Mission of the Laity

1 Definition of Laity
The Second Vatican Council described the laity as *"all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life".*[1] Therefore, in Argyll and the Isles, out of approximately ten thousand people this is everyone except for just over 20 clergy.

2 Common Baptism
Through baptism the laity are made one body with Christ and part of the People of God. They share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. The lay faithful are to minister both within the Church and in the world transforming it with the love of Christ. The Holy Spirit has bestowed diverse yet complementary gifts and charisms upon the laity which enrich both the Church and the world.[2]

3 Equality Arising from Baptism
God has given the Church a *"wonderful diversity"*[3] in which, as St Paul taught, the body has many parts with different functions but they are all for the one mission. Therefore, the People of God is one, sharing a common dignity from their baptism, having the same grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality.

4 Universal Call to Holiness
The Second Vatican Council taught that all the baptised are called to holiness. Pope John Paul II taught that the laity, in order to fulfil their vocation, had to become one with Christ, the True Vine.[4] Communion with Jesus leads to mission which in turns deepens communion with the Lord.

In the journey towards holiness the clergy are to serve the laity: *"The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments"*[5]

Opportunities for formation and subsequent maturing should be offered to the laity. Formation's purpose is to instil an ever-clearer discovery of their vocation and ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil their mission.[6] When appropriate laity, religious and clergy should be formed together.[7]

Holiness is also gained through fidelity to one's vocation and the laity's vocation to mission both within the world and within the Church will now be studied.

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[1] Lumen Gentium,31
[2] Lumen Gentium,31 & Christifideles Laici,14
[3] Lumen Gentium,32
[4] Lumen Gentium, & Christifideles Laici,8
[5] Lumen Gentium,37
[6] Christifideles Laici,57-58
[7] Synod of Bishops on Synodality Final Document,142

5 The Laity's Call to Mission

Jesus desires to continue his witness and service through the laity and so gives them life in the Holy Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work.[8]

Each lay person is called to witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and nourish the world with spiritual and temporal fruits. Their deeds, prayers and acts of witness, their married and family life, their daily occupations, their periods of relaxation and even the hardships of life can all become *"spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"*. [9] Thus the laity consecrate the world itself to God.

In 1987, 20 years after the Council, Pope John Paul called a Synod of Bishops on "The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World". In his post-Synodal exhortation Pope John Paul wrote that, *"the Church after Vatican II, in a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature and has listened again to the voice of her Lord who sends her forth into the world as the universal sacrament of salvation"*.[10] The call to mission is not only for clergy and religious but lay people too are personally called by the Lord for mission.

John Paul recalled the Council's *"earnest plea in the Lord's name that all lay people give a glad, generous, and prompt response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment. Young people should feel that this call is directed to them in particular, and they should respond to it eagerly and magnanimously. The Lord himself renews his invitation to all the lay faithful to come closer to him every day, and with the recognition that what is his is also their own (Phil 2:5) they ought to associate themselves with him in his saving mission. Once again he sends them into every town and place where he himself is to come (cf. Lk 10:1)"*[11]

"Since they have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, laymen are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, but are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society".[12] Regarding the new evangelisation, since the laity live within families, have work colleagues etc they are well placed to fulfil this.[13]

6 The Laity's Secular Characteristic

"Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the

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[8] Lumen Gentium,34
[9] Peter 2:5
[10] Christifideles Laici,2
[11] Apostolicam Actuositatem, 33
[12] Gaudium et Sped, 43
[13] Christifideles Laici,34

importance of their obligation to work with all men in the building of a more human world."[14] *"Mission involves all the Baptised. The first task of lay women and men is to permeate and transform earthly realities with the spirit of the Gospel".*[15]

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. For the Church the word 'secular' means 'in the world'. For example, diocesan priests are 'secular priests' because they live 'in the world' i.e. among the people rather than in monasteries 'apart from the world'. With this meaning the word secular is not anti-religion but refers to being among people in the world. Therefore, when the Church speaks of the secular character of the laity it is referring to their constant living in the ordinary circumstances of family, their employment in factories, education, fishing, health sectors, shops and involvement in culture, politics and their social lives.

One major element of the laity's vocation is to engage in the world's affairs and transforming them according to the plan of God. It is in the world that, inspired by the Gospel, they are to live by and witness to Christian values thereby influencing and so sanctifying the world by working within it as a leaven.[16] In this way they may make Christ known to others that the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ.[17] The laity can do this in places and ways the clergy and religious cannot. The laity can shine the light of Christ upon every part of the world. As Pope Benedict wrote *"The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.*[18]

7 Laity's Mission within the Church

As well as its vocation to the world (i.e. beyond the boundaries of the Church) the laity are also called to witness and work within the Church. Laity's involvement shouldn't be justified only from a need to support fewer priests but rather it is their right and obligation arising from baptism. God has given multiple diverse gifts to the laity just as he has done with the ordained. Through baptism laity share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. Therefore, inclusion of the laity is not a nicety but a spiritual necessity.[19] In the Church the laity can do anything which does not require Holy Orders.[20]

Laity, female and male, can be involved in the Church's life at parish, diocesan, national and universal levels. There can be individual participation (especially if no

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[14] Gaudium et Spes,57
[15] Synod of Bishops on Synodality Final Document,66 C.f. also Lumen Gentium 31 & Apostolicam Actuositatem, 33
[16] Luke 13:21
[17] Lumen Gentium,35-35
[18] Deus Caritas Est, 29
[19] Christifideles Laici,18
[20] Christifideles Laici,23

Groups are available) or communally in Groups. Laity, from their baptism, have the right to form Groups although the Church is still to discern them. Pope Francis insisted that the laity cannot replace priests but rather they work together.[21] Priests are to support the laity in their endeavours:

"Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity". [22]

The Synod of Bishops on Synodality has offered concrete steps for implementing the Council's and subsequent Papal vision of lay ministry. This includes - by women[23] as well as men - participation in leadership, decision making and roles of responsibility; utilising the ministries of Lector, Acolyte[24] and Catechist[25]; membership of Parish Pastoral, Parish Finance and Diocesan Pastoral Councils as well as other forms of lay ministries beyond the liturgical sphere,[26] including *"exploring new forms of service and ministry in response to the pastoral needs of our time in a spirit of collaboration and differentiated co-responsibility".*[27]

Our lay faithful are well educated, skilled in many practical areas and enthusiastic so they have the ability to do much. For Pope John Paul participation is not an end in itself but rather the lay faithful ought to do much towards the growth of communion in their parishes in order to reawaken missionary zeal towards nonbelievers and believers who have abandoned the faith or grown lax in the Christian life.[28] The end is always mission!

<u>The Role of the Religious</u>

Please note that there is no paper on Religious simply because (apart from the two Missionaries of St Paul and one hermit) there are no Religious in our diocese. This is to the detriment of Argyll and the Isles and it is hoped that we will once more be blessed by the presence of Religious. However, we are discerning the reality of our situation today and not what we would prefer it to be.

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[21] Pope Francis Synod Address 2nd October 2024
[22] Christifideles Laici,25
[23] Two Vatican Dicasteries now have female heads
[24] Pope Francis letter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2021
[25] Antiquum Ministerium, 2021 (Pope Francis)
[26] Synod Final Document,66
[27] Syond Final Document,77
[28] Christifideles Laici,58 That mission is the goal of communion and participation was a central theme of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality 2012-24.