

## Mission and Ministry of Priesthood

*(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)*

### Opening Prayer

O God, You consecrated Your only-begotten Son, supreme and eternal Priest, for the glory of Your majesty, and the salvation of Humanity: grant that those whom He has chosen to be priests will be faithful in fulfilling the ministry they have received. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

### Scripture

“Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.... No one takes this honor upon himself, but only when called by God.”

*(Hebrews 5: 1-4)*

*(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)*

### Introduction

A priest is a mediator presenting an offering of love and surrender to God in the name of the community of believers. At the same time, the priest is chosen by God to communicate the Lord's gifts of grace, love and forgiveness to the community. Priesthood has experienced significant changes throughout history. Current expectations of the priesthood are so diverse that false hopes are often placed on them by the community in which they serve. This program provides the opportunity to communicate the varied responsibilities and roles of the priest.

*(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)*

### Documentary Tradition

The priesthood draws its meaning from the life of Jesus, and from this foundation the Church views itself as the Body of Christ sharing in the very nature and activities of Christ. This includes sharing in his priesthood, which expresses what God has done for all humanity.

Over the course of history, the Church developed differences between the common and ministerial priesthood. This is most notably seen in the celebration of the Eucharist. Here the ordained priest acts in the person of Christ and offers the sacrifice of the Mass to God in the name of the people, and the people join with the priest in that offering. Through the sacrament of ordination priests are empowered to act in the person of Christ, which unites them in a sacramental bond with one another as they participate in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

The nature of priesthood has gained a considerable amount of attention since the Second Vatican Council. The Church is struggling to understand the priesthood of the faithful and to generate a deeper understanding of the unique call to serve in the ordained priesthood. While there are references to priesthood in the old and new testaments and church history the following quotes express our contemporary understanding of this special call from God.

“The priest has a special relationship with Jesus Christ. “By the Sacrament of Orders priests are configured to Christ, the Priest, so that as minister of the head and coworkers of the episcopal order they can build up and establish His Whole Body which is Christ.” *(Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, #12)*

“The basic elements of the priestly ministry are: a) to proclaim the Gospel; b) to preside over the sacraments and liturgy, and c) to build up and serve the community which in turn serves the world.”  
(*The Report of the Bishops Ad Hoc Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry*, p. 25)

“The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ. While being ‘ordered one to another,’ they differ essentially.... While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the faithful by the unfolding of baptismal grace — a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason, it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1547)

*(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the main conclusion that we can draw from the doctrine of the common priesthood?
2. How will this challenge the priesthood in the 21st century?
3. As Serrans how can we help the common and ordained priesthood minister to each other?

*(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)*

### **Closing Reflection**

In light of shifting perceptions of ministry within the Church, the distinctiveness of the priest has been blurred. Specifically, the Sacrament of Orders is considered to be a sacrament of service to the community. Reception of this sacrament gives those who receive it a particular role in the building up of the Church by engaging in the threefold ministry of preaching, celebrating the Eucharist and providing guidance for the faithful.

### **Bibliography**

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*The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed. Piscataway: Association Press, 1966.