

Liturgical Ministries

One of the principles guiding the renewal of the liturgy after Vatican Council II was that of “fuller, more active and conscious participation of all” those gathered to celebrate the liturgy. Not only the priest, but all present are to be more actively involved in what happens at Mass and other liturgical celebrations. Because of our baptism, we are not passive observers, but have both the right and the duty to be active participants in what happens at liturgy (CSL #14).

One of the ways laypersons are now more actively involved is through the various liturgical ministries open to us. This includes lectors, altar servers, choir members, cantors, instrumentalists, extraordinary ministers of the eucharist, ministers of hospitality, sacristans, those who prepare the church by cleaning and decorating, liturgy planners and others.

For a lively and life-giving liturgy, there is a need for many different services. Both the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#28) and the revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal (#91) ask that each ministry be done by a different person. For example, at any given liturgy, a lector will not also be an altar server, nor a choir member be a minister of hospitality. This allows for more persons to share their time and talent in the service of the liturgy. It also makes it clear who is serving in which role.

Those who serve in these ministries do so as a way of offering themselves, so that the worship of all may be made better. They do not do it for individual recognition nor to be seen as somehow better than any other worshipper (GIRM #95).

Each minister has certain functions which he or she performs, as outlined in the guidelines of the church. Some of these guidelines pertain to the entire church worldwide and others to a particular diocese or parish. All guidelines, however, are

meant to help the entire community to worship God more lovingly and vibrantly.

Before actually serving in some way at a liturgy, each minister is asked to fulfill two requirements. One of those is that he or she be responding to a call from God to serve in a particular ministry at this time. Not all persons in a parish are called at the same time in the same way for a certain ministry. God respects the responsibilities we have for our families and other obligations in our lives, and invites to ministry those who are ready to serve and to grow by serving.

A second requirement is that ministers be prepared for their ministry. They receive training on the whats, whys and hows of serving as lector or cantor or extraordinary minister of the eucharist. Along with this training, they receive periodic updates in their ministry and in their faith. They do this by attending periodic retreats or days of reflection, reading books and articles about spirituality, perhaps belonging to a prayer group or scripture sharing group, anything that will help them to grow in their faith as Catholic Christians. They will then be better able to serve the community in which they share their time, treasure and talents as liturgical ministers.

Even when ministers feel a need to take a “sabbatical” from a certain ministry, they continue to be active participants in every liturgy of which they are a part. They pray, sing, together with the presider, the liturgical ministers and the entire gathered assembly. They thus remain full and active participants in the liturgy.