

## ***INSTRUCTION***

### **ON CERTAIN QUESTIONS REGARDING THE COLLABORATION OF THE NON-ORDAINED FAITHFUL IN THE SACRED MINISTRY OF PRIEST**

*LIBRERIA EDITRICE VATICANA  
VATICAN CITY 1997*

#### ***“3. The Indispensability of the Ordained Ministry***

For a community of the faithful to be called a Church, and indeed to truly be a Church, it cannot be guided according to political criteria or those of human organisations. Every particular Church *owes* its guidance to Christ since it was He who fundamentally linked apostolic mission to the Church and hence no community has the power to grant that mission to itself(40) or to delegate it. In effect, a canonical or juridical determination made by hierarchal authority is necessary for the exercise of the *munus* of teaching and governing.(41)

The ministerial priesthood is therefore necessary for a community to exist as "Church": "The ordained priesthood ought not to be thought of as existing (...) posterior to the ecclesial community, as if the Church could be imagined as already established without this priesthood".(42) Indeed, were a community to lack a priest, it would be deprived of the exercise and sacramental action of Christ, the Head and Pastor, which are essential for the very life of every ecclesial community.

Thus the ordained priesthood is absolutely irreplaceable.....

#### **Practical Provisions**

##### **Article 1**

(3) It is unlawful for the non-ordained faithful to assume titles such as "pastor", "chaplain", "coordinator", "moderator" or other such similar titles which can confuse their role and that of the Pastor, who is always a Bishop or Priest.(58)

##### **Article 4**

The Parish and The Parish Priest

*b)* this is *participatio in exercitio curae pastoralis* and not directing, coordinating, moderating or governing the Parish; these competencies, according to the canon, are the competencies of a priest alone.

## Article 5

### *The Structures of Collaboration in the Particular Church*

§ 2. Diocesan and parochial *Pastoral Councils*(83) and *Parochial Finance Councils*, (84) of which non-ordained faithful are members, enjoy a consultative vote only and cannot in any way become deliberative structures. Only those faithful who possess the qualities prescribed by the canonical norms(85) may be elected to such responsibilities

## Article 6

### *Liturgical Celebrations*

§ 1. Liturgical actions must always clearly manifest the unity of the People of God as a structured communion.(89) Thus there exists a close link between the ordered exercise of liturgical action and the reflection in the liturgy of the Church's structured nature.

This happens when all participants, with faith and devotion, discharge those roles proper to them.....

§ 2. To promote the proper identity (of various roles) in this area, those abuses which are contrary to the provisions of canon 907 are to be eradicated. In eucharistic celebrations deacons and non-ordained members of the faithful may not pronounce prayers — e.g. especially the eucharistic prayer, with its concluding doxology — or any other parts of the liturgy reserved to the celebrant priest. Neither may deacons or non-ordained members of the faithful use gestures or actions which are proper to the same priest celebrant. It is a grave abuse for any member of the non-ordained faithful to "quasi preside" at the Mass while leaving only that minimal participation to the priest which is necessary to secure validity.

In the same way, the use of sacred vestments which are reserved to priests or deacons (stoles, chasubles or dalmatics) at liturgical ceremonies by non-ordained members of the faithful is clearly unlawful.

Every effort must be made to avoid even the appearance of confusion which can spring from anomalous liturgical practices. As the sacred ministers are obliged to wear all of the prescribed liturgical vestments so too the non-ordained faithful may not assume that which is not proper to them.

To avoid any confusion between sacramental liturgical acts presided over by a priest or deacon, and other acts which the non-ordained faithful may lead, it is always necessary to use clearly distinct ceremonials, especially for the latter

## Article 8

*The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion* To avoid creating confusion, certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches:

— extraordinary ministers receiving Holy Communion apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants;

Â— association with the renewal of promises made by priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, as well as other categories of faithful who renew religious vows or receive a mandate as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion;

Â— the habitual use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass thus arbitrarily extending the concept of "a great number of the faithful".

## **Instruction**

### ***The pastoral conversion***

#### **of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church**

## **II. The Parish in a contemporary context**

6. The aforesaid missionary conversion, which naturally leads to a reform of structures, concerns the Parish in particular, namely that community gathered around the Table of the Word and the Eucharist.

The Parish has a long history and from the outset, it has played a fundamental role in the life of Christians and in the development and pastoral work of the Church. We can see this in the writings of Saint Paul. Several of the Pauline texts show us the formation of small communities as domestic churches, which the Apostle simply calls a "house" (cf., for example, Rm 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19-20; Phil 4:22). With these "houses", we get a foretaste of the birth of the first "Parishes".

7. Since its inception, the Parish is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments. The etymology of the word makes clear the meaning of the institution: the Parish is a house among houses<sup>[10]</sup> and is a response to the logic of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, alive and active among the community. It is visibly characterised then, as a place of worship, a sign of the permanent presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his People

## **III. The value of the Parish today**

11. In virtue of this discernment, the Parish is called upon to read the signs of the times, while adapting both to the needs of the faithful and to historical changes. A renewed vitality is required that favours the rediscovery of the vocation of the baptised as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a missionary of the Gospel, in light of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Magisterium.

12. The Council Fathers were prescient in writing: "the care of souls should always be infused with a missionary spirit"<sup>[12]</sup>. In continuity with this teaching, Saint John Paul II specified that: "Whilst the Parish is perfected and integrated in a variety of forms, it nevertheless remains an indispensable organism of primary importance in the visible structure of the Church", whereby "evangelisation is the cornerstone of all pastoral action, the demands of which are primary,

preeminent and preferential”<sup>[13]</sup>. Subsequently, Benedict XVI taught, “the parish is a beacon that radiates the light of the faith and thus responds to the deepest and truest desires of the human heart, giving meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families”<sup>[14]</sup>. Lastly, Pope Francis recalled how “the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers”<sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **IV. Mission: the guiding principle for renewal**

16. Given the above-mentioned changing realities, their generous dedication notwithstanding, the current Parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful, especially when one considers the multiplicity of community types in existence today<sup>[18]</sup>. It is true that a characteristic of the Parish is that its rootedness at the centre of where people live from day to day. However, the Parish territory is no longer a geographical space only, but also the context in which people express their lives in terms of relationships, reciprocal service and ancient traditions. It is in this “existential territory” where the challenges facing the Church in the midst of the community are played out. As a result, any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to looking to the future with courage<sup>[19]</sup>. It is worth noting, however, that from a canonical perspective, the territorial principle remains in force, when required by law<sup>[20]</sup>.

17. Moreover, mere repetitive action that fails to have an impact upon people’s concrete lives remains a sterile attempt at survival, which is usually welcomed by general indifference. If the Parish does not exude that spiritual dynamic of evangelisation, it runs the risk of becoming self-referential and fossilised, offering experiences that are devoid of evangelical flavour and missionary drive, of interest only to small groups.

#### **V. “A community of communities”: A Parish that is inclusive, evangelising and attentive to the poor**

27. The subject of the missionary and evangelising action of the Church is always the People of God as a whole. The Code of Canon Law emphasises that the Parish is not identified as a building or a series of structures, but rather as a specific community of the faithful, where the Parish Priest is the proper pastor<sup>[30]</sup>. Pope Francis recalled that “the parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration”, and affirmed that it is “a community of communities”<sup>[31]</sup>.

28. The various components that make up the Parish are called to communion and unity. When each part recognises its complementary role in service of the community, on the one hand, we see the fulfilment of the collaborative ministry of the Parish Priest with his Assistant Priests, while on the other hand, we see how the various charisms of deacons, consecrated men and women and the laity, cooperate in building up the singular body of Christ (cf. 1 Co 12:12).

29. The Parish is a community gathered together by the Holy Spirit to announce the Word of God and bring new children of God to birth in the baptismal font. Assembled by the pastor, the Parish celebrates the memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, bearing witness to faith in charity, living in a permanent state of mission, whilst ensuring that no one is excluded from the salvific, life-giving message. Pope Francis expressed it thus: “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite

different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelises, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptability, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. [...] We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented”<sup>[32]</sup>.

### **VIII. a. Parish Priest**

66. The office of Parish Priest, sometimes referred to as Pastor, involves the full care of souls<sup>[89]</sup>. In order, therefore, for a member of the faithful to be validly appointed Parish Priest (parochus), he must have received the Order of Presbyter<sup>[90]</sup>, thus excluding the possibility of conferring this office on one who lacks this Order and its related functions, even where priests are scarce.

Precisely because of the relationship of familiarity and closeness that is required between a pastor and the community, the office of Parish Priest cannot be entrusted to a juridic person<sup>[91]</sup>. Apart from what is envisioned by can. 517, §§1-2, the particular office of Parish Priest may not be entrusted to a group composed of clerics and lay people. Consequently, appellations such as “team leader”, “équipe leader”, or the like, which convey a sense of collegial government of the Parish, are to be avoided

### **VIII. g. The Laity**

85. The Parish community is composed in a particular way of the lay faithful<sup>[127]</sup>, who, by virtue of their Baptism and the other Sacraments of Christian initiation, and in many cases by matrimony<sup>[128]</sup>, participate in the evangelising action of the Church, since “the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel”<sup>[129]</sup>.

In a particular way, the lay faithful, who have a specific secular character, “seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God”<sup>[130]</sup>. They “can also feel themselves called, or be called, to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community for its growth and life, by exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them”<sup>[131]</sup>.

86. The lay faithful are called upon in our present age to make a generous commitment to the service of the mission of evangelisation, first of all through the general witness of their daily lives, lived in conformity with the Gospel, in whatever environment they are in and at every level of responsibility; in a particular way, they are called to place themselves at the service of the Parish community<sup>[132]</sup>.

### **IX. Appointments and Pastoral Ministry**

96. In that vein, it is the responsibility, first of all, of the diocesan Bishop and, as far as it pertains to him, the Parish Priest, to see that the appointments of deacons, religious and laity that have roles of responsibility in the Parish, are not designated as “pastor”, “co-pastor”, “chaplain”, “moderator”, “coordinator”, “Parish manager”, or other similar terms<sup>[141]</sup> reserved by law to priests,<sup>[142]</sup> inasmuch as they have a direct correlation to the ministerial profile of priests.

In referring to the aforementioned faithful and deacons, it is likewise illegitimate, and not in conformity with their vocational identity, to use expressions such as “entrust the pastoral care of a parish”, “preside over the parish community”, and other similar phrases, that pertain to the distinct sacerdotal ministry of a Parish Priest.

For example, the terms “Deacon Cooperator” or “Coordinator of (a particular sector of pastoral care)”, “Pastoral Cooperator” or “Pastoral Associate or Assistant” seem to be more appropriate.

## **X. Bodies of Ecclesial Co-responsibility**

### **X. a. The Parish Finance Council**

### **X. a. The Parish Finance Council**

101. The administration of goods which every Parish has to some extent is an important area of evangelisation and evangelical witness, both in the Church and in civil society, since “all the goods that we have, the Lord gives them to go to the world, to go to humanity, to help others”<sup>[154]</sup>. The Parish Priest, therefore, cannot and must not remain only at this task<sup>[155]</sup>, so it is necessary that he be assisted by collaborators to administrate the goods of the Church above all with evangelising zeal and a missionary spirit.<sup>[156]</sup>

102. For this reason, in every Parish a Finance Council must be constituted as a consultative body, presided over by the Parish Priest and formed of at least three other faithful<sup>[157]</sup>; the minimum number of three is necessary so that this Council may be considered “collegial”. It bears recalling that the Parish Priest is not counted among the members of the Finance Council, but he presides over it.

106. The Finance Council fulfils a role of particular importance in the growth, at the level of the Parish community, of a culture of co-responsibility, of administrative transparency, and of service to the needs of the Church. In a particular way, transparency should not be understood as a mere formal presentation of statistics, but more as information that is the community’s due, and an advantageous opportunity for its formative involvement. Transparency refers to a *modus agendi*, indispensable for the credibility of the Church, especially where there are significant goods to administer.

### **X. b. The Parish Pastoral Council**

108. The current canonical norms<sup>[161]</sup> leave it to the diocesan Bishop to decide on the establishment of a Pastoral Council in Parishes, but in any case, they may ordinarily be considered as highly recommended, as Pope Francis recalled, “How necessary pastoral councils are! A Bishop cannot guide a Diocese without pastoral councils. A Parish Priest cannot guide without pastoral councils”<sup>[162]</sup>.

110. Far from being simply a bureaucratic organ, the Pastoral Council highlights and realizes the centrality of the People of God as the subject and active protagonist of the evangelising mission, in virtue of the fact that every member of the faithful has received the gifts of the Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation: “Rebirth to the divine life of baptism is the first step; next comes conducting ourselves as children of God, namely, by conforming ourselves to Christ who works in Holy Church, letting ourselves be involved in her mission in the world. To that end, the anointing of the Spirit is provided: ‘without your strength, we have none’ (cf. Pentecost

Sequence). [...] As Jesus was animated by the Spirit for his whole life, so also the life of the Church and of each of her members is under the guidance of the same Spirit”<sup>[166]</sup>.

113. The Parish Pastoral Council “possesses a consultative vote only”<sup>[171]</sup>, in the sense that its proposals must be accepted favourably by the Parish Priest to become operative. The Parish Priest is then bound to consider the indications of the Pastoral Council attentively, especially if they express themselves unanimously, in a process of common discernment.

So that the service of the Pastoral Council might be efficacious and fruitful, it is necessary to avoid two extremes: on one hand, that of the Parish Priest presenting to the Pastoral Council decisions already made, or without the required information beforehand, or convoking it seldom only pro forma. on the other hand, that of the Council in which the Parish Priest is only one of the members, deprived de facto of his role as Pastor and Leader of the community<sup>[172]</sup>.

114. Finally, it is considered fitting that, as far as possible, the Pastoral Council should consist for the most part of those who have effective responsibility in the pastoral life of the Parish, or who are concretely engaged in it, in order to avoid the meetings becoming an exchange of abstract ideas that do not take into account the real life of the community, with its resources and problems.

## **Conclusion**

For this reason, beyond a responsible coordination of activities and structures capable of relating and collaborating among them, the pastoral care of all requires the contribution of all the baptised. In the words of Pope Francis, “When we speak of “the people”, we are not speaking about the structures of society or the Church, but about all those persons who journey, not as individuals, but as a closely-bound community of all and for all”<sup>[180]</sup>.

That demands that the historical Parish institution not remain a prisoner of immobility or of a worrisome pastoral repetition, but rather, it should put into action that “outgoing dynamism” that, through collaboration among different Parish communities and a reinforced communion among clergy and laity, will orient it effectively toward an evangelising mission, the task of the entire People of God, that walks through history as the “family of God” and that, in the synergy of its diverse members, labours for the growth of the entire ecclesial body.

The present Document, therefore, besides underscoring the urgency of a this type of renewal, presents the canonical norms that establish the possibilities, the limits, the rights and the duties of pastors and the laity, so that the Parish might rediscover itself as a fundamental place of evangelical proclamation, of the celebration of the Eucharist, a place of fraternity and charity, from which Christian witness can shine for the world. The Parish, that is, “must remain a place of creativity, of relationship, of motherhood. It is there that this inventive capacity is realised; and when a parish moves forward this way, it achieves what I call ‘the parish on the move’ ”<sup>[181]</sup>.

124. Pope Francis invites us to invoke “Mary, Mother of Evangelisation”, so that, “the Virgin Mother may help us to say our own “yes”, conscious of the urgent need to make the Good News of Jesus resound in our time. May she obtain for us renewed zeal in bringing to everyone the Good News of the life that is victorious over death. May she intercede for us so that we can acquire the holy audacity needed to discover new ways to bring the gift of salvation to every man and woman”<sup>[182]</sup>.

