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# STABLE LAY MINISTRY OF CATECHIST

## Intent and Impact of the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*

MERLIN RENGITH AMBROSE

**Zusammenfassung:** Nach der Veröffentlichung des Direktoriums für die Katechese hat Papst Franziskus ein neues Apostolisches Schreiben in Form eines "Motu Proprio" verfasst, in dem er den Dienst des Katechisten festlegt. Dieser Artikel fasst die wichtigsten Punkte des Dokuments zusammen und hebt die Rolle der Laien im Katechistendienst hervor. Die Einrichtung dieses Dienstes, zusammen mit den Laiendiensten des Lektors und des Akolythen, wird es ermöglichen, dass die Laien besser auf die Weitergabe des Glaubens vorbereitet sind. Der Katechist arbeitet mit dem Ortsbischof und den Priestern bei der Vermittlung des Glaubens an die örtliche Gemeinschaft zusammen und kann vor allem dort von Nutzen sein, wo es an Priestern und Ordensleuten mangelt.

**Summary:** Following the publication of the Directory for Catechesis, Pope Francis wrote a new Apostolic Letter in the form of a "Motu Proprio" establishing the ministry of the catechist. This article summarizes the document's salient features, emphasizing the lay faithful's role in the catechist ministry. The institution of this ministry, together with the lay ministries of lector and acolyte, will make it possible to have a better-prepared laity in the transmission of the faith. The catechist collaborates with the local bishop and priests in the teaching of the faith to the local community and can be especially beneficial in places where priests and religious are scarce.

### 1 Introduction

"I establish the lay ministry of catechist" („*istituisco il ministero laicale di catechista*").<sup>1</sup> With these words, Pope Francis desires to fundamentally change the Catholic Church from within. The words appear towards the end of a six-page Apostolic Letter given as Motu Proprio *Antiquum Ministerium* ("Ancient Ministry"), released on 10 May 2021. This document breathes new life into the ancient ministry of catechists. This Apostolic Letter instituted the lay ministry of the catechist through a rite to be determined by the Dicastery of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.<sup>2</sup> The move comes after Pope Francis' decision to officially extend the functions of acolyte and lector to women by virtue of their baptism with his Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini* on 10 January 2021, which modified can. 230 of CIC 1983. Since Pope Francis was elected in 2013, he has been a great advocate for the increasing role of the laity in the Church. He has instituted and strengthened various lay ministries through the release of numerous documents. This is

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Motu Proprio: *Antiquum ministerium* (10 May 2021), at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510\\_antiquum-ministerium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html) (accessed on 10.05.2022), no. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum (13 December 2021), in: Comm 53 (2021) 499-505, at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/13/0845/01772.html> (accessed on 10.05.2022).

utmost important because as mentioned in the General Congregation 34 of Jesuits, lay ministry is “a grace of our time and a hope for the future.”<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Father’s interventions orient reflection on the ministries towards the future while at the same time deepening the reflection already begun by Pope Paul VI with the *Motu Proprio Ministeria Quaedam*, issued on 15 August 1972, which opened the windows for various lay ministries. The *Motu Proprio Antiquum Ministerium* is a short document, about 2500 words long, that calls for the establishment of lay catechists through stronger formation throughout the world. Just as lay ministers serve as lectors, cantors, and extraordinary ministers of holy communion to support the liturgical life of the Church, now the lay ministry of catechist will be recognized formally as a vital support to the evangelizing mission of the Church.

The Pope’s initiative may also be seen as the culmination of the Church’s pastoral concern for catechesis. As a result of this focus on catechetical renewal since the Vatican II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (“On Catechesis in Our Time”),<sup>4</sup> three Catechetical Directories over five decades (1971, 1997, 2020),<sup>5</sup> and numerous national, regional, and diocesan catechisms have been published. It is evident that the Pope elevates the ministry of a catechist by establishing a dedicated liturgical rite in *Antiquum ministerium* as he expresses his pastoral vision.

## 2 The Why of the Motu Proprio

One can already hear the array of questions lingering in the mind when one reads this Apostolic Letter of the Pope. Why should a ministry of catechist be established anew? Are there not many men and women who as catechists already toil diligently in parishes and schools to hand over the faith to others? Our initial reaction to the formal institution of the role of catechist might be to wonder and ask, “So what’s new? Isn’t the role of catechist been understood as a ministry of the Church since the first century?”

### 2.1 Vatican II Effect

Through Vatican II, the Catholic Church underwent a profound change in its understanding of itself. In its Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>6</sup> the council presented many profound and new aspects of the Church, such as Mystery, Body of Christ, Sacrament, Communion, and People of God. As a result of this new understanding of the Church, a new approach to the understanding of ministries within the Church is appropriate. As a result of this renewed understanding of the Church, the previous medieval hierarchical conception has been de-emphasized and the active participation of all members has been emphasized. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Decree on Lay Apostolate, the Church strongly emphasizes the role of lay

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Rodrigues, Edwin*, Lay-Clergy Collaboration. A Call for a Course Correction, in: *Vidyajyoti* 86/11 (2022) 806.

<sup>4</sup> *John Paul II*, Apostolic Exhortation: *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), in: *AAS* 71 (1979) 1277-1340.

<sup>5</sup> (1) General Catechetical Directory of 1971 was published in an effort to systematize the teachings of the Vatican II for catechesis. (2) General Directory for Catechesis of 1997 was prepared in response to the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was released in 1992. These two directories were released by Congregation for the Clergy. (3) Directory for Catechesis of 2020, by Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, was released in response to the New Evangelization, disaffiliation, globalization, digital culture.

<sup>6</sup> *Vatican Council II*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), in: *AAS* 57 (1965) 5-75; *Flannery, Austin* (ed.), *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Vol. 1), Mumbai 2010, 320-385.

people in the Church's mission and they are considered an indispensable part of that mission (AA 1). Lay people are now to function in collaboration with priests. As a result of Vatican II, all baptized persons are expected to use their God-given gifts in order to edify the Church. The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.<sup>7</sup>

The Church's Code of Canon Law defined the laity only by exclusion: a lay person is a Catholic who is not a member of the clergy.<sup>8</sup> However, Vatican II affirms strongly that the laity are the Church, co-responsible with bishops, priests, and religious for Christ's mission on earth.<sup>9</sup> Reading the "signs of the times" in the 1960s, the widening gap between the modern world and the message of the Gospel, necessitated the empowerment of the laity to bring the Gospel in the marketplace.

## 2.2 Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region

The possibility of further developing ministries was also discussed during the Synod on the Amazon (6 - 27 October 2019). Subsequently, Pope Francis wrote two Apostolic Letters addressing the situation: (i) *Spiritus Domini*,<sup>10</sup> published on 10 January 2021, allowed women to participate in the Lectorate and Acolytate ministries; (ii) *Antiquum Ministerium*, published on 10 May 2021, instituted the ministry of Catechist. These two interventions are made possible because of the spirit of Vatican II that had inspired Pope Paul VI.

As part of Amazonian features, a Church must have mature lay leaders with authority and familiarity with the languages, cultures, spiritual experience, and communal way of life in the different places, as well as being open to the variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows upon everyone. For wherever there is a particular need, he has already poured out the charisms that can meet it. The Church must therefore trust in and allow the growth of an ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay. It is necessary that the laity participate vigorously, broadly, and actively in the Church's presence in the Amazon region due to the challenges it faces.<sup>11</sup>

In his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020) that followed the 2019 Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis recalled the "strong and generous women who, prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, CIC 1983 envisages lay people as catechists who collaborate with the teaching office of their priests and bishops (cf. Can. 776)<sup>13</sup> and as significant aids in missionary work (cf. Can. 785 §1), which in certain areas includes lay preaching, teaching, and leading liturgical worship.

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<sup>7</sup> *Vatican Council II*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 837-864.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also *Vatican Council II*, *Lumen Gentium* (note 6), no. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 30 and Chapter 2: The People of God which refers to all.

<sup>10</sup> *Francis*, *Motu Proprio: Spiritus Domini* (10 January 2021), in: *Communicationes* 53 (2021) 66-67.

<sup>11</sup> *Francis*, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020), no. 94, at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html) (accessed on 10.05.2022).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Can. 776: "By virtue of his office, the parish priest is bound to ensure the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children. To this end, he is to avail himself of the help of clerics attached to the parish, as well as of members of institutes of consecrated life and of societies of apostolic life, being mindful of the character of each institute; and the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, especially catechists. All of these, unless they are lawfully impeded, are not to refuse to give their labours willingly."

### 2.3 Motu Proprio Ministeria Quaedam

While men and women often do undertake the ministries of lector and acolyte during Holy Mass, few are stably instituted by liturgical rite (cf. Can. 230 and Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini*). The history of such officially instituted ministries traces back to the “minor orders,” those of subdeacon, acolyte, lector, exorcist, and porter.<sup>14</sup> They were distinguished from the major orders of bishop, priest, and deacon. On 15 August 1972, with the Motu Proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*,<sup>15</sup> Pope Paul VI abolished the minor orders, however reserving two of them, namely acolyte and lector as “ministries” that could be taken up by laity. While the Pope has stressed the universal validity of the roles of acolyte and lector in *Ministeria Quaedam*, he has also suggested that episcopal conferences may establish other ministries appropriate to their areas of jurisdiction. To date, the institutionalization of this role, which Pope Paul VI had already envisioned in 1972, has not been widely followed within the Church. Pope Francis makes reference to this point in no. 7 of *Antiquum Ministerium*. Almost fifty years later, the current Pope wishes to expressly invite the bishops to make this instituted ministry more effective. Ultimately, Pope Francis’ *Antiquum Ministerium* adds to these two (lector and acolyte) the “ministry of catechist,” a ministry a man or woman would hold stably (not temporarily), instituted/installed by a prescribed liturgical rite.

### 2.4 The Pressing Priority

The Church in the West has experienced a steady decline in its membership. There has been a sharp decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life as well as an exodus from the Church of many who no longer have any formal religious affiliation. While Christianity is currently the predominant religion in Latin America, Europe, Canada, and the United States, it is steadily declining in many of these areas, especially in Western Europe, North America, and some countries of Oceania. Anyone who is serving in the Church today knows that the crisis is real, tangible, and ongoing. The crisis is multifaceted but it stems ultimately from a crisis of faith that has affected every dimension of ecclesial life, perhaps especially the spectrum of catechesis. In *Antiquum Ministerium*, Pope Francis acknowledges this decline referring to *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church. He states, “In our days, when there are so few clerics to evangelize such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of catechist is of the highest importance.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the issuing of the *Antiquum Ministerium* is the continuation of a long line of catechetical works following the close of the Council addressing the need for authentic witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a secular and post-Christian age.

### 2.5 Baptismal Call

The vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. Confirmation strengthens this bond. Through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, they participate in the *tria munera*, i.e., priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry of Christ.<sup>17</sup> According to can. 747 §1, the deposit of faith is entrusted to all and all have the task to keep it inviolate and faithfully

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<sup>14</sup> Up to the tenth century, these were truly functional, lifetime offices in the Church, but they gradually lost their function and became mere steps leading to the priesthood. By the twelfth century, subdeacon was recognized as a major order.

<sup>15</sup> Paul VI, Motu Proprio: *Ministeria Quaedam* (15 August 1972), in: AAS 64 (1972) 529-534.

<sup>16</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 4; *Vatican Council II*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church: *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 947-990, no. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Vatican Council II*, *Lumen Gentium* (note 6), nos. 31, 37.

proclaim and expound it, catechesis is a way of life for all who have been baptised and confirmed.<sup>18</sup> The need to recognize lay men and women who feel called by virtue of their baptism to cooperate in catechesis is essential in the context of evangelisation in today's world.

Highlighted above all is the fact that it is a lay ministry that has as a foundation the common condition of being baptized and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism and is essentially different from the Ordained Ministry received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It also points out that catechists, in virtue of Baptism, are called to be co-responsible in the local Church for the proclamation and transmission of the faith, carrying out such a function in collaboration with the Ordained Ministers and under their guidance.<sup>19</sup> In his Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists, Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Congregation (now Dicastery) for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments prescribes that "the exercise of this lay ministry fully expresses the consequences of being baptised and, in the particular situation of the lack of a stable presence of ordained ministers, it is a participation in their pastoral action."<sup>20</sup>

### 3 Division of the *Motu Proprio Antiquum Ministerium*

*Antiquum ministerium* is a short document consisting of only 11 numbers. It can be divided into three parts on the basis of its content.

- i) The initial part (nos. 1-3) portrays how the lay ministries, the ministry of catechist in particular, have been fundamental in the history of the Church, ranging from the epoch of the early Church until today.
- ii) The central part (nos. 4-8a) traces the physiognomy of the figure of the catechist and the importance of ministerial dynamics for the encounter with contemporary culture, drawing abundantly on the documents of the magisterium from Vatican II.
- iii) The final part (nos. 8b-11) discusses the establishment of this ministry and the steps required for the institution to become effectively operative.

## 4 The Salient Spirit Pervading *Antiquum Ministerium*

### 4.1 Discipleship of Every Catechist

The mission of catechists is to present Christ to others. They must be captivated by Christ in order to accomplish this effectively. Obviously, a key aspect of the document is the role of discipleship and being a faith-filled witness. Jesus says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully taught, will be like his teacher" (Lk 6:40). Catechesis is experiencing a crisis due to the absence of authentic disciples. The great commission mentions first to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). In many ways, this directive has simply been overlooked.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in: Tobin, Joseph, The Diocesan Bishop as Catechist, in: *Studia Canonica* 18 (1984) 365-414, 412.

<sup>19</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences On the Rite of Institution of Catechist (13 December 2021) (henceforth: On the Rite of Institution of Catechist), at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/13/211213f.html> (accessed on 10.05.2022), no. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 12.



Although we may have recruited lay people to assist in various parish ministries, we have not always adequately formed them as disciples. Discipleship and catechesis are intrinsically linked, so much so that the spread of the faith is impossible without those who conform their lives completely to Christ. It is advisable for the catechist to consider his/her position as a disciple of Jesus to be his/her first achievement.

Disciples of Christ beget other disciples and are channels of the Holy Spirit, who is the principal agent of conversion and evangelization. *Antiquum Ministerium* presupposes the foundation of discipleship for the institution of the Ministry of Catechist to be built upon. If this is not accomplished, catechesis will become merely a means of transmitting information rather than an opportunity to witness and teach about Christ. Catechists must first be disciples of Jesus in order to be effective in their mission. "Every catechist should be able to apply to [her/]himself the mysterious words of Jesus 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me'" (CCC, no. 427).

## 4.2 The Vocation of the Catechist

A noticeable emphasis of *Antiquum Ministerium* is the use of the term "vocation" in reference to catechists.<sup>21</sup> In establishing a lay ministry of catechist, Pope Francis recognizes that the Church needs to be more intentional in forming and deploying lay catechists to build up the body of Christ. The laity who recognize a calling to serve in this capacity must also be discerned, assisted, and supported by her. The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize. It is the Lord Jesus who invites both men and women to follow him, as teacher and formator of disciples, in a special way. This personal call of Jesus Christ and its relationship to him are the true moving forces of catechetical activity.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of catechesis as a *vocation* for the lay faithful is not a new or novel idea. As a matter of fact, it has its roots in our baptism as well as St. Paul's doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. "The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, the voice of the Holy Spirit."<sup>23</sup> By virtue of the sacramental power of baptism and the growing efficacy of the other sacraments, the catechist is born within the Church. A culmination of this process of growth is the ecclesial call.

The Church exists to evangelize. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI raises an interesting question, "At every new phase of human history, the Church, constantly gripped by the desire to evangelize, has one preoccupation: whom to send to proclaim the mystery of Christ?"<sup>24</sup> The discernment of catechists for the work of labour in the Lord's vineyard is of crucial importance. From the outset of her mission for the salvation of souls, the Church has always had a missionary character. The Church does not exist to remain dormant, but to proclaim the good news with passion, vigour, and conviction. To accomplish this task, it needs well-formed disciples to answer the call to be catechists. To underscore the vocational aspect of the catechist, Pope Francis takes inspiration from *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31 and states: "In their daily life, interwoven with family and social relationships, the laity come to realize that they 'are

<sup>21</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 8; *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist* (note 19), no. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Congregation for the Clergy*, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Vatican City 1997, 231.

<sup>23</sup> *Conference of Catholic Bishops of India*, *National Catechetical Directory*, Bangalore, 228.

<sup>24</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), in: AAS 68 (1976) 5-76, no. 22.

given a special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become salt of the earth."<sup>25</sup>

It is obvious that the Church considers the work of catechesis not as a job but as a vocation. Vocation is a gift given to a member of the Church by the Holy Spirit to be used for the building-up of the Church. The life of a catechist must be filled with gratitude to God for the gift he/she has been given.

### 4.3 Eligible for the Institution of Ministry of Catechist

Pope Francis' letter stipulates that lay persons called to be instituted in the ministry of catechist should have "deep faith and human maturity," and should be "active participants in the life of the Christian community, and capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion."<sup>26</sup> Bishops' conferences will be responsible for deciding "the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission" to the new ministry.<sup>27</sup> Prior experience in catechesis is also a prerequisite.<sup>28</sup> It is obvious that not everyone who is a catechist today will have access to the ministry of Catechist.

A key consideration is a vocational dimension, which implies a willingness to serve the Church where the bishop considers it to be most beneficial. Generally, ministries are not conferred for personal gain, but to serve the local Church as deemed necessary by the bishop. A diocesan Bishop is responsible for discerning the call to the ministry of catechists by assessing the community's needs and the abilities of the candidates. Men and women who have received the sacraments of Christian initiation and have presented a freely written and signed petition to the diocesan Bishop may be admitted as candidates.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.4 The Formation of Catechists

Although the Church has opened the doors for more involvement of the laity in ministry since the Second Vatican Council, in many cases it has not provided the necessary formation for them to fulfill this calling. Many of our lay catechists have not been evangelized and catechized themselves, and lack theological training, which makes them unsuitable to carry out this important ministry. The Instituting of the ministry of catechist must be accompanied by a strong catechist formation. No. 14 of *Christus Dominus* (CD) as well as Cann. 231 and 780 prescribe the need for the formation of those who are pledged to special service of the Church. They have the duty to acquire a fitting formation proper to their role in the Church.

As stated in *Antiquum Ministerium*, those called to the instituted ministry of Catechist must receive appropriate biblical, theological, pastoral, and pedagogical formation.<sup>30</sup> This need for formation is reiterated in the Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences regarding

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<sup>25</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8; *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist* (note 19), nos. 10, 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist* (note 19), no. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 8.



the Institution of Catechists.<sup>31</sup> The summit and center of the catechetical formation lie in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message. Doctrinal integrity is of utmost importance as well as fidelity to the Magisterium, without which a Ministry of Catechist will not be effective.

You cannot give what you do not have (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). In order to participate in the economy of salvation as a catechist, one must first be converted and well-formed, answering the call to teach and receiving his Word with humility. The Pope writes:

Catechists are called first to be expert in the pastoral service of transmitting the faith as it develops through its different stages from the initial proclamation of the *kerygma* to the instruction that presents our new life in Christ and prepares for the sacraments of Christian initiation, and then to the ongoing formation that can allow each person to give an accounting of the hope within them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).<sup>32</sup>

The Pope prescribes that the Bishops' conferences render effective the ministry of catechumens, establishing the necessary formation process and the normative criteria for admission. Moreover, they should devise the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise in conformity with the content of this Apostolic Letter.<sup>33</sup> The letter states that the task of the Episcopal Conferences is to clarify the profile, description, role, and the most coherent ways to exercise the ministry of Catechists in the territory of their competence, in line with what is indicated in *Antiquum Ministerium*.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4.5 Secular Character of the Lay Catechists

Pope Francis reiterates the distinctly secular character of lay ministries. He establishes the lay ministry of catechist, intended to respond to an urgent need for the evangelisation of the modern world, and undertaken in a 'secular' manner, avoiding clericalization.<sup>35</sup> Receiving the lay ministry of catechist will emphasize the missionary commitment proper to every baptised person. It needs to be fulfilled in a secular manner without falling into any expression of clericalization.

#### 4.6 In Cooperation with the Hierarchy

Pope Francis advocates a participatory Church, where clergy and laity work hand in hand. This newly instituted ministry of catechists serves a particular church according to its needs. Since the instituted ministry of catechists will be installed in the local church according to pastoral needs, therefore according to *Antiquum Ministerium*, the instituted ministry of catechist is called to work always in cooperation with the Hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> Citing from *Lumen Gentium*, Pope Francis states: "the laity can be called in different ways to more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy, like those men and women who helped the apostle St. Paul in the Gospel, working hard in the Lord."<sup>37</sup> Local Ordinaries establish the ministry of catechist based on pastoral

<sup>31</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, On the Rite of Institution of Catechist (note 19), nos. 13, 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, On the Rite of Institution of Catechist (note 19), no. 13; cf. *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 7; cf. *Vatican Council II*, *Lumen Gentium* (note 6), nos. 31, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Vatican Council II*, *Lumen Gentium* (note 6), no. 33, cited in: *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 6.

needs. Those who have been instituted as lay ministers of catechesis must be “faithful co-workers of priests and deacons, available to exercise their ministry wherever it may be necessary, and motivated by true apostolic enthusiasm.”<sup>38</sup>

This is what can. 517 § 2 of CIC 1983 affirms when it provides for the possibility of entrusting to a non-ordained person a share in the exercise of pastoral care in a parish, always under the moderation of a priest. It is necessary, therefore, to form the community so that it does not see the catechist as a substitute for the priest or deacon, but as a member of the lay faithful who lives his/her baptism “in fruitful collaboration and shared responsibility with the ordained ministers, so that their pastoral care may reach everyone.”<sup>39</sup> Can. 759 states that lay people can also be called upon to cooperate with bishops and priests in the exercise of the ministry of the word.

## 5 Stably Instituted Lay Ministry

### 5.1 Stable

The pertinent distinction seems to be that the instituted catechist must be stable in the catechetical ministry. The ministry is stable, meaning it lasts throughout a person’s entire lifetime, regardless of whether the individual is actively engaged in the activity throughout that time. The catechist ministry is a “stable form of service rendered to the local Church in accordance with pastoral needs identified by the local Ordinary.”<sup>40</sup> The stability of the ministry of catechist is analogous to that of the other instituted ministries. This definition of stability, as well as expressing the fact that it is a stable ministry in the Church, also affirms that laypersons who possess the necessary age and qualifications may be admitted (in the same manner as lectors and acolytes) to the ministry of catechist. It occurs through the rite of the institution, which should not be repeated. Nevertheless, the exercise of the ministry can and must be regulated by the individual Episcopal Conferences in terms of duration, content and modalities, always in accordance with pastoral requirements.<sup>41</sup>

### 5.2 What is the Instituted Ministry of Catechist?

An instituted ministry is a type of formal, vocational service within the Catholic Church. It can be either lay, such as lector or acolyte, or ordained. The newly instituted ministry of catechist is for lay people who have a particular call to serve the Catholic Church as a teacher of the faith. The word “instituted” implies stability.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), no. 8.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), in: AAS 81 (1989) 393-521, no. 15, cited in: *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist*, no. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), cited in: *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist* (note 19), no. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 1), cited in: *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *On the Rite of Institution of Catechist* (note 19), no. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ambrose, *Merlin Rengith*, *The Amendment in Can. 230 §1. Its Juridical Implications for Women as Lector and Acolyte*, in: *Indian Theological Studies* 58 (2021) 95-119, 113.

### 5.3 Celebration of the Rite of Institution

By the liturgical rite, *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum*<sup>43</sup> promulgated by the Apostolic See, the diocesan Bishop, or a priest delegated by him, confers the ministry of catechist. The detailed rite of institution is given in the document. While conferring the ministry, the celebrant pronounces the following form: "Take this token of our faith Christ's chair of truth and charity and his life, manners and word announcing him." The candidates' response is: "Amen."<sup>44</sup>

This ministry may be conferred during Mass or during a celebration of the Word of God. Following the liturgy of the Word the structure of the rite envisages an exhortation wherein the bishop based on the adaptation of the episcopal conferences gives a sort of homily emphasizing the role and the description of the ministry of the catechist. Therefore, the Rite will follow a precise format, beginning with an exhortation to the candidate, followed by an invitation to prayer, a blessing that they receive while kneeling, and the handing over of the crucifix as a sign of their commission.<sup>45</sup> There is one moment when everyone is invited to share in silent prayer.<sup>46</sup>

## 6 Who Should Not Be Instituted as Catechist?

According to the Letter of the dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists on 13 December 2021, the following should not be instituted as catechists:<sup>47</sup>

- i) The candidates who have already initiated their journey towards Holy Orders, particularly candidates to the diaconate and the priesthood should not be instituted, regardless of their belonging to Institutes whose charism is catechesis. As it was discussed before, the ministry of Catechist which *Antiquum Ministerium* envisages is a lay ministry and is essentially different and distinct from the ordained ministry conferred on with the Sacrament of Orders.
- ii) Men and women religious, unless they act as leaders of a parish community or coordinators of catechetical activity, cannot become catechists. The baptized, however, can, like all baptized individuals, exercise their ministries "de facto" in the absence of instituted ministers because their baptism is also the basis of their religious profession. Thus, they can exercise due to their baptismal vocation.
- iii) Those who carry out a role exclusively for the members of an ecclesial movement: in this case, this role is assigned by the leaders of the movement and not by the diocesan Bishop on the basis of his discernment in relation to pastoral needs. Therefore, those who act exclusively for the

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<sup>43</sup> After formally instituting the ministry of the catechist with the *Motu Proprio Antiquum Ministerium*, Pope Francis has approved and published an *Editio typica* (typical edition) that introduces a specific Rite of Institution of Catechists. This is the base text that will then be translated and adapted by the various Bishops' Conferences around the world. *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum* (13 December 2021), in: *Communicationes* 53 (2021) 499-505. This came into effect on 1 January 2022. On the Vatican website, both the Latin and English texts are available. Chapter I explains the rite of instituting the catechist within the holy mass and Chapter II enumerates the rite of instituting the catechist during the Word of God Celebration. Chapter III contains various appropriate biblical readings from the Old and New Testaments which could be made use of during the rite of the institution.

<sup>44</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum* (note 43), no. 9. The Latin form is as follows: "Accipe hoc fidei nostrae signum, cáthedram veritátis Christi, eúmque vita, móribus et verbo annúntia."

<sup>45</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, On the Rite of Institution of Catechist (note 19), nos. 16-18.

<sup>46</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum* (note 43), no. 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, On the Rite of Institution of Catechist (note 19), no. 8.

members of an ecclesial movement cannot become catechist. This makes sense because a plethora of volunteer catechists serve in the initiation of children and adults, and not all of them continue in this as a stable ministry.

iv) Teachers of the Catholic religion in schools unless they also perform other ecclesiastical duties for the parish or diocese.

Moreover, since this institution of lay ministry has a strong vocational value, which requires due discernment on the part of the bishop and its content being defined by each one of the Episcopal Conferences, not all those called catechists, carrying out a service of catechesis or pastoral collaboration, need to be instituted. In regard to the companions of the initiation of children and adults, they don't need to be instituted in the specific ministry, but they must receive a public ecclesial mandate at the beginning of every catechetical year.

## 7 Conclusion

For the nurturing and constant growth of people of God, Christ the Lord instituted in the Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the Church.<sup>48</sup> The prophetic words of Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* come true through this Motu Proprio *Antiquum Ministerium* which envisages the stably instituted lay ministry of catechists. Pope Paul VI stated: "We cannot but experience a great inner joy when we see so many pastors, religious and lay people, fired with their mission to evangelize, seeking ever more suitable ways of proclaiming the Gospel effectively."<sup>49</sup> It is certain that, side by side with the ordained ministries, the Church recognizes the place of non-ordained ministries which are able to offer important service to the Church.

The Church's mission of salvation in the world is accomplished not only by the ministers in virtue of the sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful. Indeed, because of their baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, instituted stable ministry of the lay catechist is a concrete expression of the long-awaited ecclesial provision to make a forum for the lay people to render their ministry in the Church's mission of salvation. It remains to be seen if it remains only a theme to be bandied about in our formal and solemn meetings and dining tables, or if concrete initiatives are taken to promote this instituted lay ministry. The Church needs to be more intentional in forming and sending lay Catechists to build up the body of Christ.

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<sup>48</sup> Paul VI, Motu Proprio: Ad Pascendum (15 august 1972), in: AAS 64 (1972) 534.

<sup>49</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (note 24), no. 73.

<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (note 39), no. 23.