

## How the Parish Works: Part 5

*Part 4 reviewed the various parish Councils, Commissions, and Committees and their role in parish life at our dual-church parish of Holy Disciples (Puyallup) and Our Lady of Good Counsel (Eatonville). This week reflect on the Church's theology of lay ministry, as grounded in Sacred Scripture and most recently expressed in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.*

When discussing people's roles in the Church, we Catholics readily acknowledge the charism from the **Holy Spirit**, that vivifies the ministry of our **ordained** clergy, the bishops, priests, and deacons (see Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47; Jn 20:22-23; Acts 1:5; 2-4; 6:1-7; 11:19-26).

The *same* Holy Spirit also calls and gifts the **lay ministers** of our parish staff, councils, and committees, and **all lay Catholics** with charisms unique to their vocation to help build up and support the Body of Christ. Let's take some time to review the **Apostolate of the Laity**, so *vital to building and nurturing our parish community of faith*.

The Second Vatican Council beautifully reflected on the ministry of lay Catholics in its "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) issued in 1965. The Council Fathers affirmed the importance of the Christian witness and described the call from God to mission (apostolate) received by each lay Christian.

Here follow some excerpts from this document for us to reflect on this coming week. I have emboldened some of its key words.

**"The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.** Sacred Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was at the very beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 11:19-21; 18:26; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3)." (AA 1)

**"The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all [people] to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate,** which the Church carries on in various ways through all her members. **For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as life of the body:** so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, "the whole body . . . in keeping with the proper activity of each part, derives its increase from its own internal development" (Eph. 4:16)." (AA 2)

**"In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission.** Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. **But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world."** (AA 2)

**"The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself.** They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world. . . ." (AA 3)

**"One engages in the apostolate through the faith, hope, and charity which the Holy Spirit diffuses in the hearts of all members of the Church. Indeed, by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of His**

kingdom and to obtain eternal life for all [people]-that they may know the only true God and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3). **On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all [people] throughout the world.**" (AA 3)

**"As sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church.** Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the manner of the men and women who helped Paul in spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3) the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18). Strengthened by active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share of the apostolic works of that community. **They bring to the Church people who perhaps are far removed from it, earnestly cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction, and offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporalities of the Church more efficient and effective.**" (AA 10)

As you can see, the Church, through teachings of the Second Vatican Council, makes abundantly clear that the vocation of each baptized Catholic person is essential to carrying out the mission of the Church both in the parish and to the world around us. Please reflect on these important teachings this week, and *appreciate how much you are needed by the Church.*

Blessings in Christ,  
**Fr. Matthew O'Leary,**  
*Pastor*