

LETTER ON MINISTERIAL REALITY IN THE CHURCH: BAPTISMAL, INDIVIDUAL, INSTITUTED, EXTRAORDINARY AND DE FACTO MINISTRIES

Message of the Holy Father FRANCIS

to Bishops, Priest and Deacons, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful
on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Apostolic Letter Issued “Motu Proprio” *Ministeria Quaedam* of Saint Paul VI

IN SHORT

Letter on the richness of the Church’s ministerial experiences, both *instituted ministries* (readers, acolytes and more recently catechists), *extraordinary ministries* and *de facto ministries*. The variety of terms in *1 Cor 12* and *Eph 4:11* reflect a *broad ministerial reality* that should be discerned, also in a careful communitarian discernment - synodal journey -, born of listening to what the Spirit suggests to the Church. “Every ministerial structure born of this discernment is dynamic, living and flexible, like the working of the Spirit, and must be grounded ever more deeply in that working” and “viewed in the broader context of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council”, taking in account *baptismal ministries* and *individual ministries*. We have to think about the terminology used to indicate ministries, knowing: realities are more important than ideas. “The Spirit is at work wherever our obedient listening is open to his activity.”

Kees Slijkerman, November 3rd, 2022

1. The fiftieth anniversary of the Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio Ministeria Quaedam* of Saint Paul VI [AAS 64 (1972), 529-534] offers us an opportunity once more to consider the subject of ministries. In a fruitful yet at times contentious period in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, that document offered the Church a meaningful reflection that resulted in the renewal, as its title indicated, of the discipline concerning the first tonsure, the minor orders and the sub-diaconate in the Latin Church. At the same time, it opened significant perspectives capable of inspiring further developments.

2. The recent Apostolic Letters issued *Motu Proprio* with which I dealt with the question of instituted ministries are to be understood in the light of that decision and the reasons supporting it. The first, *Spiritus Domini*, of 10 January 2021, modified Canon 230 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law regarding the admittance of women to the instituted ministries of reader and acolyte. The second, *Antiquum Ministerium*, of 10 May 2021, instituted the

ministry of Catechist. These two documents should not be seen as replacing the earlier teaching, but as further developing it based on the same principles – consistent with the reflection of the Second Vatican Council – that inspired *Ministeria Quaedam*. The best way to celebrate this significant anniversary is precisely to continue pursuing the reflection on the ministries undertaken by Saint Paul VI.

3. The subject is one of fundamental importance for the Church’s life. Indeed, no Christian community is without its forms of ministry. The letters of Saint Paul, among others, bear ample witness to this. When – to take but one example from the many possible – the Apostle addressed the Church in Corinth, he portrayed a community rich in charisms (*1 Cor 12:4*), ministries (*1 Cor 12:5*), activities (*1 Cor 12:6*), manifestations (*1 Cor 12:7*) and gifts of the Spirit (*1 Cor 14:1.12.37*). The variety of terms employed points to a broad ministerial reality being structured on two solid principles: that at the origin of every ministry there is always God, who with his Holy Spirit

accomplishes everything in everyone (cf. *1 Cor* 12:4-6), and that the purpose of every ministry is always the common good (v. 7), the building up of the community (14:12). Every ministry is a call from God for the benefit of the community.

4. These two basic principles enable the Christian community to organize the variety of ministries that the Spirit awakens in the light of its concrete life situation. This structuring is not merely functional but rather a careful communitarian discernment, born of listening to what the Spirit suggests to the Church in one concrete place and in the present moment of her life. We see illuminating examples of this discernment in the Acts of the Apostles, precisely with regard to ministerial structures, such as when the group of the Twelve provided for the replacement of Judas (*Acts* 1:15-26) and the group of the Seven had to resolve a conflict that had arisen in the community (*Acts* 6:1-6). Every ministerial structure born of this discernment is dynamic, living and flexible, like the working of the Spirit, and must be grounded ever more deeply in that working, lest dynamism become confusion, liveliness be reduced to extemporaneous improvisation, and flexibility turn into arbitrary ideological adaptations.

5. In *Ministeria Quaedam*, Saint Paul VI, applying the teachings of the Council, carried out an authentic discernment and indicated the direction to follow in pursuing the journey. Indeed, acceding to the requests of many Council Fathers, he reviewed the praxis then in force and adapted it to the needs of that moment, and likewise offered Episcopal Conferences the possibility of requesting that the Apostolic See institute those ministries considered necessary or most useful in their territories. The prayer for the ordination of a bishop, in its intercessions, indicates among his principal duties that of organizing ministries: “assigning offices according to your decree” (*Pontificale Romanum, De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum, Editio typical altera*, n. 47, p. 25: “ut distribuat munera secundum praeceptum tuum...”).

6. The above principles, deeply rooted in the Gospel and viewed in the broader context of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican

Council, are the common foundation that makes it possible to specify, motivated by attentiveness to the concrete life of the ecclesial communities, those ministries that here and now build up the Church. The ecclesiology of communion, the sacramentality of the Church, the complementarity of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, and the liturgical visibility of each ministry are the doctrinal principles that, thanks to the prompting of the Spirit, render harmonious the variety of ministries.

7. If the Church is the Body of Christ, the spirit of service (*ministrare*) of the Incarnate Word must completely imbue her members, each of whom – because of his or her uniqueness, which responds to a personal calling from God – manifests one feature of the face of Christ the Servant. Their harmonious action shows to the world the beauty of the One who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (*Mk* 10:45). The prayer for the ordination of deacons uses a significant expression to describe this variety within unity: “the Church, his Body, adorned with manifold heavenly graces, drawn together in the diversity of its members, and united by a wondrous bond through the Holy Spirit...” (*Pontificale Romanum. De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum, Editio typica altera*, n. 207, p. 121: “Cuius corpus, Ecclesiam tuam, caelestium gratiarum varietate distinctam suorumque conexam distinctione membrorum, compage mirabili per Spiritum Sanctum unitam...”).

8. The question of baptismal ministries involves a number of aspects that must certainly be taken into consideration: the terminology used to indicate ministries, their doctrinal basis, juridical aspects, the distinction and relationship between individual ministries, their vocational import, their programmes of training, the means whereby one is instituted in that ministry, the liturgical dimension of every ministry. From this summary list alone, we can see the complexity of the matter. Certainly, further reflection is demanded on all these issues. Even so, if we were to presume to define them and to resolve them before experiencing the lived reality of these ministries, it is unlikely that we would make much progress. As I noted in *Evangelii Gaudium* (nn. 231-233), *realities are more*

important than ideas, and “there has to be a continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities” (n. 231).

The other principle that I mentioned in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 222), albeit in a different context, can also prove helpful: *time is greater than space*. Instead of being obsessed with immediate results in resolving every tension and clarifying every aspect, thus running the risk of crystallizing processes and, at times, presuming to stop them (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 233), we should support the working of the Spirit of the Lord, risen and ascended into heaven, who gave that “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13).

9. It is the Spirit who, by giving us in different and complementary ways a share in the priesthood of Christ, makes the entire community ministerial, for the building up of his ecclesial body. The Spirit is at work wherever our obedient listening is open to his activity. *Ministeria Quaedam* opened the door to a renewed experience of the ministerial reality of the faithful, reborn in the waters of baptism, confirmed by the seal of the Spirit and nourished by the living Bread come down from heaven.

10. In order to hear the voice of the Spirit and not halt the process – out of concern not to force it by imposing decisions that are the fruit of ideological visions – I consider it useful to share our experiences of these years, especially in the context of the synodal journey. These experiences can provide valuable guidance in arriving at a harmonious vision of the question of the baptismal ministries and thus persevering in our journey. For this reason, I would like in the coming months, and in ways yet to be defined, to initiate a dialogue with the Episcopal Conferences on the subject, in order to share the richness of the Church’s ministerial experiences in these past fifty years, both with instituted ministries (readers, acolytes and more recently catechists) and with extraordinary and de facto ministries.

11. I entrust our journey to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. Guarding in her womb the Word made flesh, Mary bears in herself the ministry of her Son, which she shared in a way all her own. Here too, she is the perfect icon of the Church, which amid the variety of ministries preserves the ministry of Jesus Christ by sharing in his priesthood, each of her members in his or her own way.

Given in Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 15 August 2022, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the tenth year of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS

Source: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2022/documents/20220815-messaggio-ministeria-quaedam.html>

Vatican on synodal journey 2021-2024: *Let’s walk together as a church with the Holy Spirit*, <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

More on www.stucom.nl:

[0458uk](#) Pope Francis on CHARIS, service to renewal by the Spirit, charismatic renewal

[0457uk](#) Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa on new life in the Spirit and rediscovery of charisms

[0482uk](#) Kees Slijkerman *Understand the most central thing in the Renewal* - on the book 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'