

A Multi-skilled workforce

Any new evangelisation has to pay special attention to our young. Half the world's population, they represent exceptional potential and real challenge for us but remain the best hope for the Church and should actually be given a lead role in all our efforts to renew our society. They value justice and peace, friendship and solidarity and the environment but they are troubled by many anxieties, disillusionments and temptations. We need to have that special love for them that Jesus had and learn to talk with them in friendly and courageous dialogue.

Older people also have new opportunities for apostolate. No-one retires from the Church but finds new ways for involvement and growth.

Women must be given prominence in the life and mission of parishes and dioceses, in consultation and decision making. They are gifted in knowing how to pass on the faith, in their witness to marriage and parenting, in protecting life and holding our culture to high moral standards. Men cannot leave it all to them in worship, catechesis and good works but should work alongside them pastorally. Spouses should act as couples and as a team with their families in the service of the Church and world.

The sick, too, are evangelisers, even if weary or troubled. In fact those who are weak are our greatest strength. They live out their vocation more than ever uniting their sufferings to Christ for the good of the Church and sharing their newfound experience of the joy of the Risen Christ even in their troubles.

A Plan for Ongoing Formation

All of this needs a much better formed laity and their ongoing formation has to become a diocesan priority, to help them to really discover and grow in their vocation and in their desire to live it. Awareness of the personal vocation and mission of each member of the Church is what gives us our sense of dignity and personal responsibility for the Church. Listening to God's Word, constant prayer, wise spiritual direction, discernment of our gifts and a good grasp of our lives and times help us to uncover God's will for our lives and how not just to know what God wants but to actually do it.

Ongoing formation makes mature members of the Church and citizens of society because it aims at unity between our Christian faith and our worldly lives. Spiritual formation helps us discern our calling, catechetical and doctrinal formation show us how to explain our faith to our peers and human formation helps us to be virtuous and respected citizens.

Our family homes are our natural schools of formation in faith and these 'domestic churches' will always be crucial to the Church's mission. Families are more fundamental than schools and this means rethinking our vision of Catholic schools to make them more inclusive of the whole Church and set up 'formation communities' of parents, teachers, clergy and youth. Schools need to be full of clergy, laity and religious, offering students an attractive image of the Church and its richness and teachers have to be witnesses in the example of good, holy lives.

All this needs much training to ensure the wide-spread and ongoing formation of us all.

You go into my vineyard too!

Jesus does not want to fulfil his mission alone but involves disciples. In addition to Apostles he sends seventy-two disciples to villages, in pairs, to proclaim the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Pope Francis.

Mission involves everyone. All of us are sent out into the world. But many Christians are still idle, not working to build the Kingdom of God and today they are called to new life and fresh hope. Pope John Paul II

The lay should not be regarded as collaborators of the clergy, but as people who are genuinely co-responsible for the Church. Pope Benedict

A Positive Vision of the Laity

The Church has a very positive vision of being lay. Firstly laity are *full members* of the Church. More than that they have their own *unique* role. Their vocation is their *secular genius in worldly affairs* and taking initiative to bring ordinary, everyday things to God. Their secular world is good because God handed it over to them in partnership to enrich His creation.

We become members of the Church by baptism, the fundamental, shared identity of every Christian. It is an amazing sacrament that makes us *born again as God's children, as Christ's body throughout the world* and as the *temple of the Spirit*.

It marks us with the *triple* service of Jesus. We share his *priestly* service *offering up of our lives, state and work*. We share His prophetic service *proclaiming the Gospel and denouncing evil* and we share in His royal service *conquering sin within us and serving the poor*.

Only saints renew the Church so the laity are *called to be holy in the world* by living their lives in *Christian love or charity*.

So lay spirituality is lived out in ordinary life: in marriage, family, single life or widowhood; in employment, socialising and health. In all this we use the talents life offers and the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us to be holy and make the world holy.

An Apostolic Community

The Church is a family *communion* and being laity means being a responsible family member.

God saved us *as a family or people*, not as individuals and He gave each of us *different gifts* to serve the *common good* of all. But lay gifts are first of all for *sanctifying the world* and thereby they *build up the Church as an ever-growing community*.

Lay work in the Church is carried on at *the local level by laity who work shoulder to shoulder* with their clergy in *collaborative ministry* in the parish and diocese and in pastoral councils, or by getting involved in *parish apostolate* or sometimes by forming small *communities*.

But all apostolate has to begin in the heart of each person who wants to be involved ever more deeply, continually and effectively in discipleship in the Church. To do this effectively he soon realises he has to join a good group. Good groups work well when they *witness to their shared communion* and have a plan for how they can be ever more *holy, faith-filled, fraternal, and apostolic in society*.

Time for a Giant Leap in Lay Evangelisation

The Church is *missionary or She is nothing!* To evangelise is Her most profound identity. Moreover, the present state of the world absolutely demands it of all of us. And the Lord entrusts this mission firstly to the lay faithful. Everyone without exception has to bear fruit. *Woe to me, said St Paul, if I do not preach the Gospel*. Jesus reminds us that any authentic communion with Him proves itself by bringing new branches to flower.

But we now have to take an historic leap forward in our missionary outreach and try to bring humanity back to communion with itself and God.

Special evangelisation is needed most in the rich West, so prone to secularism, atheism or even religious indifferentism among Catholics. Only a missionary Church can face up to and solve Western problems with new faith and new freedom from its worldly forces.

Our message is attractive; that *God loves the world, that He died for everyone and is the Way, Truth and Life*. We know that Jesus is the only answer to the hopes and fears of the world and our evangelisation is a service, person to person, that cries out: *Throw open the doors to Christ!* We cry out by proclaiming the Gospel, taking on apostolate to the lost and giving catechesis, which has now become more urgent and necessary than ever.

Laity also serve the world in so many other ways: uphold the inviolable dignity of every person, in apostolates for life, conscience, freedom of religion, marriage and family life, in works of charity to the poor, sick and needy. Jesus left us this work and we cannot leave it all to the state. We must also be active in civic life and politics, arguing for liberties, justice, solidarity and the common good, for simplicity of life and preference for the poor. In economics we put people and their right to work over markets. In arts, education, entertainment and media we are to be creative and courageous in harmonising popular culture with Gospel values.