



Jubilee Year – Exploring Apostolicam Actuositatem (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People)

Apostolicam Actuositatem ultimately states that the laity needs to play a more active role in the Church and specifically in the world. To be more purposeful, the laity should better understand the Second Vatican Council documents.

Take a moment and just think about the separation taking place between the world and the message of the Gospel. The laity has an extremely important responsibility to reveal what it means to be a Christian. Pope Paul VI said fifty-nine years ago: *The laity are the bridge to the modern world.*

Summary

Chapter One: The Vocation of Lay People to the Apostolate

- A Christian has but one real goal as an apostle of Christ - to spread the Word of Christ – the Gospel.
- Share Christ's love so others can experience His redemption and connect with God.
- The laity receives this duty directly from Christ himself, not from the Ordained.
- The Holy Spirit provides us with specific gifts necessary so that we can contribute.
- Out of love we cooperate and submit to God's will.
- The life of a lay person is to be lived in both Christ and in culture and society --These are not separable.
- To live in faith means we must strive to see Christ in everyone. This starts by valuing all life.
- To hope is to see that human suffering can be altered. To hope is too long for love. In hope we find meaning in the struggles of life. We hope for love, because the culmination of Christian life is love.
- Love is foundational to ultimately choosing good over evil. To be able to love at the deepest level requires surrender.
- There is no deeper love without humility. It is by gaining humility that one begins to know their truest self.
- In understanding self, one begins to discern that gratitude is due to all that we receive. When a person realizes that it all comes from God, they can mature in their sense of justice.

Chapter Two – Objectives

- We are meant to communicate God's grace to the world, revealing Jesus and his words.
- Who we are to be is highlighted through Liturgy. We are sent from Liturgy to give witness by our lives. This witness is meant to invite others to participate in the life of Christ in his Church.
- Our mission includes other aspects of our life such as family, friends, culture, arts, work, politics, and international realities.
- The world is blinded by sin and as a result people have become selfish and see life only one way – their way.
- The Church has a duty to offer moral clarity and provide spiritual aid. It is, however, the members of the Church who most of all can bring the world to its created purpose.
- The summit of the Christian message is love. Everything we do as Christians should be motivated by love.
- The higher degree of love involves having compassion for those in need. The pinnacle of love is surrender of self, to provide what is of a higher good.
- The dignity of humans requires that they have food, drink, clothing, shelter, medicine, access to work, education, and freedom.
- No matter what a person's station in life, we are all loved equally by God. None of us are better than anyone else.
- The purest notion of love is to seek what is just. In aiming for what is just, we begin to alleviate the need for charity. In eliminating the causes for injustice, we cooperate with God's love.

Chapter Three – The Various Fields of the Apostolate

- Laypeople lead others to Christ by inviting others to Church, instructing others in faith, passing along skills that nurture souls, and by sharing their material blessings.
- Laypeople need to work with their Pastor. They should feel comfortable bringing their struggles and the needs of others to the Church. There can be a problem sometimes in being open to seeing the truth about what causes the struggle.
- Marriage and family life is also a relevant way in which the laity have an ability to reveal Jesus.
- A home is the place where a child should learn to be faithful and where they should experience and develop love. A big part of it rests in being nourished by family prayer life.

Chapter Four – The Different Forms of the Apostolate

- In one way or another each of us is called to some form of ministry.
- Groups that offer love of neighbor give powerful witness to the Body of Christ. It is in staying close to one another that we remain strong in faith.
- Everyday life with the Spirit of Christ is our aim.

Chapter Five – The Order of the Observed

- All lay individual and/or organized efforts need to function in relationship to Church hierarchy and they must foster unity.
- The hierarchy needs to promote the work of the laity and give spiritual direction.
- Pastoral activities that involve teaching faith and liturgical functions can and should be entrusted to the baptized laity.
- Bishops, pastors, priests, deacons, and those in religious life are meant to work closely with laypeople in building up the Church.

Chapter Six – Training for the Apostolate

- Laypeople must be well trained in ministerial work. They need to understand doctrines that relate to their specific ministry.
- Laypeople should pursue ministry that makes use of their strengths and talents.
- Lay ministers are much more viable when they get whatever training in theology, ethics, philosophy and technical skills is necessary.
- All lay ministers need to realize that their call to ministry is to help them to learn to love more and more like Jesus.

Comments

You may have been asking yourselves what is *lay apostolate*? You won't hear the term *lay apostolate* anymore; it has been replaced by the term *lay ministry*.

Lay ministry belongs to everyone. In other words, everyone is an apostle with a small "a". You can't really be a Christian without also being an apostle. An apostle must live and proclaim Christ. However, I think the challenge for many lay people rests in the fact that they feel like they need to separate their faith from their daily lives.

Let's stop and think about something. It is said that we are to seek the will of God. If that is true, then it is reasonable to assume that we need to be open to the truth of that will. With that said, there is always some form of call from God, through Christ, that is prompted by the Spirit. It is our free will which allows us to be open or closed to this call. We can choose to respond or not, to be drawn into a love relationship with God or to walk away from it. I think there is a terrible misunderstanding by many laypeople, as well as by some clergy, that the work of the Church is not meant to *trickle down* through the clergy to the laity. The faithfulness to God's call depends on the laity's living in union with Christ, involving oneself in his mission. And to an extent, it relies on the willingness of clergy to foster lay ministry.

Sixty-two years ago, Pope John XXIII set Vatican II apart from all other Vatican Councils. One of the primary reasons is because he placed laity as a major issue of consideration. Vatican II has been referred to as the *Council of the Laity*. There is a Catholic theology of the laity evolving because of Vatican II. The laity is the Church, heck they comprise 99% of it! The lay are members equal to anyone Ordained! For years I have prayed for vocations to the priesthood. Ironically, it was only until after being ordained that I seriously began to pray for good lay ministry vocations as well. I work side-by-side with many lay ministers

who love Christ and strive to serve him. I pray for more ministers who have a profound love of Christ and his Church. I am grateful for all those lay ministers I have been blessed to have known.

The final thoughts I want to leave you with are these: The greatest responsibility for the laity does not rest in performing service in Church. The greatest impact by far can only take place when they are sent out into the world after every Sunday Mass. More than ever faithful lay Catholics are needed in the world. Why - To fight the growing indifference to religion. Sadly, Vatican II has not been truly embraced. The world is much more secular, material, and consumer driven. Look for yourselves! Where is the meaning of life found in most people? People value what is materially gained or not. People are not concerned with who they are becoming, or who anyone else is becoming in relationship to Jesus. And with all the great advances in technology, there is a sad underlying truth: technology now controls man more than man controls it. The reality is there are more baptized lay people active in ministry in the Church than ever before, yet there are more ex-Catholics than ever before. M

My final thought for you is this, most of the people you know will not hear the Gospel in church. If they have any hope at all of hearing it, it will be from you. Remember too – you cannot give to anyone else what you do not have! Are you a bridge that brings Catholicism to the world?