

A Study Guide to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: The Unfolding Spirit of the Second Vatican Council

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Foreword to the Study Edition

More than fifty years ago, The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council addressed the laity of the Church in the decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, with pastoral guidance on what the role of the laity might look like in the “modern world.” In the five decades which have passed, we might question their views on “the modern world,” but we can certainly reflect upon this same document today in our 21st century lives. First, it is generally accepted that Vatican II significantly expanded the potential roles for laity in the work and workings of the Church. Second, most would agree that comparing the role the laity has achieved and continues to achieve today, in contrast to pre-Vatican II days, the laity continues to actively engage in the works of liturgy and in the world, making significant impact. The major question considered in this Study Guide is whether the lay faithful broadly understand and embrace these changes in its role, considering whether or not the vision of the Council Fathers has been realized or whether we remain in the early stages of this expanded role.

Now, a generation removed, many Catholics – say, those under the age of 50 – don’t even see the role of the laity as having changed, as what they experience today is simply the Church in which they have grown up. Part of the underlying rationale for this Study Guide is to address the question: Is it time for a reminder of the changes that were called for by the Council Fathers, and a renewal of the effort to empower and energize the ministry of the laity?

The history of this Decree from the Second Vatican Council is interesting to note. Herbert Vorgrimler noted, “... this document had the fewest dissenting votes during the whole of the

Council,” 2340 affirmative and only 2 negative.¹ That nearly-unanimous vote, especially as the Council was drawing to a close, reflects the support and urgency that must have been felt by the bishops as they gathered and debated the role of the laity in the 1960s. The emphasis on the laity was no accident for the Decree, and was an ongoing emphasis of the Second Vatican Council; William Madges notes that in the original draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) “... the role and power of the bishops was placed *before* the exposition of the role of the laity,” while the final document places the section on the People of God before that of the hierarchy.² It is part of the Council mandate that the laity, the People of God, have a prominent role and mission in the life of the Catholic Church, which continues into this 21st century.

In this decree, the Council cited St. Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians in reflecting that each member of the Body of Christ has a unique and essential role to play in 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).

Note to the 2025 Study Guide edition: Two lists were extracted for the Appendix (pages 75, 77) for possible use within parish settings following the Spiritual Conversation Method. The

¹ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume III*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1969, 302.

² William Madges, “Imperative of the Catholic Middle,” unpublished paper from the conference, *The irrepressible Energy of the Spirit: Vatican II and Beyond*, Chestnut Hill College, 2013, page 3. See also *Lumen Gentium*, No 9.

post-Synodal document, “Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod,” invites continuing “... conversations in the spirit...” within parish and diocesan life. This, too, is reflected in the Final Document of the Synod, encouraging ongoing conversations in the spirit that help continue the conversion of a synodal and listening Church.

A Sacramental Mandate: Baptism and Confirmation

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Cardinal Avery Dulles, while speaking more than forty years after the Council, in his March 29, 2006 lecture at Fordham University defined the role of the laity in this way: “The faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church ... These are the Church.”³ By virtue of our baptism, the Christian faithful are called to a life of ministry, albeit not always liturgical ministry.

³ Cardinal Avery R. Dulles, “The Mission of the Laity” in *Church and Society: the Laurence J. McGinley Lectures*, New York: The New York Province of the Society of Jesus, 2008, 485-486.

Yves Congar had a significant influence as a peritus at the Second Vatican Council in forming the documents on the laity. Kathryn Reyes Hamrlik notes about Congar's influence: "...the laity are called through baptism and confirmation to a direct evangelization of the world that is independent of the hierarchical apostolate."⁴ Congar highlighted that this role from their common priesthood of the baptized is not a derivative of the ministerial ordained priesthood.

A Call to "Full and Active Participation"

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us" (Romans 12:4-6).

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal,⁵ produced following the Council, includes more than thirty discrete references to the full and active participation of the laity. When examining this document in 2013 as part of a research effort, I posed the question to several clergy and lay persons as to what they felt was meant by the Church as "full and active participation." All responded that this reflected on the mandate for participation at the celebration of the Eucharist. Interestingly, only one quarter of those asked mentioned anything outside the

⁴ Kathryn Reyes Hamrlik, doctoral dissertation, "The Principle of Subsidiarity and Catholic Ecclesiology: Implications for the Laity," Loyola University Chicago, Ann Arbor: Proquest, LLC: 2011, 46.

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Washington: USCCB, Inc., 2003.

Eucharist. These responses were not entirely surprising, but they do point to the ongoing need to invite the laity to a larger role, participating not simply in Sunday liturgies, but carrying their faith into their professional vocations as well.

This liturgical participation is not isolated and invites each person to strive for a growth in holiness that will also be reflected in their lives outside the liturgy: “The quality of worship depends in great measure on the spiritual life of all present. As lay women and men cultivate their own proper response to God’s call to holiness, this should come to expression in the communal worship of the Church.”⁶

In the Decree on the Laity, the Council Fathers acknowledged this life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished “... by active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties *in the ordinary conditions of life*, they do not separate union with Christ from their life, but rather performing their work according to God's will, they grow in that union” (AA 4, *emphasis added*).

A Call to Holiness

In the years since the promulgation of the Decree on the Laity, there have been a few reminders offered by the Church. In 1980, in recognition of the 15th anniversary of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops issued the document, *Called and Gifted*.⁷ The Bishops reminded us,

⁶ United States Catholic Conference (now United States Council of Catholic Bishops), “*Called and Gifted*,” Washington, D.C., 1980.

⁷ United States Catholic Conference, “*Called and Gifted*,” Washington, D.C., 1980.

referring to *Lumen Gentium*: “... but theirs [the laity] is a unique call requiring a unique response, which itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence.”

The section from *Lumen Gentium* referenced by the American Bishops called forth the laity in these words: “... the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.”⁸

The United States Bishops addressed the laity again in 1995, on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Vatican-II document, when they spoke of the ongoing call for the laity to strive for holiness as a vocation in the world we live in, and recognized that

⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, The Vatican: November 21, 1964, No. 31.

call as a demanding one: “The call to holiness requires effort and commitment to live the Beatitudes.”⁹

Formation for the Apostolate

Cardinal Dulles helps to rationalize the sometimes conflicting understanding of the Church’s use of “ministry” and “apostolate” when addressing the various works of the lay faithful: “In official Catholic documents since Vatican II there has been a growing tendency to apply the term ‘ministry’ to lay activities, where the Council would probably have used ‘apostolate.’ ‘Ministry’ is used in particular for services intended to build up the Church from within, whereas ‘apostolate,’ to the extent that it is still used, connotes activities directed outward to the world.”¹⁰

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- Avery Cardinal Dulles

The Decree on the Laity triggered an interesting structuring of Vatican support for the new mission. In response to the Second Vatican Council Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (AA 26), the Pontifical Council for the Laity was established by Pope Paul VI on June 6, 1967, through the moto proprio *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*. An important dimension of the role of the laity can be found in the structure of this special secretariat;

⁹ United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “*Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*,” Washington, D.C., 1995.

¹⁰ Dulles, 489-490.

Paul VI created two bodies simultaneously in this promulgation, one for the laity and a second Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace. Note that from an organizational perspective, these two Commissions were created with a *single cardinal president* and *single vice president*; by defining this common leadership, the work of the laity *has been directly tied to the Church's work for justice and peace*.¹¹ A great deal of what follows in regard to the broader understanding of the role and work of the laity, therefore, relates to the promotion of social justice, and through justice the promotion of peace in the world.

Note that over the past fifty years, this Pontifical Council has undergone change, too. Pope Saint John Paul II reorganized the Vatican Curia in 1988, and separated the Council for the Laity from the Council for Justice and Peace under the Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor Bonus*.¹² Even more recently, Pope Francis changed the Curial structure in 2016, combining the former Pontifical Council for the Laity and the former Pontifical Council for the Family into one new Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life.¹³ In these new statutes, Pope Francis echoes what had been said fifty years ago, that this Dicastery ‘... helps the lay faithful to become more aware of their shared responsibility by virtue of their Baptism, for the life and mission of the Church.’ The document goes on to encourage “...all those initiatives which concern the laity’s task of evangelizing in the different areas of the temporal world ...”

¹¹ Pope Paul VI, *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, Vatican: June 6, 1967.

¹² Pope St. John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus*, The Vatican, June 28, 1988.

¹³ Pope Francis, “Statutes of the New Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life,” The Vatican, June 4, 2016.

Roles of Laity in the Church and Civil Society

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8

The Council Fathers pointed to the diversity of roles for the laity in recognizing that Catholics will frequently be called upon to interact with other Christians and non-Christians in societal and secular roles (AA 27).

When we examine the roles of the laity, we can see two distinct realms in which they may be working, either as a primary vocation or in some part-time or voluntary capacity. Some examples of these activities may be seen in the following table, classified as activities “within the Church” and “outside the Church.”

Within the Church ¹⁴	Outside the Church
Canon Lawyers	Attorneys and Judges
Catechists	Business professionals and scientists
Directors of charitable programs	Entertainers and Journalists
Healthcare workers	Healthcare workers
Journalists	Members of the armed forces
Leaders of prayer, song and liturgy	Politicians/Civil servants
Missionaries	Retail and hospitality workers
Parish managers	Teachers
Retreat Directors	... and many, daresay <i>every</i> , profession in our society
Spiritual Directors	
Teachers	

Vorgrimler notes the significant role of the laity: “For it is precisely the fact that the laity has not been called for a special office or religious state ... which gives them those special opportunities and tasks which they would not have as clerics or as religious, although these tasks are of the greatest importance for the Church and the world ...”¹⁵ We, too, can understand that when contrasting the two columns in the chart above, the laity enter daily into places “outside the Church” where priests or bishops would be outsiders, at best treated as important guests, and more often could be seen as awkward participations in conversations about business, professional activities, or politics.

¹⁴ Adapted from *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 74.

¹⁵ Vorgrimler, 305.

The individual, by virtue of his or her own baptism and confirmation, remains bound to carry the teaching of the Catholic Church into the public sector; all the faithful have an obligation to witness Christian values in every human endeavor and vocation.

The idea that Catholic women and men can have an impact in the secular world continues to gain momentum; at the 2018 *Harvard-Vatican Leadership Summit*, student leader Okendo Lewis-Gayle said, “What brought them [Harvard and The Vatican] together was this commitment to servant leadership, whether it’s the Church or it’s Harvard, both are ultimately trying to train leaders who will go and better serve the world ... The question is how we can help these leaders as they go into the worlds of business, government, law, you name it, to understand the value of servant leadership, so they can exercise it throughout their lives.”¹⁶

In the World, But Not of the World

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world” (John 17:15-16).

The Eucharistic liturgy is a central and foundational element of Catholic life. While this nourishes us spiritually and sacramentally, it is not and never was intended to be something that remains in a church building on a Sunday morning. That was never Jesus’ instruction, but rather he sent His disciples forth – in twos and in groups – to carry the Gospel message to all people. We are called to continue that today. In going forth from the

¹⁶ John Allen and Claire Giangravé, *Crux Now*, “Summit Aims to Leverage Harvard, Vatican to Unleash Youthful Idealism”, www.cruxnow.com, March 12, 2018.

Eucharistic liturgy, Henri Nouwen reminds us that the celebration of the Mass is only a starting point, not a conclusion: “The Eucharist concludes with a mission. ‘Go, now and tell!’ The Latin words ‘Ite Missa est,’ with which the priest used to conclude the Mass, literally mean: ‘Go, this is your mission.’”¹⁷

Jesus is clear in His teaching; all members of the Body of Christ need to keep ourselves secure from the allurements of the world in order to reflect the Gospel in our lives.

In introducing the Decree on the Laity to the Council, Cardinal Fernando Cento offered the following words to frame this document for the bishops: “It is the heart of this text, and our deepest desire, that all the baptized may become aware that no one can become a genuine Christian until he or she thinks of themselves as an apostle; the manifestation of such an awareness would be the greatest triumph of Vatican Council II.”¹⁸ These comments, offered fifty years ago, proclaim the challenge that must be answered in the present moment as well!

The lay faithful carry an obligation to witness the Gospel in the breadth of their lives, both within the context of Church celebrations and activities along with the call to be sent into the world – *the secular world* – and to serve the Gospel as daily witnesses to Christian values. This was definitively stated by the Council: “Regardless of status, all lay persons ... are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it” (AA 16). Father Ronald Rolheiser points out that this extension of the Eucharistic life from the altar into the world is to a great extent not the common

¹⁷ Henri Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981, 81.

¹⁸ Maureen Sullivan, OP, *The Road to Vatican II*, New York: Paulist Press, 2007, 80.

posture of most Catholics: “Sadly, we often don’t take this dimension of the Eucharist seriously. There is a common tendency to think that the practice of justice, especially social justice, is an optional part of being a Christian, something mandated by political correctness rather than by the Gospels.”¹⁹

Participation as Obligation

Pope John Paul II reminds the Catholic people that reaching outward and caring for the world is an obligation, and one of long-standing tradition within the Church: “Thus, part of the teaching and most ancient practice of the Church is her conviction that she is obliged by her vocation - she herself, her ministers and each of her members - to relieve the misery of the suffering, both far and near, not only out of her ‘abundance’ but also out of her ‘necessities.’”²⁰

We participate in the world through various organizations, vocations, and groups, yet this obligation falls to each person as individuals; Pope Benedict XVI explained this obligation in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* with these words: “Therefore it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility.”²¹ Benedict was carrying forth the message found in *Guadium et Spes* which states: “For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.”²²

¹⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, OFM, *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*. New York: Doubleday, 2011, 74.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Vatican: December 30, 1987, No. 31.

²¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, Vatican: June 29, 2009, No. 36.

²² Second Vatican Council, *Guadium et Spes*, Vatican: December 7, 1965, No. 16.

This Constitution highlighted the flawed separation between the secular life and sacred life: “Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess, and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (GS 43).

We come, therefore, to understand and see the laity working outside of the liturgical celebrations, and outside of expanded roles within ecclesial organizations, as principally lived as witnesses to the Gospel in family life and in the political, business and professional fields. In each of these areas, the lay faithful are called to witness the Gospel and advance social justice in how they participate in families and society.²³

²³ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, The Vatican: December 30, 1988, No. 40.

Political and Professional Roles – Full and Active Participation

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.” Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’” (Luke 4:5-8)

So Pilate said to him, “Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. (John 19:10-11a)

Particular roles which are closely related, and which deserve special attention are those of participation in the political and professional life – areas where clergy are for the most part excluded, except in a limited advisory capacity for some few institutions. These roles are unique in that lay persons, acting in both private and public spheres, direct major initiatives which directly and indirectly touch millions of lives. Political leaders are responsible to the people they govern, and their political actions result in policies that ultimately reflect their individual views. For Catholic men and women, the political sphere is an opportunity to have those policies reflect Gospel values.

The Council Fathers saw this responsibility clearly when they wrote: “All Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an

example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good” (GS 75). Cardinal Dulles, again quoting Murray, reflected that “Society becomes barbarian when men are huddled together under the rule of force or fear; when economic interests assume the primacy over higher values; when material standards of mass and quantity crush out values of quality and excellence; when technology assumes an autonomous existence and embarks on a course of unlimited self-exploitation ... and when men come under the sway of the instinctual, the impulsive, the compulsive.”²⁴

In this context, it is clear that the laity should not avoid political roles but rather are encouraged to pursue such vocations. Their charge to the laity in regard to active participation in political leadership stated, “A vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom. In loyalty to their country and in faithful fulfillment of their civic obligations, Catholics should feel themselves obliged to promote the true common good. Thus, they should make the weight of their opinion felt in order that the civil authority may act with justice and that legislation may conform to moral precepts and the common good. Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine should not refuse to administer public affairs since by doing this in a worthy manner they can both further the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the Gospel” (AA 14).

In addition to the Council Decree for the Laity, those who participate in the political sphere have a charge directly from Jesus; turning to Matthew’s Gospel, we find: “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post.

²⁴ Dulles, *Religion and the Transformation of Politics*, 123.

He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples” (Matthew 9:9-10). Interpreted literally, Jesus says to those in the political sphere, “Follow me.”

Gaudium et Spes speaks to the leadership roles of the laity with a unique tie to the ongoing work of creation, using the example of Jesus the Carpenter: “Christians should rather rejoice that, following the example of Christ who worked as an artisan, they are free to give proper exercise to all their earthly activities and to their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises by gathering them into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory” (GS 43).

The case may be made that in addition to those who influence political policy, professionals and business leaders are in a powerful position to influence the condition of people throughout the world, and decisions made in the mahogany-paneled board rooms have a profound impact on those laboring in mahogany-filled rain forests, and other Third World societies. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, it states: “Furthermore, in collaborating as citizens of this world, in whatever pertains to the upbuilding and conducting of the temporal order, the laity must seek in the light of faith loftier motives of action in their family, professional, cultural, and social life and make them known to others when the occasion arises” (AA 16).

Business leaders are directed to bring Gospel values and concern for the dignity of human life – of workers throughout their influence – into every business endeavor as part of their full

and active participation in a Eucharistic life: “Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor” (AA 13).

Cardinal Dulles, with reference to *Lumen Gentium*, put the obligation to business leaders and professionals this way: “What was specific to the laity as such, according to the Council, was their secular calling – namely, to engage in temporal affairs, seeking to order them according to the plan of God. ‘They live in the world,’ said the Council, ‘that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven’ (LG 31). From this it followed that they ‘are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative where only through them can she become the salt of the earth’ (LG 33).”²⁵

Specifically within the United States, the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops offered guidance to business and professionals in 1986: “Business people, managers, investors, and financiers follow a vital Christian vocation when they act responsibly and seek the common good.”²⁶ Four years later, Pope John Paul II offered this directive to business leaders on a global basis within his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: “The sphere in which lay people are present and active as missionaries is very extensive. Their own field...is the vast

²⁵ Dulles, *The Mission of the Laity*, 487.

²⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice For All*, Washington: 1986, 117.

and complicated world of politics, society and economics... on the local, national and international levels.”²⁷

Pope Benedict continued promoting this charge to the laity in his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*: “from the perspective of the Church's social doctrine, there is nevertheless a growing conviction that business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference.”²⁸ Benedict cautioned in that same document that “...It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.”²⁹

The Laity: Witness to Hope

A very great deal has changed in our world since 1965 when this decree was promulgated with the near-unanimous support of the bishops. Much of what is viewed as the “modern world” today simply did not exist more than fifty years ago. Laity – from youth to young adults to senior citizens – have many complexities to deal with that draw our professed Catholic faith and beliefs into a sharp contrast with the secular world. A few challenges are worth noting:

- The Internet did not exist in 1965; neither did the many good and objectionable “web sites.”

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 72.

²⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 40.

²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, No. 27.

- There were no cell phones in 1965.
- “Social media” was a section within the printed newspapers in 1965.
- “Global warming” would not become a common term until 1975.
- The number of people living in poverty has grown from approximately 4.5 billion in 1981 to 6.5 billion in 2005, per the United Nations.

Global security had far different players. The United States and the Soviet Union were in a Cold War as nuclear proliferation was the norm; the first U.S. troops landed in Vietnam in 1965. The Arab-Israeli War would not take place until 1967. The Soviet Union would dissolve (1991) with dramatic realignment of nations within both Central and Eastern Europe. Thirteen African nations have their start after 1965. The U.S. would become a principal combatant in wars fought in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Libya, Somalia and numerous supporting roles throughout the world. The September 11, 2001, bombing of the World Trade Center and other U.S.-based targets would transform homeland security for all Americans.

The World has changed and will continue to change.

Catholic lay men and women in differing age groups each see a different Church, and the case can be made that what each of them see is the “real” world, at least as viewed through the lens of their particular experience and lives. Catholic women and men nearing (or already in) retirement likely see a different need and role for the laity than those under 25; those under 25 likely would offer challenges to those in their 30s, 40s and 50s as to how best to live out and respond to the Vatican II Decree on the Laity. And

few of those living who participated in the framing and authorship of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* would have imagined the specifics of the future we live every day in the 21st Century.

All this means that the efforts today by Catholic laity are needed more than ever, and that the witness to the Gospel in the secular world, through the many secular professions and vocations remains both an opportunity and an obligation for men and women of faith. Work remains to be done, and that work will be accomplished by the zealous efforts of lay women and men, who stand as witnesses to hope in a world that remains broken.

Throughout this study edition of the Decree, readers will find reflections based on Church documents since 1965, and comments reflecting this author's belief that this Decree remains an important document for forming Catholic leaders. Discussion questions are offered for fruitful dialog and discussion, with some anticipated differences in how each generation of Catholics might respond to each question. It is my hope that readers will continue to be life-long disciples and will find these discussions as moments of growth and transformation.

DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY
APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM
SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS,
POPE PAUL VI
ON NOVEMBER 18, 1965
(retrieved from www.vatican.va)

Decree On the Apostolate of the Laity: Introduction

1. To intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God,¹ the most holy synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity, whose proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church has already been dealt with in other documents.² 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; Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3).

Our own times require of the laity no less zeal: in fact, modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified. With a constantly increasing population, continual progress in science and technology, and closer interpersonal relationships, the areas for the lay apostolate have been immensely widened particularly in fields that have been for the most part open to the laity alone. These factors have also occasioned new problems which demand their expert attention and study. This apostolate becomes more imperative in view of the fact that many areas of human life have become increasingly autonomous. This is as it should be, but it sometimes involves a degree of departure from the ethical and religious order and a serious danger to Christian life. Besides, in many places where priests are very few or, in some instances, deprived of due freedom for priestly work,

¹ cf. John XXIII, apostolic constitution "Humani Salutis," Dec. 25, 1961: A.A.S. 54 (1962) pp. 7-10.

² cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, nos. 33 ff.: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 39 ff.; cf. also Constitution on the Liturgy, nos. 26-40; A.A.S. 56 (1964) pp. 107-111; cf. Decree on Instruments of Social Communication: A.A.S. 56 (1964) pp. 145-158; cf. Decree on Ecumenism: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 90-107; cf. Decree on Pastoral Duties of Bishops, nos. 16, 17, 18; cf. Declaration on Christian Education, nos. 3, 5, 7; cf. Decree on Missionary Activity of Church, nos. 15, 21, 41; cf. Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry, no. 9.

the Church could scarcely exist and function without the activity of the laity.

An indication of this manifold and pressing need is the unmistakable work being done today by the Holy Spirit in making the laity ever more conscious of their own responsibility and encouraging them to serve Christ and the Church in all circumstances.³

In this decree the Council seeks to describe the nature, character, and diversity of the lay apostolate, to state its basic principles, and to give pastoral directives for its more effective exercise. All these should be regarded as norms when the canon law, as it pertains to the lay apostolate, is revised.

³ cf. Pius XII, allocution to cardinals, Feb. 18, 1946: A.A.S. 38 (1946) pp. 101-102; Idem., sermon to young Catholic workers, Aug. 25, 1957: A.A.S. 49 (1957) p. 843.

Chapter I: The Vocation of the Laity to the Apostolate

2. 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 men to share in His saving redemption,⁴ and that through them the whole

“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 men to share in His saving redemption ...”

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).

Indeed, the organic union in this body and the structure of the members are so compact that the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself.

⁴ cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Rerum Ecclesiae:" A.A.S. 18 (1926) p. 65

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.⁵

They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.

“It is they [the laity] who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions, such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development and family planning.”

Called and Gifted, USCCB, 1980

3. 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

⁵ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 31: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 37.

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. The sacraments, however, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.⁶

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 men—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 men throughout the world.

For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), "allotting them to everyone according as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11) in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10), to build up the whole body in charity (cf. Eph. 4:16). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit

⁶ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church. no. 33, p. 39; cf. also no. 10, *ibid.*, p. 14.

who "breathes where He wills" (John 3:8). This should be done by the laity in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors who must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold for what is good (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12,19,21).⁷

4. Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy.⁸ These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will, they grow in that union. In this way the laity must

“These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will, they grow in that union.”

⁷ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 12, p. 16.

⁸ cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Liturgy, Chap. 1, no. 11: A.A.S. 56 (1964) pp. 102-103.

make progress in holiness in a happy and ready spirit, trying prudently and patiently to overcome difficulties.⁹ Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be irrelevant to their spiritual life, in keeping with the words of the Apostle, "What-ever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17).

Such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope, and charity. Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in Whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28), seek His will in every event, see Christ in everyone whether he be a relative or a stranger, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things both in themselves and in their relation to man's final goal.

They who have this faith live in the hope of the revelation of the sons of God and keep in mind the cross and resurrection of the Lord. In the pilgrimage of this life, hidden with Christ in God and free from enslavement to wealth, they aspire to those riches which remain forever and generously dedicate themselves wholly to the advancement of the kingdom of God and to the reform and improvement of the temporal order in a Christian spirit. Among the trials of this life they find strength in hope, convinced that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

⁹ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 32: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 38; cf. also nos. 40-41: *ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

Fr. Yves Congar, OP, a prominent theologian serving at the Second Vatican Council declared in 1964: "Seeds planted today will give their fruit later, in thirty to fifty years."

Might we now see those fruits of the Council?

Impelled by divine charity, they do good to all men, especially to those of the household of the faith (cf. Gal. 6:10), laying aside "all malice and all deceit and pretense, and envy, and all slander" (1 Peter 2:1), and thereby they draw men to Christ. This charity of God, "which is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5), enables the laity really to express the spirit of the beatitudes in their lives. Following Jesus in His poverty, they are neither depressed by the lack of temporal goods nor inflated by their abundance; imitating Christ in His humility, they have no obsession for empty honors (cf. Gal. 5:26) but seek to please God rather than men, ever ready to leave all things for Christ's sake (cf. Luke 14:26) and to suffer persecution for justice sake (cf. Matt. 5:10), as they remember the words of the Lord, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Promoting Christian friendship among themselves, they help one another in every need whatsoever.

This plan for the spiritual life of the laity should take its particular character from their married or family state or their single or widowed state, from their state of health, and from their professional and social activity. They should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with

these conditions of life, and they should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the laity who have followed their vocation and have become members of one of the associations or institutes approved by the Church try faithfully to adopt the special characteristics of the spiritual life which are proper to them as well. They should also hold in high esteem professional skill, family and civic spirit, and the virtues relating to social customs, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, kindness, and courage, without which no true Christian life can exist.

The perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, who while leading the life common to all here on earth, one filled with family concerns and labors, was always intimately united with her Son and in an entirely unique way cooperated in the work of the Savior. Having now been assumed into heaven, with her maternal charity she cares for these brothers of her Son who are still on their earthly pilgrimage and remain involved in dangers and difficulties until they are led into the happy fatherland.¹⁰ All should devoutly venerate her and commend their life and apostolate to her maternal care.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 62, p. 63; cf. also no. 65. *ibid*, pp. 64-65.

**Discussion
Questions:**

1. How do you see the call for the laity to spread the message of the Gospel in daily life? What challenges do you see?
 2. In what ways do you see family or secular affairs as integrated with your spiritual life? In what ways are they kept separate?
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Chapter II: Objectives

5. Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, initially on earth and completely on the last day. In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience.

6. The mission of the Church pertains to the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by His grace. The apostolate of the Church and of all its members is primarily designed to manifest Christ's message by words and deeds and to communicate His grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, entrusted in a special way to the clergy, wherein the laity also have their very important roles to fulfill if they are to be "fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 8). It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary.

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to

God; for the Lord says, "Even so let your light shine before men in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. "For the charity of Christ impels us" (2 Cor. 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16).¹¹

Since, in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen-each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning-to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church.

7. God's plan for the world is that men should work together to renew and constantly perfect the temporal order.

All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress, not only aid in

¹¹ cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Ubi Arcano," Dec. 23, 1922: A.A.S. 14 (1922) p. 659; Pius XII, encyclical "Summi Pontificatus," Oct. 20, 1939: A.A.S. 31 (1939) pp. 442-443.

the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order. "God saw that all He had made was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This natural goodness of theirs takes on a special dignity as a result of their relation to the human person, for whose service they were created. It has pleased God to unite all things, both natural and supernatural, in Christ Jesus "so that in all things He may have the first place" (Col. 1:18). This destination, however, not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence, its proper goals, laws, supports, and significance for human welfare but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth and puts it on a level with man's whole vocation upon earth.

In the course of history, the use of temporal things has been marred by serious vices. Affected by original sin, men have frequently fallen into many errors concerning the true God, the nature of man, and the principles of the moral law. This has led to the corruption of morals and human institutions and not rarely to contempt for the human person himself. In our own time, moreover, those who have trusted excessively in the progress of the natural sciences and the technical arts have fallen into an idolatry of temporal things and have become their slaves rather than their masters.

The whole Church must work vigorously in order that men may become capable of rectifying the distortion of the temporal order and directing it to God through Christ. Pastors must clearly state the principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use of temporal things and must offer the moral and spiritual aids by which the temporal order may be renewed in Christ.

The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens with their own particular skill and on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God's kingdom. The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without detriment to its own proper laws, it may be brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples. Preeminent among the works of this type of apostolate is that of Christian social action which the sacred synod desires to see extended to the whole temporal sphere, including culture.¹²

8. While every exercise of the apostolate should be motivated by charity, some works by their very nature can become specially vivid expressions of this charity. Christ the Lord wanted these works to be signs of His messianic mission (cf. Matt. 11:4-5).

The greatest commandment in the law is to love God with one's whole heart and one's neighbor as oneself (cf. Matt. 22:37-40). Christ made this commandment of love of neighbor His own and enriched it with a new meaning. For He wanted to equate Himself with His brethren as the object of this love when He said, "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me" (Matt. 25:40). Assuming human nature, He bound the whole human race to Himself as a family through a certain

¹² cf. Leo XIII, encyclical "Rerum Novarum:" A.A.S. 23 (1890-91) p. 47; Pius XI encyclical "Quadragesimo anno:" A.A.S. 23 (1931) p 190; Pius XII, radio message of June 1, 1941: A.A.S. 33 (1941) p. 207.

supernatural solidarity and established charity as the mark of His disciples, saying, "By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

In her very early days, the holy Church added the agape to the eucharistic supper and thus showed itself to be wholly united around Christ by the bond of charity. So, too, in every era it is recognized by this sign of love, and while it rejoices in the undertakings of others, it claims works of charity as its own inalienable duty and right. For this reason, pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind are held in highest honor by the Church.¹³

The world has gotten smaller, in a sense, through the rapid advances in communications.

- Grogan, 2014

At the present time, with the development of more rapid facilities for communication, with the barrier of distance separating men greatly reduced, with the inhabitants of the entire globe becoming one great family, these charitable activities and works have become more urgent and universal. These charitable enterprises can and should reach out to all persons and all needs. Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education; wherever men lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are afflicted with serious distress or illness or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great

¹³ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra" May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961), p. 402.

solicitude, and help them with appropriate relief. This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous nation and person.¹⁴

In order that the exercise of charity on this scale may be unexceptionable in appearance as well as in fact, it is altogether necessary that one should consider in one's neighbor the image of God in which he has been created, and also Christ the Lord to Whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person. It is imperative also that the freedom and dignity of the person being helped be respected with the utmost consideration, that the purity of one's charitable intentions be not stained by seeking one's own advantage or by striving for domination,¹⁵ and especially that the demands of justice be satisfied lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift. Not only the effects but also the causes of these ills must be removed and the help be given in such a way that the recipients may gradually be freed from dependence on outsiders and become self-sufficient.

Therefore, the laity should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private, including international programs whereby effective help is given to needy individuals and peoples. In so doing, they should cooperate with all men of good will.¹⁶

¹⁴ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra" May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961), pp. 440-441.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 442-443.

¹⁶ cf. Pius XII, allocution to "Pax Romana" April 25, 1957: A.A.S. 49 (1957) pp. 298-299; and especially John XXIII, "Ad Conventum Consilii" Food and Agriculture Organization Nov. 10, 1959: A.A.S. 51 (1959) pp. 856-866.

**Discussion
Questions:**

3. How do you understand the “temporal order” of the world, and in what ways do you see the laity as stewards of these tasks?
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Chapter III: The Various Fields of the Apostolate

9. The laity carry out their manifold apostolate both in the Church and in the world. In both areas there are various opportunities for apostolic activity. We wish to list here the more important fields of action, namely, church communities, the family, youth, the social milieu, and national and international levels. Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate.

10. 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

“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.”

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.

The parish offers an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences within its boundaries and merges them into the universality of the Church.¹⁷ The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in union with their priests,¹⁸ bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which they should examine and resolve by deliberating in common. As far as possible the laity ought to provide helpful collaboration for every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish.

They should develop an ever-increasing appreciation of their own diocese, of which the parish is a kind of cell, ever ready at their pastor's invitation to participate in diocesan projects. Indeed, to

“... they should not limit their cooperation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national, and international fields. ... Thus they should be concerned about the needs of the people of God dispersed throughout the world.”

¹⁷ cf. St. Pius X, apostolic letter "Creationis Duarum Novarum Paroeciarum" June 1, 1905: A.A.S. 38 (1905) pp. 65-67; Pius XII, allocution to faithful of parish of St. Saba, Jan. 11, 1953: Discourses and radio messages of His Holiness Pius XII, 14 (1952-53) pp. 449- 454; John XXIII allocution to clergy and faithful of suburbicarian diocese of Albano, "Ad Arcem Gandulfi Habita," Aug. 26, 1962: A.A.S. 54 (1962) pp. 656-660.

¹⁸ cf. Leo XIII, allocution Jan. 28, 1894: Acts, 14 (1894) pp. 424- 425.

fulfill the needs of cities and rural areas,¹⁹ they should not limit their cooperation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national, and international fields. This is constantly becoming all the more necessary because the daily increase in mobility of populations, reciprocal relationships, and means of communication no longer allow any sector of society to remain closed in upon itself. Thus they should be concerned about the needs of the people of God dispersed throughout the world. They should especially make

missionary activity their own by giving material or even personal assistance. It is a duty and honor for Christians to return to God a part of the good things that they receive from Him.

11. Since the Creator of all things has established conjugal society as the beginning and basis of human society and, by His grace, has made it a great mystery in Christ and the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32), the apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society.

The Council focused on the Catholic Family and the witness of the Gospel mirrored in their lives and homes as a central focal point: "...the apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society."

Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in

¹⁹ cf. Pius XII, allocution to pastors, etc., Feb. 6, 1951: Discourses and Radio Messages of His Holiness Pius XII, 12 (1950-51) pp. 437- 443; 852: *ibid*, 14 (1952-53) pp. 5-10; March 27, 1953: *ibid*, 15 (1953-54) pp. 27-35; Feb. 28, 1954: *ibid*, pp. 585-590.

their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life. They prudently help them in the choice of their vocation and carefully promote any sacred vocation which they may discern in them.

It has always been the duty of Christian married partners but today it is the greatest part of their apostolate to manifest and prove by their own way of life the indissolubility and sacredness of the marriage bond, strenuously to affirm the right and duty of parents and guardians to educate children in a Christian manner, and to defend the dignity and lawful autonomy of the family. They and the rest of the faithful, therefore, should cooperate with men of good will to ensure the preservation of these rights in civil legislation and to make sure that governments give due attention to the needs of the family regarding housing, the education of children, working conditions, social security, and taxes; and that in policy decisions affecting migrants their right to live together as a family should be safeguarded.²⁰

This mission-to be the first and vital cell of society-the family has received from God. It will fulfill this mission if it appears as the domestic sanctuary of the Church by reason of the mutual affection of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common, if the whole family makes itself a part of the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and

²⁰ cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Casti Connubii." A.A.S. 22 (1930) p. 554; Pius XII, Radio Messages, Jan. 1, 1941: A.A.S. 33 (1941) p. 203; idem., to delegates of the convention of the members of the International Union to Protect the Rights of Families, Sept. 20, 1949; A.A.S. 41 (1949) p. 552; idem., to heads of families on pilgrimage from France to Rome, Sept. 18, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) p. 731, idem., Christmas Radio Message of 1952: A.A.S. 45 (1953) p. 41; John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra" May 15, 1961: A.A.S. (1961) pp. 429, 439.

promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need. Among the various activities of the family apostolate may be enumerated the following: the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to strangers, assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the benefits of an expanding economy.

At all times and places but particularly in areas where the first seeds of the Gospel are being sown, or where the Church is just beginning, or is involved in some serious difficulty, Christian families can give effective testimony to Christ before the world by remaining faithful to the Gospel and by providing a model of Christian marriage through their whole way of life.²¹

To facilitate the attainment of the goals of their apostolate, it can be useful for families to be brought together into groups.²²

12. Young persons exert very important influence in modern society.²³ There has been a radical change in the circumstances of their lives, their mental attitudes, and their relationships with their own families. Frequently they move too quickly into a new social and economic status. While their social and even their political

²¹ cf. Pius XII, encyclical "Evangelii Praecones," June 2, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) p. 514.

²² cf. Pius XII, to delegates to the convention of members of the International Union for the Defense of Family Rights, Sept. 20, 1949: A.A.S. 41 (1949) p. 552.

²³ cf. St. Pius X, allocution to Association of French Catholic Youth on piety, knowledge and action, Sept. 25, 1904: A.A.S. 37 (1904- 05) pp. 296-300.

importance is growing from day to day, they seem to be unable to cope adequately with their new responsibilities.

Their heightened influence in society demands of them a proportionate apostolic activity, but their natural qualities also fit them for this activity. As they become more conscious of their own personalities, they are impelled by a zest for life and a ready eagerness to assume their own responsibility, and they yearn to play their part in social and cultural life. If this zeal is imbued with the spirit of Christ and is inspired by obedience and love for the Church, it can be expected to be very fruitful. They should become the first to carry on the apostolate directly to other young persons, concentrating their apostolic efforts within their own circle, according to the needs of the social environment in which they live.²⁴

Adults ought to engage in such friendly discussion with young people that both age groups, overcoming the age barrier, may become better acquainted and share the special benefits each generation can offer the other. Adults should stimulate young persons first by good example to take part in the apostolate and, if the opportunity presents itself, by offering them effective advice and willing assistance. By the same token young people should cultivate toward adults respect and trust, and although they are naturally attracted to novelties, they should duly appreciate praiseworthy traditions.

13. The apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of

²⁴ cf. Pius XII, letter "Dans Quelques Semaines" to Archbishop of Montreal, Canada, to be relayed to the Assemblies of Canadian Young Christian Workers, May 24, 1947: A.A.S. 39 (1947) p. 257; radio message to Young Christian Workers, Brussels, Sept. 3, 1950: A.A.S. 42 (1950) pp. 640-641.

the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others. In this area the laity can exercise the apostolate of life toward life. It is here that they complement the testimony of life with the testimony of the word.²⁵ It is here where they work or practice their profession or study or reside or spend their leisure time or have their companionship that they are more capable of helping their brethren.

The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the living conditions, labors, sorrows, and aspirations of their brethren with the result that the hearts of all about them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace. Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor.

²⁵ cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno," May 15, 1931: A.A.S. 23 (1931) pp. 225-226.

“Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor.”

This apostolate should reach out to all wherever they may be encountered; it should not exclude any spiritual or temporal benefit which they have the ability to confer. True apostles however, are not content with this activity alone but endeavor to announce Christ to their neighbors by means of the spoken word as well. For there are many persons who can hear the Gospel and recognize Christ only through the laity who live near them.

Children also have their own apostolic work to do. According to their ability they are true living witnesses of Christ among their companions.

14. A vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom. In loyalty to their country and in faithful fulfillment of their civic obligations, Catholics should feel themselves obliged to promote the true common good. Thus they should make the weight of their opinion felt in order that the civil authority may act with justice and that legislation may conform to moral precepts and the common good. Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine should not refuse to administer public affairs since by doing this in

a worthy manner they can both further the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the Gospel.

Catholics should try to cooperate with all men and women of good will to promote whatever is true, whatever just, whatever holy, whatever lovable (cf. Phil. 4:8). They should hold discussions with them, excel them in prudence and courtesy, and initiate research on social and public practices which should be improved in line with the spirit of the Gospel.

Among the signs of our times, the irresistibly increasing sense of the solidarity of all peoples is especially noteworthy. It is a function of the lay apostolate sedulously to promote this awareness and to transform it into a sincere and genuine love of brotherhood. Furthermore, the laity should be aware of the international field and of the questions and solutions, doctrinal as well as practical, which arise in this field, with special reverence to developing nations.²⁶

All who work in or give help to foreign nations must remember that relations among peoples should be a genuine fraternal exchange in which each party is at the same time a giver and a receiver. Travelers, whether their interest is international affairs, business, or leisure, should remember that they are itinerant heralds of Christ wherever they go and should act accordingly.

²⁶ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra" May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961) pp. 448-450.

Discussion**Questions:**

4. Families – and by reference married persons – are the smallest community within the Church. In what ways to do see families as the incubator for Church teaching?
 5. Do you feel that the Church provides sufficient guidance and resources to lay people in “how” to be a “Catholic in the secular world?”
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Chapter IV: The Various Forms of the Apostolate

15. The laity can engage in their apostolic activity either as individuals or together as members of various groups or associations.

16. The individual apostolate, flowing generously from its source in a truly Christian life (cf. John 4:14), is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even of the organized type, and it admits of no substitute.

Regardless of status, all lay persons (including those who have no opportunity or possibility for collaboration in associations) are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it. This

“Regardless of status, all lay persons ... are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it...”

type of apostolate is useful at all times and places, but in certain circumstances it is the only one appropriate and feasible.

There are many forms of the apostolate whereby the laity build up the Church, sanctify the world, and give it life in Christ. A particular form of the individual apostolate as well as a sign specially suited to our times is the testimony of the whole lay life arising from faith, hope, and charity. It manifests Christ living in those who believe in Him. Then by the apostolate the spoken and written word, which is utterly necessary under certain circumstances, lay people announce Christ, explain and spread His teaching in accordance with one's status and ability, and faithfully profess it.

Furthermore, in collaborating as citizens of this world, in whatever pertains to the upbuilding and conducting of the temporal order, the laity must seek in the light of faith loftier motives of action in their family, professional, cultural, and social life and make them known to others when the occasion arises. Doing this, they should

“Furthermore, in collaborating as citizens of this world, in whatever pertains to the upbuilding and conducting of the temporal order, the laity must seek in the light of faith loftier motives of action in their family, professional, cultural, and social life and make them known to others when the occasion arises.”

be aware of the fact that they are cooperating with God the creator, redeemer, and sanctifier and are giving praise to Him.

Finally, the laity should vivify their life with charity and express it as best they can in their works.

They should all remember that they can reach all men and contribute to the salvation of the whole world by public worship and prayer as well as by penance and voluntary acceptance of the labors and hardships of life whereby they become like the suffering Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10; Col. 1:24).

17. There is a very urgent need for this individual apostolate in those regions where the freedom of the Church is seriously infringed. In these trying circumstances, the laity do what they can to take the place of priests, risking their freedom and sometimes their life to teach Christian doctrine to those around them, training them in a religious way of life and a Catholic way of thinking,

leading them to receive the sacraments frequently and developing in them piety, especially Eucharistic devotion.²⁷ While the sacred synod heartily thanks God for continuing also in our times to raise up lay persons of heroic fortitude in the midst of persecutions, it embrace them with fatherly affection and gratitude.

The individual apostolate has a special field in areas where Catholics are few in number and widely dispersed. Here the laity who engage in the apostolate only as individuals, whether for the reasons already mentioned or for special reasons including those deriving also from their own professional activity, usefully gather into smaller groups for serious conversation without any more formal kind of establishment or organization, so that an indication of the community of the Church is always apparent to others as a true witness of love. In this way, by giving spiritual help to one another through friendship and the communicating of the benefit of their experience, they are trained to overcome the disadvantages of excessively isolated life and activity and to make their apostolate more productive.

18. The faithful are called to engage in the apostolate as individuals in the varying circumstances of their life. They should remember, nevertheless, that man is naturally social and that it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ into the people of God (cf. 1 Peter 2:5-10) and into one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, "Where

²⁷ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the first convention of laymen representing all nations on the promotion of the apostolate, Oct. 15, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) p. 788.

two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

"The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life. This initiative is a normal element of the life of the Church."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, No 899

For this reason the faithful should participate in the apostolate by way of united effort.²⁸ They should be apostles both in their family communities and in their parishes and dioceses, which themselves express the community nature of the apostolate, as well as in the informal groups which they decide to form among themselves.

The group apostolate is very important also because the apostolate must often be performed by way of common activity both the Church communities and the various spheres. For the associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own.

²⁸ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the first convention of laymen representing all nations on the promotion of the apostolate Oct. 15, 1951: A.A.S. 43 (1951) pp. 787-788.

In the present circumstances, it is quite necessary that, in the area of lay activity, the united and organized form of the apostolate be strengthened. In fact, only the pooling of resources is capable of fully achieving all the aims of the modern apostolate and firmly protecting its interests.²⁹ Here it is important that the apostolate encompass even the common attitudes and social conditions of those for whom it is designed. Otherwise those engaged in the apostolate are often unable to bear up under the pressure of public opinion or of social institutions.

19. There is a great variety of associations in the apostolate.³⁰ Some set before themselves the broad apostolic purpose of the Church; others aim to evangelize and sanctify in a special way. Some purpose to infuse a Christian spirit into the temporal order; others bear witness to Christ in a special way through works of mercy and charity.

Among these associations, those which promote and encourage closer unity between the concrete life of the members and their faith must be given primary consideration. Associations are not ends unto themselves; rather they should serve the mission of the Church to the world. Their apostolic dynamism depends on their conformity with the goals of the Church as well as on the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of every member and of the whole association.

Now, in view of the progress of social institutions and the fast-moving pace of modern society, the global nature of the Church's mission requires that apostolic enterprises of Catholics should

²⁹ cf. Pius XII, encyclical "Le Pelerinage de Lourdes," July 2, 1957: A.A.S. 49 (1957) p. 615.

³⁰ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Men, Dec. 8, 1956: A.A.S. 49 (1957) pp. 26- 27.

more and more develop organized forms in the international sphere. Catholic international organizations will more effectively achieve their purpose if the groups comprising them, as well as their members, are more closely united to these international organizations.

Maintaining the proper relationship to Church authorities,³¹ the laity have the right to found and control such associations³² and to join those already existing. Yet the dispersion of efforts must be avoided. This happens when new associations and projects are promoted without a sufficient reason, or if antiquated associations or methods are retained beyond their period of usefulness. Nor is it always fitting to transfer indiscriminately forms of the apostolates that have been used in one nation to other nations.³³

20. Many decades ago the laity in many nations began to dedicate themselves increasingly to the apostolate. They grouped themselves into various kinds of activities and societies which, while maintaining a closer union with the hierarchy, pursued and continue to pursue goals which are properly apostolic. Of these associations, or even among similar and older institutions, those are specially noteworthy which followed different methods of operation and yet produced excellent results for Christ's kingdom. These societies were deservedly recommended and promoted by the popes and many bishops, from whom they received the title of

³¹ cf. in Chap. 5, no. 24.

³² cf. Sacred Congregation of the Council, concerning the dissolution of the Corrientes diocese in Argentina, Nov. 13, 1920: A.A.S. 13 (1921) p. 139.

³³ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Princeps Pastorum," Dec. 10, 1959: A.A.S. 51 (1959) p. 856.

"Catholic Action," and were often described as the collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy.³⁴

Whether these forms of the apostolate have the name of "Catholic Action" or some other title, they exercise an apostolate of great value for our times and consist in the combination and simultaneous possession of the following characteristics:

- a) 'The immediate aim of organizations of this kind is the Church's apostolic aim, that is, the evangelization and sanctification of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life.
- b) Cooperating with the hierarchy in their own way, the laity contribute the benefit of their experience to, and assume responsibility for the direction of these organizations, the consideration of the conditions in which the pastoral activity of the Church is to be conducted, and the elaboration and execution of the plan of things to be done.
- c) 'The laity act together in the manner of an organic body so that the community of the Church is more fittingly symbolized and the apostolate rendered more effective.
- d) Whether they offer themselves spontaneously or are invited to action and direct cooperation with the apostolate of the hierarchy, the laity function under the higher direction of the hierarchy itself, and the latter can sanction this cooperation by an explicit mandate.

³⁴ cf. Pius XI, letter "Quae Nobis" to Cardinal Bertram, Nov. 13, 1928: A.A.S. 20 (1928) p. 385. cf. also Pius XII, allocution to Italian Catholic Action, Sept. 4, 1940: A.A.S. 32 (1940) p. 362.

Organizations in which, in the opinion of the hierarchy, the ensemble of these characteristics is realized, must be considered to be Catholic Action even though they take on various forms and titles because of the needs of different regions and peoples.

The most holy council earnestly recommends these associations, which surely answer the needs of the apostolate of the Church among many peoples and countries, and invites the clergy and laity working in them to develop the above-mentioned characteristics to an ever greater degree and to cooperate at all times with all other forms of the apostolate in a fraternal manner in the Church.

21. All associations of the apostolate must be given due appreciation. Those, however, which the hierarchy have praised or recommended as responsive to the needs of time and place, or have ordered to be established as particularly urgent, must be held in highest esteem by priests, Religious, and laity and promoted according to each one's ability. Among these associations, moreover, international associations or groups of Catholics must be specially appreciated at the present time.

22. Deserving of special honor and commendation in the Church are those lay people, single or married, who devote themselves with professional experience, either permanently or temporarily, to the service of associations and their activities. There is a source of great joy for the Church in the fact that there is a daily increase in the number of lay persons who offer their personal service to apostolic associations and activities, either within the limits of their own nation or in the international field or especially in Catholic mission communities and in regions where the Church has only recently been implanted.

The pastors of the Church should gladly and gratefully welcome these lay persons and make sure that the demands of justice, equity, and charity relative to their status be satisfied to the fullest extent, particularly as regards proper support for them and their families. They should also take care to provide for these lay people the necessary formation, spiritual consolation, and incentive.

**Discussion
Questions:**

6. Can you name specific ways in which you have or would like to build up the Church in the secular world?
 7. What does the phrase, “Ministry of the Laity” mean to you?
 8. What do you consider the most important responsibility of a Catholic adult in our society today?
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Chapter V: External Relationships

23. Whether the lay apostolate is exercised by the faithful as individuals or as members of organizations, it should be incorporated into the apostolate of the whole Church according to a right system of relationships. Indeed, union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule His Church (cf. Acts 20:28) is an essential element of the Christian apostolate. No less necessary is cooperation among various projects of the apostolate which must be suitably directed by the hierarchy.

Indeed, the spirit of unity should be promoted in order that fraternal charity may be resplendent in the whole apostolate of the Church, common goals may be attained, and destructive rivalries avoided. For this there is need for mutual esteem among all the forms of the apostolate in the Church and, with due respect for the particular character of each organization, proper coordination.³⁵ This is most fitting since a particular activity in the Church requires harmony and apostolic cooperation on the part of both branches of the clergy, the Religious, and the laity.

24. The hierarchy should promote the apostolate of the laity, provide it with spiritual principles and support, direct the conduct of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and attend to the preservation of doctrine and order.

³⁵ cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Quamvis Nostra," April 30, 1936: A.A.S., 28 (1936) pp. 160-161.

“Everyone has a responsibility to answer the call to mission and to develop the gifts she or he has been given by sharing them in the family, the workplace, the civic community, and the parish or diocese.”

USCCB, Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium

Indeed, the lay apostolate admits of different types of relationships with the hierarchy in accordance with the various forms and objects of this apostolate. For in the Church there are many apostolic undertakings which are established by the free choice of the laity and regulated by their prudent judgment. The mission of the Church can be better accomplished in certain circumstances by undertakings of this kind, and therefore they are frequently praised or recommended by the hierarchy.³⁶ No project, however, may claim the name "Catholic" unless it has obtained the consent of the lawful Church authority.

Certain forms of the apostolate of the laity are given explicit recognition by the hierarchy, though in various ways.

Because of the demands of the common good of the Church, moreover, ecclesiastical authority can select and promote in a particular way some of the apostolic associations and projects which have an immediately spiritual purpose, thereby assuming in them a special responsibility. Thus, making various dispositions of the apostolate according to circumstances, the hierarchy joins some particular form of it more closely with its own apostolic

³⁶ cf. Sacred Congregation of the Council on the dissolution of the diocese of Corrientes, Argentina, Nov. 13, 1920; A.A.S. 13 (1921) pp. 137-140.

function. Yet the proper nature and distinctiveness of each apostolate must be preserved, and the laity must not be deprived of the possibility of acting on their own accord. In various Church documents this procedure of the hierarchy is called a mandate.

Finally, the hierarchy entrusts to the laity certain functions which are more closely connected with pastoral duties, such as the teaching of Christian doctrine, certain liturgical actions, and the care of souls. By virtue of this mission, the laity are fully subject to higher ecclesiastical control in the performance of this work.

As regards works and institutions in the temporal order, the role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is to teach and authentically interpret the moral principles to be followed in temporal affairs.

Furthermore, they have the right to judge, after careful consideration of all related matters and consultation with experts, whether or not such works and institutions conform to moral principles and the right to decide what is required for the protection and promotion of values of the supernatural order.

25. Bishops, pastors of parishes, and other priests of both branches of the clergy should keep in mind that the right and duty to exercise this apostolate is common to all the faithful, both clergy and laity, and that the laity also have their own roles in building up the Church.³⁷ For this reason they should work fraternally with the laity in and for the Church and take special care of the lay persons in these apostolic works.³⁸

³⁷ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the second convention of laymen representing all nations on the promotion of the apostolate, Oct. 5 1957: A.A.S. 49 (1957) p. 927.

³⁸ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 37. A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 442-443.

Special care should be taken to select priests who are capable of promoting particular forms of the apostolate of the laity and are properly trained.³⁹ Those who are engaged in this ministry represent the hierarchy in their pastoral activity by virtue of the mission they receive from the hierarchy. Always adhering faithfully to the spirit and teaching of the Church, they should promote proper relations between laity and hierarchy. They should devote themselves to nourishing the spiritual life and an apostolic attitude in the Catholic societies entrusted to them; they should contribute their wise counsel to the apostolic activity of these associations and promote their undertakings. Through continuous dialogue with the laity, these priests should carefully investigate which forms make apostolic activity more fruitful. They should promote the spirit of unity within the association as well as between it and others.

Finally, in keeping with the spirit and norms of their societies, Religious Brothers and Sisters should value the apostolic works of the laity and willingly devote themselves to promoting lay enterprises.⁴⁰ They should also strive to support, uphold, and fulfill priestly functions.

26. In dioceses, insofar as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres, and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity. While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will

³⁹ cf. Pius XII, apostolic exhortation "Menti Nostrae," Sept. 23 1950: A.A.S. 42 (1950) p. 660.

⁴⁰ cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Renovation of Religious Life, no. 8.

be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises.⁴¹

Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, interparochial, and interdiocesan level as well as in the national or international sphere.⁴²

A special secretariat, moreover, should be established at the Holy See for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate. It can serve as a well-equipped center for communicating information about the various apostolic programs of the laity, promoting research into modern problems arising in this field, and assisting the hierarchy and laity in their apostolic works with its advice. The various movements and projects of the apostolate of the laity throughout the world should also be represented in this secretariat, and here clergy and Religious also are to cooperate with the laity.

27. The quasi-common heritage of the Gospel and the common duty of Christian witness resulting from it recommend and frequently require the cooperation of Catholics with other Christians, on the part of individuals and communities within the Church, either in activities or in associations, in the national or international field.⁴³

Likewise, common human values not infrequently call for cooperation between Christians pursuing apostolic aims and those who do not profess Christ's name but acknowledge these values.

⁴¹ cf. Benedict XIV, *On the Diocesan Synod*, I, 3, Chap. 9, no. 7.

⁴² . Pius XI, encyclical "*Quamvis Nostra*," April 30, 1936: A.A.S. 28 (1936) pp. 160-161.

⁴³ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "*Mater et Magistra*," May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961) pp. 456-457. cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 12: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 99-100.

By this dynamic and prudent cooperation,⁴⁴ which is of special importance in temporal activities, the laity bear witness to Christ, the Savior of the world, as well as to the unity of the human family.

Discussion**Questions:**

9. The Church often uses the phrase, “the common good” in documents and doctrine. What does that phrase mean to you?
 10. While the Church speaks of the common good, it has no power to legislate national or international protections to achieve this. How should this be accomplished?
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⁴⁴ cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, no. 12: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 100. Also cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, no. 15: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 19-20.

Chapter VI: Formation for the Apostolate

28. The apostolate can attain its maximum effectiveness only through a diversified and thorough formation. This is demanded not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the lay person himself but also by the accommodation of his activity to circumstances varying according to the affairs, persons, and duties involved. This formation for the apostolate should rest upon those bases which have been stated and proclaimed by this most holy council in other documents.⁴⁵ In addition to the formation which is common for all Christians, many forms of the apostolate demand also a specific and particular formation because of the variety of persons and circumstances.

29. Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of the spiritual life.

The formation for the apostolate presupposes a certain human and well-rounded formation adapted to the natural abilities and conditions of each lay person. Well-informed about the modern world, the lay person should be a member of his own community and adjusted to its culture.

⁴⁵ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, Chaps. 2, 4 and 5: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 12- 21, 37-49; also cf. Decree on Ecumenism, nos. 4, 6, 7 and 12: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 94, 96, 97, 99, 100; cf. also above, no. 4.

“Often people can go the extra mile for others because they have been spiritually formed through suffering. For Christians, suffering is both hope and challenge.”

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However, the lay person should learn especially how to perform the mission of Christ and the Church by basing his life on belief in the divine mystery of creation and redemption and by being sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit who gives life to the People of God and who urges all to love God the

The world of the laity mirrors “...the movement of the Holy Spirit who gives life to the People of God ...”

Father as well as the world and men in Him. This formation should be deemed the basis and condition for every successful apostolate.

In addition to spiritual formation, a solid doctrinal instruction in theology, ethics, and philosophy adjusted to differences of age, status, and natural talents, is required. The importance of general culture along with practical and technical formation should also be kept in mind.

To cultivate good human relations, truly human values must be fostered, especially the art of living fraternally and cooperating with others and of striking up friendly conversation with them.

Since formation for the apostolate cannot consist in merely theoretical instruction, from the beginning of their formation the

laity should gradually and prudently learn how to view, judge and do all things in the light of faith as well as to develop and improve themselves along with others through doing, thereby entering into active service to the Church.⁴⁶ This formation, always in need of improvement because of the increasing maturity of the human person and the proliferation of problems, requires an ever deeper knowledge and planned activity. In the fulfillment of all the demands of formation, the unity and integrity of the human person must be kept in mind at all times so that his harmony and balance may be safeguarded and enhanced.

In this way the lay person engages himself wholly and actively in the reality of the temporal order and effectively assumes his role in conducting the affairs of this order. At the same time, as a living member and witness of the Church, he renders the Church present and active in the midst of temporal affairs.⁴⁷

30. The training for the apostolate should start with the children's earliest education. In a special way, however, adolescents and young persons should be initiated into the apostolate and imbued with its spirit. This formation must be perfected throughout their whole life in keeping with the demands of new responsibilities. It is evident, therefore, that those who have the obligation to provide a Christian education also have the duty of providing formation for the apostolate.

⁴⁶ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the first international Boy Scouts congress, June 6, 1952: A.A.S. 44 (1952) pp. 579-580; John XXIII, encyclical, "Mater et Magistra," May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961) p. 456.

⁴⁷ cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, p. 33: A.A.S. 57 (1965) p. 39

In the family parents have the task of training their children from childhood on to recognize God's love for all men. By example especially they should teach them little by little to be solicitous for the material and spiritual needs of their neighbor. The whole family in its common life, then, should be a sort of apprenticeship for the apostolate. Children must be educated, too, in such fashion that transcending the family circle, they may open their minds to both ecclesiastical and temporal communities. They should be so involved in the local community of the parish that they will acquire a consciousness of being living and active members of the people of God. Priests should focus their attention on the formation of the laity for the apostolate in their catechetics, their ministry of the word, their direction of souls, and in their other pastoral services.

Schools, colleges, and other Catholic educational institutions also have the duty to develop a Catholic sense and apostolic activity in young persons. If young people lack this formation either because they do not attend these schools or because of any other reason, all the more should parents, pastors of souls, and apostolic organizations attend to it. Teachers and educators on the other hand, who carry on a distinguished form of the apostolate of the laity by their vocation and office, should be equipped with that learning and pedagogical skill that are needed for imparting such education effectively.

Likewise, lay groups and associations dedicated to the apostolate or other supernatural goals, should carefully and assiduously promote formation for the apostolate in keeping with their purpose and condition.⁴⁸ Frequently these groups are the ordinary vehicle for harmonious formation for the apostolate inasmuch as

⁴⁸ cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra," May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961) p. 455.

they provide doctrinal, spiritual, and practical formation. Their members meet in small groups with their associates or friends, examine the methods and results of their apostolic activity, and compare their daily way of life with the Gospel.

Formation of this type must be so organized that it takes into account the whole lay apostolate, which must be carried on not only among the organized groups themselves but also in all circumstances throughout one's whole life, especially one's professional and social life. Indeed, everyone should diligently prepare himself for the apostolate, this preparation being the more urgent in adulthood. For the advance of age brings with it a more open mind, enabling each person to detect more readily the talents with which God has enriched his soul and to exercise more effectively those charisms which the Holy Spirit has bestowed on him for the good of his brethren.

31. Various types of the apostolate demand also a specially suitable formation.

a) In regard to the apostolate for evangelizing and sanctifying men, the laity must be specially formed to engage in conversation with others, believers, or non-believers, in order to manifest Christ's message to all men.⁴⁹

Since in our times, different forms of materialism are spread far and wide even among Catholics, the laity should not only learn doctrine more diligently, especially those main points which are the

⁴⁹ cf. Pius XII, encyclical "Sertum Laetitiae," Nov. 1, 1939: A.A.S. 31 (1939) pp. 653-654; cf. idem., to graduates of Italian Catholic Action, May 24, 1953.

subjects of controversy, but should also exhibit the witness of an evangelical life in contrast to all forms of materialism.

b) In regard to the Christian renewal of the temporal order, the laity should be instructed in the true meaning and value of temporal things, both in themselves and in relation to all the aims of the human person. They should be trained in the right use of things and the organization of institutions, attentive always to the common good in line with the principles of the moral and social teaching of the Church. Laymen should above all learn the principles and conclusions of the social doctrine so as to become capable of working for the development of this doctrine to the best of their ability and of rightly applying these same principles and conclusions to individual cases.⁵⁰

c) Since the works of charity and mercy express the most striking testimony of the Christian life, apostolic formation should lead also to the performance of these works so that the faithful may learn from childhood on to have compassion for their brethren and to be generous in helping those in need.⁵¹

32. There are many aids for lay persons devoted to the apostolate, namely, study sessions, congresses, periods of recollection, spiritual exercises, frequent meetings, conferences, books, and periodicals directed toward the acquisition of a deeper knowledge of sacred Scripture and Catholic doctrine, the nourishment of spiritual life,

⁵⁰ cf. Pius XII, allocution to the universal congress of the World Federation of Young Catholic Women, April 18, 1952: A.A.S. 42 (1952) pp. 414-419. cf. idem., allocution to the Christian Association of Italian Workers, May 1, 1955: A.A.S. 47 (1955) pp. 403-404.

⁵¹ cf. Pius XII, to delegates of the Assembly of Charity Associations, April 27, 1952: pp. 470-471.

the discernment of world conditions, and the discovery and development of suitable methods.⁵²

These aids in formation take into consideration the various types of the apostolate in the milieu where it is exercised.

For this purpose also centers or higher institutes have been erected, and they have already proved highly successful.

The most holy council rejoices over projects of this kind which are already flourishing in certain areas, and it desires that they may be promoted also in other areas where they may be needed.

Furthermore, centers of documentation and study not only in theology but also in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and methodology should be established for all fields of the apostolate for the better development of the natural capacities of the laity-men and women, young persons and adults.

⁵² cf. John XXIII, encyclical "Mater et Magistra," May 15, 1961: A.A.S. 53 (1961) p. 454.

**Discussion
Questions:**

11. In what ways can the Church better prepare you for your role as a lay leader in the secular world? How does this relate to this Decree's use of the term "formation?"
 12. Youth and young adults will be leaders in the secular world in 15-20 years; should the process or model of religious education change to better prepare the next generation of leaders?
 13. If you could take off for a year-long service project that reflects your faith and interests, what would it be?
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Exhortation

33. The most holy council, then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Younger persons should feel that this call has been directed to them especially and they should respond to it eagerly and generously. Through this holy synod, the Lord renews His invitation to all the laity to come closer to Him every day, recognizing that what is His is also their own (Phil. 2:5), to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission. Once again He sends them into every town and place where He will come (cf. Luke 10:1) so that they may show that they are co-workers in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church, which must be constantly adapted to the new needs of our times. Ever productive as they should be in the work of the Lord, they know that their labor in Him is not in vain (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

Appendix

About the Author – Rev. Jim Grogan, Sr.

Father Jim Grogan is a priest in the Diocese of Trenton, and currently serves as the pastor at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Moorestown, NJ. Father Jim brings the experience of more than 35 years in the business world to his priesthood, along with the journey through marriage for more than 25 years, raising three sons, and accompanying his wife on her pilgrimage through cancer.

Father Jim holds an undergraduate degree from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, PA, along with graduate degrees from Villanova University (computer science), La Salle University (Pastoral Theology) and Seton Hall University/Immaculate Conception Seminary (Systematic Theology). Father Grogan enjoys teaching about the doctrine of the Catholic Church, as well as incorporating music into retreat and catechetical programs.

The examination of the role of the laity as promulgated by the Second Vatican Council has been a particular area of interest for Father Jim, as he prepared and delivered papers on this topic at the Chestnut Hill College Conference, "The Irrepressible Energy of the Spirit: Vatican II and Beyond" in 2013, and as part of his studies at Seton Hall University in 2014.

Discussion Points for Consideration: Spiritual Conversation Method

The following excerpts from this Study Guide may be used for parish consideration of the role of the laity within the framework of the Spiritual Conversation Method.

- Called and Gifted (USCCB) - “Everyone has a responsibility to answer the call to mission and to develop the gifts she or he has been given by sharing them in the family, the workplace, the civic community, and the parish or diocese.”
How is this responsibility lived within parish life?
- Called and Gifted (USCCB) - “It is ... [the laity] who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions, such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development and family planning.” ***What structures within parish life encourage and support such community and professional engagement?***
- No. 2 - 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 men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ. ***How can parish or diocesan initiatives encourage the laity of their prophetic role advancing the Kingdom of God?***
- No. 4 - This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while

correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will, they grow in that union. ***How does the Church help people to witness the Gospel values in their family and professional life?***

- No. 10 - 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. ***What specific actions can parishes take to encourage understanding of how they bring the work of their hands to the Eucharist?***
- No. 11 - Since the Creator of all things has established conjugal society as the beginning and basis of human society and, by His grace, has made it a great mystery in Christ and the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32), the apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society. ***How can parishes offer programs which support and encourage married life to witness the Gospel?***
- No. 13 - Another requisite for the accomplishment of ... [the laity's] task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor. ***In what ways can parishes or***

diocese encourage and recognize when Gospel values are reflected in family and professional lives?

- No. 16 - Furthermore, in collaborating as citizens of this world, in whatever pertains to the upbuilding and conducting of the temporal order, the laity must seek in the light of faith loftier motives of action in their family, professional, cultural, and social life and make them known to others when the occasion arises. ***How can parishes encourage families to reflect the integrative teaching of Laudato Si in their lives?***
- No. 16 - The individual apostolate, flowing generously from its source in a truly Christian life (cf. John 4:14), is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even of the organized type, and it admits of no substitute. Regardless of status, all lay persons (including those who have no opportunity or possibility for collaboration in associations) are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it. ***How can parishes encourage and celebrate when the laity engage in apostolic actions in their professional lives?***

Appendix: Discussion Questions

The discussion Questions from this Study Guide may be used for further study within parishes, especially as potential questions for Spiritual Conversation Method gatherings.

1. How do you see the call for the laity to spread the message of the Gospel in daily life? What challenges do you see?
2. In what ways do you see family or secular affairs as integrated with your spiritual life? In what ways are they kept separate?

3. How do you understand the “temporal order” of the world, and in what ways do you see the laity as stewards of these tasks?
4. Families – and by reference married persons – are the smallest community within the Church. In what ways do you see families as the incubator for Church teaching?
5. Do you feel that the Church provides sufficient guidance and resources to lay people in “how” to be a “Catholic in the secular world?”
6. Can you name specific ways in which you have or would like to build up the Church in the secular world?
7. What does the phrase, “Ministry of the Laity” mean to you?
8. What do you consider the most important responsibility of a Catholic adult in our society today?
9. The Church often uses the phrase, “the common good” in documents and doctrine. What does that phrase mean to you?
10. While the Church speaks of the common good, it has no power to legislate national or international protections to achieve this. How should this be accomplished?
11. In what ways can the Church better prepare you for your role as a lay leader in the secular world? How does this relate to this Decree’s use of the term “formation?”
12. Youth and young adults will be leaders in the secular world in 15-20 years; should the process or model of religious education change to better prepare the next generation of leaders?
13. If you could take off for a year-long service project that reflects your faith and interests, what would it be?

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