

## Faith in 5 – Adult Vocations for the Laity



1. **Catholic laity** are the members of the Catholic Church who are neither clergy nor recipients of Holy Orders or vowed to life in a religious order or congregation. The Church recognizes a clear differentiation between Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the general ministry of the laity.

**An ecclesial ministry** is one that is directed to the Church itself, with the aim of helping it better respond to its mission in the world. The ecclesial vocations serve the Church, while general lay vocations are vocations by which the Church serves the world. These lay “ministries, offices and roles” find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation; some ministries may also include the Sacrament of Matrimony.

2. **Lay ecclesial minister** is not itself a specific position title. It describes and identifies a developing apostolate which aids in the fulfillment of an ordained priest’s pastoral care. This ministry is lay because it is service done by lay persons. The sacramental basis are the Sacraments of Initiation, not the Sacrament of Ordination. The ministry is ecclesial because it has a place within the community of the Church and is offered to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy. It is ministry because it engages in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet, and king.
3. **Lay ecclesial ministry** has been adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to “establish a framework to indicate what is common to many roles and responsibilities undertaken by lay persons”. Examples of lay ecclesial ministers are Pastoral Coordinator or Moderator of a Parish, Pastoral Associate, Director of Religious Education, Youth Minister, Campus Minister, Hospital Chaplain, Spiritual Director, and Catholic School Principal or Teacher. The gifts and leadership roles are used for the welfare of the Church, used for every good work and strengthening the community. A required level of professional education, training and competence is necessary for these roles. It is not a position of special privilege, power or superiority.
4. The ministry is not necessarily a lifelong commitment as in Holy Orders but exercised in accordance with the specific lay vocation. **The distinction of lay engagement is to bring the secular order into conformity with God’s plan.** Lay collaboration is not a substitute for ordained ministry. The relationship is mutually reliant on the other, where purposes are joined to the mission and ministry of Christ.
5. **Lay Associations**, sometimes known as Third or Secular Orders, consist of lay men and women who feel called to live out a charism in the world associated with a specific spirituality of the Catholic faith and tradition.
6. As a result of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. Paul VI issued the **motu proprio** (a document issued by the pope on his own initiative and personally signed by him), “ **Ministeria Quaedam**” which suppressed the minor orders and replaced

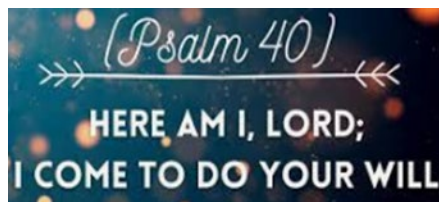
them with two ministries, those of lector and acolyte. Certain ministries may now be entrusted to the laity; they are no longer to be considered as reserved only for candidates for the Sacrament of Orders.

7. Lay **liturgical** ministry pertains to the service and assistance which non-ordained members of the Church provide in the context of its public worship. The laity comes to actively participate in a more specific way in the life and mission of the Church. At the same time, the lay faithful provide the necessary assistance for the sacred ministry of priests. It is a collaborative apostolate. Qualifications for these ministries may vary between diocese or parish. Basic qualifications can be expected for those who wish to contribute voluntarily, along with permission of the priest or leader of the role:
  - a. Be a practicing Roman Catholic with an established prayer life – regular attendance at Mass, active participation in the sacraments and prayer.
  - b. Receive adequate training, and work together as a coordinated body
  - c. The person's character or virtuous life is immediately known by fellow parishioners and priests.
  - d. Possess a high level of emotional maturity - the ability to sustain friendships and professional relationships, the management and appropriate expression of both anger and affection.
  - e. Demonstrate a willingness to serve joyfully, faithfully and with humility.
  
8. Examples of liturgical ministries:
  - a. **Lectors** – Proclaim the scriptural readings before the Gospel at Mass (cf. GIRM 99, 101). The Book of Readings (Lectionary) is their main responsibility.
  - b. **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC)**– Tasked with helping priests and deacons (who are ordinary ministers of Holy Communion) in distributing communion to the faithful. In the absence of a deacon, they may also administer the chalice to communicants (cf. GIRM 98, 100). EMHC may be tasked with distributing Holy Communion to sick parishioners or to the faithful who come for the Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest.
  - c. **Sacristan** – This person works with the parish priest, making sure all the requisites for the celebration of the Mass and other sacraments are in order (cf. GIRM 319-351) . They aid in the overall coordination of the liturgy.
  - d. **Altar Servers** - Altar servers assist the priest and the deacon during the celebration of the Mass and at other liturgies (cf. GIRM 100). When serving at Mass, they should participate in the eucharistic celebration and be attentively present from the entrance procession to the recessional. They place themselves at the disposition of the parish priest to serve the parish and also to grow “in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with people” (Lk 2:52).
  - e. **Choir, Cantor** - Music is essential to the liturgy; music ministers are important especially during Sundays and the solemn celebrations of the parish. Their role is one of leading and instructing: they lead the singing and instruct the faithful on what and how to sing during liturgical celebrations.

**f. Ushers** – in their role as collectors, they accept the monetary offerings of the faithful (cf. GIRM 105, c). Ushers are particularly called for in important celebrations which involve a large number of people. They are “ministers of hospitality,” welcoming people as they enter the church and helping them to their appropriate place in the assembly (cf. GIRM 105, d). They help parishioners during Mass, especially in times of emergency.

Laity may provide service and support on a limited and voluntary basis in roles such as catechists, pastoral council members, visitors to the sick and needy, and those who serve in programs such as sacramental preparation, youth ministry, including ministries for charity and justice. The vocation is aligned with the [Church’s social doctrine](#): “All this must be done in a specifically Christian way: the laity especially must be present ..., without ever yielding to the temptation to turn Christian communities into mere social agencies”.

9. Lay vocations are opportunities for the laity to practice their personal and deep commitment to the church, to serve for love of God and a desire to do His will. As with all vocations, discernment to any lay ministry requires prayer, dialogue and evaluation of one’s current state. One should consider what talents, limitations and virtues are necessary to conduct their ministry. The actions and language of a lay minister - who represents the Catholic Church and the parish - will either help or deter others on the path to holiness. Service is for the glory of God and must not be self-serving. Lay vocations are not to be pursued for recognition, popularity or favors.
10. As baptized Catholics, we are all called by God to work to transform the world, to contribute to the sanctification of the world from within. Pope St. John Paul II encourages all to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church’s life. “Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from education of the young to the widest array of charitable works”. [[John Paul II, At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 \(Novo Millennio Ineunte\) \(NMI\), no. 46](#)].



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