

Redemptionis Sacramentum

Chapter VII

Extraordinary Functions of Lay Faithful

146. There can be no substitute whatsoever for the ministerial Priesthood. For if a Priest is lacking in the community, then the community lacks the exercise and sacramental function of Christ the Head and Shepherd, which belongs to the essence of its very life.²⁴⁷ For “the only minister who can confect the sacrament of the Eucharist in *persona Christi* is a validly ordained Priest.”²⁴⁸

147. When the Church’s needs require it, however, if sacred ministers are lacking, lay members of Christ’s faithful may supply for certain liturgical offices according to the norm of law.²⁴⁹ Such faithful are called and appointed to carry out certain functions, whether of greater or lesser weight, sustained by the Lord’s grace. Many of the lay Christian faithful have already contributed eagerly to this service and still do so, especially in missionary areas where the Church is still of small dimensions or is experiencing conditions of persecution,²⁵⁰ but also in areas affected by a shortage of Priests and Deacons.

148. Particular importance is to be attached to the training of catechists, who by means of great labors have given and still give outstanding and altogether necessary help in the spreading of the Faith and of the Church.²⁵¹

149. More recently, in some dioceses long since evangelized, members of Christ’s lay faithful have been appointed as “pastoral assistants,” and among them many have undoubtedly served the good of the Church by providing assistance to the Bishop, Priests and Deacons in the carrying out of their pastoral activity. Let care be taken, however, lest the delineation of this function be assimilated too closely to the form of pastoral ministry that belongs to clerics. That is to say, attention should be paid to ensuring that “pastoral assistants” do not take upon themselves what is proper to the ministry of the sacred ministers.

150. The activity of a pastoral assistant should be directed to facilitating the ministry of Priests and Deacons, to ensuring that vocations to the Priesthood and Diaconate are awakened and that lay members of Christ’s faithful in each community are carefully trained for the various liturgical functions, in keeping with the variety of charisms and in accordance with the norm of law.

151. Only out of true necessity is there to be recourse to the assistance of extraordinary ministers in the celebration of the Liturgy. Such recourse is not intended for the sake of a fuller participation of the laity but rather, by its very nature, is supplementary and provisional.²⁵² Furthermore, when recourse is had out of necessity to the functions of extraordinary ministers, special urgent prayers of intercession should be multiplied that the Lord may soon send a Priest for the service of the community and raise up an abundance of vocations to sacred Orders.²⁵³

152. These purely supplementary functions must not be an occasion for disfiguring the very ministry of Priests, in such a way that the latter neglect the celebration of Holy Mass for the people for whom they are responsible, or their personal care of the sick, or the Baptism of children, or assistance at weddings or the celebration of Christian funerals, matters which pertain in the first place to Priests assisted by Deacons. It must therefore never be the case that in parishes Priests alternate indiscriminately in shifts of pastoral service with Deacons or laypersons, thus confusing what is specific to each.

153. Furthermore, it is never licit for laypersons to assume the role or the vesture of a Priest or a Deacon or other clothing similar to such vesture.

1. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

154. As has already been recalled, "the only minister who can confect the Sacrament of the Eucharist in *persona Christi* is a validly ordained Priest."²⁵⁴ Hence the name "minister of the Eucharist" belongs properly to the Priest alone. Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon,²⁵⁵ to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ's faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial Office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete.

155. In addition to the ordinary ministers there is the formally instituted acolyte, who by virtue of his institution is an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion even outside the celebration of Mass. If, moreover, reasons of real necessity prompt it, another lay member of Christ's faithful may also be delegated by the diocesan Bishop, in accordance with the norm of law,²⁵⁶ for one occasion or for a specified time, and an appropriate formula of blessing may be used for the occasion. This act of appointment, however, does not necessarily take a liturgical form, nor, if it does take a liturgical form, should it resemble sacred Ordination in any way. Finally, in special cases of an unforeseen nature, permission can be given for a single occasion by the Priest who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist.²⁵⁷

156. This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not "special minister of Holy Communion" nor "extraordinary minister of the Eucharist" nor "special minister of the Eucharist," by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.

157. If there is usually present a sufficient number of sacred ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may not be appointed. Indeed, in such circumstances, those who may have already been appointed to this ministry should not exercise it. The practice of those Priests is reprobated who, even though present at the celebration, abstain from distributing Communion and hand this function over to laypersons.²⁵⁸

158. Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so

great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.²⁵⁹ This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.

159. It is never allowed for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone else to administer the Eucharist, as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick person who is the communicant.

160. Let the diocesan Bishop give renewed consideration to the practice in recent years regarding this matter, and if circumstances call for it, let him correct it or define it more precisely. Where such extraordinary ministers are appointed in a widespread manner out of true necessity, the diocesan Bishop should issue special norms by which he determines the manner in which this function is to be carried out in accordance with the law, bearing in mind the tradition of the Church.