

The essential role of the laity in the Church

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Did you know the Holy Father has a special prayer intention each month? Each member of the Church is asked to pray for his intentions, especially at Mass each day. I thought it would be helpful to talk about the Holy Father's intention for this month of October:

That by the virtue of baptism, the laity, especially women, may participate more in areas of responsibility in the Church.

The Church has several "layers" – universal, national, diocesan, parish, household, individual – and people's experiences and impressions can vary greatly. I'm glad to share with you that in the Archdiocese of Seattle, we have many faith-filled, qualified lay leaders active at every level. That is not to say we are perfect and cannot do any better, but I want people to hear that lay leaders, including women, are very involved in ministry and decision-making.

For instance, our Leadership Team that I work closely with in making many day-do-day decisions in the archdiocese has 10 members: three bishops, one priest, three women and three other men. One of those women holds the key office of chancellor, the highest diocesan position open to laypeople. We have a very collaborative decision-making model, and the voices of the laity are equal and much appreciated.

The archdiocese is supported by several lay-led consultative bodies like our recently commissioned Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. This inspiring group of ethnically diverse men and women is filled with faith and inspires me every time we meet! The primary task of the group is to help draft a new pastoral plan for the archdiocese, but in early October we spent a Saturday morning discussing the present challenges of COVID, racial justice, divisiveness in our Church and society, and possible constructive ways to address them from our faith perspective.

The Archdiocesan Review Board is another significant group of lay leaders. Since 1986, the Archdiocese of Seattle has sought the aid of qualified professionals to develop policies for the protection of youth and the prevention of abuse, and to aid in the review of accusations of sexual abuse. This board operates as an independent, confidential, consultative body that advises me on issues related to the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and assists me in assessing allegations and fitness for ministry. Most of the board members are women.

Our Archdiocesan Finance Council is another dedicated, professional, consultative body – again, made up primarily of lay men and women. There are other such groups, but you are beginning to see how many lay men and women are highly engaged in Church leadership.

Of course, our local Church has many lay leaders beyond the chancery. We have dedicated lay leaders with tremendous responsibilities serving at our parishes throughout the archdiocese – as employees, volunteers, and members of pastoral and finance councils. It is because of their faith and dedication that our parishes are able to carry out the mission of Church.

It goes without saying that the Church does not just exist at the archdiocesan and parish offices! We have so many dedicated Catholic men and women who generously serve the mission of the Church in Catholic health care, Catholic schools, Catholic Community Services/Catholic Housing Services, Catholic cemeteries and ministries all across Western Washington.

Indeed, the laity play an essential role in the life of the Church, and, as Pope Francis notes this month, we want to continue to facilitate their important and rightful place of leadership and decision-making. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the lay leaders who serve our Church and help people grow closer to Christ!