

CHAPTER 12

THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE PASTORAL GROWTH OF AUCHI DIOCESE

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Introduction

The Catholic Diocese of Auchi was created on the 4th of December 2002, with Gabriel Dunia appointed as its first Bishop. The creation of the diocese brought the church 'closer' to the people of Edo North district of Edo State. The Bishop, Priests, Religious and laity have worked so hard in seeing to the pastoral growth of the Diocese. The diocese began with 15 parishes but as at now on its 20th anniversary, the Diocese has 33 Parishes and 25 Mass Centres (cf Pg. 6 of 2021 Auchi Diocesan Diary and Directory). This growth is consequence of the collaborative efforts of all. However, the Diocese is still growing hence, this paper draws the intention of all, especially the laity, of their role in the pastoral life of the Diocese. And our major point of reference shall be on evangelization.

To draw home on point, we shall examine the pre-Vatican II concept of the Laity in the Church and the Second Vatican Council. This paper shall also look at the renew awareness of the lay faithful in the Church and square that in their mission and ministry in the enrichment of the pastoral life of the Catholic Diocese of Auchi.

Pre-Vatican II understanding of the Laity and their Role:

Canon 107 of the 1917 code of canon Law states “...by divine institution, there are in the Church clergy distinct from the laity, although not all degrees of clerics are of divine institution. Both clerics and laity may be religious”.

A study of the above canon reviles the distinction between two groups (clerics and Laity) with distinct roles in the Church; that the lay faithful lack participation in the jurisdiction and they are subject to jurisdiction and orders. Hence, they are looked upon as passive and subjects in the Church (cf A. Pre- winter 1987:53)

The lay faithful had a position that was absolutely subordinate to the clergy. Their ecclesial role was much limited and insignificant, almost as though there were Christians of an inferior grade and in a certain sense immature (cf Nwagwu 2005:55).

Pius X stated “*the Church essentially is an unequal society. That is, it is a society formed by two categories of persons: pastors and folks... as far as the multitude is concerned they have no other duty than to let themselves be led*” (cf PiusX *Vehementer Nos*: 1906).

Also, Gregory XVI in his *Mirari Vos* of 1832 says “No one can deny that the Church is an unequal society in which God destined some to be government and other to be servant the latter are the laity the former the clergy”

The above conception of the Laity was remedied at the second Vatican Council and post-Vatican council to date.

Vatican II and Post Vatican II’s The Role of the Laity within the Church

The advent of Second Vatican Council opened the Church’s windows onto the modern world, updated the liturgy, gave a larger role to laypeople/laity, introduced the concept of religious freedom and started a dialogue with other religions. The signs of the times prior to Vatican II showed a widened gap between the modern world and the message of the Gospel, hence the demand that the laity be empowered to bring

the Gospel to the marketplaces and to places where the Gospel message had not reached.

During the Second Vatican Council, the view of the Church as the people of God, and as a cycle rather than a pyramid changed the conception of the Laity totally. *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* are important constitution and decrees that complement, and integrate the ideas of the new understanding of the role of the Laity in the Church and the world. However, the description of the Laity as all faithful who are neither clerics nor religious was maintained by the council (cf LG no 31a); However, it added a very positive definition in the same *Lumen Gentium 31a* which was adopted throughout the other documents such as *canon. 204*

The Christian faithful are those who, in as much as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, made sharers in their own way in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly functions are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the word in accord with the condition proper to each.

In *Lumen Gentium, no 31b*, the distinguishing elements of the lay state are listed thus:

- a. The secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity;
- b. Their special vocation is to engage in temporal affairs and direct them according to God's will;
- c. They contribute to the sanctification of the world from within;
- d. They illuminate and order all temporal things.

In *Apostolican Actuositatem(2a)*, the council fathers also added in No 2b:

- e. Their mission of evangelization and sanctification of men is exercised when they permeate and improve the temporal order with gospel spirit;

- f. The lay state that characterizes them involves life in the midst of the world, involvement in secular affairs and being a leaven in the world by the vigour of their faith.

Apostolican Actuositatem No 7b, also identifies the temporal order the laity should involve. They are; personal and family values, culture, economic, interests, trades and secular professions, institutions of political community, civil life, and affairs, international relations, and the development of all these.

Lumen Gentium chapter V concretely speaks of the mission of the Laity not only in the world, but also in the Church i.e their participation in the three munera of Christ (Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly)

The Catholic Laity sharing in the “Three Munera”

The Catholic Laity like Clergy and Religious also share in the threefold offices of Christ namely; Priest, Prophet and King as identified above. These roles of the Laity are spelt out by the Church in the monumental constitution of the present Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*. In the Church although there is a diversity of ministries, there must be a unity 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 who likewise shares in this *munera* have their own share in the mission of the people of God in the Church and in the world. 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, with the enthusiasm and eagerness of the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

The Laity must always recall that they have been consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world. This mission of evangelization for the laity is a life lived in the midst of the world and among secular affairs. They are, to the best of their ability carry on the Church’s mission by proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to the

world, by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God, and in so doing sanctify the world through the witness given by their lives.

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king finds its source of baptism. This is further developed in confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance is found in the Eucharist. The sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself. Hence, the lay faithful are supposedly required to be able to proclaim the Gospel in faith, word and deed, and they are expected to be able to give their services promptly in their parishes.

The Catholic Laity as Salt and Light of the World

Salt is the most necessary spice. When added to food, it enhances other ingredients and food has the best flavours. Likewise, laity is called to be salt for the earth, to bring out the truth and goodness of the world especially in others. The Laity is also called to be light for the world, and that light must not be put under a bushel but rather to let it shine. A lay man or woman is the light for the world when he or she share his or her talents and gifts with others, not hiding them or keeping them to his or her self. As salt of the earth and light of the world, the Laity must add flavour and must illuminate the lives of others in the society.

The task of the lay faithful is to be salt of the earth and light of the world, especially in those places where only the lay person is able to render the Church present. (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 108) The Laity is called to be true Christians and give flavour to the life of others, not to be tempted to shine light upon themselves but to bring the light of faith to their neighbours and to mankind. Pope Francis, in his homily given at the Casa Santa Marta on the 7th of June, 2016; says lay faithful must develop and build up a Christian attitude that pushes them “to give of oneself”, to give flavour to the lives of others, to bright up lives of everyone, to give flavour and brightness to many things with the message of the Gospel”. So the laity, being salt and light is for others,

not for oneself. The Laity must then go forth to the whole world and proclaim the message of salvation.

Lay Spirituality within the Church and the world

The Second Vatican Council clearly states that all Christ's faithful - clergy, religious and lay faithful are called to a life of holiness. This invitation to holiness is for everyone. Now to put it faultlessly and plainly, how this call to holiness is accomplished in the life of the faithful of Christ is what the church calls technically '**spirituality**'. Every person in its canonical state has a particular spirituality that suits his or her state of life in the church.

Spirituality, in a narrow sense, concerns itself with matters of the spirit or of the soul. In Catholicism, 'spirituality' refers to one's life in the spirit or how one live out his or her Christian faith. Spirituality is a way of approaching God in prayer and in living out the gospel message of Christ. Hence, the lay faithful must have developed a personal relationship with God to be spiritual person. Nevertheless, Catholics use the term 'spirituality' to express the living out of the Christian life with some intensity. (cf. Joseph O'Donnell, *Spirituality: A Catholic Perspective*, SAGE journals, 1982) It is obvious therefore that not all Christians live the way of Jesus with the same passion and commitment. Some may be almost totally devoid of any depth of Christian living even though they may continue to call themselves followers of the Lord.

There are various kinds of spirituality. The clergy and the religious may have their own kind of spirituality suited to their own way of life. While, the Laity have their own style of spirituality. The Laity's specific character is secular. They seek the kingdom of God in the world by engaging in the affairs of the world and directing them according to God's will. (cf. Second Vatican Document, *LumenGentium*, 9) They grow up in personal and intimate unification with God by means of the world. Their spirituality therefore is not a

matter of retiring from the world as the monks and the nuns do. It is in particular through the material world that they sanctify themselves and reach their God.

The Elements of the Spirituality of the Laity

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines held in Manila from January 20, 1991 to February 17, 1991. (PCP II) described the following as elements of Lay spirituality.

1. A genuine love for and personal commitment to Jesus Christ
2. Love for the Church
3. Fidelity to her teachings and respect for their pastors
4. Dedication for their families and to the apostolate of the family
5. Love for neighbour, especially the poor and those in need
6. Dedication to the promotion of justice with involvement in the socio-political, economic problems of the society where they live
7. Regular reception of the sacraments, especially the sacraments of Christian initiation.
8. Practises of some devotion, especially in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and other Saints of the Church.

Different Forms of lay Spirituality

There are different forms of lay spirituality which have developed over centuries and after Vatican II. We shall examine three of them:

1. **Charismatic Spirituality:** This group of people emphasize on personal experience generally shared in groups. It is a form of Christianity in our parishes that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and modern-day miracles as an everyday part of a Catholic Laity's life in the parishes. Charismatic spirituality assumes that it is normal on a

continuing basis for the Church and for the presence and power of God, and a felt joy in God or enthusiasm about God.

2. **Marian Spirituality:** This is a set of principles, norms and methods that a group of devotees follow to live out their vocations as lay Catholic Christians. In the Marian spirituality, Mary is the model that they all want to imitate. They do this to experience in their lives the mystery of the annunciation so Jesus can be incarnated in their lives. They have prayer groups that champion the course of the Blessing Virgin Mary in parish such as: The Society of Mary, Legion of Mary, Block Rosary Crusade, Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima and so on. There are a good number of Marian devotions such as, Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, The Holy Rosary, the Miraculous Medal, Prayers for Consecration, Scapulars, Three Hail Marys devotions, The Angelus/Regina Caeli, Litany of Loreto, First Five Saturday Devotion, Devotion to the Seven Sorrows, Marian Feast Days etc.
3. **Opus Dei Spirituality:** They emphasize the universal call to holiness. They teach and practice the belief that everyone should aspire to be a saint, not just a few special individuals. One of the distinctive features of Opus Dei is its stress of lay spirituality - a spiritual life for lay people living an everyday life and doing ordinary work.

All these groups enhance the course of mission in the parishes and Church in general. These prayer groups spiritually edify and improve the spiritual life of the lay faithful.

The Catholic Laity and Collaboration in Mission of the Church

The Laity is very much recognized to hold a vital position in the Church by their own right. They possess a double mandate of fidelity to the Church and fidelity to the world. As missionaries in the mission of Christ, they are admonished to develop a close collaboration and be co-responsible in promoting the unity of the Body of Christ in the world.

Despite the multiplicity of graces or gifts and ministries or works with in the Body of Christ, there is unity that can be actualized in cooperation in the Church and in service to the world through the one Spirit of God who directs the mission of Christ here on earth. The Laity is therefore in the words of Pius XII, the first presence of the Church to the world, which they are called, by Christ, to transform and govern. They have an obligation of being witnesses and collaborators in the one mission of Christ in the world. Also, “Bishops, parish priests and other priests of the secular and regular clergy will remember that the right and duty of exercising the apostolate are common to all the faithful, whether clerics or lay; and that in the building up of the Church the laity too have parts of their own to play. For this reason they will work as brothers with the laity in the Church and for the Church, and will have a special concern for the laity in the apostolic activities of the latter”. (cf *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 25)

THE LAITY AND PASTORAL LIFE OF AUCHI DIOCESE: EVANGELIZATION IN PERSPECTIVE

...And when the Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (cf Acts 1:8)

With the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation, power is given to the Laity to preach the word of God (Act 1:8) to the world just as the early apostles did without fear. As laypeople of God, this fearlessness in evangelization must be accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world. As baptized Christians, we are called to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will or plan of God (cf CCC 898).

In the declaration of the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI talked about the opening of avenues to foster an encounter with Christ through authentic witness to faith and also a deeper understanding of the truth of our faith that Jesus revealed. And Pope Francis encourages

us to be prepared to share this faith, so as to be credible joy-filled witnesses, given hope to a hopeless world, and become bearers of the goodness of Christ. Without faith sharing, from authentic witnessing, Pope Francis says we will become isolated, sterile, and sick Christians.

The Catholic Laity as Evangelizers

As a group of people commissioned in service to God and humanity in the Church, the Laity also has a stake to renew Catholics whose faith are stagnant. In our churches, we have Catholics who do the minimum. They attend Mass regularly but their faith turns off when the liturgy ends. Once their faith is awakened and dynamic, these same individuals, in turn, go out and share their faith with non-practising Catholics who feel marginalised, estranged from or hurt by the Church. At this point in the life of the Church, a new form of evangelization is needed; one that would include the active participation of the Laity in every parish.

The question remains; what role does an average lay person, have in the Church's mission to ensure that every man and every woman has a real and living opportunity to encounter Jesus? The Laity is called to a life of authentic witnessing. This is the first and irreplaceable form of the New Evangelization which the Laity is invited into. This does not consist in engaging in propaganda but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make as if God did not exist in it. This is really what it means to be witnesses to the Gospel of Christ. The Laity must acceptably leave their comfort zones to share an experience of God with people who have not had such experience.

There are people longing for hope, healing, and goodness, grace that the lay person has experienced in and through his or her personal encounters with Jesus. The Laity would necessarily have to embrace this calling to sharing their encounters with the risen Christ; this is the New Evangelization, which the Laity needs to provide for themselves in a bid to sustain the life of the Church.

Foundations for a Vibrant Work of Evangelization of a Catholic Laity in the Diocese.

The mission of the Laity in the world must have the following supports or foundations if it is to be vibrant and flourishing. They are:

- a. **Sacraments of Initiation:** Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist are the three sacraments of initiation that lay a strong spiritual foundation for all Catholics and for very Christian life. The sacraments of initiation communicate and nourish the soul of the lay faithful which is love. For the exercise of this mission, the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments of initiation gives the Laity special gifts also (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), allotting them to every lay faithful according as He wills (cf. 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 4:5), to build up the whole body of Christ in charity and love (1 Peter 4:10). By so doing, the Laity is been given the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and women and the building of the Church, in the freedom the Holy Spirit Who has breathed where He wills (John 3:8).
- b. **Life in Christ Jesus:** Since, Christ sent by the Father into the world (John 3:16), is the source and origin of the whole mission of the Church, the success in the mission of the Laity depends upon the Laity’s living in union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord’s words in John 15:5; “He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing”. There is no doubt saying therefore, that this life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially an active participation in the Sacred Liturgy of the Church. This is 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 their union with Christ but rather grow in that union. In this way, the Laity must make progress in holiness in a happy and ready spirit. The Laity has a mission of seeing Christ in everyone

whether he is a relative or a stranger, while in seeking the will of God in all and every circumstance.

- c. **Scriptural Guide:** One of the most amazing ways we see the power of the Word of God is how it guides each and every one on the right way to go (Psalm 119: 105). The Laity needs God and His Word as truth in their daily living to guide each step they take. So, constant meditation on the Word of God helps the Laity to know what God wants from them in their missionary activities. Also, by meditation on the word of God the Laity can always and everywhere recognizes God in whom “we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).
- d. **Good Christian Life:** There are innumerable opportunities open to the Laity for the exercise of their mission of evangelization and sanctification. Hence, the very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men and women to belief and to God; for the Lord says in the Gospel of Mathew chapter 5, verse 16; “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”. We must also know that a mission of this kind does not only consist 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 the intention of leading them to Christ, or to the faithful with a view of instructing, strengthening and encouraging them to more fervent life in Christ Jesus. In the present time, wherein problems arise daily, the Laity is being exhorted to be more diligent in doing what they can explain, defend and properly apply Christian principles in accordance with the mind of the Church and the Holy Spirit.

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 mission of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. Similar to the early disciples/Christians (cf. Acts 18:18,26; Rom. 16:3), comprising men and women, the laity with the

right apostolic attitude supplies what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18). The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in union with their priests. They should bring to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation; all could examine and resolve by deliberating on common. As a matter of fact, and truth, the laity ought to provide helpful collaboration for everyone; and at all missionary undertakings sponsored by their local parish. They are to be the forerunners of mission work in their parishes.

The Catholic Laity making the Church Active and Alive in our Diocese

The Laity, have a special mission to make the Church present and active in our diocese where they are “salt and light” within and outside its geographical space. Hence, the mission of the Laity within the diocese is first and foremost a sharing in the salvific mission of Christ. Thereafter, they must take up the all-important role of influencing the society in which they live. In the most recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *FratelliTulli* he calls dialogue among all good will on the issue of human fraternity and social friendship. He goes on to state, “it is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity; fraternity between all men and women; old and young alike.” (F.T. no. 8). This also must be at the heart of the Laity's mission in the world.

Archbishop Henry D' Souza in his inaugural address at a laity conference in Asia, speaks of the responsibility of evangelization highly on the shoulders of the lay faithful, more than the Priests and other religious workers in the future. He says the history of some countries in Asia indicates the important role played by laypeople in the task of evangelization. This is also true in Africa and Nigeria. In many parts of our diocese, especially the interior villages, it is through catechists and lay faithful that faith has been kept alive and has

flourished. The Laity in Nigeria needs to take their rightful place in the mission of evangelization again. Going beyond just meetings, conferences, fundraising, etc to real evangelization in the vast complex areas of politics, economics, industry, education, the mass media, sciences, technology, the arts, and the sports.

The Laity/ Lay Apostolate and Evangelization in a Parish

The Church basically sees the Laity as persons who are baptised into the Church, who have secular qualities and whose functions in the Church differ from those who are ordained or consecrated. However, the activities of the laity in the Parish are understood in contrast to the clerical functions and roles in the Parish. It implies that it is really not difficult to distinguish between a Laity and the clerics as regards their functions in the Parish. In some parts of the world, some lay people are deprived of the participation in their jurisdiction as lay collaborators but are subjected to jurisdiction and orders of the clerics. While the clerics having received jurisdiction and orders, look down on the Laity as passive subjects. In other areas, however and with the recent developments in the life of the Church, there is a swift shift in the understanding of the lay people in the Church that favours the lay faithful collaboration in the life and mission of the Church. This inclusion pushes its points to that fact that lay people who are suitable by training can now be admitted to exercise certain ecclesiastical offices and functions.

For instance, there are six agents of evangelization as identified by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *EvangeliiNuntiandi* (1975). He categorized these agents as: The Pope, Bishops and Priests, Religious, Laity, Catholic Family and Youth. He also classified the Basic Christian Communities commonly known as BCC (Basic Christian Communities), which are the Laity, the family, the youth, consecrated men and women, seminarians in training, deacons awaiting priestly ordination, priests and bishops as all agents of evangelization. All these agents of evangelization need to establish

an extensive deep faith and collaboration with the Holy Spirit who inspires the works of evangelization. So, the work of evangelization belongs to Jesus Christ, and therefore, those who are commissioned to do it are stewards of Christ Himself whom the Holy Spirit sanctifies (Cf. Mt 28: 19-20).

The mission of the Laity in the parish starts immediately after baptism. Through this sacrament, the Laity is commissioned to evangelize since they have been called in a special way to make the Church present and alive, so as to become salt of the earth and light of the world. The Laity can show this active participation in evangelization in the Parish through different ways such as visiting the sick, prisoners and even orphans. This, they carry out within their parish setting to complement the work of evangelization championed and approved by their Parish Priest.

The Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (*This is an agency of the Catholic Church which includes the bishops of Africa and Madagascar. The SECAM was born, on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council, to express the will of the African bishops to speak and act together, overcoming the language difference, historical and cultural. The project, submitted to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, was approved in 1968. The Symposium was convened for the first time during the visit of Pope Paul VI to Uganda in 1969*) clearly confirms that the Laity has a very special form of evangelization; nicely knitted with a particular vision that places them in the midst of the world and in charge of most varied temporal tasks. This is why the formation of the Laity in every parish in our diocese is very important. In order to avoid a situation whereby the Laity are spectators and not participants in their parishes, this training in the social teachings of the Church and faith building is important.

The lay faithful are encouraged to resume their responsibilities as agents of evangelization in their Parishes. If we have a vibrant and a dutiful lay faithful in our parishes, the whole idea

of clericalism will be defeated. There will not be any form of monopoly of mission by the clergy which is clearly not promoting the mission of the lay faithful in parishes. As I have stated before; by virtue of their baptism, the lay faithful are called to participate in the prophetic mission of Christ who proclaimed the mission of His Father by the testimony of the life and by the power of his life. The lay faithful must testify in the same way through their daily life, strengthened by the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The role of the lay faithful in our parishes is a very important element in the entire process of evangelization of our diocese. The lay faithful participate strictly in internal affairs of the Church through the celebration of the sacraments, liturgy, preaching of the word of God or biblical apostolate, catechetical instruction of children and youth, encouraging and nurturing vocations of ordained ministers and religious life and the lay apostolate organizations in the Parish. Through their faith and witness of faith, they are able to participate fully in the work of evangelization and nurture vocations in the Parish. As agents and stakeholders of evangelization in the parish, they are expected to foster good working relationship between them and the priests in the parish. For instance, check the parish pastoral council which is one of the organs of the representatives of various groups of the faithful in the parish, most members of the communities that make up the council do not know the mandate of the council and consequently do not know their role in the parish.

The lay faithful have role in promoting of the Bible sharing in their parishes by sharing the word of God together. They can also raise funds for their parish through projects which are meant to support the growth of the parish community. They can also teach catechism and read the scripture during liturgical ceremonies. There are other parish groups where they can promote the message of Christ; such as, the Choir group, Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Catholic Men Organization (CMO), Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), Marriage encounter group, Catholic Girls' Organization (CGO), even other pious groups like Legion of Mary

Society, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria (CCRN), Precious Blood Society, and St. Vincent De Paul Society, Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate of Mary and the host of other avenues in the Parish.

It is already becoming a norm our in Dioceses that Small Christian Communities which are popularly known as Basic Christian Communities (BCC) are life witnesses to the work of evangelization because they bring people together to share the word of God. They pray and share the sacraments together as a unit of believers. This is a means whereby the parishes bring the Church down to the daily lives of the people in their homes. Through this evangelical exercise, members are able to recognize Christ among them, and embrace the word of God in their daily interactions.

Catechists and Evangelization process in our Diocese and Parishes

Catechists are special workers, direct witnesses, and indispensable evangelizers which represent the basic strength of Christian communities in the young Church. (cf Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2003, 67) Most importantly, the Decastery for the Evangelization of Peoples (*The Decastery for the Evangelization of Peoples is a Congregation of the Roman Curia of the Catholic Church in Rome, responsible for missionary work and related activities. It is also known by its former title, the Sacred Congregation for the propagation of the Faith, or simply the Propaganda Fide*) made a distinction between two types of catechists in service; namely the **full time catechists**, who devote their lives completely to this service and are officially recognised as such, and the **Part time catechists**, who offer a more limited but still precious collaboration in the evangelization of parishes. They are lay members of Christ's faithful who must receive proper formation and are outstanding in their living of the Christian life. (cf: *The Canon*. 231) This group of persons engage in liturgical worship and in works of charity. They are lay

persons appointed by the Church in accordance with local needs to make Christ known, loved and followed by those who do not yet know him. It suffices to say therefore, that catechists who are lay persons have even more special vocation of evangelization within the parishes they work.

Catechists are very important persons in the life of the Church. The work of evangelization is flourishing today in our parishes and Diocese because of the strenuous efforts of these lay men and women make in teaching catechism. They assist the priest in evangelizing in areas where they cannot get to. They to promote communication and communion between the members of the Christian community committed to their care and tries to understand their particular needs so as to help them grow spiritually.

Having been equipped with special skills, they lead prayers in Small Christian Communities like leading the Rosary prayers before the sacrifice of the Holy Mass commences and help the people of God prepare for liturgical rites/ceremonies; this progresses from the family to the Small Christian community and then to the entire parish. By so doing a deeper mode of evangelization is been facilitated.

Challenges facing the Laity in participating in Evangelization

Evangelization in our Diocese and Parishes has been faced with numerous challenges. Respondents from researches carried out show that the laity who are lay evangelizers in parishes have myriads of challenges they face on a daily basis. These challenges pose serious and strong obstacles to the work of evangelization in parishes beautifully positioned in the extremely rural areas of the diocese. Like the early European, Catholic Christian missionaries faced tropical climate and health hazards that led to the death of a lot of them, the today's Catholic Christian evangelizers have a pack full of challenges.

The most important challenge faced by the laity in our diocese is education. Many the lay faithful do not really have the

knowledge of who a laity, his position and mission in the body of Christ; that is the church really entails. Hence, the council fathers encourages all to focus on the training of the lay faithful in these words: “a training, at once many-sided and complete, is indispensable if the apostolate is to attain full efficacy. This is required, not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the layman himself, but also by the variety of circumstances, persons and duties to which he should adapt his activity. This education to the apostolate must rest on those foundations which the Council has in other places set down and expounded. Not a few types of apostolate require, besides the education common to all Christians, a specific and individual training, by reason of the diversity of persons and circumstances.” (cf *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 28)

Another challenge faced by the Laity in parishes is priority of the evangelizer’s commitment, time, and opportunities. A lot of evangelizers in our parishes are really not committed to the work of evangelization. Lack of commitment makes evangelization inactive in parishes. Priests and religious workers have had the course to banter words with lay evangelizers who do not want to get totally involved in the work of mission in their parishes. Every now and then, you hear the lay faithful saying he or she was not called to mission. The Laity, over and over again, shy away from missionary activities in parishes and when asked they claim not to have time for God’s work. It is a situation where everyone seems to be busy. This has really posed a challenge to evangelization in parishes.

Another challenge faced by the Laity in parishes is insufficient funds for inflated costs, emergencies and promotion of work. Funds have always been an important tool to promoting the work of evangelization in the parish. There have been situations where funds have created a firm barrier to evangelization processes in the parishes. If there are no funds, for instance to transport the Laity to a particular challenged missionary territory missionary work in that territory might be very difficult to accomplish. Apart from transportation to challenged areas for mission, the laity might also

need funds to get relieve materials for the underprivileged. So, having a considerable amount of money to inflated costs in mission is very essential to tackle emergencies.

In some cases, a sense of restriction on individual initiative, expression of talents, professional excellence, and implementation of new ideas can be a challenge faced by Laity in the parishes. The Laity have in so many occasions found themselves in situations where their intelligent ideas and innovations are discarded or cast off by some constituted authority in the parishes. Priests and religious workers at times do not allow the Laity to express their God given talents within the parish. If they are not allowed to expression themselves freely, in line with the Church's social and ecclesial teachings though, then missionary processes could get halted in the parishes. In some parishes, the parish administrators do not encourage or facilitate the participation of Laity in evangelization. Such administrators should be encouraged to collaborate for effective growth of the parish community.

The Laity forms the very core and essential membership of the church. Through their social life, the lay people are able to evangelize those they interact, work and live with. While some do charitable works within the parish like visitation to the needy and orphanages, others do not because of personal commitments. However, the priests need to be on the front line to encourage their Laity to be active Christians within their parishes. In view of the fact that the participation of the Laity in the mission of the church has a noble ancestry, the priests should also encourage the laity to move out and evangelise as the Church expects them to participate in the venture. Since the Laity forms the very core of the church, for any meaningful expression or development to take place in the parishes the should be carried along.

Ways for an Effective Participation of the Laity in our Diocese

With experiences and stories recounted about treatment and handling of lay faithful in our parishes, there is urgent need for a change of attitudes of pastors in all our parishes. The Laity should be treated with great deference and dignity because they play an important role in the church. The dignity of the Laity is not to be detracted; to a certain extent it has to be elevated, credited and respected in the parishes. With confidence and trust in the Laity by the church, this goal can be achieved without much stress. If the church authorities within the parishes must have an active evangelization process in the parishes, then they must uphold the dignity of the Laity. The Laity should be granted the opportunity to collaborate with the clergy in the mission of the church in every parish. The urgent need for evangelization within the parishes should be recognised and encouraged in a bid to promote that participatory approach to mission in the parishes.

Another factor that needs to be considered is the Laity's incorporation in the programs of the parish. This would help them express and exploit their talents and skills. The Laity is central to the life of the church and can be said to be the backbone of the church. They are not spectators but an active group of persons that should not be kept away from the church's mission of preaching the message to the ends of the world. When they are kept in the fringe this can be construed to mean they are not fully formed in faith and therefore become dormant. The Laity and clergy have to work as a team because each require the other to achieve the objective of the parish and the mission of evangelization within the parish.

Conclusion

Lay persons are the roots of the church and a lot of them do not know how important they are in the life and mission of the church.

They are like the flesh of the church, without the Laity the church is like a body without a flesh. This is true since the growth of the church is calculated by the noticeable numbers of the Laity in the parish. So, the vibrancy of the Laity can be judge from the visible growth of the parish. It suffices to say that the lay people are the engine of the growth of the church as a family in every parish. Through active participation and co responsibility of the mission of Christ and his church, the Laity can add to the growth of the church. By so doing, the Laity must be totally involved in the affairs of their parishes. They are to give their complete time and energy to the work of mission within their parishes.

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