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# Ministries and Roles within the Liturgical Assembly

**E**ach time we come together as the Body of Christ to celebrate the Eucharist, we are doing what we were baptized to do! Our baptism gives us a share in the priesthood of Christ, and this allows us to be one with Christ in his self-offering to God. The liturgy of this offering, the Mass, is not initiated by us but by God. The liturgy is in fact a gift from God, who acts in and through the Church, the Body of the risen Christ. It is our action only to the extent that we give ourselves to this mystery of redemptive worship. When we gather for the Eucharistic liturgy, the center of the whole Christian life (*General Instruction*, n. 16), we do so because our baptism calls us to it and empowers us for it.

## Different Roles, Indispensable Ministries

It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates the liturgy (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1140). As the Body of Christ, the Church, we each and all have a very important and necessary role in the celebration of Mass. Saint Peter reminds us that we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Peter 2:9–10). In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church is her truest self. Because God has redeemed the Church in Christ we are able to come before God and offer our praise and thanksgiving in the Church’s liturgy.

All the baptized, the whole community, the holy People of God, are united with Christ, but some

members of the Church are called to special service of Christ in the community of the Church. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, ordained priests and bishops make present Christ as the head of the Church. They are, as it were, “icons of Christ,” the one high priest (see Hebrews 7:24), in the midst of the assembly.

Priests and deacons, gathered around the bishop, act always in communion with him, the pastor of the local Church which is the Diocese. The *priest* acts in the liturgy in the person of Christ (see *Lumen Gentium*, n. 10), giving voice to the prayers of the Church, presiding over the celebration of the mysteries of our faith, preaching God’s word, and feeding God’s people by ministering the Body and Blood of Christ. The *deacon* assists the bishop and the priest, serves the poor and oppressed, and proclaims the Gospel of Christ.

Other members of the Body of Christ, the Church, are also called to service in duties of their own. Tasks not specifically reserved to the ordained ministers should be fulfilled by the lay faithful and exercised by them in conformity with their specific lay vocation.

For example, *lectors* are called to proclaim the scriptures in the first and second readings. *Psalmists* or *cantors* and *musicians* are called to lead the assembly in lifting up their voices in sung prayer and

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praise of God. *Servers* are called to assist and support the bishop, priest, deacon, and other ministers. *Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion* are called to assist in the distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ when there are not enough ordained ministers to do so in an orderly fashion. *Ushers and greeters* help to assemble the congregation in their prayer and worship.

These liturgical ministries and others that have not been mentioned are important; therefore, those who fill them have a responsibility to be well prepared and to carry out their duties with reverence, dignity, and understanding.

### **The Responsibility of All the Baptized**

The *General Instruction* states that “all . . . whether they are ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, in fulfilling their office or duty should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them” (n. 91).

The celebration of the Eucharist is the most important thing any parish does during the entire week. Nothing in the life of the parish should have a higher priority. Therefore, every parish must give attention to the thoughtful, careful development of these liturgical functions and ministries and to the proper training of those who exercise them.

But what about those of us who are not bishops or priests, deacons or lectors, extraordinary ministers of communion or cantors? What is our part in the liturgy? The *General Instruction* reminds us that through our baptism, we are all responsible for the

worship of God by the Church. Therefore we ought to do so to the best of our ability, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. We are called to participate in the liturgy with deliberate and full attention and with conscious and active participation. The *General Instruction* makes it clear that as the holy People of God, purchased by Christ’s blood, called together by the Lord, nourished by his word, we nevertheless grow “continually in holiness by [our] conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (n. 5).

This means that we need to be fully engaged throughout the whole liturgical celebration, not merely present, watching as if at a performance. In our praise and thanksgiving, through song and spoken word, posture and gesture, listening attentively to God’s word, we exercise our baptismal priesthood by joining our prayer to those spoken by the priest celebrant. Our part expresses the “cohesion and hierarchical ordering” (see *General Instruction*, n. 91) of the People of God in our different roles and ministries. We mirror Christ who served by washing the feet of his disciples, who is himself God’s word, who proclaimed the kingdom, who faithfully and with love offered to God his very life, who prayed to God on behalf of others, especially those who had no one else to intercede for them. During the liturgy, in our various ways, all of us who participate in the Mass unite ourselves in intention and love with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Those who exercise a particular function or ministry mirror Christ who, in the end, instructed his followers to imitate, always and everywhere, his example of love and service.