

## Christian Levites — Administrators

“But the laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world” ( Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People #2 in Vatican II Documents).

“These faithful are by Baptism made one body with Christ, and are established among the People of God. They are in own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world” (Constitution on the Church # 31 in Vatican II Documents).

Levites assisted priests in their Temple ministry. Assisted because they shared a wider priesthood which designated them for other services. Some priestly activities were interrelated but others distinct. All came from the tribe of Levi. Some ordained with oil to perform the sacrificial liturgy. Others purified with water, set aside to assist that ritual. But those purified were assigned a large number of other tasks. All sought to maintain an atmosphere of holiness needed for Temple devotion. Oil ordained priests. Water purified Levites. A need existed in both sides for each other.

In today’s Church, certain laity assist priests in their ministry. They are today’s Levites. They come to this role by virtue of their Baptism. Washing purified Levites of the Old Testament. Baptismal washing purifies Levites of the New Testament. Ordained priests begin first as members of the Church in a Baptismal priesthood, They too are spiritually born through the same font of Baptismal water. Later, another Sacramental event is added to their life journey. They enrich the priesthood of the laity with an ordained priesthood. All share this initial priesthood of the Baptized. Fewer are called to the ordained level. In Temple liturgies, certain functions were performed together but with special roles of priest and Levite. In Christian Liturgy, certain lay ministries celebrate along with the priest celebrant but within their special roles.

Documents of the Second Vatican Council emphatically state a need to activate an awareness of the priesthood of the laity and its ministries. Similar to Levites, that particular priesthood covers broad territory. The Council expressed Church mission through the ministry of Christ. He approached his mission as priest, prophet, and king. Those three ministerial functions the Church Fathers put forward as models to characterize lay ministry. Priestly ministry seen in Eucharistic Ministers because of their service to the altar. Prophetic ministry seen in Lectors because of service to the pulpit and the Word of God. And royal ministry for Church Administrators — those who accept responsibility for practical issues underlining Church ministry in general. These titles offer an opportunity to pour Old Testament thinking into New Testament structures. Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, and Church Administrators serve the Church as Levites served the Temple. Old Testament roles may supply depth to New Testament apostolates. Activities of Temple Levites offer Biblical roots for the flowering of current day lay ministry.

These three models do not carry the same burden. Some are more concentrated than others. Lectors function as prophets tied primarily to the pulpit. The priestly nature of Eucharistic Ministers ties them to the altar. Which leaves the Administrator. These people are tied to maintaining various things happening in the church. Therefore, it may be best to start with them.

Administration tends to suggest practical and more general activities. To use an old seminary term, the Administrator is the *fac totum*. It means someone who does everything. Even a church needs a manager. Too often priests are burdened with this role as well as a Sacramental one. But it takes a number of people to make a church come alive because of the number of needs. Levites performed various jobs around the Temple. Many not directly attached to liturgical life. Often asked to accomplish very secular tasks, they answered all necessities. Administrators today supply assistance that channel oxygen to keep a church community breathing. They pay bills, supervise daily workers or those called for special jobs. They set their sights on practical problems and seek solutions. But their role is not merely task oriented. Public relations adds to their responsibility. They function as ambassadors of a particular church to the wider social community. Sales people contact them because of various church needs and for payment. People of other faiths or no faith at all, take from them impressions of Christianity as lived in this church. They supervise work done throughout the church, whether that be cleaning or caring for grounds. These Christian Levites walk the line between the sacred and the profane. It pervades their role description. They strive to inject an atmosphere that calls for at least respect if not reverence. They strive to maintain an awareness of holy things that occur in this building. Which suggests they perform a ministry rather than doing a job. They keep the engine running. Like Levites, it is given to them to handle the business of religion.

Some Levitical administration also takes place closer to the sanctuary. People not participants in the ritual but who contribute to it more directly. They prepare for or accompany services. Some who prepare are people who oversee flowers that decorate the sanctuary. Their responsibility may range from replacement and arrangement to ordering and buying. They contribute an element of life to altar decorations. Paintings and statues are beautiful but flowers are alive. They add freshness as well as attractiveness to any sanctuary.

Musicians prepare for and accompany liturgical life of church celebrations. American Bishops in 1967 wrote in their document on liturgical music that liturgical celebrations should be humanly attractive. They warned, as good celebrations support faith, bad celebrations destroy faith. Bad celebrations destroy faith — a somber observation. The importance of music stems from its role in directing liturgical feelings. Music helps a congregation feel holiness in what is taking place. Musicians also engage in administration because of their work during the week, leading into Saturday/Sunday performances. Music must be chosen, practiced, typed, photocopied. Things must be prepared not only for musicians themselves but also for congregational singing. They

sing and play instruments on the weekend. Weekdays are spent planning out the weekend agenda.

An administrative role most closely related to the Liturgy is the Levitical role of sacristan. Their administrative skills become key on ordinary days and most particularly during major feast days. In large churches, priests depend upon these people heavily. They organize the sacristy where most of what is needed for celebrations is kept. Some are brought into the sanctuary before times of Liturgies. The presence of the sacristan suggests order prevails rather than chaos, particularly before celebrations. They answer a variety of questions and needs. Sacristans plan out the future. They arrange for correct vestments, books, chalices, wine and water, all prepared before celebrations. They play a role similar to Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, except they work behind the curtain. One might see them before and after but rarely during celebrations. They set up before and take down afterward. Normally they arrive first in the sacristy and are last to leave.

Those who work in offices of church administration are the least noticeable ones. They work to carry out tasks necessary for events to take place smoothly. They tend to receive the least amount of credit. The tasks they perform are expected of them. They work to maintain an atmosphere of holiness by practical means. Notice comes to them only when something goes wrong. Questions then are raised of who is responsible for what particular task.

Levites in the Temple, as musical performers, sang or played instruments at the morning and evening sacrifice. Other Levites pursued more mundane work but were expected to do it well. Cleaning, paying bill, or paying workers may have been asked of them. Levites also walked the line between the sacred and the profane. In church situations, bills are paid, sacristans care for vestments and altar vessels, secretaries take calls or schedule events. Church grounds require maintenance. All these people, along with cherished volunteers, work for the church as Levites once worked for the Temple. Their work consists of maintaining the smooth running of events with what appears outwardly as very little effort.

Christian Levites who work in administration are similar to people who work in the basement of a many storied building. Rarely seen, since their work takes place in an out of the way area, they receive little notice because few have cause to visit a basement. Most of the give and take of social relationships occurs upstairs. Upstairs hosts most of the action — the more interesting things. Buried in the basement with these Levites are the roots of the house. Where few go, also locates the source of all energy that feeds the entire building — electricity, water, heat, cooling elements. Without which, most of what is happening upstairs, would come to a sudden halt. Some summers ago, our old cooling system needed to be replaced. We could not wait until Fall. That meant a number of weekends without air conditioning in a church with windows that cannot be opened. Noteworthy was the number of telephone calls asking in midweek whether or not the air conditioning system had been fixed. Therefore, the

importance given to what goes on in the basement. Without events running smoothly there, far from the sanctuary, any particular church becomes another story.