with the theological insights of the post-conciliar Church.

Taken together, the theological and juridical evaluation of c. 230 highlights both the possibilities it opened for lay participation and the limitations it maintained in relation to Vatican II's broader vision. To understand these tensions more fully, it is necessary to return to the foundational reform of *Ministeria quaedam*, which

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[16] See *EDM*, art. 8.

[17] See *MQ*.

[18] See Letter to the Presidents.

[19] See *IL*, Part B, nos. 8–10.

restructured the minor orders and laid the groundwork for the current framework. Only by re-examining that pivotal document fifty years later, with attention to continuity, discontinuity, and emerging tensions, can c. 230 be properly situated within the Church's evolving theology of ministry and in relation to more recent papal interventions.

4.2 – *Ministeria Quaedam* Fifty Years Later: Continuities, Discontinuities, and Emerging Tensions

The apostolic letter *Ministeria quaedam* of Paul VI marked a decisive turning point in the history of ecclesial ministries. By suppressing the minor orders and the subdiaconate, and by introducing the instituted lay ministries of lector and acolyte, it sought to embody the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II concerning the active participation of the laity in the liturgical and pastoral life of the Church.[20] A logical consequence of this decision was the abandonment of the division between "major" and "minor" orders that had structured the Church's hierarchy since the thirteenth century. Terminology was also reshaped: lector and acolyte were no longer conferred by *ordinatio* but by *institutio*, and the language of "orders" gave way to that of "ministries."[21]

This reform may be characterised by a fourfold orientation: first, the reservation of the term "ordination" to the sacramental ministries of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, while other functions were to be designated as "instituted ministries"; second, the suppression of minor orders such as porter, exorcist, and subdeacon, together with the discontinuance of clerical tonsure; third, the retention of lector and acolyte, with the functions of the subdeacon being distributed between these two ministries rather than

[20] See *MQ*; FRANCIS, Message on the 50th Anniversary of Ministeria quaedam, no. 1.

[21] See *MQ*.

absorbed exclusively into the acolyte; and fourth, the possibility granted to episcopal conferences to petition the Apostolic See for new ministries suited to local pastoral needs.[22]

From a theological perspective, Louis-Marie Chauvet underlined the significance of the reform applying the term *ministerium* to laypeople. What had once been understood as transitional stages on the path to priesthood now became recognitions of the baptismal dignity of the faithful.[23] Pope Paul VI thereby enabled lay persons to exercise stable forms of ministry within liturgical assemblies, while preserving the sacramental–ontological distinction proper to ordained ministry. In light of the motu proprio, the ecclesial status of the instituted lay person does not change; he or she remains a lay member of the faithful, since these functions do not derive from the sacrament of orders but from the baptismal priesthood shared by all the baptised.[24]

At the same time, structural limits hindered the reform's full reception. The instituted ministries of lector and acolyte were restricted to men, justified by reference to long-standing ecclesial tradition, and were tied closely to the clerical state, being obligatory stages for seminarians preparing for ordination.[25] These factors reinforced the perception of lector and acolyte as clerical functions rather than lay roles in their

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[22] See *MQ*; J.M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 63 (1998), 272–282; F.X. AMHERDT, "Points d'attention pour la mise en œuvre des récents Motu proprio *Spiritus Domini et Antiquum ministerium*," in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 144 (2022), 408–409; A. BORRAS, "Éléments Canoniques et Pastoraux pour un Discernement dans la mise en œuvre du Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini*," in *L'Année canonique*, 63 (2023), 169–170; A. SANTANTONI, "Il Sacramento dell'ordine," in A.J. CHUPUNGCO (ed.), *Scienza Liturgica Manuale di Liturgia: Sacramenti e sacramentali,* vol. 4, Casale Monferrato, Piemme, 1998, 263–264.

[23] See L.M. CHAUVET, "Les ministères de laïcs: vers un nouveau visage de l'Église?" in *La Maison-Dieu*, 215 (1998), 35.

[24] See J.M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," 273.

[25] See *CIC/83*, c. 1035.

own right. Although the stated aim was to prevent clericalisation, the structural design unintentionally encouraged it.[26]

Half a century later, therefore, *Ministeria quaedam* continues to invite both appreciation and critique: appreciation for its boldness at a moment of transition, and critique for its limitations, ambiguities, and pastoral consequences. More recent interventions of Pope Francis, particularly *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, may be read simultaneously as developments of, and correctives, to the framework established in 1972. Three aspects in particular are decisive for evaluating its long-term significance: (a) its continuities with Vatican II and the conciliar vision of ministry; (b) its discontinuities, limitations, and restricted reception; and (c) the emerging tensions that call for renewed theological and canonical reassessment.

4.2.1 – Continuities with Vatican II and Initial Vision

At its best, the reform represented a genuine effort to translate conciliar ecclesiology into canonical structures. By affirming that ministries such as lector and acolyte were not restricted to the ordained but could be entrusted to the laity, *Ministeria quaedam* gave juridical embodiment to *Lumen gentium*'s teaching on the common priesthood of the faithful and the co-responsibility of all the baptised in the Church's mission (*LG*, 31–33).[27] The shift from "minor orders" to "instituted ministries" underscored that these functions were rooted not in ordination but in baptismal dignity.

Furthermore, the decision to confer ministries in a stable and public manner granted recognition to forms of lay service that had often been informal or temporary. Perhaps most significantly, the motu proprio explicitly sought to prevent clericalisation

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[26] See A. MONTAN, "Presidência E Ministérios Uma Releitura da Tradição Entre "Fato" e "Direito" Desde Ministeria Quaedam Até Hoje," in *Teocomunicação*, 39 (2009), 26–27.

[27] See FRANCIS, Message on the 50th Anniversary of Ministeria quaedam, no. 6.

by stressing that lector and acolyte should be regarded not as preparatory steps toward priesthood but as ministries in their own right.[28] However, as later experience showed, the obligatory association of these ministries with seminarians inevitably blurred this intended distinction.[29]

4.2.2 – Discontinuities, Limitations, and Limited Reception

Despite these achievements, the reform was marked by notable discontinuities and limitations that explain its uneven reception. Most strikingly, *Ministeria quaedam* restricted itself to two instituted ministries, while suppressing others such as porter and exorcist without proposing alternatives that might reflect the wider diversity of charisms already exercised in the post-conciliar Church.[30] This narrowing of scope reduced the reform's capacity to embody the richness of the Church's lived ministerial reality, especially in areas such as catechesis, pastoral leadership, and social ministry.

The exclusion of women further accentuated these limitations. By reserving instituted ministries to men alone, the motu proprio stood in tension with the Council's affirmation of the equal dignity of all the baptised (*LG*, 10, 32). Combined with the requirement that seminarians receive ministries of lector and acolyte prior to ordination, this restriction reinforced a clerical conception of instituted ministries. In practice, therefore, these offices were often perceived less as stable lay ministries and more as preparatory stages towards ordination,[31] a contradiction that endured until Pope Francis formally opened them to women through *Spiritus Domini*.

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[28] See *MQ*, no. 7; J.M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," 282.

[29] Canon 1035 requires that a man who is to be promoted to the permanent or transitional diaconate have received the ministries of lector and acolyte and exercised these ministries for a suitable time. At least six months must elapse between the conferral of the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate. See *CIC/83*, c. 1035.

[30] See *MQ*, nos. 3–4.

[31] See J.M. GRONDELSKI, "Lay Ministries? A Quarter Century of *Ministeria quaedam*," 273.

Another limitation lay in the document's insufficient theological grounding. Primarily concerned with liturgical and canonical restructuring, *Ministeria quaedam* did not fully articulate the pneumatological and ecclesiological foundations of lay ministry. As a result, episcopal conferences rarely availed themselves of the possibility to petition for new ministries. Although Pope Paul VI explicitly envisaged such creativity, in practice no episcopal conference appears to have pursued this option successfully,[32] leaving the openness of the framework more theoretical than real. Moreover, because lector and acolyte were linked almost exclusively to sanctuary service, their potential to connect liturgy with catechesis, charity, and mission was significantly curtailed.

4.2.3 – Emerging Tensions and the Need for Reassessment

Taken together, these factors meant that, despite its innovative intent, the framework of *Ministeria quaedam* remained clerical in practice. The ministries it introduced were interpreted largely through the lens of priesthood, which limited their capacity to foster a richer theology and practice of lay service. The gap between Pope Paul VI's vision and the subsequent reality thus became increasingly evident.

In retrospect, the reforms of Pope Francis may be seen as attempts to address precisely these shortcomings: by opening instituted ministries to women (*Spiritus Domini*), creating the instituted ministry of catechist (*Antiquum ministerium*), and encouraging episcopal conferences to exercise greater creativity in ministerial development, the more recent magisterium has sought to recover dimensions of Vatican II that *Ministeria quaedam* had only partially realised.[33] The present challenge is to

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[32] See A. SANTANTONI, "Il Sacramento dell'ordine," 263–264.

[33] See F.X. AMHERDT, "Points d'attention pour la mise en œuvre des récents Motu proprio *Spiritus Domini et Antiquum ministerium*," 407.

move beyond the restrictive framework of the past and to integrate instituted lay ministries into a broader theology of ministeriality, one that honours the diversity of charisms, affirms baptismal co-responsibility, and situates ministry within the Church's mission of evangelisation and service.

4.3 – Canonical Insights from Recent Papal Interventions and Their Impact

The promulgation of *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* represents a decisive moment in the post-conciliar reform of ministries. These two motu proprios are not merely juridical adjustments but also substantial theological statements on the nature of ministry, the dignity of the baptised, and the synodal orientation of the Church. They must therefore be read both in continuity with *Ministeria quaedam* and as innovative responses to contemporary pastoral challenges.

4.3.1 – *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum Ministerium*: Assessing Continuities, Innovations, and Divergences

Pope Francis's interventions have considerably reshaped the canonical framework of instituted lay ministries, introducing both anticipated reforms and new pastoral opportunities.

4.3.1.1 – Inclusion of Women in Instituted Ministries (Lector and Acolyte)

With *Spiritus Domini*, Pope Francis amended c. 230, §1, thereby permitting women, as well as men, to be stably instituted as lectors and acolytes. This reform brought the canonical text into harmony with a long-standing pastoral reality: in many regions, women were already proclaiming the readings, serving at the altar, and distributing Holy Communion. By regularising practices already widespread in ecclesial life, the reform both acknowledged the indispensable contribution of women

in liturgical service and removed a juridical inconsistency that stood in tension with the baptismal equality articulated by Vatican II (*LG* 32).[34]

From a theological perspective, the reform is particularly significant as it affirms that instituted ministries arise from baptism rather than ordination.[35] The previous exclusion of women had been criticised by canonists who argued that treating these ministries as "closely linked to ordained ministry" was inconsistent with their baptismal foundation.[36] By extending access to women, Pope Francis confirmed these critiques, underlining that instituted ministries are no longer to be understood as minor orders in the pre-conciliar sense, but as distinct lay ministries with their own theological basis.[37] The reform thus marks a deliberate step away from residual clerical paradigms.

At the same time, *Spiritus Domini* introduces an important note of doctrinal caution. In his accompanying letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Francis emphasised that this reform does not alter the theological distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful (*CCC* 1547).[38] The measure therefore broadens participation in instituted ministries without blurring the doctrinal boundary of holy orders. In this sense, the reform is both progressive, in its expansion of lay participation, and conservative, in its reaffirmation of established theological distinctions.

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[34] See B. LUCAS, "Commentary on the Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini*," 14.

[35] See *SD*.

[36] See J.H. PROVOST, "The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 168; J. ŠALKOVIĆ, "Sudjelovanje vjernika laika u posvetiteljskoj službi Crkve (kan. 230)," 286.

[37] See *SD*.

[38] See FRANCIS, Letter to Cardinal Luis Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 10 January 2021, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11 January 2021, 6.

4.3.1.2 – Stabilisation of the Catechist's Role

The second reform, *Antiquum ministerium*, goes beyond modifying an existing canon[39] and institutes a new stable lay ministry: the ministry of catechist.[40] This intervention acknowledges the vital role that lay catechists have exercised throughout the history of Christianity, from the patristic era, through the period of missionary expansion, to the present.[41] What was previously considered a delegated or extraordinary function is now formally recognised as a stable instituted ministry of the Church.

Theologically, the institution of catechist reinforces the conviction that evangelisation is a shared responsibility of all the baptised, rather than the exclusive domain of the clergy.[42] By establishing a liturgical rite of institution for catechists, the Church confers formal recognition upon their vocation and mission.[43] Canonically, the reform provides greater stability and visibility to the role, distinguishing catechists from temporary volunteers and embedding their service within the Church's juridical framework.[44]

Nevertheless, questions persist concerning the scope and limits of this ministry. The motu proprio makes clear that the ministry of catechist should not be confused with the catechetical activity that belongs to all Christians, such as parents instructing their children, but is reserved for those with a recognised charism and a mission entrusted by

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[39] The 1983 Code does not mention liturgical installation for catechists (*CIC/83*, c. 785)–even though *Ad gentes* 17 called for them to be given a canonical mission within a local community in a liturgical rite.

[40] See *AM*.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid; *AG*, no. 21.

[43] See *AM*.

[44] See Letter to the Presidents.

the bishop.[45] This highlights the responsibility of episcopal conferences to develop precise norms for the discernment, formation, and institution of catechists. While some conferences have begun this work, only a small number have thus far promulgated formal guidelines, such as the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Episcopal Conference of Portugal, while others, including the Conferences of England and Wales and Brazil, have initiated processes of drafting or issuing preliminary criteria. By contrast, many conferences, such as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, have not yet released national norms.[46] This situation underscores the ongoing challenge of translating the motu proprio into coherent and locally adapted practice. Without such clarity, the ministry risks being undervalued as a mere formalisation of existing practice, or overburdened by expectations that it functions as a substitute for ordained ministry in pastoral governance. Several episcopal conferences and dioceses have begun to articulate more detailed expectations regarding the practical exercise of instituted catechists, offering examples of emerging pastoral practice.[47] In some contexts, theological clarification has also been provided to distinguish this instituted ministry from other forms of lay service.[48] Finally, dioceses implementing the reform

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[45] See *AM*, no. 5.

[46] For examples of developing or absent national norms, see CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *I ministeri istituiti del Lettore, dell'Accolito e del Catechista per le Chiese che sono in Italia: Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, Rome, CEI, 5 June 2022, https://liturgico.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/07/13/NotaCeiMinisteri.pdf (14 April 2026); CONFERÊNCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA, *Ministérios laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial,* 22 June 2022, https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/ministerios-laicais-para-uma-igreja-ministerial/ (14 April 2026); CONFERÊNCIA NACIONAL DOS BISPOS DO BRASIL, *Ministério de Catequista: Orientações pastorais para a organização do processo formativo diocesano a partir do Documento 112 da CNBB*, August 2022; CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES, "Recognising the Ministry of Catechist," 13 May 2021, https://www.cbcew.org.uk/recognising-the-ministry-of-catechist/ (14 April 2026); Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, absence of national norms as of 2024.

[47] For Italian norms detailing the role, formation, and competencies of catechists, see CEI, *Nota ad experimentum*, nos. 6–8. These include service in small communities without a resident presbyter and leading Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, see https://liturgico.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/07/13/NotaCeiMinisteri.pdf (14 April 2026).

[48] See F. MORAGLIA, "Ministeri istituiti, a servizio della Chiesa": ecco il testo della nuova lettera pastorale del Patriarca," https://www.patriarcatovenezia.it/ministeri-istituiti-a-servizio-della-chiesa-la-lettera-del-patriarca/ (14 April 2026), offering clarification that the instituted catechist is not an honorary

demonstrate both the potential for synodal renewal and the uneven pace of reception across the Church.[49]

4.3.1.3 – Complementarity or Divergence Between the Two Motu Proprios

Considered together, *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* illustrate Pope Francis's vision of a more inclusive and synodal Church.[50] Both documents locate ministry in baptism, emphasise the recognition of charisms, and aim to regularise pastoral practices already present in the life of the Church. They also respond to distinct needs: *Spiritus Domini* addressed the inconsistency of excluding women from ministries they already exercised, while *Antiquum ministerium* responded to the urgent need for strengthening catechetical structures in increasingly secularised contexts.

At the same time, their differences are notable. *Spiritus Domini* functions as a corrective reform, aligning canon law with theological consistency and lived practice. *Antiquum ministerium*, by contrast, represents a constructive reform, introducing a new stable ministry into the canonical cohort order. The two documents are therefore

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designation but a genuine ecclesial ministry. "I ministeri non sono, perciò, dei "riconoscimenti" – come una sorta di onorificenza da esibire in determinate circostanze – quanto piuttosto l'esercizio effettivo di un servizio nei molteplici campi della vita ecclesiale e sociale. I ministri istituiti, pertanto, si pongono nella comunità per sostenere e accompagnare – non per sostituire – le molteplici forme di ministerialità di fatto (catechisti, educatori, animatori, lettori della Parola di Dio, quanti a vario titolo prestano servizio nella liturgia ecc.) già presenti e così indispensabili per la vita delle nostre comunità."

[49] On the first cohort of instituted catechists in the Diocese of Rome, see Diocesi di Roma, La lettera del Consiglio Episcopale per i nuovi catechisti, Rome, 2024, La lettera del Consiglio episcopale per i nuovi catechisti | DIOCESI DI ROMA (14 April 2026). For the Croatian context, see ZAGREBAČKA NADBISKUPIJA, *Druga sinoda Zagrebačke nadbiskupije: Izjave i odluke*, Zagreb, Glas Koncila, 2022, no. 37, noting the absence of national norms despite synodal encouragement for greater lay involvement, https://www.zg-nadbiskupija.hr/UserDocsImages/arhiva/stories/SINODA/Sinoda_Crkve%20zagrebacke_24122022.pdf (14 April 2026). See also N. VRANJEŠ, "Povjerenje i suradnja između svećenika i vjernika laika: Prema novim pomacima," in *Bogoslovska smotra*, 88 (2018), 657–674.

[50] See GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission, Final Document, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Second Session, 2-27 October 2024*, Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 26 October 2024 (=*Final Document*), nos. 28-30; INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2 March 2018 (=*ITC*), no. 70a, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html (26 September 2025); R. GOMES, "Pope on Synod: The participation of everyone, guided by the Holy Spirit," in *Vatican News*, 9 October 2021, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/Pope/news/2021-10/Pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html (25 September 2025);

complementary, in that they both advance the conciliar vision of lay co-responsibility, but divergent in scope and method: one modifies existing norms, while the other innovates by creating something new.

Yet both reforms leave unresolved questions. If ministries are grounded in baptism and the discernment of charisms, why should stable institution be restricted only to lectors, acolytes, and catechists? Other forms of lay service, such as pastoral coordinators, leaders of small communities, or ministers to the sick, may also warrant similar recognition. Such questions indicate that the reforms of 2021, while highly significant, represent not a terminus but an important stage in an ongoing process of ecclesial discernment regarding the theology and canonical configuration of lay ministry.

4.3.2 – The Exercise of the Power of Governance by Lay Persons

The evolution of instituted ministries and the canonical recognition of the laity's role necessitate a careful examination of the *potestas regiminis* (power of governance) and the extent to which lay people can legitimately exercise it. This analysis considers the historical trajectory of lay participation, the developments introduced by the 1983 Code, and the implications of recent papal interventions, moving beyond a narrow understanding of "delegation" towards a robust acknowledgment of proper lay involvement in ecclesial governance.

4.3.2.1 – From *Soli Clerici* to Early Openings

Historically, ecclesiastical governance was the domain of clerics. The 1917 Code maintained a strict separation between clergy and laity, asserting that the laity could not perform acts of jurisdiction or governance (c. 948).[51] Canon 118 explicitly

[51] In examining the structure and provisions of the 1917 Code, it becomes evident that particular emphasis was placed on delineating the roles and privileges of the clergy within ecclesiastical governance. A significant portion of Book II, *De personis*, is dedicated to outlining the rights and responsibilities of clerics, highlighting their exclusive authority over ecclesiastical matters. This focus

excluded the laity from the exercise of jurisdiction, stating: *soli clerici possunt potestatem […] obtinere* (only clerics can obtain power).[52] This reflected a hierarchical ecclesiology in which authority and ministerial responsibility were predominantly reserved to ordained clergy, while lay persons were largely passive recipients of ecclesial direction.[53] This rigid framework set the stage for the theological and pastoral developments initiated by Vatican II.

4.3.2.2 – Vatican II and the Theological Reframing of Office

Vatican II provided a decisive theological shift in the understanding of ecclesiastical office. *Presbyterorum ordinis* no. 20 broadened the concept of office, opening the possibility for lay persons to be entrusted with certain ecclesiastical responsibilities.[54] *Lumen gentium* and *Apostolicam actuositatem* explicitly affirmed that lay persons may be deputed for ecclesiastical offices, signalling genuine, although still circumscribed, participation in the exercise of sacred power.[55] This conciliar vision, shaped by the Church's *communio* ecclesiology, emphasised the equal dignity of all the

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on the clergy, particularly in matters of ecclesiastical power, whether of orders or jurisdiction, is a prominent feature of the Code. The Code mentions very little about the participation of lay persons in the legal dimension of the Church and forbids them from participating in the governance of the Church, especially at the level of a Church office. See C. GALLAGHER, "Theological Trends: Canon Law and Ecclesiology II—The Ecclesiological Implications of the 1983 Code of Canon Law," in *The Way*, 23 (1983), 308.

[52] *CIC/17*, c. 118 states: "Clerics alone can obtain power either of orders or of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and ecclesiastical benefices and pension." It should be kept in mind that, according to this Code, one becomes a cleric by the reception of the first tonsure (c. 108, §1). The understanding of ecclesiastical office always implied some participation in the power of order or the power of governance (c. 145). However, there is some reference, in a general way, to the laity's role in catechising and administration (cc. 1333, §1; 1521; 373; 1592; 1657). "Possession of such power was essential to holding an ecclesiastical office in the sense commonly used in the Code (c. 145)." (J.H. PROVOST, "The Participation of the Laity in the Governance of the Church," 418).

[53] See J. ESLER, "The New Code on the Laity– A Challenge to the Whole Church," in *Australasian Catholic Record*, 4 (1983), 363–364; See A. PREW-WINTERS, "Who is a Lay Person," 52–54; J.H. PROVOST, "The Christian Faithful," in *CLSA Comm1*, 131.

[54] See *PO*, no. 20.

[55] See *LG*, nos. 32, 33, 37; *AG*, nos. 2, 24.

baptised and their shared responsibility in the Church's mission.[56] The Council also recommended the establishment of structures, such as diocesan pastoral councils, to assess pastoral activities and provide informed guidance for future programmes.[57]

Despite this affirmation, unresolved tensions remained. Scholars such as Ormond Rush and John Beal observed that the Council did not clarify how the laity's participation in governance (*munus regendi*) or in the exercise of sacred power (*sacra potestas*) was to be operationalised.[58] Theologically, the Council presented Christ's threefold office of priest, prophet, and king as shared by all the baptised; yet, it left ambiguous the practical application of this principle to the laity's governance role.[59]

The post-conciliar motu proprio *Causas matrimoniales* (1971) provided a concrete application of Vatican II's ecclesiology by permitting lay men to serve as judges in marriage cases, directly involving them in the judicial aspect of governance.[60]

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[56] See *LG*, no. 13; J.G. WILLEBRANDS, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion," in *One in Christ*, 23, (1987), 181; R.J. KASLYN, "Baptism as Basis for Church Ministry: Application of the Ecclesiology of *Communio*," in *The Jurist*, 60 (2000), 312–319; D.M. DOYLE, "Communion Ecclesiology, Mandatum, and Prudential Judgments," in *Pro Ecclesia*, 11 (2002), 20–23. For further reflections on the Ecclesiology of Communion, see J.M. TILLARD, "Ecclesiology of Communion and Canon Law," in *CLSAP*, 58 (1996), 24–34; E. HAHNENBERG, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historic Parallels," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 70 (2005), 3–30 especially 5–10; L. BOFF, *Church: Charism and Power*, New York, Crossroad, 1985; M. ŠÁLY, "Roman Catholic Communion Ecclesiology: Sources and Opportunities," in *Communio Viatorum*, 59 (2017), 293–315; E.E. UZUKWU, "Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism: Between Vatican Council II and African Synod II," in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, 34 (2022), 166–170; W. SCHWARTZ, "Baptism, Ecclesiology and Vocation: Letter from Christ to the World: An Exploration of the Role of the Laity in the Church Today," in N. APOSTOLA (ed.), *A Letter from Christ to the World: An Exploration of the Role of the Laity in the Church Today*, Geneva, 1998, 85–97; J.A. RENKEN, "*'Duc In Altum!' Communio:* Source and Summit of Church Law," in *The Jurist*, 63 (2003), 22–69.

[57] See *CD*, no. 27; See R. MAHONY, "Synod 1987, Clergy-Laity Relationship," in *Origins*, 17 (1987), 350.

[58] See O. RUSH, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation*, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 2009, 193; J.P. BEAL, "The Exercise of the Power of Governance by Lay People: State of the Question," 17.

[59] See L. ÖRSY, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2009, 138–142.

[60] *Causas matrimoniales* of Paul VI explicitly gave judicial power to a layman (*vir laicus*) who could be a judge on a collegiate tribunal. See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter Determining Norms for Expediting Marriage Cases *Causas matrimoniales*, 28 March 1971, no. V, §1, in *AAS*, 63 (1971), 441–446, English translation in *CLD*, vol. 7, 969–974. According to the 1971 report of the *coetus* on the sacred hierarchy, "a layperson, as a member of a judicial college, most certainly exercises the judicial

This precedent demonstrated that restrictions on lay jurisdiction were ecclesiastical, not divine, and prepared the way for the more systematic treatment of lay participation in governance in the 1983 Code.[61]

4.3.2.3 – Canon 129 and the 1983 Code

Canon 129 of the 1983 Code represents a significant development:

> §1 Those who are in sacred orders are, in accordance with the provisions of law, capable of the power of governance, which belongs to the Church by divine institution. This power is also called the power of jurisdiction.
> §2 Lay members of Christ's faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power in accordance with the law.

By omitting the restrictive term *solus*, the Code implicitly recognises that clergy are not the only ones who exercise the power of governance. Lay persons, by virtue of baptism, can legitimately participate in governance through canonical appointment.[62] As Huels notes, incapacity must be expressly stipulated by law (c. 10); since the Code does not exclude lay persons, they cannot be deemed inherently incapable.[63] Historical practice, such as the appointment of lay judges, further confirms this principle.[64] The critical interpretive issue concerns the scope of the term *cooperari* (to cooperate) in §2, which has been the subject of sustained theological and canonical debate.

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power of governance, or jurisdiction." (*Communicationes*, 3 [1971], 187). According to *CIC/17*, c. 1573, §4, only clerics could be judges.

[61] The 1983 Code goes a step further and states that laypersons, both men and women, could be appointed judges on collegiate tribunals. See *CIC/83*, c. 1421, §2; *DC*, art. 43, §2. This canon has dropped the restriction to males so that any competent layperson, man or woman, may be considered.

[62] See G. FELIX, *Canon 129: The Participation of Christ's Lay Faithful in "Potestas Regiminis": A Juridical Approach with Special Reference to the Indian Context*, Romae, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Facultas Iuris Canonici, 1993, 63. See also M. FRANCIS, "An Exegesis of CIC Canon 129, §2," in *The Canonist*, 11 (2020), 59–79, for a detailed study on c. 129.

[63] See J.M. HUELS, "The Power of Governance and Its Exercise by Lay Persons: A Juridical Approach," in *Studia canonica*, 35 (2001), 79. Huels clarifies this with an example of c. 229, §3, which states that lay people are capable (*habiles*) of receiving a mandate to teach the sacred sciences. No one would say that this means that clergy are not capable of receiving such a mandate, even though the Code never says that clergy are *habiles* for receiving such a mandate. See ibid.

[64] See J.A. CORIDEN, "Lay Persons and the Power of Governance," in *The Jurist*, 59 (1999), 337.

4.3.2.4 – The Term *Cooperari* and Its Interpretations

The term *cooperari* in c. 129, §2 has generated differing interpretations in canonical scholarship. Its general meaning conveys the idea of working or acting together with another, but its legal significance in this canon must be determined in light of the text and context of the provision, in accordance with c. 17.[65] The term does not, in itself, resolve the precise extent of the laity's participation in the power of governance. Some canonists construe it narrowly, limiting lay involvement to consultative or administrative functions, while others argue that it permits substantive participation in governance. A sound interpretation must avoid both extremes: it should neither equate cooperation automatically with the full capacity attributed to those in sacred orders under §1 nor reduce it categorically to non-decisional assistance. The scope of cooperation must instead be assessed in relation to the particular canonical norms governing each function or office.[66] Cardinal Suenens emphasised that cooperation should reflect the Church's intrinsic nature, not merely pragmatic

[65] Canon 17 states: "Ecclesiastical laws must be understood in accord with the proper meaning of the words considered in their text and context. If the meaning remains doubtful and obscure, recourse must be made to parallel places, if there are such, to the purpose and circumstances of the law, and to the mind of the legislator."

[66] In the 1983 Code, the word *cooperari* is used in a variety of contexts, each carrying a different nuance. It can be an expression of mutual assistance or a subordinate attitude. It can also denote working together within religious institutes, as in c. 652, whereas c. 1041, 4° refers to criminal cooperation in voluntary homicide or abortion, resulting in an irregularity for orders. It may indicate the collaborative effort of parents and teachers (c. 796, §2). Canon 208 expresses the fundamental need of all the baptised, who are called by the fact of their baptism to cooperate in the work of building up the Body of Christ. Other examples of cooperation can be seen in cc. 275, §1 (where it can be imposed on clergy by a particular law), 328 (association with one another), 434 (meetings of bishops in an ecclesiastical region), 680 (among religious institutes and between them and the secular clergy), 708 (major religious superiors with bishops and Conferences of Bishops), 820 (ecclesiastical faculties with other faculties), and 1274, §4 (diocesan financial institutions with each other). Further references include cc. 369 and 545, §1. Thus, while the Code frequently employs the term *cooperari*, it does so with flexible meaning, without necessarily implying the exercise of the same type of power.

efficiency.[67] Scholars such as Beal, Provost, and Hill affirm that cooperation entails active sharing in governance, rather than ancillary roles.[68]

Historical precedents reinforce this broader understanding: leaders of early Christian communities, abbesses managing monastic houses, lay papal legates, curial officials, and medieval bishops exercising jurisdiction prior to ordination demonstrate that lay participation has historically been both real and consequential.[69] The debate remains whether ordination is essential for governance, or whether governance can be exercised legitimately through canonical mission, directly implicating canons such as 274, §1.[70]

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[67] See L.J. SUENENS, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1968, 33.

[68] See J.P. BEAL, "Lay People in Church Governance: Oxymoron or Opportunity," in *Together in God's service: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry: Papers from a Colloquium*, Washington, DC, National Conference of Catholic Bishops/USCC, 1998, 118; J.H. PROVOST, "The Participation of the Laity in the Governance of the Church," 434; R.A. HILL, "The Power of Governance," 93.

[69] Coriden listed the following examples to show several "historical precedents" when the laity exercised power of governance in the Church:

"• the leaders of the "house churches" in the first century were usually householders who welcomed and hosted the congregations in their homes;

• the Christian emperors of Rome convoked all of the early ecumenical councils, and they enacted laws for the internal discipline of the Church;

• feudal landlords freely appointed priests as pastors of the churches located on their lands;

• medieval abbesses and prioresses supervised and directed their subjects and the properties of their monasteries and convents;

• Popes granted jurisdiction to laypersons for various special tasks, e.g., to act as their legates or representatives or to serve as senior officials in the Roman Curia, for instance, as Cardinal Secretary of State;

• from about the twelfth century ecclesiastical jurisdiction was generally limited to those in the clerical state, which was entered by the rite of tonsure (up until 1972), rather than by ordination; often tonsured but non-ordained clerics held ecclesiastical offices;

• those selected as bishops or Popes in the Middle Ages often received holy orders after their confirmation in office; they were acknowledged to have the authority of their office from the time of their confirmation or election and acceptance, prior to their ordination." (J.A. CORIDEN, "Lay Persons and the Power of Governance," in *The Jurist*, 59 [1999], 337).

[70] See J.I, ARRIETA, "Power of Governance," in J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022 (=*Code of Canon Law Annotated, 4th edition*), 113; J.P. BEAL, "The Exercise of the Power of Governance by Lay People: State of the Question," 17; M. WIJLENS, "The Power of Governance," in *CLSA Comm2*, 184.

4.3.2.5 – Related Canons: 228, 274, and 1421, §2

The interpretation of c. 129 must be considered alongside cc. 228, 274, and 1421, §2. In 1976, the Study Group on General Norms sought clarification from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the admission of lay people to governmental or jurisdictional offices.

The CDF was asked whether the laity, made participants in the mission (*munera*) of Christ in their own way by baptism, can be admitted under the guidance of the bishops to some governmental or jurisdictional offices, namely those involving participation in executive, legislative, or judicial powers; and, if so, what are the ecclesiastical offices (*munera*) to be carried out for spiritual ends that can be given to them.[71]

The CDF responded with the following response: "Dogmatically, the laity are excluded only from intrinsically hierarchical offices, the capacity for the exercise of which is tied to the reception of the sacrament of orders."[72] This nuanced position affirms the unity of sacred power, while recognising that it can be exercised either through ordination or canonical mission. Offices open to the laity are therefore those not intrinsically hierarchical.[73] Apparent contradictions, such as c. 274, §1 restricting

[71] "Utrum laici, utpote baptismate suo modo munerum Christi participes facti, adsumi possunt, sub ductu quidem Episcoporum, ad aliqua munera regiminis seu iurisdictionis, participationem nempe secumferentia in potestatibus legislativa, executiva vel iudiciali; et, si affirmative, quaenam sint haec munera ecclesiastica ad finem spriritualem exercenda quae etiam committi possunt." The text is quoted by U. Betti, "In Margine al Nuovo Codice," in *Antonianum*, 58 (1983), 628–647, 641, footnote, 36. The above English translation is cited in K. GILLESPIE, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2017, 386.

[72] "Dogmatice, laici excluduntur a solis officiis intrinsece hierarchicis, ad quae exercenda capacitas cum receptione sacramenti Ordinis connectitur." U. BETTI, "In Margine al Nuovo Codice," in *Antonianum*, 58 (1983), 641, footnote no. 36. The English translation is cited in K. GILLESPIE, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power*, 386.

[73] See K. GILLESPIE, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power*, 386.

governance to clerics,[74] versus c. 1421, §2 allowing lay judges,[75] are reconciled by recognising that lay judges, once appointed, exercise judicial power in their own right, ensuring collegial equality.

Judges were always recognised in the canonical tradition as having judicial power in their own right. Canon 135, §3, says that judges or judicial colleges possess judicial power. Since only judges can be on a judicial college, this distinction simply means that judges, whether acting solely or collegially, exercise judicial power. This applies to all judges, clerical and lay. If lay judges did not have judicial power, they could not even be part of the college. A college presumes that all members are equal, but if a lay judge did not really have judicial power, he or she could not be equal to the two clerics. Judicial power comes with the bishop's appointment of a person to the office of judge. It is the ordinary power of office. It does not come from the collegiate tribunal. If that were true, no appointment to the office of judge would be necessary to function validly on a collegiate tribunal because the judicial power would come from the college itself. Consequently, both clerical and lay judges on a collegiate tribunal have judicial power. Otherwise, they would not be judges.[76] Scholars including

[74] *CIC/83*, c. 274, §1 states: "Only clerics can obtain offices for whose exercise the power of orders or the power of ecclesiastical governance is required."

[75] According to c. 1421, §2, the conference of bishops has the authority to allow the appointment of lay judges within the dioceses that belong to its territory. Once the conference of bishops gives the required permission for its territory, the diocesan bishop can appoint lay persons as judges to the diocesan court. All major English-speaking episcopal conferences have enacted decrees permitting lay judges to function on collegial courts. These include, among others, the conferences of Australia, Canada, England and Wales, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States of America. See K. LÜDICKE, and R.E. JENKINS, *Dignitas connubii Norms and Commentary*, Washington, DC, Canon Law Society of America, 2015, 90. See also PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR LEGISLATIVE TEXTS, *Dignitas connubii*: Instruction to be observed by Diocesan and Inter-diocesan Tribunals in Handling Causes of the Nullity of Marriage. For official Latin Text with English Translation, Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2005 (=*DC*).

[76] See J.M. HUELS, "The Power of Governance and Its Exercise by Lay Persons," 75–76.

Urrutia,[77] Labandeira,[78] and Ghirlanda[79] have harmonised these tensions, concluding that lay people possess the *habilitas* to hold offices not intrinsically requiring ordination and may thereby fully cooperate in governance.[80]

4.3.2.6 – Moving Beyond Delegation: Recent Developments

Recent papal interventions have further advanced this understanding. Pope Francis' *Praedicate Evangelium* allows any of the faithful to preside over dicasteries or offices, provided the nature of governance permits it (no. 5),[81] emphasising that governance derives from canonical mission and baptism, not solely from ordination

[77] Urrutia interprets c. 274, §1 as setting forth the general principle that only clerics are eligible for ecclesiastical offices requiring the exercise of sacred orders or jurisdiction. Canon 1421, §2, which permits lay judges in ecclesiastical tribunals, is regarded merely as an exception that does not undermine the validity of the general rule. To resolve this tension, Urrutia appeals to the interpretative principle of c. 14, according to which doubtful laws do not bind, even when they are incapacitating. Since the scope of c. 274, §1 is objectively doubtful, he concludes that lay persons may be appointed to certain offices entailing the exercise of governance, when this is expressly permitted by law. See F.J. URRUTIA, "Delegation of the Executive Power of Governance," 343–344.

[78] Labandeira, as quoted by Huels, offers a different solution by narrowing the interpretation of c. 274, §1. He maintains that the canon should be understood as referring not to every office involving the exercise of governance, but specifically to the so-called "capital" offices, such as the papacy, the diocesan episcopate, and the parochial pastorate, which inherently require both the *munus pastorale* and the *sacra potestas* conferred through ordination. While lay persons cannot hold such principal ecclesiastical offices, they may nevertheless be called upon by pastors of the Church to collaborate in subordinate offices of governance. A strict interpretation of the law, in accordance with c. 18, reinforces this reading, restricting the prohibition of c. 274, §1 to the major hierarchical offices alone. See J.M. HUELS, "The Power of Governance and Its Exercise by Lay Persons," 76.

[79] Ghirlanda undertakes a more systematic approach to the apparent contradiction within cc. 129, 274, §1, and 228, §1. Drawing on the preparatory work of the *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis*, particularly the 1972 schema, he highlights the recognition therein of the laity's possible participation in the power of governance by positive ecclesiastical law. He carefully distinguishes between power and capacity: power is something to be conferred, whereas capacity (*capacitas*) is a quality conferred in baptism that makes one apt (*habilis*) to receive jurisdictional power when legitimately entrusted. On this basis, he argues that all the baptised possess the capacity for ecclesiastical offices that do not, by their nature, require sacred orders or jurisdiction. This capacity does not, however, translate into a subjective right to such offices. Harmonising the canons in question, Ghirlanda insists that c. 274, §1 affirms the clerics' right, by virtue of ordination, to offices requiring sacred power, but it does not exclude the laity from being called as cooperators in governance (c. 129, §2), nor from assuming offices legitimately open to them according to c. 228, §1. See G. GHIRLANDA, "De natura, origine et exercitio potestatis regiminis iuxta novum Codicem," 130–131.

[80] For an overview of the doctrinal debate on lay participation in the power of governance, see the bibliography provided in Chapter 2, footnote no. 293.

[81] See FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia and Its Service to the Church in the World *Praedicate Evangelium*, 19 March 2022, no. 5, in *AAS*, 114 (2022), 433–521 (=*PE*), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html (25 September 2025).

(no. 10).[82] Canonists such as Ghirlanda[83] and Marco Mellino[84] stress that governance flows from mission, reaffirming the authority of lay persons in ecclesiastical office.

[82] See *PE*, Preamble, no. 10.

[83] Ghirlanda explains this power thus, "During the process of reforming the Code of Canon Law, the question was again discussed, and at the Plenary Congregation of the Enlarged Commission, held on October 20-29, 1981, a request was made to suppress the current canons 129, §2 and 1421, §2 on the basis of the affirmation of the Second Vatican Council that all the power of governance in the Church has its origin in the Sacrament of Orders. The two canons remained. The Commission rejected the request because it did not appear that the Council had affirmed this. […]. The fact, then, is that c. 1673, §3 of Pope Francis' *motu proprio Mitis Iudex* of August 15, 2015, admits that out of a college of three judges, two may be laypersons, while providing that the president must be a cleric, reinforces the norm of c. 1421, §2 of the *CIC*, because it cannot be doubted that the laity, exercising the power of judicial governance received with the canonical mission, determine the nullity or otherwise of the marriage in question. *Praedicate Evangelium* settles the question of the capacity of the laity to receive offices involving the exercise of the power of governance in the Church, provided that they do not require the reception of holy orders, and indirectly affirms that the power of governance in the Church does not come from the sacrament of orders, but from the canonical mission; otherwise, what is provided for in the Apostolic Constitution itself would not be possible." (G. GHIRLANDA, "The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* on the Roman Curia," footnote no. 24, in *La civiltà Cattolica*, 6 April 2022, https://www-laciviltacattolica-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/the-apostolic-constitution-praedicate-evangelium-on-the-roman-curia/) (25 September 2025).

[84] M. MELLINO, "La Curia Romana alla luce della Constituzione apostolica "Praedicate Evangelium," in *L'Osservatore Romana*, Italian ed., 9 May 2022: "Quanto affermato in Principi e criteri 5 e disposto nell'art. 15 trova il suo fondamento innanzitutto nei cann. 208 e 204, §1 *CIC* e 11 e 7, §1 *CCEO*, che assumono la dottrina conciliare (*Lumen gentium*, 31a; 32b): uguaglianza tra tutti i battezzati nella dignità e nell'agire, unitamente a differenti condizioni giuridiche. Questa uguaglianza fondamentale, anche se nella differenziazione e complementarietà, fonda la sinodalità e inoltre indica che la potestà di giurisdizione (o di governo) nella Chiesa non viene dal sacramento dell'ordine, ma dalla missione canonica. Le due potestà, quindi, hanno una fonte diversa: la potestà d'ordine è conferita con il sacramento, mentre la potestà di giurisdizione è annessa all'ufficio conferito mediante la missione o provisione canonica (can. 146). In questo senso il Concilio Vaticano II afferma che il sacramento dell'ordine concede i tre *munera* di insegnare, santificare e governare, ma non la potestà corrispondente. Coscientemente la Nota esplicativa previa utilizza la parola *munus* (incarico, funzione) e non la parola *potestas*, perché non sono sinonimi.

Ne consegue quanto previsto nei cann. 129, §1 e 274, §1 *CIC*, secondo i quali la potestà di governo non è data con l'ordine sacro, bensì mediante la provvisione canonica di un ufficio.

Il can. 129, §1 dichiara che «sono abili alla potestà di governo […] coloro che sono insigniti dell'ordine sacro», e al §2 aggiunge che i fedeli laici «possono cooperare» (*cooperari possunt*) nell'esercizio della medesima potestà. Cooperare significa propriamente operare insieme con un altro. In questa cooperazione ciascuno contribuisce con la propria parte a realizzare la stessa opera. Cooperare nell'esercizio della potestà di governo significa, quindi, esercitare la stessa potestà che ha colui con il quale si coopera. Ciò presuppone che chi coopera nell'esercizio della potestà di governo ha quella stessa potestà. Dunque, l'espressione latina *cooperari possunt* ha lo stesso significato di *partem habere possunt*.

Il can. 274 § 1 stabilisce che «solo i chierici possono ottenere uffici il cui esercizio richieda la potestà d'ordine o la potestà di governo ecclesiastico». La norma, quindi, non nega l'abilità dei laici ad avere la potestà di governo, ma la limita agli uffici che non richiedano né la potestà d'ordine, né quella di governo ecclesiastico. Risulta così precisato il criterio con il quale si determinano quali sono i dicasteri e/o gli organismi della Curia Romana che possono essere presieduti da un fedele laico."

Marcello Semeraro similarly stresses the missionary dimension of governance, highlighting that offices assisting the Pope in his pastoral ministry serve the evangelising mission of the Church.[85] The Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* had already established the possibility for non-episcopal members of the Synod of Bishops to participate as full members, including with voting rights, whenever they are appointed by the Roman Pontiff.[86] This marked a significant development in synodal practice. The 2023 Synod *Synthesis Report* builds on and embodies this trajectory by concretely implementing such participation and strengthening the model of collaborative and synodal decision-making.[87] In this way, recent reforms present a vision of shared authority that transcends a purely delegated conception of lay involvement in governance.

A coherent understanding of lay participation in governance rests upon several interrelated principles. Foremost is the primacy of baptism, as participation in governance is grounded in the baptismal dignity shared by all the faithful, reflecting their inclusion in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly office (*LG* 9–10, 31). Equally important is the recognition of canonical office: lay people can legitimately hold ecclesiastical offices, as articulated in c. 145, through lawful appointment, exercising governance in their own right rather than merely as delegates of clerics. The principle

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[85] See C. WOODEN, "Opening Curia to Laity, Pope is Implementing Vatican II," in *Catholic News Service*, 21 March 2022, https://catholicreview.org/opening-curia-posts-to-laity-Pope-is-implementing-vatican-ii-experts-say/ (25 September 2025).

[86] FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops *Episcopalis communio*, 15 September 2018, nin *AAS*, 110 (2018), 1359–1378, English translation in *Origins*, 48 (2018), 371–378, art. 3 §1 and art. 18 §3. These articles together establish that non-bishops may be appointed as full members of the Synod of Bishops by the Roman Pontiff and therefore exercise voting rights during the Assembly.

[87] See *Synthesis Report*, nos. 8–10; see also S. CERNUZIO, "Synod: Laymen and Laywomen Eligible to Vote at General Assembly," in *Vatican News*, 26 April 2023, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-04/synod-synodality-general-assemblies-laypeople-eligible-vote.html (25 September 2025); "Synod of Bishops Gets More Lay Members," in *The Pillar*, 26 April 2023, https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/synod-of-bishops-gets-more-lay-members (25 September 2025); A.A. ALLEN, "Laypeople, Including Women, Will Vote as Full Members in Upcoming Synod," in *Crux*, 26 April 2023, https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2023/04/laypeople-including-women-will-vote-as-full-members-in-upcoming-synod (25 September 2025).

of synodality further underscores that governance should incorporate the expertise and consultation of the laity, thereby fostering shared responsibility and accountability within ecclesial structures.[88] Finally, a careful conceptual distinction between the broader *munus regendi*, the pastoral function of guiding the community, and the specific *potestas regiminis*, the legal authority to perform acts of ecclesiastical governance, ensures the preservation of theological integrity while simultaneously recognising the genuine exercise of authority by lay persons.[89]

In conclusion, the trajectory of canonical development underlines a shift from the restrictive *soli clerici* paradigm to a model recognising lay persons' proper exercise of governance. Rooted in baptism, enacted through canonical mission, and supported by synodal structures, this development reflects the Church's evolving self-understanding as the People of God and calls for ongoing theological and canonical reflection to ensure its full realisation.

4.3.3 – Stability and Juridical Mandate in Instituted Ministries

The development of lay instituted ministries within the Church, most notably those of lector, acolyte, and catechist, requires close attention to two canonical categories that decisively shape their identity and function: "stability" and "juridical mandate." These concepts illuminate the distinction between instituted ministries and

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[88] See *EG*, no. 31. Pope Francis highlights the role of the diocesan bishop in fostering canonical "means of participation" and "other forms of pastoral dialogue," not as a means of hearing only what might be pleasing, but as authentic opportunities for listening to all voices in view of the Church's missionary mandate to reach everyone. In *Evangelii gaudium*, the only explicit reference to the Code of Canon Law identifies twenty-six canons that regulate seven such participatory structures in the particular Church: the diocesan synod (cc. 460–468), the diocesan finance council (cc. 492–494), the presbyteral council (cc. 495–501), the college of consultors (c. 502), the diocesan pastoral council (cc. 511–514), the parish pastoral council (c. 536), and the parish finance council (c. 537). Of these, four are required at all times by universal law (the diocesan finance council, the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, and the parish finance council), two may be established by particular law at the discretion of the diocesan bishop (the diocesan pastoral council and the parish pastoral council). One, the diocesan synod, is convoked occasionally at the bishop's initiative. See J.A. RENKEN, "Pope Francis and Participative Bodies in the Church: Canonical Reflections," in *Studia canonica*, 48 (2014), 206.

[89] See G. GHIRLANDA, "The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* on the Roman Curia."

temporary deputations, clarify their integration into the life of the Church, and articulate their relationship to both the common priesthood of the faithful and the ordained ministry. The challenge lies in preserving fidelity to the Church's tradition while responding effectively to the pastoral needs of contemporary ecclesial life.

4.3.3.1 – The Significance of "Stable" Institution

The designation of instituted ministries as "stable" (*stabiliter*) is central to their canonical identity. When Pope Paul VI promulgated *Ministeria quaedam*, he identified lector and acolyte as "stable ministries," thereby inaugurating a category of lay ministry distinct from temporary deputations.[90] Stability here implies that the ministry, once conferred, accompanies the individual for life, regardless of whether it is continuously exercised in a given parish or diocesan setting.[91]

This principle was confirmed by Pope Francis in *Spiritus Domini*, which situates instituted ministries within the baptismal dignity of the faithful and their participation in the royal priesthood, emphasising their essential distinction from the sacrament of orders.[92] Similarly, *Antiquum ministerium*, in establishing the ministry of catechist, referred to it as a "stable form of service," underscoring continuity with lector and acolyte.[93] Stability, therefore, is not functional but constitutive, embedding the minister within an enduring ecclesial identity. The rite of institution conferred once and not repeated,[94] signifies the permanence of this relationship.

Canonically, stability elevates instituted ministries beyond the level of voluntary service by integrating them into the Church's juridical and liturgical structures. This is

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[90] See *MQ*.

[91] See *AM*, no. 8; J.H. PROVOST, "Ecclesiastical Offices," in *CLSA Comm2*, 197.

[92] See *SD*.

[93] See *AM*, nos. 2, 8.

[94] See *AM*, no. 9; Letter to the Presidents, no. 3.

formally codified in c. 230, §1 provides for the stable institution of laymen and women as lectors and acolytes, whereas §2 regulates temporary deputations, such as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.[95] The distinction is more than semantic: instituted ministries create a permanent bond between the person and the Church's ministerial life, while temporary deputations remain contingent responses to immediate pastoral necessity.

4.3.3.2 – Juridical Implications of the "Liturgical Rite" of Institution

Instituted ministries are conferred by a prescribed liturgical rite which possesses both theological and juridical significance. *Ministeria quaedam* did not merely rename the minor orders; it decisively detached them from clerical status and entrusted them to lay persons in a stable form.[96] The rite therefore functions simultaneously as theological sign and canonical act: it incorporates the individual into the Church's ministerial order and establishes a stable juridical condition recognised by the community and the hierarchy alike.

The juridical weight of this rite derives from its capacity to generate ecclesial identity. Pope Paul VI emphasised that the ministry of acolyte involves not only liturgical service but also the deepening of eucharistic devotion and catechetical formation, shaping what he described as the "intimate core of the person."[97] In this sense, the rite cannot be reduced to a symbolic or devotional gesture; it confers a recognised ecclesial role that endures independently of the frequency or regularity of its exercise.

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[95] See *CIC/83*, c. 230, §§1–2.

[96] See *MQ*, nos. 2–3.

[97] See *MQ*, no. 6.

Furthermore, the liturgical dimension clarifies the distinctive juridical character of instituted ministries. Huels, in his analysis of sacramentals, distinguishes between sacramentals without juridic effect, such as the blessing of objects, and sacramentals with juridic effect, such as the blessing of an abbot or the dedication of a church.[98] Within this framework, the rite of institution for lector and acolyte is properly understood as a sacramental with juridic effect, since it not only imparts spiritual grace but also constitutes the individual in a stable ecclesial role.[99] This elucidates why the rites of institution are unique to these ministries and cannot be replaced or replicated by other blessings or appointments of lay ministers. Their conferral generates a recognised ecclesial status that carries juridical consequences and ecclesial visibility distinct from temporary deputations,[100] thereby linking liturgical conferral with canonical legitimacy.

4.3.3.3 – Role of the Mandate from the Legitimate Authority

While the rite of institution establishes stable identity of the minister, the concrete exercise of instituted ministries requires a mandate from the legitimate authority, ordinarily the diocesan bishop. This mandate determines the scope of ministry, including its time, place, and modalities, thereby translating theological recognition into canonical practice.[101] In this context, it is important to distinguish instituted ministry from ecclesiastical office in the strict canonical sense. The 1983 Code defines an ecclesiastical office as "any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose" (c. 145, §1). Although instituted ministers, by virtue of their formation and ecclesial standing, may

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[98] See J.M. HUELS, "The Ministers of Sacramentals," in *The Jurist*, 65 (2005), 369; "A Juridical Notion of Sacramentals," in *Studia canonica*, 38 (2004), 355. See also J.M. HUELS, *Liturgy and Law: Liturgical Law in the System of Roman Catholic Canon Law*, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur, 2006, 211–212.

[99] See J.M. HUELS, "The Ministers of Sacramentals," 369; "A Juridical Notion of Sacramentals," 355.

[100] See Letter to the Presidents, no. 5.

[101] See See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 273.

be appointed to certain ecclesiastical offices, where permitted by law, the exercise of their instituted ministry as such does not, in itself, constitute an ecclesiastical office.[102] Their active service typically presupposes an act of appointment by the bishop, which ensures accountability and integration into the diocesan structure, reflecting the bishop's responsibility as moderator of ministries in the local Church (cc. 391; 835, §1).

Although the faculties proper to instituted ministries derive from and are conferred by the rite of institution, which is a sacramental with juridic effect,[103] their juridical exercise depends upon the episcopal mandate.[104] This framework prevents instituted ministers from being regarded as mere executors of clerical tasks. Instead, they act as collaborators and animators of ecclesial life, exercising genuine responsibility within a system of ministerial cooperation presided over by the bishop.[105] Such an arrangement safeguards the distinctive sacramental role of the ordained while fostering lay co-responsibility in ecclesial governance and pastoral action.

The introduction of instituted ministries, structured through stability and mandate, exemplifies a synodal vision of the Church. By rooting ministries in baptism, conferring them through liturgical rite, and regulating their exercise juridically, the Church provides a coherent framework that honours the distinctiveness of ordained ministry while promoting the active integration of the laity into its ministerial life. These developments invite continued canonical discernment, particularly concerning the relationship between orders and jurisdiction and the formation processes required to sustain these responsibilities. Ultimately, the categories of stability and juridical mandate serve not merely to regulate lay ministries but to integrate them more deeply into the Church's witness to the Gospel in contemporary society.

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[102] See *CIC/83*, c. 228, §1.
[103] See J.M. HUELS, "The Ministers of Sacramentals," in *The Jurist*, 65, (2005), 379.
[104] See ibid., 361; see also S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 273.
[105] See S. NOCETI, "Instituted Ministers and Ordained Ministers," 273.

4.4 – Towards a Synodal Framework for Ministries: Foundational Principles and Future Development

The reforms initiated by *Ministeria quaedam* and further advanced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* demonstrate that the theology and law of ministries are dynamic, reflecting the Church's growth in self-understanding as a *communio* animated by the Spirit. These developments reach beyond the refinement of juridical categories and touch the very nature of the Church. Within this perspective, the framework of instituted ministries requires reinterpretation in light of synodality, which Pope Francis has described as "the constitutive dimension of the Church." Synodality is not a new programme but a way of being and acting (*modus vivendi et operandi*), a style of walking together as the pilgrim People of God, in which all the baptised, and indeed people of good will, are called to participate actively, irrespective of age, sex, or state of life.[106] Rooted in the ecclesiology of the People of God, the International Theological Commission affirms that synodality implies the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, expressed in the ordered diversity of their charisms, vocations, and ministries.[107] In this light, instituted ministries should not be reduced to

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[106] See FRANCIS, Address for the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops; *ITC*, no. 7

[107] See *ITC*, no. 6. For detailed studies on the concept of synodality, see FRANCIS, Address for the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015; INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 2 March 2018; L. GIOIA, "The Recent Practice of Synodality and Its Ecclesiological Significance in the Light of Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium*,' paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion, 21-24 October 2015, at the seminar "What's the Point of Synods?," organised by the Ecclesiological Investigations Group, 1–14; W. NAPIER, "What Made Synod 2014 and 2015 So Interesting? Collegiality and Synodality!" in *The Jurist*, 76 (2016), 327–338; J.A. RENKEN, "Synodality: A Constitutive Element of the Church, Reflections on Pope Francis and Synodality," in *Studia canonica*, 52 (2018), 5–44; J.A. RENKEN, "The Management of Church Property in a Synodal Church: Towards Eliminating Financial Misconduct," in *Studia canonica*, 52 (2018), 593–626; M. WIJLENS, "Representation and Witnessing in Synodal Structures," in *Studia canonica*, 53 (2019), 75–105; P. SZABÓ, "Episcopal Conferences, Particular Councils, and the Renewal of Inter-Diocesan "Deliberative Synodality," in *Studia canonica*, 53 (2019), 265–296; N.B. XAVIÈRE, "The Pandemic, A Kairos to Foster Synodality as a Way to Implement *Laudato Si*," in *UISG Bulletin*, 173 (2020), 15–20; M. FAGGIOLI, "Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words," in *The Way*, 59 (2020), 89–100; J.S. PALAKEEL, "Journeying Together to Evangelise: A Look at the Synodal Church of Pope Francis," in *Asian Horizons*, 14 (2020), 119–136; B. HINZE, "Can We Find a Way Together? The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding

functional or juridical categories, but recognised as concrete instruments that enable and embody synodality in the Church's daily life.

4.4.1 – Synodality as the Hermeneutical Key for Ministries

Synodality provides a decisive hermeneutical key for rethinking the nature and purpose of instituted ministries. Earlier canonical formulations often defined lay ministry negatively, either in contrast to ordained ministry or as a substitute for it. By contrast, synodality situates all ministries, both ordained and lay, within the single mission of the Church. This perspective recovers the conciliar vision of the Church as the People of God, within which diverse ministries emerge from baptism and confirmation, and are discerned, recognised, and ordered for the service of communion and mission (*LG* 9–12, 31).[108]

From this standpoint, instituted ministries are not marginal supplements to ordained service but ordinary expressions of co-responsibility in the Church. Their theological significance extends well beyond the provision of liturgical assistance: they embody the synodal life of the Church itself, characterised by listening, discernment, mutual recognition of charisms, and collaborative mission. This perspective stands in deliberate contrast to the supplementary and substitutive framework articulated in the

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Church," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 85 (2020), 215–229; M. FAGGIOLI, "From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis's 'Listening Primacy'," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 85 (2020), 352–369; P.J. MCGREGOR, "Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council: Listening to and Looking at Those Who are Living in the Spirit," in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 86 (2021), 21–38; F. WILFRED, "Synodality in Action with Butterfly Effect," in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 85 (2021), 728–745; R. BARRON, "Three Cautions in Regard to Synodality: An Address to the Canon Law Society of America," in *CLSAP*, 84 (2022), 1–15; R. LUCIANI, *Synodality A New Way of Proceeding in the Church*, New York/Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2022, 1–188; M. MCQUEEN, *Walking Together: A Primer on the New Synodality*, New London, Twenty-Third Publications, 2022, 1–63; R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "Synodality and the Francis Pontificate: A Fresh Reception of Vatican II," in *Theological Studies*, 84 (2023), 44–60; M. WIJLENS, "Synodality Implies Accountability. Accountability Requires a Synodal Church: A Theological Reflection with Canonical Implications," in *Studia canonica*, 56 (2022), 413–439; J.D. FARIS, "The Role of Consultation in Practical Governance," in *Studia canonica*, 56 (2022), 605–627; J. MOONS, "Synodality and Discernment. The Affective Configuration of the Church," in *Studia canonica*, 56 (2022), 379–393; E. ROPER, "Synodality: A Process Committed to Transformation," in *The Australian Catholic Record*, 412–423.

[108] See *ITC*, no. 6.

instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, which tended to define lay involvement primarily in terms of assisting or replacing the ordained.[109] In a synodal key, instituted ministries are therefore presented not merely as functional tasks, but as juridical recognitions of Spirit-given vocations that shape the ecclesial community.

4.4.2 – Evaluating the Distinction Between Instituted and Temporary Ministries

One of the most enduring legacies of *Ministeria quaedam* and of c. 230 of the 1983 Code is the distinction between instituted ministries and temporary or extraordinary deputations. The purpose of this division was to safeguard the stability of instituted ministries such as lector and acolyte, while simultaneously allowing for pastoral flexibility through the temporary deputation of lay persons to particular functions. After more than fifty years of experience, however, and especially in light of recent reforms, the adequacy of this binary framework requires critical reassessment.

4.4.2.1 – Historical Justification, Practical and Theological Ambiguities

The original justification for distinguishing between instituted and temporary ministries was both theological and pastoral. On the theological level, instituted ministries were conceived as stable vocations rooted in baptism and conferred through a liturgical rite, thereby distinguishing them from *ad hoc* deputations.[110] On the pastoral level, the Church sought a juridical mechanism to address clerical shortages by permitting the temporary deputation of lay persons for specific functions without compromising the unique identity of ordained ministers.[111] This framework provided flexibility: an instituted lector enjoyed a stable and recognised ministry, but in the

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[109] See *EDM* especially arts. 1 §4 and 8, which frame the participation of the non-ordained in explicitly supplementary or substitutive terms. The synodal approach adopted here represents a development by interpreting instituted lay ministries not as extraordinary replacements for clerical functions but as ordinary expressions of baptismal co-responsibility within the life and mission of the Church.

[110] See *MQ*, nos. 1–2.

[111] See *CIC/83*, c. 230, §§1–2.

lector's absence a lay person could be deputed to proclaim the readings; similarly, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion could be designated where bishops, priests, deacons, or acolytes were unavailable.[112]

In practice, however, this distinction has produced a number of ambiguities. The most acute difficulty is the functional equivalence between instituted and deputed ministries, since both often entail identical tasks. For instance, a deputed lay lector performs precisely the same act as an instituted lector, while an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion distributes the Eucharist in a manner indistinguishable from that of an acolyte.[113] This overlap raises the question of whether the distinction between instituted and deputed ministries retains meaningful pastoral significance.

A second difficulty lies in the hierarchical perception fostered by this framework. Instituted ministries, by virtue of their stability and liturgical conferral, are frequently perceived as more authentic ministries, while temporary deputations are treated as inferior or exceptional. Yet both forms of service derive from baptismal dignity and charism, and both serve the Church's mission.[114] The framework thus risks creating an artificial hierarchy between equally legitimate expressions of ecclesial service.

Finally, the very category of "extraordinary" ministry defines lay participation in negative terms, as a response to absence rather than as an affirmation of vocation. Such a construction risks obscuring the deeper reality that lay service, even when

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[112] See Instruction *Immensae caritatis*, no. 1, in *CLD*, vol. 8, 497.

[113] See A. BORRAS, "Les laïcs: suppléance ou partenariat? Une mise en perspective du canon 230," in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 95 (2000), 321.

[114] Ibid.

deputed, is an authentic manifestation of baptismal mission and not merely a stopgap measure to compensate for a lack of ordained ministers.[115]

4.4.2.2 – Towards Re-evaluation and Implications for Canonical Reform

A synodal reading of contemporary developments suggests that the framework distinguishing between instituted and deputed ministries requires substantial re-evaluation. Instead of permanence or temporariness being the decisive criteria, a synodal vision emphasises the ecclesial recognition of charisms and the discernment of authentic vocations. Some charisms may indeed call for stable institution, while others may be exercised more flexibly. The decisive factor should therefore be not juridical permanence alone but the Spirit's gift and the Church's discernment of its authenticity.[116]

This shift calls for a corresponding reform in canonical language. Rather than relying on categories such as "extraordinary" and "temporary," the Church might move towards terminology of "discerned" and "mission-specific" ministries. Such a framework would classify ministries not only by their permanence but also by their orientation, liturgical, catechetical, pastoral, or evangelising, and by the ecclesial processes that recognise and sustain them. This reorientation would prevent lay service from being reduced to functional substitution and instead affirm it as a diverse manifestation of baptismal co-responsibility for mission of the Church.[117]

The canonical implications of such a reconsideration are significant. Revising c. 230 to move beyond the restrictive language of "extraordinary deputation" would embed ministries more deeply within a theology of charisms and missions. Episcopal

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[115] See A. BORRAS, "Les laïcs: suppléance ou partenariat? 322.

[116] See *PE*, preamble, nos. 5, 10.

[117] See *ITC*, nos. 70–75.

conferences would be tasked with discerning which ministries in their contexts should be stably instituted and which should remain more flexible. The goal would not be to abolish the categories of stability and deputation altogether, but to relativise them in favour of a richer theological grounding. Stability must continue to be safeguarded, but not at the expense of preventing recognition of other authentic forms of ministry; equally, flexibility must not render such ministries invisible or inferior. A synodal framework thus requires that stability and flexibility be held together in service of communion and mission, ensuring that all ministries are genuinely oriented towards the building up of the Body of Christ.

4.4.3 – Universal and Particular Law in Practice

The interaction between universal and particular law in the field of instituted ministries reveals a dynamic juridical landscape shaped by historical discontinuity, evolving theological insights, and diverse pastoral applications. Prior to the 2021 reforms, *Ministeria quaedam* and c. 230 constituted the principal universal norms governing instituted ministries, and they delegated significant discretion to episcopal conferences. As demonstrated in Section 2.2.5, this delegation produced an extensive body of particular law throughout the world. Although canonically valid, much of this legislation was marked by a functional or predominantly liturgical understanding of ministry, often reflecting residual categories drawn from clerical formation. What emerged was a rich but uneven body of norms, highly effective pastorally yet lacking a unified theological and canonical framework.

The promulgation of *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* introduced a decisive shift. These documents do not simply extend access to lectorate and acolytate or formally institute the ministry of catechist. They articulate a renewed ecclesiological vision grounded in baptismal dignity, charismatic co-responsibility, and synodal

participation. Earlier particular laws remain in force unless explicitly abrogated, but they now stand within a new framework that demands reinterpretation. Episcopal conferences therefore find themselves in a transitional moment. Their legislative task no longer concerns primarily procedural details but the coherent reception and contextual expression of a universal theological and canonical vision.

In this respect, the documents issued by the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (CEP)[118] and the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI)[119] provide significant examples of post-2021 reception. The CEP emphasises baptismal identity, ecclesial mission, and pastoral structuring,[120] whereas the CEI places the ministries within a synodal hermeneutic marked by discernment, charisms, and co-responsibility.[121] Although differing in emphasis and tone, both demonstrate the potential of particular law to give concrete expression to the renewed ministerial framework proposed by universal law. Their contributions therefore offer a key interpretative horizon for the future development of universal and particular norms.

4.4.3.1 – The Role of Episcopal Conferences in Implementing Universal Norms

The reforms of *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* reaffirm the central juridical competence of episcopal conferences in structuring the concrete exercise of instituted ministries.[122] Canon 455 authorises conferences to issue binding general

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[118] See CONFERÊNCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA (CEP), *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, 22 June 2022, https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/ministerios-laicais-para-uma-igreja-ministerial/ (21 April 2026).

[119] See CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (CEI), *I Ministeri Istituiti del Lettore, dell'accolito e del Catechista Per le Chiese Che Sono In Italia, Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, 5 June 2022, https://liturgico.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/07/13/NotaCeiMinisteri.pdf (21 April 2026).

[120] See CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 2, 5, 8, 9,10, 43.

[121] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, nos. 3, 5.

[122] See *CIC/83*, c. 230, §1; *AM*, nos. 7, 9.

decrees when permitted by universal law,[123] and c. 230 expressly reserves to them the determination of the age, qualities, and formation required for admission to instituted ministries.[124] Universal law therefore provides the theological vision and juridical framework, while particular law determines its practical application in the diverse contexts of the Church.

The Portuguese Episcopal Conference's document, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, offers a notably coherent reception of the 2021 reforms. By grounding instituted ministries firmly in baptismal dignity and missionary identity,[125] the CEP articulates a unified scheme of discernment,[126] formation,[127] and pastoral integration.[128] The document distinguishes clearly between instituted ministries, ordained ministry,[129] and temporary deputation,[130] offering a systematic vision well aligned with *Antiquum ministerium*. Its combination of theological clarity and practical detail makes it a significant model for other conferences.

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[123] *CIC/83*, c. 455 states: "§1. A conference of bishops can only issue general decrees in cases where universal law has prescribed it or a special mandate of the Apostolic See has established it either motu proprio or at the request of the conference itself.

§2. The decrees mentioned in §1, in order to be enacted validly in a plenary meeting, must be passed by at least two thirds vote of the prelates who belong to the conference and possess a deliberative vote. They do not obtain binding force unless they have been legitimately promulgated after having been reviewed by the Apostolic See.

§3. The conference of bishops itself determines the manner of promulgation and the time when the decrees take effect.

§4. In cases in which neither universal law nor a special mandate of the Apostolic See has granted the power mentioned in §1 to a conference of bishops, the competence of each diocesan bishop remains intact, nor is a conference or its president able to act in the name of all the bishops unless each and every bishop has given consent."

[124] See *CIC/83*, c. 230, §1.

[125] See CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 2, 5, 8, 9,10, 43.

[126] See ibid., nos. 10, 36, 37.

[127] See ibid., nos. 12, 26, 32, 40, 41.

[128] See ibid., no. 35.

[129] See ibid., nos. 8, 21, 37.

[130] See ibid., nos. 24, 29.

The Italian Episcopal Conference's 2022 *Nota* presents an alternative but complementary reception. Issued within the context of the national synodal process,[131] it emphasises vocational discernment,[132] the relationship between charisms and instituted ministry,[133] and the formation of co-responsible ecclesial communities.[134] Its theological tone is more pronounced than that of the CEP, integrating Trinitarian and charismatic perspectives into its canonical norms.[135] The CEI thus provides a paradigmatic example of how instituted ministries can serve as instruments of synodal renewal.

These two documents demonstrate that episcopal conferences, exercising their competence collegially and in communion with the Apostolic See, play a decisive role in the contemporary development of instituted ministries. They exemplify the capacity of particular law to receive, interpret, and concretise universal norms without compromising ecclesial unity.

4.4.3.2 – Varied Interpretations of Universal Norms and Local Adaptation

The diversity evident in the reception of instituted ministries among episcopal conferences reflects not only the variety of pastoral contexts but also differing theological emphases and stages of ecclesial reception. As shown in Section 2.2.5, pre-2021 particular law often prioritised functional and liturgical aspects of lectorate and acolytate, with limited theological elaboration. While canonically valid, this framework lacked the depth of the baptismal and synodal vision articulated in the 2021 reforms.

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[131] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, Presentazione; no. 4.

[132] See ibid., nos. 2, 4, 5.

[133] See ibid., no. 1.

[134] See ibid., no. 3.

[135] See ibid., Introduction.

Both the CEP and the CEI illustrate two complementary paths of reception. The CEP offers a structurally coherent and pastorally oriented model grounded in baptism, mission, and ecclesial identity. The CEI, meanwhile, presents a more explicitly theological and synodal vision, highlighting charisms, vocational discernment, and the communal nature of ecclesial ministry. Together they reveal how universal norms can be legitimately adapted, diversified, and enriched through particular law, provided that the fundamental theological and canonical criteria established by universal law remain intact.

The emerging diversity is therefore not a sign of fragmentation but of differentiated reception. It illustrates a broader canonical principle: universal law establishes foundational norms and theological orientation, while particular law provides contextualisation, pastoral specificity, and practical coherence.

4.4.3.3 – The Italian Episcopal Conference: A Synodal Reception of Post-2021 Ministerial Reform

The CEI's 2022 *Nota* constitutes one of the most theologically robust and canonically detailed post-2021 receptions of instituted ministries. Approved at the CEI's 76th General Assembly and issued *ad experimentum* for three years, it interprets lectorate, acolytate, and the ministry of catechist within the broader synodal journey underway in Italy.[136] This framing situates ministerial reform within a wider project of ecclesial renewal rather than merely disciplinary adaptation.

4.4.3.3.1 – Theological and Synodal Foundations

The CEI grounds its approach in Pauline ecclesiology (1 Cor 12:4–7), stressing that ministries arise from the Spirit's distribution of charisms for the building up of the

[136] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, Presentazione.

Body of Christ.[137] Its explicitly Trinitarian framework strengthens the link between ecclesiology and canon law, situating the 2021 reforms within the trajectory extending from Vatican II through *Ministeria quaedam*. The synodal method is expressed not only in content but also in the *ad experimentum* character of the norms, which invites iterative discernment with local Churches.

4.4.3.3.2 – Identity and Tasks of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist

The CEI provides substantial theological and pastoral descriptions of the three instituted ministries. The lector is understood as a minister of the Word who makes Christ present through the proclamation of Scripture. The ministry extends beyond liturgical reading to include biblical formation, ecumenical engagement, and promoting discernment grounded in Scripture.[138] The acolyte is framed within Eucharistic theology: serving at the altar and serving the Body of Christ in the poor, the sick, and the homebound are presented as inseparable. The ministry therefore bridges liturgy and *diakonia*, reinforcing the unity between Eucharistic celebration and the Church's charitable mission.[139] The catechist is defined as a minister of evangelisation, Christian initiation, and lifelong catechesis. The CEI's decision to institute catechists specifically for the coordination of parish catechesis reflects careful alignment with universal norms as elaborated in the Dicastery for Divine Worship's 2021 letter on the Rite of Institution of Catechists.[140]

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[137] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, Introduction.

[138] See ibid., no. 3a.

[139] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 3b.

[140] See ibid., no. 3c.

4.4.3.3.3 – Formation, Vocational Discernment, and Criteria for Admission

Formation is conceived as vocational discernment rather than mere acquisition of competencies. The CEI establishes criteria of mature faith, ecclesial commitment, biblical competence, and relational aptitude. It mandates a minimum one-year programme combining academic, pastoral, and supervised practical components, thereby promoting both doctrinal integrity and pastoral readiness.

> Communities with their priests present candidates, who will be appointed by the bishop after a period of appropriate guidance and formation by a team of experts. The bishop first recognises the vocation and evaluates its usefulness for a specific service within the local ecclesial community; he then institutes them with the proper liturgical rite; finally, with a juridical act, he confers the mandate for that specific ministry.
> The established ministries of Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist are open to men and women who express their availability, according to the following *discernment criteria* : they are people of profound faith, educated in the Word of God, humanly mature, actively participating in the life of the Christian community, capable of establishing fraternal relationships, able to communicate the faith both by example and by word, and recognised as such by the community, in the forms and ways that the Bishop deems appropriate.
> Bishops should establish *suitable training programs* to achieve three essential objectives: to assist in discerning the intellectual, spiritual, and relational suitability of candidates; to enhance formation for specific service, through the practice of appropriate pastoral activities; and to enable ongoing biblical, theological, and pastoral development for those already mandated for ministry. These training programs can be conducted with the assistance of existing academic institutions in the area, such as Institutes of Theology and Religious Sciences. The support of these institutions will facilitate the development of training plans, which include not only classroom lectures but also seminars and *in-person* training. Finally, regarding the duration of training, at least one year should be planned, under the guidance of a diocesan team, which can continue the formation during the initial period of ministry.[141]

4.4.3.3.4 – Juridical Structure: Rite, Mandate, Duration, Stability

The CEI reaffirms that the Rite of Institution is conferred once and is not repeated.[142] The ministry is stable, yet its exercise is structured through a five-year renewable mandate.[143] The minimum age of 25 is retained.[144]

> The mandate for the actual exercise of the ministry is conferred for an initial period of five years, followed by a review conducted by the bishop together with a designated

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[141] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 4.

[142] See ibid., no. 5.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Regarding the age of admission, what was already written in the document of the Italian Episcopal Conference, *I ministri nella Chiesa*, published in 1973, is confirmed. This document, no. 9, established the age limit of 21, later raised to 25 in resolution no. 21 of 18 April 1985. See ibid.

> team. In light of this review, the mandate for the exercise of the ministry may be renewed, taking into account the changes in the life conditions of the instituted minister and the ever-changing needs of the Church.[145]

This juridical configuration harmonises the permanence of institution with periodic evaluation of suitability. One recent study notes that the CEI's synthesis of stable institution with renewable mandate provides a canonical model that other episcopal conferences may adapt in light of their pastoral circumstances.[146]

4.4.3.3.5 – Pastoral Orientation and Co-Responsibility

The CEI presents instituted ministers not as auxiliary functionaries but as animators of ecclesial life who foster co-responsibility, synodal participation, and missionary engagement.

> The instituted ministers "will not be simple executors of the indications of the priests and deacons, but true animators of assemblies presided over by the pastor of souls, promoters of co-responsibility in the Church and of the welcome of those seeking to follow a journey of faith, evangelizers in the various situations and emergencies of life, interpreters of the human condition in its many aspects" (cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem,* n. 24).[147]

This approach marks a significant departure from the functionalist tendencies evident in much pre-2021 legislation.

4.4.4 – Future Directions for Canonical Development: Formation, Accountability, and Support

The post-2021 landscape of instituted ministries, illuminated by the legislative developments of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference and the Italian Episcopal Conference, reveals several areas requiring further canonical refinement. While the motu proprios of 2021 provide a renewed theological and canonical horizon, the concrete structuring of instituted ministries at diocesan and national levels remains in development. Episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops face the dual challenge of

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[145] CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 9.

[146] See F.X. AMHERDT, "The Instituted Ministries of Readers and Acolytes: A Kairos for the Synodality of the Liturgy," *The Person and the Challenges*, 13 (2023), 221.

[147] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 5.

articulating coherent structures that express the renewed theological vision and ensuring that these structures promote genuine synodality and co-responsibility.

Three areas emerge as especially urgent: (1) the standardisation of formation and the establishment of ongoing training; (2) the development of juridical norms for accountability, evaluation, and removal; and (3) the provision of financial and structural support necessary for the exercise of ministry.

4.4.4.1 – Formation Programmes and Ongoing Training

A renewed understanding of instituted ministries demands a transformation of formation practices. Earlier norms frequently focused on functional preparation, reflecting the liturgical orientation of pre-2021 legislation analysed in Section 2.2.5. By contrast, *Antiquum ministerium* and the post-2021 documents emphasise the vocational nature of instituted ministries and require formation that is doctrinal, spiritual, pastoral, and ecclesial.[148]

4.4.4.1.1 – Formation as a Process of Vocational Discernment

For both the CEP and the CEI, instituted ministry is intrinsically vocational: the Lord calls, the community discerns, and the bishop confirms.[149] Formation must therefore serve as a process of vocational discernment, not simply skill acquisition. This requires evaluating candidates for maturity of faith, ecclesial commitment, capacity for service, and relational aptitude.[150]

4.4.4.1.2 – Academic Standards and Collaboration with Theological Institutes

The CEP and the CEI both call for collaboration with theological institutes and faculties of religious sciences.[151] Such collaboration ensures doctrinal soundness and

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[148] See *AM*, nos. 6, 8, 9; See CEP, *Ministérios laicais para uma igreja ministerial*, nos. 26, 32.

[149] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 4; See CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 36, 37.

[150] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 4.

[151] Ibid.; CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, no. 12.

intellectual rigour. The CEI specifies a minimum one-year programme that integrates academic instruction, pastoral experience, and supervised practice.[152] This anticipates a broader trend toward national or even universal standards for ministerial formation.

4.4.4.1.3 – Ongoing Formation as a Canonical and Pastoral Obligation

Both the CEP and the CEI insist on ongoing formation as essential for the dynamic and stable exercise of ministry.[153] Future canonical norms would benefit from establishing minimum standards for continuing theological study, spiritual direction, pastoral supervision, liturgical proficiency, and participation in diocesan ministerial structures. This reflects a mature understanding of "stable" ministry as a lifelong commitment requiring continual growth.

4.4.4.2 – Norms for Accountability, Oversight, and Cessation of Ministry

Historically, one of the greatest lacunae in pre-2021 legislation concerned the lack of clarity regarding the duration, evaluation, and removal of instituted ministers. As shown in Section 2.2.5, many episcopal conferences developed mandate systems or had implicit norms for suspension, but universal law provided little guidance. The new ministerial landscape requires clearer and more explicit juridical structures.

4.4.4.2.1 – The Juridical Meaning of Stability in Instituted Ministries

Both the CEP and the CEI reaffirm that instituted ministries are stable and not repeatable.[154] Stability, however, does not imply indefectibility. The CEI's five-year mandate system provides an example of how stability can be harmonised with periodic

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[152] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 4. See also CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, no. 15.

[153] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 5; CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 10e, 15.

[154] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 5; CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 10e, 15.

evaluation and renewal. Such mechanisms allow ecclesiastical authorities to balance the dignity of stable ministry with pastoral realism.[155]

4.4.4.2.2 – Criteria and Procedures for Removal or Suspension

Universal law does not provide explicit norms for the removal or cessation of the exercise of instituted ministries. This silence reflects the fact that instituted ministries, as configured in c. 230, §1, are not ecclesiastical offices and therefore do not fall directly under the regime for loss of office articulated in cc. 184–196. The stability of institution does not, however, preclude the need for juridical mechanisms governing the exercise of ministry, particularly in cases where a minister becomes unsuitable or unable to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to him or her. This lacuna becomes increasingly significant as instituted ministries acquire greater stability and visibility within ecclesial life. In the absence of universal norms, episcopal conferences have begun to articulate procedures and criteria for regulating cessation in a manner consistent with their competence under c. 230.

The CEP provides one of the clearest post-2021 formulations. It holds that the exercise of instituted ministries may be suspended or terminated when either of the two foundational conditions for admission, declared availability and recognised suitability, is no longer present. In such cases, the diocesan bishop is competent to dispense, temporarily or permanently, from the exercise of the ministry.[156] This approach highlights a key juridical distinction: while institution remains permanent, the "exercise" of the ministry is contingent upon continued suitability and pastoral need.

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[155] See F.X. AMHERDT, "The Instituted Ministries of Readers and Acolytes: A Kairos for the Synodality of the Liturgy," 221.

[156] See CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. 18, 19.

The CEI employs a related but structurally distinct model. Its adoption of a renewable five-year mandate introduces a framework in which cessation is ordinarily linked to the periodic review of the minister's suitability, personal circumstances, and ecclesial context. The bishop, assisted by a designated team, assesses whether renewal of the mandate is appropriate.[157] This mechanism does not undermine stability but provides an orderly means to determine whether a minister can responsibly continue exercising the ministry. The CEI model thus offers an example of how stability can coexist with regulated accountability.

Pre-2021 legislation also provides relevant precedents. The norms of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria explicitly envisage dismissal from the exercise of ministry when a minister is found unworthy.[158] While formulated in a pre-2021 context, this provision underscores the long-standing need for juridical clarity regarding removal, particularly where moral or disciplinary concerns are involved.

Taken together, these examples show a consistent emerging pattern: instituted ministries require a juridical system that distinguishes between the permanent nature of institution and the conditional nature of their exercise. Grounds for cessation may include culpable factors, such as misconduct or doctrinal deviation, as well as non-culpable situations, including serious health limitations, major changes in family responsibilities, relocation to another diocese, or other circumstances that render stable exercise of the ministry impracticable. What remains lacking in universal law is a systematic and coherent framework to guide bishops and conferences in responding to such cases. The developments within the CEP and CEI, complemented by earlier precedents such as Nigeria, point toward the eventual need for universal legislation that

[157] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 5.
[158] See Appendix III. See also 2.2.5.4, footnote no. 21.

delineates minimum criteria and procedural safeguards while respecting episcopal discretion.

4.4.4.2.3 – Episcopal Oversight within a Synodal Framework

The bishop retains primary responsibility for recognising vocations, instituting ministers, overseeing formation, and evaluating continued suitability. Yet oversight must be exercised within a synodal ecclesiology, involving pastoral councils, formation teams, theological institutes, and local communities.[159] Episcopal conferences may therefore consider developing national guidelines that ensure coherence while respecting episcopal autonomy.

4.4.4.3 – Structural and Financial Support for Instituted Ministries

A final area requiring development concerns the financial and structural support necessary for the flourishing of instituted ministries. Although the 2021 reforms do not impose financial obligations, the exercise of stable, publicly recognised ministries carries practical implications for dioceses and parishes.

4.4.4.3.1 – Remuneration, Expenses, and Pastoral Sustainability

Instituted ministries often require a significant investment of time, formation, and sustained pastoral engagement. While these ministries are neither ecclesiastical offices nor forms of professional ecclesiastical employment, those entrusted with them may incur legitimate expenses or experience reduced availability for secular work due to their ecclesial responsibilities. This dynamic is especially evident in missionary or under-served contexts, where instituted ministers may carry out functions that would otherwise be fulfilled by ordained ministers.

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[159] See CEI, *Nota ad experimentum per il prossimo triennio*, no. 4; CEP, *Ministérios Laicais para uma Igreja Ministerial*, nos. nos. 3, 44.

In this regard, future canonical and particular norms would benefit from greater clarity concerning the reimbursement of expenses and, where pastorally appropriate, the provision of modest financial support. Such clarification must nevertheless preserve the fundamental juridical principle expressed in c. 230, §1, namely that the conferral of an instituted ministry does not of itself establish any right to support or remuneration.

Accordingly, what is envisaged is not a revision of the canon to introduce a juridical entitlement, but the development of prudent, context-sensitive norms by episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops. These may provide for the reimbursement of legitimate expenses, or, in exceptional circumstances, modest compensation where the demands of ministry substantially affect a person's livelihood or substitute in practice for clerical service.

Such measures remain pastoral and discretionary, grounded in equity, justice, and the needs of the ecclesial community, and do not alter the canonical nature of instituted ministries as stable lay ministries rooted in baptism rather than in ecclesiastical office.

4.4.4.3.2 – Professional Recognition and the Prevention of Clericalisation

As instituted ministries become more prominent, there is a risk of clericalising lay ministers or developing quasi-clerical structures. This must be avoided by ensuring clear theological teaching, appropriate liturgical roles, and transparent pastoral responsibilities. Professional recognition should arise from ecclesial stability, sound formation, and clarity of mission, not from the creation of parallel clerical identities.

4.4.4.3.3 – Towards a Coherent Diocesan Ministerium

The legislative developments of both the CEP and the CEI point toward the emergence of a coherent diocesan *ministerium*: a structured network of ordained, instituted, and other lay ministries. Such a structure would require diocesan offices for

formation and ministry, coordinated pastoral planning, clear lines of accountability, and mechanisms for collaboration among diverse ministries. This approach aligns closely with synodality: the Church is conceived as a communion of ministries arising from baptism and directed to mission.

4.5 – Proposals for Broadening the Spectrum of Instituted Ministries and Canonical Reform

The ongoing synodal process has profoundly deepened the Church's understanding of its identity as the People of God journeying together, emphasising the co-responsibility of all the baptised in the mission of the Church.[160] This renewed ecclesiological vision invites a re-evaluation of ministerial structures, prompting discernment regarding the potential institution of new ministries beyond the established roles of lector, acolyte, and catechist. Such developments are consonant with the notion of an "all-ministerial Church" and require a dynamic canonical framework responsive to evolving pastoral needs, emerging charisms, and the Spirit's guidance.[161]

4.5.1 – Theological and Canonical Bases for New Instituted Ministries

The theological foundation for expanding instituted ministries lies in the common priesthood of the faithful. By virtue of baptism, all Christians share in Christ's threefold office of priest, prophet, and king, and are called to participate in the sanctifying, teaching, and governing mission of the Church (*LG* 10, 31, 34). New ministries should therefore be understood as authentic expressions of baptismal dignity and co-responsibility, rather than as functional extensions or substitutes for ordained

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[160] See *ITC*, nos. 67–70; SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission, Preparatory Document for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, (=*Preparatory Document*), Block V, "Co-responsibility in Mission," Vatican City, Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2021, https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-preparatory-document.html (22 October 2025).

[161] See *IL*, no. B.2.2.

ministry. They represent discerned charisms of the Spirit, recognised by the community and confirmed by ecclesial authority, oriented toward mission and communion.[162]

A nuanced understanding of how all ministries, ordained and non-ordained, participate in Christ's *tria munera* is essential. While the *munus docendi*, *sanctificandi*, *et regendi* belongs in its fullness to the ordained, lay faithful may collaborate in certain functions when legitimately deputed by ecclesiastical authority (c. 129, §2).[163] The identity of each ministerial figure should therefore be discerned through its liturgical institution, its participation in the *tria munera*, and its role within the ecclesial body.

Earlier sections of this chapter have highlighted the pastoral and theological ambiguities surrounding the traditional distinction between stably instituted ministries and temporary or *ad hoc* deputations, particularly in contexts where both forms of service converge in practice. While this distinction is not without its limitations, it remains an essential canonical category in the Church's present juridical structure. Maintaining it is therefore necessary, not as a hierarchy of dignity, but as a means of recognising the different ways in which the Church publicly entrusts responsibility, discerns charisms, and structures collaboration with the bishop. Properly reinterpreted, instituted ministries provide public authentication of a personal call and a stable form of collaboration, whereas temporary deputations retain pastoral flexibility for particular needs.

The inclusion of women in instituted ministries represents a notable development, challenging the traditional *cursus honorum* and the clerical–laity binary, and strengthening the role of local discernment in addressing diverse pastoral contexts.[164] Episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops are therefore best placed to

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[162] See R.R. GAILLARDETZ, "Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinction," 130–133.

[163] See *CIC/83*, c. 129, §2.

[164] See P. ZAGANO, *Women: Icons of Christ*, Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2020, 113–115.

identify emerging ministerial needs and to petition the Apostolic See for new instituted ministries in accordance with *Ministeria quaedam*.[165]

Formation and discernment are indispensable in this process. Proposals for new ministries require comprehensive programmes fostering human maturity, spiritual depth, theological competence, and pastoral communication skills. Both initial and ongoing formation must ensure that ministries correspond to genuine charisms, confirmed by ecclesial authority and integrated into the synodal journey of the local Church.[166]

4.5.2 – Expanding the Scope of Lay Instituted Ministries (Beyond Lector, Acolyte, and Catechist)

Theological reflection and canonical praxis increasingly support instituting new lay ministries beyond those already established. *Ministeria quaedam* envisaged that episcopal conferences could propose additional ministries deemed necessary or useful for local pastoral needs. Recent synodal documents, including the *Instrumentum laboris* and *Synthesis Report*, reaffirm the imperative to foster baptismal ministries responsive to contemporary challenges.[167] This discernment extends beyond liturgical and catechetical functions to areas such as pastoral administration, youth accompaniment, family life, and specialised chaplaincies.[168]

4.5.2.1 – Rationale for Formalising Diverse Lay Ministries

The persistent shortage of ordained ministers has resulted in the proliferation of *de facto* lay ministries. While essential, these roles often lack stability or juridical recognition. Formalising them provides clarity of identity, canonical integration, and

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[165] See *MQ*, no. 4.
[166] See *AM*, nos. 8–9.
[167] See *IL*, no. B.3.2; *Synthesis Report*, no. 8, n.
[168] See ibid.

continuity. Theologically, this initiative is rooted in Vatican II's teaching on the common priesthood and the distribution of charisms "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7), underscoring the Church's responsibility to recognise, order, and sustain such gifts.[169]

4.5.2.2 – Ministries for Ecclesial Coordination and Pastoral Administration

The institution of ministries focused on pastoral coordination or administration is increasingly recognised as a pastoral necessity in many local Churches. Historical examples, such as lay leaders in Kinshasa (*mokambi*) and pastoral assistants in Germany, illustrate long-standing practices of lay oversight and community care, particularly in contexts marked by a shortage of clergy. These roles represent a significant development in the participation of the lay faithful in the Church's mission, extending their collaboration into the *munus regendi* while remaining complementary to the sanctifying and teaching functions.[170]

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[169] See *AA*, no. 3; 1 Cor 12:7.

[170] A parish *mokambi* (lay parish leader) is a lay minister who is married in the Church and has attained a certain stability in family life. He is mandated by the bishop to participate in the exercise of the pastoral office and is appointed for a renewable three-year term. He must also have a paid profession. Mandated by the bishop, the *mokambi* enjoys a power of jurisdiction that allows him to carry out the *tria munera*: the *munus docendi* (task of teaching), the *munus sanctificandi* (task of sanctifying), and the *munus regendi* (task of governing). The *mokambi* participates in these three functions without ceasing to be a layman. As regards the task of teaching, the *mokambi* contributes by instructing Christians in the Word of God, both in catechesis and in preaching, as well as in other forms of doctrinal formation. In relation to the task of sanctifying, he participates by preparing the faithful to receive the sacraments. Finally, with regard to the task of governing, he fulfils this role by taking responsibility for the administration of the parish and the organisation of pastoral activities.

As for the parish assistant, this ministry may be assumed by married lay men or by women religious. He is appointed by the bishop in a parish "to be a co-operator of the parish priest and under his authority." He is called to share in the exercise of the pastoral ministry according to the provisions of canon law. In addition, he performs a function similar to that of the parochial vicar: he takes part in the concerns and responsibilities of the parish priest and cooperates with him in the tasks assigned. He is part of the pastoral team, *ex officio* a member of the parish council. His status is similar to that of the *mokambi*. In the case of a religious, this role must be regulated by an agreement between the bishop and the religious institute of which he is a member. See JOSEPH ALBERT CARDINAL MALULA, "La promotion des laïcs dans l'Eglise locale de Kinshasa," in *Xaverian Missionaries*, 10 January 2025, https://afrique.xaveriens.org/blog/theologat-de-kinshasa/item/la-promotion-des-laics-dans-leglise-locale-de-kinshasa-par-joseph-albert-cardinal-malula (29 September 2025). See J.J. CARNEY, "The People Who Do All Things Together: Living Base Ecclesial Communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo," in *Theological Studies*, 85 (2024), 271, quoting Eugène Moke, "*Les ministères laïcs et l'organisation de la pastorale dans l'Archidiocèse de Kinshasa*". The term *mokambi*, from Lingala

The emergence of such roles, however, also raises important questions regarding their precise canonical configuration within the Church's juridical structure. In canon law, an ecclesiastical office is defined as a stable function constituted by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance for a spiritual purpose (c. 145 §1). While instituted ministries likewise possess stability through their liturgical conferral, they do not, as such, constitute ecclesiastical offices in the strict juridical sense. The two realities, however, may converge at the level of their exercise: when a stable ministry entails responsibilities of coordination, leadership, or administration within the diocesan structure, the competent authority may entrust the minister with a corresponding ecclesiastical office, where this is permitted by law.[171] In such cases, the instituted ministry provides the theological and ecclesial foundation, while the ecclesiastical office supplies the concrete juridical responsibilities, including defined competencies, accountability, and integration into the diocesan structure. This distinction ensures that stability of ministry is not confused with the juridical structure of governance, while still allowing for their complementary interaction in practice.

Within this framework, the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synod on Synodality encourages the discernment of ministries that respond to concrete pastoral needs, while preserving the essential distinction and complementarity between the common and ministerial priesthood.[172] Establishing ministries for pastoral coordination would confer recognition and stability on those already serving in these capacities, integrate them into diocesan structures, and strengthen accountability alongside ordained ministers.

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meaning "chief," carries significant cultural weight for a lay leader in this context. See MOKE, E., "Les ministères laïcs et l'organisation de la pastorale dans l'Archidiocèse de Kinshasa," in L.S. KINKUPU (ed.), *L'avenir des ministères laïcs: Enjeux et perspectives pastorales*, 29–35, Kinshasa, Éditions Signes de Temps, 1997.

[171] See *CIC/83*, cc. 145–149; c. 228, §1; see also Section 4.3.3.3 of this thesis.

[172] See *IL*, no. B.3.2.

At the same time, canonical and theological challenges remain. The 1997 Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, approved in *forma specifica*, cautions against the clericalisation of the laity and maintains that governance of parishes remains the competence of priests.[173] This distinction responds to the concerns of *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, which safeguards the proper differentiation between lay participation and governance reserved to the ordained, while also aligning with contemporary synodal discourse on co-responsibility. A careful synthesis of *Lumen gentium* and *Praedicate Evangelium* remains necessary to delineate more precisely the theological and canonical limits of lay participation in structures involving ecclesial governance.[174]

4.5.2.3 – Ministries in Specific Pastoral Fields

Several pastoral contexts warrant the formalisation of new instituted ministries. Youth ministers, who are essential for evangelisation, catechesis, and discipleship, could benefit from stable recognition and integration within parish and diocesan structures. Family ministers, particularly married couples assisting in marriage preparation and supporting domestic Church life, may also be candidates for institution, as suggested by the *Synthesis Report*,[175] thereby grounding their service in a stable ecclesial mandate.

Pastoral settings such as hospitals, prisons, schools, and universities reveal the need for structured ministerial roles. The intention here is not to redefine the canonical office of chaplain, which is governed by cc. 564–572 and is ordinarily entrusted to clerics,[176] but to recognise that many lay persons already exercise significant pastoral care in these environments. What is envisaged is the potential institution of stable lay

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[173] See *EDM*, arts. 1, §1, 4.

[174] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 12, g.

[175] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 8, n.

[176] See *CIC/83*, cc. 564–572.

ministries that collaborate with or assist the chaplain, ensuring proper formation, accountability, and ecclesial recognition. Such ministries would not replace the chaplain's canonical office but would provide a structured and mission-oriented framework for lay pastoral agents whose service is currently exercised on a delegated or informal basis.

Formalising such ministries would highlight the Church's commitment to pastoral presence at the margins and affirm that chaplaincy settings constitute vital spaces of ecclesial *diakonia*. Clarifying these roles canonically would enhance collaboration, safeguard quality of formation, and strengthen the Church's mission in contexts where lay pastoral care has become indispensable.

4.5.2.4 – Canonical and Pastoral Implications of Formal Institution

The canonical institution of new ministries, following the trajectory of *Ministeria quaedam*, *Spiritus Domini*, and *Antiquum ministerium*, carries significant implications. Firstly, it confers juridical recognition and stability on lay service, rooting ministries in baptismal charisms rather than temporary delegation.[177] Secondly, it necessitates context-specific formation programmes that cultivate the competencies, pastoral skills, and spiritual depth appropriate to each ministry. Integrated formation for ordained and lay ministers fosters collaboration and embodies co-responsibility.[178] Thirdly, these developments concretise the synodal vision of the Church as a communion of diverse gifts and charisms. Proposed ministries, such as listening and accompaniment, exemplify a relational, dialogical approach to mission, affirming that

[177] See *MQ*, no. 2; *SD*; *AM*.

[178] See *Synthesis Report*, nos. 10 j; 11 c, d, e, j; 14 e, f.

ministry is not merely functional but participatory. Canonical recognition would confer legitimacy, provide formation structures, and establish admission criteria.[179]

Finally, the expansion of instituted ministries intersects with ongoing discussions regarding the role of women in ministry. While *Spiritus Domini* opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to women, and *Antiquum ministerium* established the catechist ministry without distinction of sex, historical evidence and synodal reflection call for continued discernment concerning the potential restoration of the deaconess ministry.[180] Any such development would require rigorous theological, historical, and canonical study, yet it forms part of the broader horizon of a synodal Church attentive to baptismal dignity and the Spirit's guidance.

4.5.3 – The Instituted Ministry of Deaconess: Avenues for Further Research and Canonical Consideration

The question of a ministry for women analogous to the diaconate has re-emerged with particular urgency in recent years, especially following Pope Francis's admission of women to the instituted lay ministries of lector and acolyte through *Spiritus Domini*. This development has reinforced the recognition of baptismal dignity as the foundation of all ministries and has revived historical and theological reflection on the presence of women deacons in the early Church, as well as on the potential for reimagining their service within contemporary ecclesial structures.[181] While debates regarding the sacramental diaconate for women remain unresolved, recent work by the Vatican-appointed Study Commission on the Female Diaconate has contributed important elements to the discussion. In September 2025, the commission submitted a

[179] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 16 e, i, p.

[180] See ibid., no. 9 j, n.

[181] See A.J. LAMBERT, A. HAQUIN, "Lectorat et acolytat pour les femmes: Transformer une évidence en opportunité pour le renouveau de l'Église," in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 143 (2021), 257.

report to Pope Leo XIV which concluded that, in light of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterial teaching, it is not currently possible to admit women to the ordained diaconate as a degree of holy orders, although the commission did not rule out further theological study or development. The report also affirmed the value of establishing new ministries that contribute to the synergy of men and women in the service of the Church, and called for appropriate formation and ecclesial recognition of such ministries.[182] Within this context, this section considers the possibility of an instituted ministry of deaconess grounded in baptism and situated within the framework of lay ministries as a theologically sound and canonically feasible response to synodal calls for the fuller participation of women in the life of the Church.

4.5.3.1 – Justification for Inclusion

Theological and synodal discernment in recent decades has consistently highlighted the indispensable contribution of women to the mission of the Church. Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasised that "the Church cannot be herself without the woman and her role," encouraging deeper reflection on the ways women can exercise responsibility within the life of the Church.[183] The *Synthesis Report* explicitly recommended further study regarding "the access of women to the diaconate," inviting engagement with historical, theological, and exegetical research.[184] This directive

[182] The summary report of the Study Commission on the Female Diaconate submitted to Pope Leo XIV, 4 December 2025, concluded that that the question of "the possibility of proceeding in the direction of women's admission to the diaconate understood as the degree of the sacrament of the Order" doesn't allow for a definitive judgment, but recommended further theological inquiry and support for new ministries that foster collaboration between men and women in service to the Church. See "Petrocchi Commission says no to female diaconate, though judgment not definitive," in *Vatican News*, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html (26 December 2025).

[183] See *EG*, no. 103; FRANCIS, "Address to the International Union of Superiors General (*UISG*)," 12 May 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papa-francesco_20160512_uisg.html (1 October 2025).

[184] See *Synthesis Report*, no. 9, n.

makes clear that the Church is invited not merely to rehearse past debates, but to discern new avenues through which women's gifts may be more fully integrated into ecclesial life in a way that is faithful to tradition and responsive to pastoral needs.[185]

In this context, the proposal for an instituted ministry of deaconess arises not as an attempt to replicate the sacramental diaconate, but as an effort to recover elements of historical practice and to channel them into a form compatible with the theology of instituted ministries clarified by *Ministeria quaedam* and developed in *Spiritus Domini*. This proposal also reflects the current ecclesial landscape. Advocates of women's sacramental ordination to the diaconate will understandably find such an instituted ministry insufficient, yet the recent report of the Study Commission on the Female Diaconate reaffirmed that the Church is not presently in a position to admit women to the ordained diaconate. Within these limits, an instituted lay ministry of deaconess represents the most realistic and pastorally responsible path forward. It offers a structured and theologically grounded means of recognising women's longstanding contributions to service, catechesis, and pastoral care, while remaining faithful to the Church's doctrinal parameters and the synodal call to enhance the participation of women in the life and mission of the Church.

4.5.3.2 – Historical and Theological Background

Historical sources attest to the presence of deaconess, particularly in the Eastern Churches, from at least the third century. Texts such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (c. 250) and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (c. 380) describe their service in catechesis, baptismal preparation, and ministries directed especially to women.[186] Although the

[185] See *Final Synod Document*, no. 60.

[186] See *Didascalia Apostolorum*, R.H. CONNOLLY (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929, Book. III, ch. 12; *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII, 19-20.

extent to which these figures participated in the sacramental diaconate remains debated, they clearly exercised stable ecclesial functions authorised and supervised by bishops.[187] The International Theological Commission (*ITC*), in its 2002 study *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles*, concluded that female deacons were not the equivalent of male deacons in terms of sacramental ordination.[188] However, it also acknowledged that the ultimate judgment belonged to the magisterium.[189] Critics have argued that the *ITC*'s interpretation was shaped by a limited reading of historical data, noting that certain Byzantine rites appear to include parallels between the ordination of female and male deacons.[190] Yet recent canonical scholarship cautions against drawing sacramental equivalence from these rites, because in the Eastern Churches the diaconate did not historically entail sacramental functions beyond those universally permitted to the baptised, such as baptism in necessity.[191] Thus, apparent liturgical similarities do not provide a solid basis for asserting sacramental identity. A more fruitful reading of the evidence emphasises that women in both East and West exercised stable, bishop-authorised ministries, even if their sacramental status was not equivalent to that of male deacons.

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[187] See A.G. MARTIMORT, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1986, 41–78.

[188] See INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles, 2002, no. IV, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_05072004_diaconate_en.html (29 September 2025).

[189] See ibid., V, Conclusion.

[190] See P. ZAGANO, "Remembering Tradition Women's Monastic Rituals and the Diaconate," in P. ZAGANO, (ed.), *Women Deacons: Essays with Answers*, 191–205; "Women Deacons and Service at the Altar," in *Theological studies*, 79 (2018), 591–598; "Can Women rejoin the ranks," in *National Catholic Reporter*, 13 May 2016, https://www.ncronline.org/can-women-rejoin-ranks (29 September 2025); J. WIJNGAARDS, *No Holy Orders for Women? The Women Deacons of the Early Church*, 6, https://www.academia.edu/13610878/NO_WOMEN_IN_HOLY_ORDERS_The_Ancient_Women_Deacons (29 September 2025); J. FRANCO, "Women in the Diaconate: The State of the Question," in *The Dunwoodie Review*, 29 (2006), 86.

[191] See *ITC*, From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles.

The Synod for the Amazon renewed attention to the question of women deacons in light of significant pastoral needs in remote communities.[192] Pope Francis subsequently established commissions in 2016[193] and 2020[194] to study the historical and theological evidence,[195] and in *Querida Amazonia* encouraged the Church to "broaden her vision" of women's ministries while cautioning against reducing their contribution to functional substitution.[196] These developments indicate that, even if the sacramental diaconate for women remains unresolved, the Church retains the freedom to explore new non-sacramental ministries that are theologically grounded and canonically

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[192] See SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region, 8 June 2018, no. 14, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html (29 September 2025); Final Document of the Amazon Synod, nos. 95, 99, 103, http://secretariat.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/final-document-of-the-amazon-synod.html (29 September 2025).

[193] In 2016, Pope Francis established a commission to examine the historical evidence concerning the presence of women deacons in the early Church. The commission held its first meeting in Rome in November of that year, following the Pope's earlier commitment to a gathering of several hundred major superiors of women's religious institutes. By January 2019, the group had submitted an initial report to the Pope. However, its findings were inconclusive, as the members could not reach consensus on the precise role of women deacons in early Christianity. On 7 May 2019, Pope Francis explained that the commission had not arrived at a "definitive response," mainly due to disagreements on whether the ordination of women deacons in the early Church was sacramental in nature. He observed: "They worked together. And they found agreement up to a certain point. But each one of them has their own vision, which doesn't accord with that of the others. They stopped there as a commission, and each one is studying and going ahead." He did not specify whether the body remained formally active, but stressed that its work could serve as a foundation for further inquiry, adding: "I am not afraid of studies." See J.J. MCELWEE, "Women Deacons Commission to Meet in Rome for the First Time Next Week," in *National Catholic Reporter*, 19 November 2016, https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/women-deacons-commission-meet-rome-first-time-next-week (5 September 2025). See also W. CHRISTOPHER, "Papal Advisers Say Francis will Know Right Moment to Act on Women Deacons," in *Crux*, 16 January 2019, https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2019/01/papal-advisers-say-francis-will-know-right-moment-to-act-on-women-deacons (29 September 2025).

[194] Following the first commission, the Synod for the Amazon urged that the question of the female diaconate be studied further. In response, Pope Francis initially indicated his intention to reconvene the earlier commission, but on 8 April 2020 he instead announced the establishment of a new body, composed of five men (including two permanent deacons and three priests) and five women.

[195] See FRANCIS, Address to the International Union of Superiors General (*UISG*), 12 May 2016; HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE, "Institution of a New Study Commission on the Female Diaconate," 8 April 2020, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/04/08/200408b.html (1 October 2025); B.M. REIS, "Pope Institutes New Commission to Study Women Deacons," 8 April 2020, in *Vatican News*, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/Pope/news/2020-04/Pope-commission-women-deacons.html (1 October 2025).

[196] See *QA*, no. 103.

structured. It is within this horizon that the concept of an instituted ministry of deaconess gains coherence: it recovers meaningful aspects of historical practice while respecting current doctrinal boundaries and responding to synodal calls for deeper participation of women in ecclesial life.

These developments suggest that, even if the sacramental diaconate for women remains theologically contested, the Church is free to explore non-sacramental forms of ministry that integrate women's service into canonical and liturgical structures. In this light, the concept of an instituted ministry of deaconess emerges as both theologically plausible and canonically feasible, offering a development that is faithful to tradition while responsive to contemporary pastoral needs.

4.5.3.3 – Canonical Feasibility

Building upon this theological and historical foundation, the canonical question that follows is whether such an instituted ministry of deaconess can be integrated coherently within the existing legal framework of the Church. The distinction between sacramental ordination and instituted lay ministries provides the key interpretative lens. Instituted ministries derive their stability from baptism and confirmation and are conferred through a liturgical act of institution rather than through ordination, a structure clarified in *Spiritus Domini* and rooted in the reform introduced by *Ministeria quaedam*.

From this standpoint, the creation of an instituted ministry of deaconess is canonically feasible. Canon 1024, which reserves sacred ordination to baptised men,[197] pertains exclusively to the sacrament of holy orders and does not apply to instituted ministries, which belong to the sphere of the lay apostolate. *Ministeria quaedam* expressly envisioned the possibility of episcopal conferences petitioning the Apostolic

[197] *CIC/83*, c. 1024 states: "Only a baptised man can validly receive sacred ordination."

See for new instituted ministries adapted to pastoral needs, a competence that remains operative and has been reaffirmed in subsequent canonical reflection.[198] Accordingly, the establishment of a deaconess as an instituted ministry would not require any modification to the theology of Orders or to existing canonical norms concerning the sacramental diaconate.

Such a ministry would be conferred through a liturgical rite of institution, thereby granting the minister public recognition, juridical stability, and a defined ecclesial mission. This stability would allow a deaconess to exercise functions of *diakonia*, such as catechesis, pastoral accompaniment, coordination of charitable initiatives, or liturgical service, within the parameters proper to lay ministry. Her service would be exercised under mandate from the diocesan bishop, in harmony with the canonical norms governing ecclesiastical office and other stable assignments (cc. 145–196), without implying any sacramental faculties proper to ordained deacons.

The conclusions of the 2025 Study Commission on the Female Diaconate further clarify the canonical parameters for such development. While the commission judged that the Church is not presently in a position to affirm sacramental ordination of women to the diaconate, it encouraged the creation of new ministries that recognise women's contributions and enhance their participation in ecclesial mission.[199] An instituted deaconess fits precisely within this space: it honours doctrinal boundaries while responding constructively to pastoral realities identified through the synodal process.

In this way, an instituted ministry of deaconess would not be a substitute for the sacramental diaconate, nor an attempt to circumvent existing doctrinal teaching.

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[198] See *MQ*.

[199] See Study Commission on the Female Diaconate, *Summary Report to Pope Leo XIV*, 4 December 2025.

Instead, it would represent a legitimate development within the Church's canonical tradition: a stable, publicly recognised ministry grounded in baptismal dignity, authorised by ecclesiastical authority, and ordered to service of the Word, charity, and pastoral care. Such a ministry would enable the Church to acknowledge more fully the gifts of women and to embody more completely the synodal vision of co-responsibility in the life and mission of the Church.

4.5.3.4 – Theological and Pastoral Challenges

Any proposal for a ministry of deaconess must carefully address several challenges. First, doctrinal clarity is essential: the ministry must be clearly distinguished from the sacramental diaconate so as to avoid ambiguity concerning women's ordination.[200] Second, the risk of clericalisation must be mitigated; an instituted deaconess should not develop into a quasi-clerical rank, but should embody the synodal vision of differentiated yet complementary ministries, rooted in baptismal dignity.[201] Third, pastoral prudence requires sensitivity to ecclesial diversity. If episcopal conferences petition for this ministry and the Apostolic See approves it, its implementation need not be universal or uniform. In a genuinely synodal Church, ministries may appropriately develop differently according to local contexts and pastoral needs. Thus, it is conceivable that an instituted ministry of deaconess could be established in some particular Churches and not in others, allowing the Church to discern concrete forms of women's ministerial participation without imposing a single model on all communities.

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[200] See CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Inter insigniores*, 15 October 1976, in *AAS*, 69 (1976), 98–116, English translation in *Origins*, (6 (1977), 517, 519–524, no. 5; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994, in *AAS*, 86 (1994), 545–548, English translation in *Origins*, 24 (1994), 49, 51–52, no. 4.

[201] See *ITC*, no. 104.

A further consideration is whether the proposal for an instituted lay ministry of deaconess might inadvertently be understood as closing, pre-empting, or discouraging further discussion concerning the possibility of the sacramental diaconate for women. Such an interpretation must be avoided. The proposal advanced in this study is not intended to resolve that distinct theological and ecclesial question, nor to suggest that the recognition of a non-sacramental ministry should replace further historical, theological, and doctrinal investigation. Rather, it considers whether a stable instituted lay ministry could be recognised as a distinct form of ecclesial service within the Church's existing framework for instituted ministries. Its possible establishment would therefore need to be distinguished from, and should not be presented as determining the outcome of, the wider discussion concerning the sacramental diaconate. That question remains subject to the continuing theological study and discernment of the competent ecclesial authority. The proposal is consequently offered as a possible development in the recognition of women's ecclesial service, not as a definitive answer to every question concerning women and diaconal ministry.

4.5.3.5 – Towards a Proposal

The instituted ministry of deaconess, envisaged as a stable lay ministry rooted in baptism, would represent a creative recovery of historical precedent adapted to contemporary canonical structures. By entrusting this ministry through a liturgical rite of institution, the Church would provide public and enduring recognition of women's service, situating it within the cooperative system of ministries envisioned by Vatican II and reinforced in subsequent magisterial teaching.

Such a ministry would enable the Church to affirm women's indispensable contribution to the Word, the altar, and acts of charity, while maintaining a clear distinction from the sacramental diaconate. It would also offer a concrete expression of

a synodal Church in which men and women, sharing the same baptismal dignity, exercise complementary responsibilities for the sake of communion and mission. In doing so, this development would respond both to historical awareness and to contemporary pastoral needs, enhancing the Church's capacity to witness and serve in a co-responsible, inclusive, and synodal manner.

4.5.4 – General Canonical Pathways for Instituting and Formalising New Ministries

A decisive element in the canonical structuring of new ministries lies in the role of episcopal conferences as agents of discernment and petition. *Ministeria quaedam* envisaged that, with the approval of the Apostolic See, episcopal conferences could establish ministries adapted to the specific pastoral needs of their regions.[202] This mechanism provides both contextual flexibility and the safeguarding of ecclesial unity, while exemplifying the synodal method: listening to the People of God, discerning pastoral priorities, and responding with creative fidelity.[203]

In practice, this pathway requires bishops to act as authentic teachers and pastors, cultivating consultation processes that engage clergy, religious, and laity.[204] Such participation ensures that new ministries emerge from lived ecclesial experience rather than being perceived as top-down impositions. The synodal approach is thus both procedural and theological: it recognises that the Holy Spirit distributes charisms within the body of Christ and that the Church must discern carefully how these charisms are institutionalised.[205]

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[202] See *MQ*.

[203] See *IL*, nos. 17, B 3.2, d, B 3.4; *Synthesis Report*, nos. 1 h, 12 b, c 16.

[204] See *Episcopalis communio*, no. 7.

[205] See *LG*, 12; *ITC*, no 6, 22, 67; *CL*, 24.

The formal institution of ministries is not exhausted by juridical recognition alone. The liturgical act of institution situates ministry within the sacramental economy, without conflating it with holy orders. Through this rite, the Church entrusts a person publicly to a ministry and affirms the communion of ministries, both ordained and lay, ordered towards the mission of the People of God. The ritual functions as a visible sign of co-responsibility, rooting ministerial service in baptismal dignity while maintaining its distinction from the sacrament of orders.[206]

Moreover, the establishment of new ministries requires integrated formation, encompassing theological, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. Such preparation equips lay ministers to exercise their duties with discernment and maturity. Without this formation, ministries risk being reduced either to functional substitutes for ordained clergy or to honorary titles lacking substantive ecclesial grounding. Properly discerned and formed, instituted ministries manifest a cooperative system of service grounded in baptism and confirmation, in which the participation of men and women is both explicitly affirmed and canonically safeguarded.[207]

4.5.5 – Canonical Reform of Canon 230

Despite the clarifications introduced by *Spiritus Domini*, the current structure of c. 230 presents ambiguities. Its tripartite division, comprising stable instituted ministries (§1), temporary functions (§2), and extraordinary deputations (§3), while useful for distinguishing modes of service, risks reinforcing a hierarchical perception of lay participation. In practice, it has sometimes led to the perception that only

[206] See CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *De Institutione Catechistarum Ritus*, 2021; *Letter to the Presidents*, nos. 6, 8.

[207] See *AM*, no. 8; Letter to the Presidents, nos. 13, 15.

instituted ministries are genuinely ecclesial, while temporary or extraordinary forms of service are seen as merely contingent.[208]

A more comprehensive reform would re-centre all lay ministries on their baptismal foundation, as articulated in *Lumen gentium*, emphasising that the common priesthood of the faithful undergirds all participation in the Church's mission.[209] In this framework, distinctions between stable, temporary, and extraordinary ministries reflect modalities of service, not degrees of dignity. All ministries, whether instituted or occasional, would thus be recognised as authentic contributions rooted in baptismal grace.

Additionally, while *Spiritus Domini* opened instituted ministries to both men and women, the canon remains silent regarding inclusivity in temporary and extraordinary ministries. This silence risks restrictive interpretations in some cultural contexts. A reformed canon could explicitly affirm that all lay ministries are equally accessible to men and women, consolidating the principle of baptismal equality across the spectrum of ecclesial service.

The following proposal for a revised c. 230 represents the canonical synthesis of the theological, historical, and pastoral developments examined in this chapter. By presenting the current canon in parallel with a proposed reformulation, this section makes explicit the shifts required for a more coherent, synodal, and theologically grounded framework for lay instituted ministry. The proposed text seeks to integrate the insights of *Ministeria quaedam*, *Spiritus Domini*, *Antiquum ministerium*, and the

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[208] See *SD* and *CIC/83*, c. 230 (as amended).

[209] See *LG*, nos. 10–12 on the common priesthood of the faithful as the theological basis for lay participation; the synodal documents repeatedly return to this baptismal principle, see *Instrumentum laboris*, *Synthesis Report*. It must be remembered that the common priesthood of the faithful encompasses both the ordained and the lay, since the ordained are themselves members of the Christian faithful (see c. 207, §1). Baptism, the gateway to the Christian life, constitutes the foundation of the vocation shared by all believers, whether clerical or lay.

synodal process, offering a constructive contribution to the ongoing renewal of the Church's ministerial structures.

Proposed text of a revised c. 230

Current c. 230 (*CIC/83*)	**Proposed Revised c. 230**
§1 Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church. [revised wording according to motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, 10.I.2021]	§1 Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications determined by the conference of bishops may, by virtue of baptism and confirmation, be instituted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite for ministries of service to the Word, the altar, and charity. These ministries are exercised in accordance with liturgical law and pastoral necessity, and their conferral does not of itself establish any right to support or remuneration.
§2 Lay people can receive a temporary assignment to the role of lector in liturgical actions. Likewise, all lay people can exercise the roles of commentator, cantor or other such, in accordance with the law.	§2 Lay persons may, in the absence of instituted ministers, be temporarily entrusted with particular ministries in the service of the liturgy, catechesis, or pastoral care. Such temporary assignments are exercised according to the norms established by the episcopal conference and approved by the Apostolic See.
§3 Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism and distribute Holy Communion, in accordance with the provisions of the law.	§3 Where pastoral necessity requires, lay persons may be deputed for the extraordinary exercise of certain ministerial functions in accordance with the law, always respecting the proper role of sacred ministers and sacramental order of the Church.

The proposed reformulation of c. 230 seeks to provide a more coherent and theologically grounded structure for the exercise of lay instituted ministries in light of developments since *Ministeria quaedam* and its reception in *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. By preserving the tripartite organisation of the current canon while expanding the scope of instituted ministries, the revision aligns the law with the Church's emerging synodal vision of baptismal co-responsibility. The proposed text clarifies the distinction between stable instituted ministries, temporary assignments

governed by episcopal conference norms, and extraordinary deputation in cases of pastoral necessity, thereby enhancing juridical precision and safeguarding the proper relationship between sacred and instituted ministries. In this way, the revision offers a constructive canonical framework that responds to contemporary pastoral needs while remaining faithful to the Church's ministerial tradition.

4.5.6 – Towards a Truly Synodal Church: Ministries as Expressions of Communion and Mission

Synodality, increasingly central to the Church's self-understanding, demands that ministries be appreciated not merely as functions, but as theological realities. Ministries are ordered to communion and mission: they manifest the unity of the People of God and channel its service to the world. Instituted ministries such as lector, acolyte, and catechist, and potentially a ministry of deaconess, are therefore part of a broader movement towards a participatory ecclesiology.[210]

Theologically, synodality situates ministry within the Church's identity as the People of God journeying together. Instituted ministries give stable, visible expression to the baptismal call to discipleship and service, providing structured avenues for discernment, collaboration, and missionary outreach. They demonstrate that the Church's mission belongs to all the baptised, not exclusively to the ordained.[211]

Historically, *Ministeria quaedam* detached ministry from a narrowly clerical paradigm, situating lector and acolyte as lay ministries grounded in baptism. *Spiritus Domini* affirmed the equal participation of women, while *Antiquum ministerium* extended the principle to the ministry of catechist, linking it explicitly to the Church's

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[210] See *Synthesis Report* and the *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality for sustained reflections linking synodality, participation, and mission.

[211] For theological account of instituted ministries giving visible expression to baptismal call, see *MQ*, *SD* and *AM* read together (historical progression), and the *Instrumentum laboris*' pastoral framing of synodality and mission.

synodal and missionary vocation. Collectively, these developments illustrate a coherent trajectory: constructing a system of ministries that reflects the Church's baptismal and synodal nature.[212]

Canonically, instituted ministries require stable recognition to avoid functionalism or improvisation. They must be supported by proper formation, discernment, and ongoing pastoral accompaniment. When these conditions are met, ministries serve as bridges between hierarchical authority and the participation of the laity, embodying the inseparability of communion and mission: communion as the source of unity, mission as its outward expression.[213]

A synodal Church must continue developing a theology and legal framework of ministries that resists both clericalisation and reductive functionalism. Instituted ministries are not intended to replace clergy, but to recognise the manifold ways the Spirit equips the baptised for service. They are visible signs of a Church that listens, discerns, and acts together, making tangible the equal dignity and complementary vocations of all members.[214]

In conclusion, the renewal and expansion of ministries, through canonical reform, historical retrieval, and synodal discernment, offer the Church a concrete means of embodying synodality. By entrusting ministries to men and women alike, the Church proclaims that communion is not uniformity but differentiated unity, and that mission is the shared responsibility of all the baptised. Ministries thus become theological

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[212] Historical progression — *Ministeria quaedam*, *Spiritus Domini*, *Antiquum ministerium*.

[213] The need for stable recognition, adequate formation, and pastoral accompaniment is underlined in *Antiquum ministerium* and in the 2021 *Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences*, both of which set out requirements, formation pathways, and the liturgical rite of institution. See *AM*; *Letter to the Presidents*.

[214] Theological cautions against both clericalisation and functionalism are repeatedly articulated in synodal documents, such as the *Instrumentum laboris* and the *Synthesis Report*. They stress the need to preserve the proper distinction between the sacrament of orders and instituted lay ministries.

affirmations of what it means to be the People of God journeying together in faith, hope, and charity.

Conclusion

This chapter has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the evolution and contemporary significance of lay instituted ministries, tracing developments from *Ministeria quaedam* to Pope Francis's interventions in *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. It reveals the richness of the Church's engagement with lay participation, while simultaneously highlighting the unfinished character of its canonical and theological discernment. While the post-conciliar reforms decisively moved beyond the clerical paradigm of minor orders and opened new avenues for lay service, the current canonical framework remains fragmented, with ambiguities persisting between instituted, temporary, and delegated ministries. Moreover, its scope does not yet fully accommodate the diversity of charisms active among the People of God.

A critical assessment of c. 230 demonstrates that, despite the legislator's intent to balance stability and flexibility, its tripartite structure has at times produced categories that lack pastoral coherence. The reforms of Pope Francis, through *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, represent important steps forward: they affirm the baptismal foundation of all ministries, extend instituted ministries to include women as lectors and acolytes, and formally recognise catechists. Yet these reforms also expose enduring challenges, including the risk of clericalisation, the persistence of functionalist approaches that risk marginalising charisms, and the need to integrate new ministries into a coherent ecclesial vision.

In response, the chapter has advanced proposals to frame ministries within the hermeneutic of synodality. This approach emphasises episcopal discernment, safeguards against clericalisation, and views ministries as authentic expressions of

communion and mission. By critically re-examining distinctions between instituted and temporary ministries, the chapter advocates a flexible continuum that respects both stability and pastoral adaptability. Furthermore, the proposal for an instituted ministry of deaconess, grounded in historical precedent, contemporary pastoral necessity, and synodal listening, exemplifies the creative integration of lay service into ecclesial life. Such a ministry would honour the contributions of women while remaining clearly distinct from the sacramental diaconate, balancing doctrinal clarity with canonical prudence. It is presented not as a definitive solution, but rather as an invitation to further discernment in the spirit of synodality.

Collectively, these reflections suggest that the Church stands at a pivotal moment. Post-conciliar reforms have laid the groundwork for a renewed theology and canon law of lay ministry, but this framework remains incomplete. A truly synodal approach to instituted ministries requires moving beyond clerical substitution to embrace co-responsibility grounded in baptism, transcending functionalism to recognise charisms, and evolving from rigid categories toward a flexible continuum of ministries. It also demands expanding ecclesial recognition to encompass the full range of ministerial service.

The reforms initiated by Popes Paul VI and Francis should thus be understood not as final endpoints but as stages within an ongoing journey. The future of instituted ministries lies in deepening their theological foundations, clarifying canonical structures, and fully integrating them into the synodal life of the Church. In doing so, instituted ministries can become prophetic signs of a Church that journeys together, where all the baptised share in communion and mission, and where the Holy Spirit continually raises up new forms of service for the building up of the Body of Christ.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the historical development, theological foundations, and canonical configuration of instituted ministries in the Catholic Church, with particular attention to c. 230 of the 1983 Code and the developments introduced by Pope Francis through the motu proprios *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. The central question guiding this research has been whether the existing canonical framework adequately expresses the theological and pastoral understanding of ministry that has emerged since the Vatican II, especially in light of the renewed recognition of the baptismal dignity, charisms, and missionary responsibility of the lay faithful.

The investigation has demonstrated that the canonical framework established by the 1983 Code remains an essential point of reference for understanding and regulating the participation of the lay faithful in ecclesial ministry. Nevertheless, the theological and pastoral developments of recent decades reveal the need for a more coherent articulation of the different forms of service through which the faithful participate in the Church's mission. The reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* represent significant developments in this regard. They demonstrate that instituted ministries cannot be understood exclusively as liturgical functions or as preparatory stages for holy orders, but must also be considered in relation to baptism, charisms, ecclesial discernment, and the missionary responsibilities of the People of God.

The principal argument of this thesis is that the existing canonical provisions provide a necessary foundation for the recognition and regulation of lay ministries, but their theological and pastoral significance would be more fully expressed through a coherent framework that recognises the diversity of ecclesial service while preserving the juridical distinctions established by the Church. Such a framework must hold

together stability and flexibility, personal charism and ecclesial discernment, baptismal participation and canonical responsibility, and the contributions of the lay faithful and ordained ministers. The aim is not to erase distinctions between different forms of ministry, but to clarify their relationship within the communion and mission of the Church.

Historical Development and the Continuing Renewal of Ministry

The historical investigation undertaken in this thesis has shown that the forms through which the Church recognises and organises ministry have developed in response to changing ecclesial circumstances, pastoral needs, and theological understandings. The early Christian communities manifested a diversity of charisms and services directed towards worship, proclamation, charity, and the building up of the community. Over time, particular ministries acquired more defined institutional and liturgical forms, eventually becoming associated with the minor orders and the traditional structure of preparation for holy orders.

This historical development demonstrates that the organisation of ministry has never been entirely independent of the Church's broader ecclesiological understanding. The relationship between ministry, ordination, liturgical service, and pastoral responsibility has been expressed differently at different periods. Consequently, the historical forms of ministry must be understood within their proper ecclesial and juridical contexts rather than treated as unchanging arrangements applicable to every period of the Church's life.

Vatican II marked a decisive development by recovering the baptismal dignity and missionary responsibility of the entire People of God. Its ecclesiological vision placed greater emphasis on the participation of all the faithful in the Church's life and mission, according to their particular vocations, charisms, and responsibilities. This

development provided the theological background for the reform of the minor orders and the recognition of instituted ministries as services that could be entrusted to lay faithful without being understood merely as stages towards ordination.

The Apostolic Letter *Ministeria quaedam* of Paul VI gave juridical expression to this reform by suppressing the former minor orders in the Latin Church and establishing the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte in a renewed form. These ministries were no longer to be understood simply within the traditional progression towards holy orders. They could instead be entrusted to lay men for the service of the ecclesial community. Nevertheless, the subsequent reception of this reform within the 1983 Code retained a framework that, in certain respects, continued to reflect the historical association between instituted ministries and the path towards ordained ministry.

The historical analysis therefore supports two complementary conclusions. First, the development of ministries must respect the continuity of the Church's tradition and the distinctions that belong to its sacramental and juridical structure. Second, continuity does not exclude legitimate development. The Church has repeatedly adapted the forms through which it recognises and organises ecclesial service. The present discussion of instituted ministries should consequently be understood not as a departure from tradition, but as an inquiry into how the Church's enduring mission may be served more adequately through its developing theological and canonical understanding of ministry.

Canon 230 and the Canonical Configuration of Lay Ministries

The examination of c. 230 has identified both the value of its existing provisions and certain limitations in the way the different forms of service are articulated. The canon distinguishes among instituted ministries, temporary deputation for liturgical

functions, and the extraordinary provision for certain functions when the needs of the Church warrant it. These provisions serve different purposes and possess distinct juridical characteristics. They should therefore not be treated as interchangeable forms of service.

Canon 230, §1 provides for the stable institution of lay men in the ministries of lector and acolyte, in accordance with the requirements of universal law. §2 addresses the temporary deputation of lay persons to fulfil particular liturgical functions, while §3 provides for the possibility of lay persons exercising certain functions in the absence of suitable ordained ministers, under the conditions established by law. Together, these provisions recognise that the Church's liturgical and pastoral life depends upon the participation of the lay faithful in different circumstances and according to different forms of ecclesial authorisation.

The distinction between an instituted ministry and a function performed on a temporary or extraordinary basis remains important. An instituted ministry involves a more stable form of ecclesial service, publicly recognised through the prescribed rite of institution and governed by the applicable canonical norms. A temporary or extraordinary function, by contrast, is ordinarily connected with a particular need or circumstance. The existence of a common purpose, which is, service to the Church, does not remove the differences in stability, recognition, and juridical status among these forms.

At the same time, the study has shown that the relationship among these categories could be articulated more clearly. The juridical provisions of c. 230 establish the relevant distinctions, but they do not by themselves provide a comprehensive account of how stable instituted ministries, temporary liturgical functions, and extraordinary forms of service relate to the wider theological understanding of lay

participation in the Church's mission. This becomes particularly significant when the Church recognises ministries that involve sustained pastoral responsibility, formation, and public ecclesial commitment beyond the immediate performance of liturgical functions.

A further distinction concerns the relationship between function and ministry. A function ordinarily refers to a particular task or responsibility, whereas ministry, in the more developed sense explored in this thesis, encompasses a broader ecclesial reality involving vocation, charism, formation, stability, recognition, and responsibility. Not every function constitutes an instituted ministry, and not every form of ecclesial service requires institution. Nevertheless, a clearer account of their relationship would help the Church distinguish between occasional assistance and a more enduring form of recognised service.

This distinction must also be maintained in relation to ecclesiastical office and the exercise of governance. The institution in a lay ministry does not, by itself, confer an ecclesiastical office or the power of governance. The possibility of lay participation in certain forms of ecclesiastical governance must be considered according to the applicable canonical provisions, including c. 129, §2. Such participation depends upon the nature of the responsibility involved and the requirements of the law; it does not follow automatically from the reception of an instituted ministry.

The central conclusion arising from the analysis of c. 230 is therefore not that its existing categories should be abolished or merged, but that their relationship requires more coherent theological and juridical articulation. A renewed framework should preserve the specific legal characteristics of each category while making clearer how the different forms of service contribute to the Church's communion and mission.

The Reforms of Pope Francis and the Recognition of Baptismal Responsibility

The Motu Proprios *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* constitute important developments in the contemporary understanding of instituted ministries. Although they address different aspects of ecclesial service, both reflect a renewed recognition that the participation of the lay faithful in the Church's mission cannot be understood solely through a framework centred on clerical preparation or the performance of liturgical functions.

Through *Spiritus Domini*, Pope Francis amended c. 230, §1 to permit the stable institution of both women and men in the ministries of lector and acolyte. This development removed the previous restriction based on sex and gave more explicit canonical recognition to the participation of women in these instituted ministries. Its significance is not limited to access to particular liturgical responsibilities. It also reflects a broader ecclesiological understanding of the baptismal dignity and missionary responsibility shared by all the faithful, while maintaining the distinction between instituted lay ministries and holy orders.

The Apostolic Letter *Antiquum ministerium* subsequently established the instituted ministry of catechist, responding to the longstanding contribution of catechists to evangelisation, catechetical formation, and the transmission of the faith. The recognition of this ministry demonstrates that instituted service is not confined to the liturgical functions traditionally associated with lector and acolyte. It may also encompass forms of pastoral and missionary responsibility that have developed in response to the needs of particular ecclesial communities.

Taken together, these interventions represent a significant development in the Church's recognition of lay ministry. They affirm that the Church may discern, recognise, and regulate stable forms of service according to the gifts of the faithful and

the needs of its mission. They also reveal the limitations of an understanding of instituted ministries that is too narrowly centred on the liturgy or on their historical relationship with ordained ministry.

Nevertheless, these reforms do not constitute a complete canonical system for every form of lay ministry. Questions remain concerning the criteria for recognising new instituted ministries, the formation and preparation expected of candidates, the relationship between universal norms and particular pastoral circumstances, and the responsibilities associated with stable ecclesial service. The reforms have therefore opened an important field for further theological reflection and canonical development.

The significance of these developments lies precisely in the relationship between continuity and renewal. The Church remains responsible for safeguarding the distinction between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood, while recognising the varied ways in which the faithful participate in its mission. The renewal of instituted ministries should neither diminish the particular nature of holy orders nor reduce lay ministry to a secondary or merely functional contribution. Rather, it should recognise the distinct vocation and responsibility of the lay faithful within the one ecclesial communion.

Synodality and a More Coherent Framework of Ministry

The synodal perspective provides an important ecclesiological framework for interpreting these developments. Synodality emphasises communion, participation, discernment, and mission. It invites the Church to recognise the gifts present among the People of God and to discern how these gifts may contribute to the building up of the ecclesial community. In this context, instituted ministries can be understood as one means through which particular charisms and forms of service receive public ecclesial recognition and are directed towards the common mission.

A synodal understanding of ministry does not imply that every charism must become an instituted ministry, nor does it eliminate the authority of the Church to discern and regulate ecclesial responsibilities. Rather, it highlights the importance of a process in which personal gifts and aspirations are considered alongside the needs of the community, the requirements of ecclesial communion, and the norms established by competent authority. The recognition of a ministry must therefore involve more than the identification of an individual's ability to perform a task. It also requires discernment concerning the suitability, formation, stability, and ecclesial purpose of the service proposed.

This approach can help the Church avoid two opposite tendencies. The first is clericalism, which risks concentrating responsibility for ecclesial life too narrowly around ordained ministers and insufficiently recognising the gifts and responsibilities of the lay faithful. The second is a reductive functionalism, which treats ministries simply as practical solutions to a shortage of clergy or as a collection of tasks that can be distributed according to immediate needs. Both tendencies fail to express the fuller theological meaning of ministry as service within the communion and mission of the Church.

Canon law has an essential role in mediating between ecclesiological vision and pastoral practice. Synodality provides an ecclesiological horizon, while canon law establishes the juridical structures through which responsibilities are recognised, regulated, and exercised. Canonical norms can protect the integrity of ministries, clarify the responsibilities of those who exercise them, and ensure that their development remains ordered towards the good of the Church. At the same time, juridical structures must be capable of receiving legitimate developments in the Church's understanding of its mission.

A synodal framework for instituted ministries should therefore promote meaningful participation without confusing the distinct responsibilities of the faithful, ordained ministers, and ecclesiastical authority. It should encourage consultation and discernment, support the recognition of charisms, and provide appropriate mechanisms for formation, appointment, supervision, and accountability. In this way, synodality can contribute to a more integrated understanding of ministry without weakening the juridical distinctions that sustain ecclesial communion.

Towards a More Coherent Framework: Stability, Flexibility, and the Continuum of Ministries

One of the principal proposals emerging from this research is the need for a more coherent framework through which the different forms of lay service may be understood in relation to one another. Such a framework may be described as a continuum of ministries. The term is intended to express the relationship among forms of service that differ in stability, ecclesial recognition, formation, and juridical responsibility. It does not imply that all forms of service possess the same status, nor does it establish a progression in which temporary functions necessarily lead to instituted ministries or instituted ministries lead to holy orders.

The proposed continuum is therefore relational rather than hierarchical. It recognises that the Church's mission is served through a variety of contributions, ranging from occasional assistance to stable and publicly recognised ministries. These forms remain distinct, but their relationship can be clarified within a common theological understanding of baptismal participation, ecclesial discernment, and service to the community. The continuum relates the categories; it does not erase them.

Such a framework would help the Church distinguish more clearly between the performance of a particular function and the assumption of an enduring ecclesial

responsibility. It would also encourage a more systematic consideration of the criteria appropriate to each form of service. These may include the stability of the commitment, the nature of the responsibility entrusted, the formation required, the process of ecclesial discernment, and the degree of accountability associated with the ministry.

The relationship between stability and flexibility is particularly important. Stability gives a ministry ecclesial identity, continuity, and a clear sense of responsibility. It helps ensure that the ministry is not dependent solely upon immediate circumstances or individual initiative. Flexibility, however, enables the Church to respond to diverse pastoral realities and to the differing needs of local communities. A coherent framework should therefore preserve stability in the identity, formation, recognition, and accountability of ministries while allowing appropriate flexibility in their concrete pastoral expression.

This approach would not require every form of service to be instituted. Temporary and extraordinary forms of service remain necessary and appropriate in their own circumstances. Nor would every stable pastoral responsibility necessarily need to become a new instituted ministry. The question is rather whether the nature and duration of a particular service, together with its ecclesial significance and the responsibilities involved, justify a more formal form of recognition.

The proposed framework could also assist in evaluating the possible development of additional instituted ministries. The recognition of a new ministry should not be determined exclusively by practical necessity or by the desire to provide formal recognition to every existing pastoral activity. It should arise from careful discernment of the Church's mission, the charisms of the faithful, the needs of the community, and the theological and canonical implications of the responsibility concerned.

Accordingly, any further development would require appropriate canonical clarification concerning the process of institution, the qualifications and formation expected of candidates, the responsibilities attached to the ministry, and the relationship between universal law and particular norms. The objective would be to establish a coherent framework that permits legitimate development while preserving the unity, order, and juridical integrity of ecclesial life.

Pastoral Implications and the Proposed Instituted Ministry of Deaconess

The findings of this research have practical implications for the formation, discernment, and integration of those entrusted with instituted ministries. If such ministries are to be understood as stable forms of ecclesial service rather than merely as authorisations to perform particular functions, appropriate attention must be given to the preparation and ongoing formation of those who receive them. Formation should correspond to the nature of the ministry and should include the relevant theological, spiritual, liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral dimensions.

The process of discernment should likewise consider the candidate's charisms, suitability, commitment, and capacity to serve the ecclesial community. The needs of the community are important, but they should not be the sole criterion. An instituted ministry represents an ecclesial responsibility and should therefore be conferred through a process that recognises both the gifts of the individual and the requirements of the mission entrusted to the Church.

Clear expectations concerning responsibility and accountability are equally necessary. Those who exercise instituted ministries should understand the nature and limits of their responsibilities, the relationship of their service to the wider pastoral mission, and the appropriate channels of cooperation with ordained ministers and other pastoral collaborators. Such clarity can prevent confusion between distinct ministries

and help ensure that responsibilities are exercised in accordance with ecclesial discipline.

The pastoral integration of instituted ministers is also essential. Formal institution should not be treated as an isolated liturgical event without meaningful consequences for the life of the community. Rather, it should be accompanied by appropriate recognition of the ministry's purpose, a clear understanding of its responsibilities, and practical support for its exercise. At the same time, the juridical and pastoral implications of institution should be explained carefully so that neither the authority of the ministry nor its limitations are misunderstood. The applicable canonical norms must continue to govern the rights and obligations associated with each form of service.

Within this wider discussion, the proposal concerning an instituted ministry of deaconess requires particular care. The thesis has considered whether a distinct instituted lay ministry could provide an appropriate means of recognising certain forms of stable ecclesial service historically associated with women's ministry and relevant to contemporary pastoral needs. This proposal must be distinguished clearly from the question of the sacramental ordination of women to the diaconate. The historical evidence concerning women's service in the Church requires careful interpretation and does not, by itself, establish an equivalence between historical forms of service and the sacramental diaconate.

The proposal advanced here is therefore not a claim that an instituted lay ministry of deaconess is equivalent to holy orders, nor does it presume that such a ministry should be established without further ecclesial discernment. It is a proposal for continued theological and canonical examination of whether a distinct, stable, and publicly recognised lay ministry might appropriately acknowledge particular forms of

service and respond to identified pastoral needs. Any such development would require clarity concerning its purpose, functions, formation, juridical status, and relationship to existing ministries.

The broader principle is that the recognition of a lay ministry does not confer holy orders. Rather, it gives ecclesial form to a particular service within the mission of the Church. The proposal concerning a ministry of deaconess must therefore be evaluated according to its own theological rationale and juridical structure, while maintaining the distinctions that belong to the Church's sacramental and ministerial order.

Contributions, Limitations, and Directions for Further Research

This thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion of instituted ministries by bringing historical, theological, canonical, and pastoral considerations into a common analysis. Its principal contribution lies in demonstrating that the recent reforms concerning instituted ministries are not merely isolated changes to particular canonical provisions. They are part of a broader development in the Church's understanding of baptismal responsibility, the recognition of charisms, and the participation of the lay faithful in its mission.

The study has also highlighted the importance of distinguishing the different juridical forms of service addressed by c. 230 while examining their relationship within a more coherent ecclesiological framework. The proposed continuum offers a way to consider stability, temporary service, and extraordinary provision in relation to one another without treating them as equivalent. It also provides a basis for evaluating the possible recognition of additional instituted ministries, provided that such development remains grounded in theological discernment and appropriate canonical regulation.

A further contribution is the emphasis placed on synodality as a framework for understanding the recognition and exercise of ministry. The study has argued that participation, discernment, and mission must be accompanied by clear juridical structures. In this respect, the development of instituted ministries requires neither the displacement of canonical order by pastoral flexibility nor the restriction of pastoral development to the categories already established. It requires a constructive relationship between ecclesiological reflection and canonical formulation.

The scope of the research, however, also imposes certain limitations. The analysis has focused principally on the Latin Church and on the canonical framework of c. 230, together with the relevant developments concerning instituted ministries. Further research could examine more extensively the experiences of particular Churches, the reception of instituted ministries in diverse cultural and pastoral contexts, and the relationship between universal norms and particular legislation. Comparative studies could also contribute to a more detailed understanding of how stable forms of lay service are recognised and regulated in different ecclesial settings.

Further investigation would also be valuable in relation to the practical reception of the reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*. Such research could explore how dioceses and local communities implement the relevant provisions, how candidates are prepared, and how instituted ministries are integrated into pastoral structures. These questions would help assess whether the theological aims of the reforms are being realised in practice and identify areas where further canonical or pastoral clarification may be necessary.

Finally, the proposed continuum of ministries and the possible recognition of an instituted lay ministry of deaconess require further examination. The former would benefit from more detailed analysis of the criteria by which different forms of service

might be distinguished and related juridically. The latter requires careful historical, theological, and canonical study, together with appropriate ecclesial discernment. These areas remain open to further inquiry and should not be regarded as conclusions that remove the need for continued reflection by competent ecclesiastical authority.

Ministry in the Service of Communion and Mission

The overall findings of this research return to the central question of whether the existing canonical framework adequately expresses the Church's developing understanding of instituted ministries. Canon 230 continues to provide an important juridical foundation for the stable institution of certain lay ministries and for the temporary or extraordinary exercise of particular functions. Nevertheless, the developments considered in this thesis indicate that a more coherent articulation of the relationship among these forms of service would help the Church express more fully the theological and pastoral significance of lay participation in its mission.

The reforms introduced by *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium* have advanced this development by broadening access to instituted ministries and recognising a stable ministry directed towards catechesis. They have demonstrated that instituted ministries are not confined to a single historical model or exclusively to liturgical service. At the same time, they reaffirm the need to preserve the distinction between lay ministries and holy orders and to ensure that any further development remains consistent with the Church's sacramental, ecclesiological, and canonical order.

A coherent framework for instituted ministries should therefore be rooted in baptism, attentive to the charisms of the faithful, guided by ecclesial discernment, and ordered towards the mission of the Church. It should recognise that stable ministries require appropriate formation, public ecclesial recognition, clearly defined responsibilities, and suitable accountability. It should also preserve the distinction

between an instituted ministry, a temporary liturgical function, an extraordinary provision, and an ecclesiastical office. These distinctions are not obstacles to participation; properly understood, they help ensure that the diverse forms of service contribute to the unity and mission of the ecclesial community.

The proposed continuum offers a constructive way of relating the different forms of service without confusing their juridical status. It encourages the Church to recognise both the value of stable instituted ministries and the continuing importance of temporary and extraordinary forms of assistance. It also provides a framework for considering further developments in response to pastoral needs, while ensuring that new ministries are introduced through appropriate theological reflection, ecclesial discernment, and canonical regulation.

Ultimately, the renewal of instituted ministries is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to enable the Church to recognise and coordinate the gifts of the faithful more effectively in the service of communion and mission. The question is not simply how many ministries the Church should establish, but how the gifts and responsibilities of the faithful may be discerned, recognised, and exercised in ways that serve the Gospel and build up the People of God.

Instituted ministry may therefore be understood as a stable ecclesial form of service, rooted in baptism, discerned by the Church, ordered towards mission, and situated within the communion of the whole People of God. This understanding brings together the principal findings of the present research. It acknowledges the theological significance of baptismal participation, the necessity of ecclesial recognition, the importance of canonical regulation, and the missionary purpose of ministry.

The future development of instituted ministries will require continued dialogue between theology, canon law, and pastoral practice. Such dialogue should remain

faithful to the Church's tradition while being attentive to the needs of its communities and the gifts of its members. By bringing these dimensions together, the Church can continue to develop a more coherent understanding of instituted ministries—one that respects the distinct nature of each form of service, strengthens the participation of the lay faithful, and supports the common mission entrusted to the entire People of God.

APPENDICES

Appendix I[1]

Canon 529 (1977 Schema)	Alternative Version	Canon 230
§1. Viri laici, qui aetate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum Conferentiae decreto statutis, ritu liturgico praescripto ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quae tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemuve ab Ecclesia praestandas.	§1. Christifideles laici facultate gaudent ut muneribus commentatoris, cantoris aliisve fungantur, ut ex temporanea deputatione munus lectoris et acolythi impleant, et ut ritu liturgico praescripto ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumantur.	§1. Laici, qui aetate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum conferentiae decreto statutis, per ritum liturgicum praescriptum ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quae tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemve ab Ecclesia praestandam.
§2. Laici, quibus ministeria de quibus in §1 non sunt collata, et quidem sive viri sive mulieres, ex temporanea deputatione in actionibus liturgicis munus lectoris implere possunt; item omnes laici facultate gaudent ut muneribus commentatoris, cantoris aliisve ad norman iuris fungantur.		§2. Laici ex temporanea deputatione in actionibus liturgicis munus lectoris implere possunt; item omnes laici muneribus commentatoris, cantoris aliisve ad normam iuris fungi possunt.
§3. Ubi Ecclesiae necessitas aut utilitas id suadeat, possunt etiam, deficientibus sacris ministris necnon lectoribus et acolythis, quaedam eorundem officia supplere,	§2. Ubi Ecclesiae necessitas aut utilitas id suadeat, possunt laici etiam, deficientibus sacris ministris necnon lectoribus et acolythis, quaedam eorundem	§3. Ubi Ecclesiae necessitas id suadeat, deficientibus ministris, possunt etiam laici, etsi non sint lectores vel acolythi, quaedam eorundem officia supplere,

[1] See T. GREEN, et al., "Second Report of the Canon Law Society of America Task Force Committee on the *Schema canonum libri II de populo Dei*, 15 December 1978, 79, in CLSA. Task Force for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, *Task Force Critiques of the Initial Schemata for the Revision of the Code*, (compilation of photocopied reports, 1978?), various pagings.

videlicet ministerium verbi exercere, precibus liturgicis praeesee, baptismum conferre atque Sacram Communionem distribuere, iuxta iuris universalis et particularis praescripta.	officia supplere, videlicet ministerium verbi exercere, precibus liturgicis praeesse, baptismum conferre atque Sacram Communionem distribuere.	videlicet ministerium verbi exercere, precibus liturgicis praeesse, baptismum conferre atque sacram Communionem distribuere, iuxta iuris praescripta.

Appendix II

Canon 529 (1977 Schema)	**Canon 230 (prior to the modifications introduced by the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini***	**Canon 230 (following the modifications introduced by the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*)**
§1. Lay men who have the age and qualities determined by the Conference of Bishops may be permanently entrusted with the ministries of reader and acolyte according to the prescribed liturgical rite; which conferring of ministries, however, does not give them the right to sustenance or remuneration from the Church.	§1. Lay men who possess the age and qualifications determined by decree of the conference of bishops can be installed on a stable basis in the ministries of lector and acolyte in accord with the prescribed liturgical rite; the conferral of these ministries, however, does not confer on these lay men a right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.	§1. Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.
§2. Lay persons on whom the ministries spoken of in §1 have not been conferred, whether they be men or women, may carry out on a temporary basis the office of reader in liturgical rites; moreover, all lay persons enjoy the opportunity of being commentator, leader of song and other such positions according to the norms of law.	§2. Lay persons can receive a temporary assignment to the role of lector in liturgical actins. Likewise, all lay persons can exercise the roles of commentator, cantor or other such, in accordance with the law.	§2. Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation. All lay persons can also perform the functions of commentator or cantor, or other functions, according to the norm of law.
§3. Where either necessity or utility of a Church warrants it, lay persons are able when there are no sacred ministers or readers	§3. Where the needs of the Church requires and ministers are not available, lay persons, even though they are not lectors or	§3. When the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not

or acolytes to perform some of the offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the Word, to preside over liturgical prayer, to confer Baptism and to distribute Holy Communion according to the prescripts of Universal and particular law.[2]	acolytes, can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the Word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer Baptism and distribute Holy Communion, in accordance with the provisions of the law.[3]	lectors or acolytes, can also supply certain of their duties, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion, according to the prescripts of the law.[4]

[2] English translation in B. DUNN, "The Sources of Canon 230," JCL thesis, Ottawa, Saint Paul University, Faculty of Canon Law, 1989, 48.

[3] See *CIC/83*, c. 230 (prior to the modifications introduced by the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*).

[4] See *CIC/83*, c. 230 (following the modifications introduced by the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*).

Appendix III

CANON 230

Particular Legislation: Lectors and Acolytes

Canada:

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 230, §1, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops hereby decrees that if laymen who are not candidates for the diaconate or the priesthood are to be admitted to the ministries of lector and acolyte, they must be 21 years of age.

In addition, they are to have a serious Christian life and a recognised human maturity; a good reputation which would enable them to assume that responsibility for a community; and must be able to cooperate with others and have acquired the competence necessary to exercise the intended ministry.

This decree becomes effective January 1, 1988.

OD no. 583; 01-12-87; *SC* 22 (1988), p. 223.

The Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone:

Lectors and acolytes should be sacramental Christians who have completed secondary or high school education or its equivalent.

They must have completed the training program for lectors and acolytes at the National Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

These laymen will have one year's probation in a parish. They must have completed their twenty-fifth year. The parish council is to be consulted before conferral of the stable ministry.

ITCABIC, 3 (1986), p. 1.

Nigeria:

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria prescribes and decrees the following prerequisites for laymen to be installed formally in the ministry of lector and acolyte:

General Guidelines for Both Lector and Acolyte

1. He must have a good reputation in the community, and be free of qualities that would cause scandal if later detected.

2. He must be properly married or, if single, a fully mature adult. It would not be wise to install a man as lector or acolyte who may later put himself in a condition in which he could not receive the sacraments.

3. Number 2 sets the minimum age well enough. The maximum age for installation permitted for ministers should be 60 years.

4. Not to be conferred on anyone just to honour him or reward him for long service to the community. Conferral of ministry must be an upgrading for the whole community and be conferred on a man so he can serve the community better.

5. Not to be conferred just so my parish will have one. Some parishes may need acolytes(s) another lector(s), another both, another neither, depending on circumstances prevailing at parish level.

6. Formation program: Since men chosen for installation will surely have been performing all or most of the respective ministry on a temporary basis, and have indeed been selected because of their above average performance, little formal training will be needed for the work of the ministry as such.

However, all candidates for ministry should have a minimum of twenty lectures, each of which will entail outside reading on the following subjects, to be determined on a more particular *ratio studiorum* in the near future:

a) the nature and history of ministry in the Catholic Church;

b) canonical parlance; office, power of ruling, ordinary power, dispensation, validity, etc;

c) the theology of liturgy and theology of preaching;

d) ecclesiology; namely, the mystery of the Church;

e) some basic things about Scripture studies.

Candidates are to make a three day retreat shortly before installation day. This retreat can be of any style, but must be with a director. No 'private' retreat should be allowed in this case.

7. Those to be installed are to freely draw up and present to the local Ordinary a signed petition to be so installed. The Ordinary has the right of acceptance.

8. Before installation, each candidate is to sign a document in the presence of 123 the Ordinary or his delegate and two witnesses, in which he states that he shall never seek or demand any form of remuneration for services rendered to the Church as a minister.

9. Although any priest can be delegated to install men into ministries, it is preferable in the African context that the Ordinary, the 'Chief,' comes to the parish church to install them.

– Calling men to be installed at a ceremony at the diocesan level is less acceptable than at the parish level.

– However, there could be one ceremony in the central parish church if men from various outstations of that parish are to be installed.

10. A formal certificate, signed and sealed by the Ordinary is to be given to each minister, preferably as part of the ceremony itself.

11. A parish social celebration following the installation is to be encouraged.

The Ministry of Lector (See *Ministeria quaedam*, 5)

1. Ability to speak or read the English language should not be an absolute requirement or criterion of suitability for this ministry.

2. He must have sufficient background and mental coordination to read the language to be used in a manner that is above the average reader.

3. He must have a singing voice good enough to sing the responsorial psalm and the Alleluia verse, and to direct the singing for the whole liturgical action if the need should arise.

4. He must be able to give instructions to the faithful on the worthy reception of the sacraments, both in an informal manner and in a classroom setting.

5. He must be able to conduct series of instructions for those who are appointed to read by temporary appointment, and be able to correct and encourage these temporary readers in a charitable manner.

The Ministry of Acolyte (See *Ministeria quaedam*, 6)

1. A catechist who has been serving mass and setting up the altar or a sacristan with sufficient mental coordination and physical presence is 'a natural' candidate for installation as an acolyte.

2. An acolyte is *ipso facto* in charge of training mass servers. Therefore, those who are psychologically unable or unwilling to do this work should not be chosen for this ministry.

3. Before installation, it must be ascertained that he is familiar with everything that pertains to divine worship, and should be taught the liturgical, as well as the 124 symbolical meaning of all these things. This may be addition to the instructions noted in A-6.

4. Once installed, a specific role should be assigned to the acolyte, so that it is obvious to the faithful that the acolyte's role in the liturgy is more intimate and important than that of ordinary mass-servers.

5. During ceremonies and in exercising his ministry outside liturgical actions, he should wear a distinctive garb, which is different form that which the mass servers in that place wear.

6. He should be called upon to distribute communion at all public Eucharistic celebrations at which his assistance would lessen the overall time of the ceremony.

7. He should be called upon to expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration and to repose it (without giving the blessing) whenever the priest or deacon is physically or morally unavailable.

Dismissal

Any minister who is found unworthy of his ministry shall be dismissed and prohibited from exercising his office.

General Notes:

1. Although canon 230 is concerned with lectors and acolytes, and these guidelines cover only these two, the Canon Law Commission puts forth the possibility of inventing a ceremony for Roman approval to install catechists into a canonically recognised ministry. However, see B-4 and C- 1 of this document.

2. The faithful will also need instruction so they can appreciate these official ministers in their midst. They must be taught to accept the functions of ministers,

especially the distribution of communion, as an uplifting of the whole community, and not an imposition or a case of 'acceptance of persons.'

PCN, pp. 4-7.

Scotland:

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland decrees that the Bishops' Conference will, when the need arises determine the age and qualities of aspirants to the ministries of lector and acolyte.

Newsletter CLSGBI, no. 69 (March 1987), p. 27.

South Africa:

In accordance with the prescriptions of canon 230, §1, the Southern African 125 Catholic Bishops' Conference hereby decrees that if lay men who are not candidates for the diaconate or the priesthood are to be admitted to the ministries of lector and acolyte, they must be at least twenty-six years of age.

In addition, they are to have manifested a serious Christian commitment, an outstanding moral life and a recognised human maturity. Moreover, they are to enjoy a good reputation which would enable them to assume some responsibility for a community. They must also be able to work together with others and have acquired the competence necessary to exercise the intended ministry.

(This decree applies in those instances where a lay man is being installed as lector or acolyte. Where a candidate for the diaconate or priesthood is concerned, the general regulations presently in effect would continue to be observed.)

SACBC[5]

England and Wales

The episcopal conference decrees that the bishops' conference will, when the need arises determine the age and qualities of as pirants to the ministries of lector and acolyte.

CLSGBI *Newsletter*, March 1987, p. 27.

France

1. Minimum Age: In order to be installed in the ministries of lector or acolyte, candidates must have completed their 25th year.

2. The qualities required for candidates to be installed in the ministry of lector or acolyte are:

a. a serious Christian life and a recognized human maturity;

b. a good reputation which permits one to assume responsibility for a community and a stable family background;

c. the ability to collaborate in the Church;

d. the acquisition of the necessary competence to exercise the desired ministry.

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[5] *CLD*, vol. 12, 121-125.

Official Bulletin. 1128/86, p. 448.

Philippines

1. A lay man can be admitted to the ministries of lector and acolyte, whose exercise of office is subject to renewal every year.

2. The candidate must fulfill the following requirements:

a. He must be an exemplary Catholic;

b. He must be at least twenty-one years old;

c. He must be adequately literate;

d. He has finished the seminar established for the proper training and formation of lectors and acolytes.

Commentary

Lay persons are now eligible for certain ministries. They include among others:

the permanent ministries of lector and acolyte reserved to men;

the temporary assignment to the roles of reader, commentator, cantor, etc.;

- the exercise of the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism and to distribute Holy Communion, etc. (c. 230).

The admission of lay persons to the exercise of certain liturgical functions should not be viewed as a novel experiment. For in ancient times lay people had been engaged in ministries instituted to give worship to God and to render service to the faithful, such as liturgical functions, works of charity and apostolate (Mp. *Ministeria quaedam*. MS, 1972, pp. 64 and 529; *CLD*. VII, p. 490).

An urgent call for the restoration of the old practice was issued by Vatican II: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations.” (*SC*, 14).

This wish of the conciliar fathers became a reality through the revision of discipline and the suppression of the minor orders, and the subdiaconate carried out by Paul VI in the motu proprio, *Ministeria quaedam* of 15 August 1972.

Thus, lay persons became once more eligible for the exercise of certain ministries which are now conferred by installation. Though their reception and exercise are a must for the candidates for orders (c. 1035), such ministries are no longer reserved to clerics.

The permanent assignment to the ministries of lector and acolyte is reserved to men of befitting age and of special qualifications which are to be determined by the episcopal conferences.

Lay men installed in the ministries of lector and acolyte have no claim to support or compensation from the church (c. 230, §1), a right exclusively reserved to clerics

(cc. 269, §1; 281); They are entitled, however, to a worthy remuneration to adequately provide for their own needs and those of their families (c. 231, §2).

CLD of Philippine Catholic Church, pp. 9-10.

Spain

Candidates for the permanent ministry of lector and acolyte must have completed 25 years of age, be lay men outstanding for Christian life, and have been well formed so as to know well the doctrine of the Church especially the principles and norms which regulate the liturgical life.

Ius Canonicum 25 (1985): 632.

Switzerland

To be permanently installed into the ministry of acolyte and lector the following conditions are required:

1. Completed 21 years;

2. To present to the ordinary of place responsible for the acceptance, a signed written request by the petitioner at his own initiative;

3. To possess a firm will to serve God and the people of God faithfully by possessing the following:

- to be alive with an ecclesial commitment to and participation in the life of the Church, particularly in the Sunday Eucharist;

- to live the Christian life and to manifest favourable disposition in regard to marriage and the family;

- to not be a member of extremist groups;

4. To have pursued with success the program of studies pre scribed in each case by his diocesan bishop.

Evangile et Mission 30/31 (1985): 503-506.[6]

[6] *CLD*, vol. 11, 19-22.

Appendix IV

Canon 230, §1 – Complimentary Legislation Concerning the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte

The American bishops, at their General Meeting in November 1999, approved complementary legislation implementing canon 230, §1 concerning installation of lay men in the ministries of lector or acolyte. The complementary legislation addresses the requirements of age and other qualifications. What follows is a citation of the canon and the decree implementing it. The decree has received the required recognition by Cardinal Lucas Moreia Neves, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops.

Canon 230, §1: Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops United States of America
DECREE OF PROMULGATION

On November 17, 1999, the Latin Rite *de iure* members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved complementary legislation for canon 230, §1 of the *Code of Canon Law* for the Latin Rite dioceses of the United States.

The action was granted *recognitio* by the Congregation for Bishops in accord with article 82 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* and issued by Decree of the Congregation for Bishops signed by His Eminence Lucas Cardinal Moreira Neves, Prefect, and His Excellency Most Reverend Franciscus Monterisi, Secretary, and dated June 14, 2000.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of canon 230, §1 hereby decrees that a layman who is to be installed in the ministries of lector or acolyte on a stable basis must have completed his twenty-first (21) year of age. The candidate must also possess the skills necessary for an effective proclamation of the Word or service at the altar, be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church, be free of any canonical penalty, and live a life which befits the ministry to be undertaken.

As President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, I hereby decree that the effective date of this decree for all the Latin Rite dioceses in the United States will be September 1, 2000.

Given at the offices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, DC, on July 10, 2000.

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza
Bishop of Galveston-Houston
President, NCCB

Reverend Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr
General Secretary[7]

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[7] "Canon 230, §1 – Complimentary Legislation Concerning the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte" in F.S. PEDONE and J.I. DONLON (eds.), *Roman Replies and CLSA Advisory Opinions 2000*, Washington, DC, CLSA, 2000, 9-10.

Appendix V

Complementary Norms to the Canon 766 of 1983 Code of Canon Law by English Language Conferences of Bishops

1. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

In accordance with the prescription of c. 766, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops hereby decrees that non-ordained persons may be authorized by the diocesan bishop to preach in churches and chapels on the following occasions, in accord with c. 767:

1. When there is no priest or deacon who can converse in the language of the people;
2. When the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated without a priest or deacon;
3. When seminarians who have begun their studies in theology are sent to parishes as part of their pastoral formation;
4. When certain circumstances require the participation of lay persons (financial questions, special appeals, special circumstance);
5. When the diocesan bishop judges it opportune.[8]

2. Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

In conformity with c. 767, §1, the homily is always to be given by a priest or deacon. If a lay person is to speak at Mass, this should take place after the post-communion prayer. For children's Masses, however, the norms contained in the Directory on Children's Masses continue to apply.[9]

3. Irish Episcopal Conference

In accordance with the prescriptions of c. 766, §1, the Irish Episcopal Conference, while stressing that the homily at any Mass may be given only by a priest or deacon (cf. c. 767, §1), hereby decrees that in the circumstances of this country it may in some particular cases be advantageous (though rarely, if ever, necessary) to allow a lay person to preach in a church or oratory, provided permission be given by eh diocesan bishop, even by way of general regulation.[10]

4. New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference hereby decrees that the members of the lay faithful, certified by the local Ordinary to be doctrinally competent and of the

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[8] CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, General Principles, Article, 20 – Adoption, Confirmation and Amendment, Decree no. 6 in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004; J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022, 1551-1552.

[9] BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES, in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004; J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022, 1565.

[10] IRISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004; J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022, 1577.

exemplary Christian life may be authorised by him to preach in a church or oratory in the following circumstance:

- When there is no priest or deacon who can converse in the language of the people;
- When the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated without a priest or deacon;
- When seminarians who have completed their studies in theology are sent to parishes as part of their pastoral formation;
- When the Diocesan Bishop judges it opportune.

In conformity with c. 767, §1, the homily is always to be given by a priest or deacon. For children's Masses, however, the norms contained in the Directory on Children's Masses continue to apply.[11]

5. National Conference of Catholic Bishops

Preaching the Word of God is among the principal duties of those who have received the sacrament of orders (cc. 762-764). The lay faithful can be called to cooperate in the exercise of the Ministry of the Word (c. 759). In accord with c. 766 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops hereby decrees that the lay faithful may be permitted to exercise this ministry in churches and oratories, with due regard for the following provision:

If necessity requires in certain circumstances or it seems useful in particular cases, the diocesan bishop can admit the lay faithful to preach, to offer spiritual conferences or give instructions in churches, oratories or other sacred places within his diocese, when he judges it to be to the spiritual advantage of the faithful.

In order to assist the diocesan bishop in making an appropriate pastoral decision (Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, art. 2, §3), the following circumstances and cases are illustrative: the absence or shortage of clergy, particular language requirements, or the demonstrated expertise or experience of the lay faithful concerned.

The lay faithful who are to be admitted to preach in a church or oratory must be orthodox in faith, and well-qualified, both by the witness of their lives as Christians and by a preparation for preaching appropriate to the circumstances.

The diocesan bishop will determine the appropriate situations in accord with c. 772, §1. In providing for preaching by the lay faithful the diocesan bishop may never dispense from the norm which reserves the homily to the sacred minister (c. 767, §1; cf. Pontifical Commission of the Authentic Interpretation of the *Code of Canon Law*, 26-05-1987, in *AAS*, 79(1987), 1249). Preaching by the lay faithful may not take place within the Celebration of the Eucharist at the moment reserved for the homily.[12]

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[11] NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004; J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022, 1589.

[12] NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, "Norms for Priests and Their Third Age," in E. CAPARROS et al. (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2nd rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2004; J.I. ARRIETA (ed.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th rev. ed., Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur Limitée, 2022, 1606.

6. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA

Canon 766 Competent lay people may be allowed to preach during liturgical services if on special occasions it is necessary or in particular cases it would be advantageous, keeping in mind the following criteria:
1. Lay people who are invited to preach are to be person s who are living exemplary Christian lives, known for their fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church and prepared through a formation in Christian doctrine or Scripture;
2. These lay people can be invited to preach on occasions such as: a) when the liturgy of the Word is celebrated without the presence of the priest or deacon; b) when there is no priest or deacon available who knows the language of the people, keeping in mind that the pre aching is to be done at the end of the Eucharistic celebration;
3. Lay people can also be invited to speak to the assembly in certain special circumstances when it is deemed appropriate by the Parrish Priest. However, this type of preaching is to be done only at the end of the Eucharistic celebration and never instead of the homily, which is to be given by the priest or deacon after the Gospel in conformity with Canon 767.

Approved at Goa, 1986 and amended in November 1994 at the instance of the Holy See).[13]

[13] CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA, Complementary Legislations to the Code of Canon Law, "Canon 766," Bangalore, CCBI Centre, 5, https://ccbi.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Complementary-Legislations-to-the-Code-of-Canon-Law-1.pdf (29 February 2024).

Appendix VI

CANON 910

Authentic Interpretation: Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, 1 June 1988. *AAS*, 80 (1988), 1373

D. Whether the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, deputed in accordance with canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, can exercise his or her supplementary function even when ordinary ministers, who are not in any way impeded, are present in the church, though not taking part in the Eucharistic celebration.

R. Negative.

Pont. Com. for the Auth. Interp. of the Code of Canon Law. *AAS*, 80 (1988), 1373; RRAO (1990), 114.

The proper function of extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, 21 September 1987. Private

Letter from Congregation for the Sacraments:

One of the forms more suitable for the lay participation of the faithful in the liturgical activity of the Church is undoubtedly the faculty granted to them to be able to distribute Holy Communion, as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist (cf., cc. 230, §3; 910, §2).

This faculty has indeed constituted from one viewpoint a real help for the celebrant as well as for the laity on the occasion of great numbers at the time of Holy Communion. It has given way, on the other hand, in some instances, to substantial abuses, often by leading to forgetfulness of the extraordinary character of this ministry, if one considers this to be of ordinary administration or as a type of reward with which one repays the collaboration of the laity.

We are treating of abuses which are verified if:

– the extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist ordinarily distribute Holy Communion together with the celebrant, whether this happens when the small number of those who desire to receive the Sacrament do not constitute a real necessity, or whether it happens in the presence of other concelebrants or other ordinary ministers who are available even if not celebrating.

– the extraordinary ministers, at the moment of Holy Communion, distribute it to themselves and to the faithful while the ordinary minister and the concelebrants, if there are any, remain inactive.

In light of numerous indications of such abuses, this Dicastery has requested from the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law an exact interpretation of canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, regarding precisely the extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. The doubt was formulated in this manner:

"Whether the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, appointed according to canons 910, §2, and 230, §3, may exercise his supplementary task when there are present in the church, even if they are not participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, unimpeded ordinary ministers."

Having examined the problem, the above-mentioned Pontifical Commission, in a Plenary session of 20 February 1987, replied: "In the Negative."

This authentic interpretation was approved by the Holy Father on 15 June 1987, and the faculty granted to this Congregation to communicate the matter to the Episcopal Conferences.

The reply of the Pontifical Commission clearly indicates that, in the presence of ordinary ministers (bishop, priest, deacon; cf., c. 910, §1), whether in the role of celebrant, or present but not participating in the celebration, provided that they are not impeded and in sufficient number, the *extraordinary ministers* are not allowed to distribute the Holy Eucharist either to themselves or to others.

In order, therefore, to bring a halt to the abuses taking place and to prevent others of this type, I ask Your Excellency to please communicate to the President 644 of the Episcopal Conference the above-mentioned authentic interpretation so that it may be made known firsthand to the bishop members of the same Conference.

I will be grateful, thereafter, to Your Excellency if you would pursue the matter with particular care so that the clarification not be further ignored, but that it contribute to reestablishing the exact observance of' liturgical discipline on a point of notable importance.

Letter from Cong. for the Sacraments to papal representatives, 11 Sept. 1987. RRAO (1988): 3-7.

Letter from the Pro-Nuncio to the NCCB President:

The Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Sacraments, in a circular letter to all Papal Representatives, has issued the following clarification with regard to extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

To be sure, the faculty granted to the laity enabling them to distribute Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist (cc. 230, §3; 910, §2) represents without a doubt one of the more suitable forms of lay participation in the Church's liturgical action. On the one hand, this privilege has provided a real help to both the celebrant and to the congregation on occasions when there exists a large number of people receiving Holy Communion. On the other hand, however, in certain instances, significant abuses of this privilege have taken place. Such abuses have led to situations where the character of this ministry has been lost. At times, it also appears as though the designation of extraordinary ministers becomes a kind of reward to repay those who have worked for the Church.

Cardinal Mayer notes that the abuses he speaks of happen if:

– the extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist ordinarily distribute Holy Communion together with the celebrant, both when the number of communicants would not require their assistance, and when there are other concelebrants present or other ordinary ministers available, though not celebrating,

– the extraordinary ministers distribute Holy Communion to themselves and to the faithful while the celebrant and concelebrants, if there are any, remain inactive.

After receiving numerous indications of such abuses, the Congregation decided to seek an authentic interpretation of the appropriate canons from the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law. The following doubt was formulated:

"*Utrum minister extraordinarius Sacrae Communionis, ad normam cann. 910, par. 2 et 230, par. 3 deputatus suum munus suppletorium exercere possit etiam cum praesentes sint in ecclesia, etsi ad celebrationem eucharisticam non participantes, ministri ordinarii qui non sint quoque modo impediti.*"

The Pontifical Commission took up the question in its Plenary Session of' February 20, 1987, and responded: negative.

This authentic interpretation was approved by the Holy Father on June 15, 1987 who then directed the Congregation for Sacraments to communicate the decision to the Episcopal Conferences.

The reply of the Pontifical Commission clearly indicates that, when ordinary ministers (Bishop, Priest, Deacon) are present at the Eucharist, whether they are celebrating or not, and are in sufficient number and are not prevented from doing so by other ministries, the *extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are not allowed* to distribute Communion either to themselves or to the faithful.

Finally, Cardinal Mayer asks that you please convey these directives to the members of the Episcopal Conference.

Letter from Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to the Pres. of the NCCB, 21 Sept. 1987. RRAO (1988): 3-7.[14]

[14] *CLD*, vol. 12, 642-645.

Appendix VII

CANON 1112

DELEGATION FOR QUALIFIED LAY PERSONS TO ASSIST AT MARRIAGES OF THE FAITHFUL

A diocesan bishop, with the previous favourable vote of the episcopal conference of his territory, requested permission from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to delegate two non-ordained persons the faculty to assist at the marriages of the faithful of the diocese.

_____

UNOFFICIAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Prot. N.____

Most Holy Father,

His Most Excellent Lordship _____

Bishop of _____

In light of the scarcity of priests and deacons in his diocese, asks for the permission spoken of in CIC c. 1112 so that he can delegate two religious sisters, of whom mention is made in the episcopal petition, as qualified witnesses of the Church in the territory of his ecclesiastical authority for properly carrying out the liturgical celebrations of marriage in the name of the Church.

THE CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

By force of the faculties given to it by the Supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II, in light of the information set forth by the Ordinary and with the previous favourable vote of the Conference of _____ Bishops, kindly assents to the requests set forth and concedes the desired permission, until otherwise provided by this Dicastery, but without prejudice to the prescripts of the Code and in accord with the following explanations and prescriptions, regarding which the Bishop Petitioner is bound to make each lay person to be delegated aware, namely:

1. This permission is to be held as an entirely extraordinary concession and granted in light of the particular circumstances. Lay persons to be deputed for the duty of assistance at the marriages of faithful must never be considered as "ordinary," since it is of its very nature a supplement, that is, this duty must not be exercised if there are present priests or deacons who are able and willing to assist in celebrating marriage. Pastors and other priests and deacons are earnestly asked that, imbued with pastoral zeal, they be prepared willingly to exercise their proper liturgical duty in the celebration of each marriage and not absent themselves from it unless legitimately impeded. The presence of lay persons delegated for this duty does not constitute a circumstance exempting priests and deacons from their proper duty.

2. The bishop, either personally or through another priest – through the pastor competent by reason of place if it can be done – is to be made certain that the qualified

witness is entirely competent and prepared for giving instruction to those to be married, if this duty is entrusted to the witness, and for worthily carrying out the celebration.

3. General delegation, which is the focus of this rescript, must be conceded in writing (cf. c. 1111, §2) by only the diocesan bishop and those equivalent to him in law, to the exclusion of the vicars general and episcopal vicars unless these are invested with a special mandate.

4. In the document of delegation is to be written the name of the delegated lay person, to whom a determined time of concession is to be assigned. Also to be indicated is the place or places in which the person can exercise the delegation, under penalty of the invalidity of the marriage. The place is to be limited and a circumscription of a parish or several parishes. The delegation is never to be conceded for the whole territory of the diocese.

5. The qualified witness cannot validly subdelegate the delegation so received to others.

6. The delegation expires after the term established in the letters of delegation has elapsed. The delegate is to inform the bishop about this, and the delegate is to return the mandate to him or ask for its renewal.

7. If a priest or deacon lacking the faculty of assisting is present, the delegated lay person is bound to ask him whether he wishes to assist at the marriage. This request causes the effect of delegation conceded by law in this case.

8. The faculty of dispensing from matrimonial impediments, spoken of in cc. 1079-1080, does not pertain to the delegated lay person.

9. The delegated lay person cannot in any way wear the vestments proper to priests or deacons in carrying out the marriage rite. It is necessary that he or she wears appropriate clothing approved by the Ordinary or only an alb.

10. The delegated lay person is bound to use the rite in the vernacular language that is recognized by the Holy See and prescribed for marriage in that diocese.

11. The qualified witness is to take care that he or she attest to the celebration in marriage in a document, in which are put the signatures of the spouses, witnesses and the qualified witness him/herself, and a document is to be sent as quickly as possible to the pastor of the parish competent for the territory so that he can properly make mention of it in the register of marriages of the parish as is the custom (cc. 1121 §1; 1122).

12. The qualified witness is to warn the contracting parties that they are equally to fulfill the solemnities and prescriptions of civil law.

Given in Rome, at the Halls of the Congregation, _____, 2012.

(Signed)

+Antonius Card. Cañizares Llovera

Prefect

_____

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Anthoni Bawanthade, was born on 17 July 1982 in Balapur Buj, Maharashtra, India. He is a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries [CMF]), Province of Bangalore. After completing his initial formation at Claret Niketan Minor Seminary in Belgaum (1998–2000), he pursued philosophical studies at Claretian Ashram, Wardha (2001–2004), and entered the novitiate at Claret Bhavan, Carmelaram, where he made his First Profession on 31 May 2005. Following a year of regency in Meghalaya, he completed his theological studies at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore (2006–2009), making his Perpetual Profession on 31 May 2009 and receiving ordination to the diaconate and priesthood in the same year.

Fr. Bawanthade has served in various pastoral and administrative roles, including Assistant Parish Priest in the Diocese of Chanda, Administrator of Claret Niketan Minor Seminary in Belgaum, Bursar and Administrator of St. Claret School, Butibori, and Parish Priest of St. Claret Church, Butibori. His ministry has combined pastoral leadership with significant administrative responsibilities within his congregation and the local Church.

In 2018, he commenced advanced canonical studies at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, where he earned the Licentiate in Canon Law (JCL) in 2020 and from September 2020, he commenced his doctoral studies in canon law.