

COLLABORATION IN LITURGICAL MINISTRIES: A SYNODAL CHURCH

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***Abstract:** The issue of participation, communion and the general sharing of all the baptized in the mission of the Church is central to the discussions going on in preparation for the “Synod on Synodality.” At the heart of this discussion, therefore, is the collaboration and sharing which should be at the heart of liturgical ministry. This paper contributes to the discussion by studying the origins of ministries in Christ and the early Church. It posits that collaboration is at the heart of the exercise of liturgical ministries and that the variance in the practice of this collaboration within the various churches of the Universal Church has a lot to do with the cultural experiences over time of the various churches. With this established, the example from Minna diocese in Nigeria demonstrates that collaboration in ministry, despite the challenges that abound in its practice, is not something that belongs to the ancient Church but one that is being realized in the diocese of Minna Nigeria, and thus, a possible example for other churches in the spirit of synodality.*

Key Words: Clericalism; Collaboration; Liturgical Ministries; Minna Diocese; Synodality.

Introduction

The question of the exercise of priestly ministry and collaboration between the various ministries and charisms of the Church has been fundamental to the calling of the present Synod on Synodality by Pope Francis. Having seen the direction of the so-called ‘Der Synodalen Weg’ of the German Church, where it seems there is a movement from ‘Clericalism’ to ‘Lay domination’ rather than collaboration, the Pope has called for this Synod so that the whole Church listens to one another. Since the preparatory document focuses on ‘listening to one another,’ this paper seeks to present collaboration in liturgical ministry in Minna Diocese Nigeria, as a case study for the whole of the dioceses of the northern ecclesiastical provinces of Kaduna, Abuja and Jos. To do this, we shall first analyse the source of ministry and its driving force from Scripture and

the Fathers and then link it with the Nigerian experience in the Diocese of Minna.

The Origin and Basis of Christian Ministry

The origin and basis of Christian ministry have always been accepted by theologians as the ministry of Christ himself.¹ This was reiterated by the Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963 which stated that

All ministry in the Church is rooted in the ministry of Christ himself, who glorifies the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ stirs up, calls, strengthens and sends those whom he has chosen for the whole ministry of his Church or for the special ministry, making them the instruments of his message and of his work.²

The above statement explains the ministry of Christ as his quest to glorify the Father; to do the will of the Father. He glorifies the Father in his *act of submission* to the Eternal Father—an act of will. Jean Corbon associates this act of will with the *kenosis* described by Paul in Phil. 2:7.³ Fundamental to any ministry, therefore, is the humility and disposition to do the will of the Father — the disposition to do the will of someone else (or the community's) and not the personal one.

Basis of Ministry and Collaboration in Scripture

Based on this ministry of Christ as the model of all ministries, ministries and collaboration evolved and developed, and were established in the early Church. The character of this ministry of Christ is founded on his ministry as a prophet (Cf. Matt. 21:11, 46; Luke 17:16; John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40),⁴ but also on his ministry as king and priest since throughout the NT Jesus is also presented as recapitulat-

¹ Cf. Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to the Word and Sacrament: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 36.

² Cooke, *Ministry*, 51.

³ Jean Corbon, *The Wellsprings of Worship*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1988), 39.

⁴ According to Audet, at the time of Christ only the ministry of prophet remained among the three ministries of priest, prophet and king that facilitated mediation between YHWH and Israel. Cf. Jean Paul Audet, *Structures of Christian Priesthood* (New York: MacMillan 1968), 77-79.

ing the roles of king and priest in his ministry and service.⁵ Eventually, the ministries of prophet, teacher, elder, and priest evolved in the early Church.

The most classical example of the relationship between specified ministries and the ministry of the community is to be seen in the teaching of Paul in 1 Cor. 12 and 13. Fitzmyer, for example, has extended it to 14:40.⁶ Here Paul demonstrates the continuity and discontinuity between the charismatic ministries and the institutional ones since he talks, not only of *ta pneumatika* (spiritual gifts) but also *diakoniai* (ministry/service).⁷ The conclusion of Paul in this pericope is that the *pneumatika* (spiritual gifts) or *diakoniai* (ministries) are essentially “given” (not acquired), to work hand-in-hand for the benefit of the whole of the body of Christ and according to the will of Christ. Although it is clear that the list given by Paul here is given in a hierarchy of importance (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28), the focus is that all are needed for the body to function well.⁸

Therefore, the NT presents a two-structured hierarchy: bishops (episkopoi) and deacons (diakonoi), and a college of elders called the presbyters (presbyteroi; cf. Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1, 5).⁹ Paul explicitly mentions the bishop-deacon structure in Phil 1:1 and it seems that each had his specific function and performed it in collaboration with the other—the bishop to oversee the affairs of the community in matters of organization, doctrine and teaching, and the deacon as an assistant of the bishop in matters of the organization only (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9). Moreover, all through the Acts of the Apostles, we see everyone involved, each in his/her specific way in the life and activities of the Church. Teamwork was essentially the spirit and as such, we see actors like Luke, John Mark, and Titus, and women like Priscilla and Aquilla, all performing their

⁵ See Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1958). Cf. John 6:15; 18:36; 19:19; Heb. 1:3-4 and 1 Tim. 6:15.

⁶ Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, 32; Yale: Yale University Press 2008), 454.

⁷ Collins demonstrates this continuity in discontinuity by interpreting the use of the image of the body by Paul as a sign that it is not just the spiritual gifts that matter but the various roles allotted to various people in the community. Cf. Raymond F. Collins et al., *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina Series; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1999), 458-460.

⁸ See Collins et al., *First Corinthians*, 468.

⁹ Whether these were of the same level in hierarchy as the *episkopoi* is a matter of dispute among scholars. See Cooke, *Ministry*, 40-46.

various roles without questioning the superiority or inferiority of the other.

Ministry and Collaboration in the Apostolic and Patristic Times

In the Apostolic and Patristic eras, what started within the NT period in the form of part-time ministries (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1-18; 2 Cor. 11:7) grew into a more formidable way of approaching ministry as the group of ministers called the clergy emerged, who now undertook ministry in a full-time form principally because of the changing size of Christianity and the complexity of its emerging community life.¹⁰ Cooke seems to consistently insist that the emergence of the *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* as ‘priests’ in this period has to do with a return to categories of the OT.¹¹ On the contrary, the emergence of this group of ministers seems more to have been predicated on the fact that the Eucharist, which was the central identity of the Christian community, in its continuous revelation, came to be identified, not only as a ‘ritual meal’ but also as a ‘ritual sacrifice’ in consonance with the intention of Christ himself.¹² As such, those who presided at the Eucharist were also identified with Christ who was the High Priest.

In any case, ministry evolved organically according to the needs of the community in faithfulness to the initial fundamental principle in Christ: service to the people. It is with such a principle in mind that Augustine wrote, “...Nor are we bishops for our own sake, but for the sake of those to whom we minister the word and the sacrament of the Lord.”¹³ Where ministry was exercised as a call in obedience to Christ, and to the will of the Father, collaboration was easy. Examples abound of the collaboration between the various levels of the Church. In the Letter of Ignatius to Polycarp, for example, we see the collaborative ministry of the clergy and the laity being demonstrated with the phrases, “Train together with one another, compete

¹⁰ Cooke, *Ministry*, 63.

¹¹ Cooke, *Ministry*, 79 and in several other places.

¹² Cf. Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 90. Also, Josef A. Jungmann, *Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976).

¹³ Augustine, “Contra Cresconium” 2:10, 12: PL 43, 474.

together, run together, suffer together, rest together, get up together, as God's managers, assistants and servants."¹⁴

Thus in the Apostolic Tradition, collaboration is demonstrated aptly with various functions being specified. There are clear indications in the letter of Ignatius to Polycarp of an all-inclusive Church, where everyone has a function: bishops (2:1-5), presbyters (7:1-5), deacons (9:1-2), confessors (9:1-5), widows (10:1-5), readers (11), virgins (12), and subdeacons (13). In 19:1, concerning the "Imposition of Hands on Catechumens," it is stated explicitly there that this could be done both by a cleric (*ekklesiastikos*) or a lay person (*laikos*), provided the person is the teacher.¹⁵ In the same document it is clear that although the bishop presides over most of the ceremonies, the liturgical ministry was shared. For the initiation ceremony, for example, the deacon (or deaconess) performed the pre-baptismal anointings; the presbyter baptizes while the bishop presides, administers the chrism and is chief celebrant at the Eucharistic celebration.¹⁶

A look at the *unde et memores* of the Roman Canon, which dates to the 6th century, the collaboration between clergy and laity in the offering of the Eucharist is emphasised. The statement, *nos servi tui et plebs tua sancta* ("we your servants and your holy people") serves to demonstrate that the offerings are a joint offering, not just of the priest but also of the people.¹⁷

The Decline of Ministry and Collaboration in the Western Church

Starting from the Middle Ages, what used to be ministry exercised for the sake of shepherding the people and continuing in the Tradition of the apostles,¹⁸ gradually declined. This has been identified as the beginning of 'clericalism,' which evolved out of the historical and societal developments in the western church, which include:

¹⁴ Ignatius, "Letter to Polycarp," 6:1, in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translation*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2007), 267.

¹⁵ See Paul F. Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 102. All citations of the Apostolic Tradition are from this text.

¹⁶ Bradshaw, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 112-135.

¹⁷ Josef A. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia: Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe*, 5th edition (Wien – Freiburg – Basel: Herder 1962), II: 277.

¹⁸ Cooke, *Ministry*, 76.

a) The influence of the Roman system of imperial patronage and civic ordines on the ecclesial understanding of church order; b) The emerging connection between clerical continence and ritual purity which gave rise to one influential theological account of priestly celibacy; c) A narrowing of a theology of the eucharist in the ninth century that focused on the transformation of the eucharistic elements to the exclusion of the transformation of the gathered eucharistic community; d) The consequent reduction of the theology of the ministerial priesthood to one focused on the priest's power to confect the eucharist to the relative neglect of the priest's pastoral leadership of a eucharistic community; e) The rise of the *cursus honorum*, the gradual reconfiguration of the plurality of ministries in the church into a hierarchically conceived ladder for ecclesiastical advancement and promotion.¹⁹

Furthermore, the notion of the *societas christiana* became a fixed mentality of medieval society where the church was 'married' to the state and the clergy became more and more a part of the officialdom of society.²⁰ You then had societal developments that exalted the clerical ministry in an institutionalized manner over others, and where becoming a cleric was institutionally and societally identifiable with having worldly governing powers. Thus, there occurred a gradual decline in collaboration between the clergy and laity in many areas from the 7th century onwards; in the area of teaching, preaching, and especially the active participation of the people in the celebration of liturgical ceremonies, especially the Eucharist.²¹

It is within such changes that the Reformation broke out. This is particularly important because often a treatment of the Reformation seems to obscure the cultural and societal background from which it emanated: the culture of Renaissance humanism with the emphasis

¹⁹ Adopted from Richard R. Gaillardetz, "A Church in Crisis," *Worship* 93 (2016): 207. A look at the presentation of the author of 'clericalism' seems to present it in such a way as if what happened at this time happened historically everywhere in what constitutes the western church today. African theologians must, however, begin to reject this categories because such developments as far as socio-cultural and historical development is concerned were limited to the European areas. The problems were not so much a 'Church' problem as they were a 'Western/European church' problem. The people of Nigeria to which the missionaries came later have no cultural memory of this phenomenon.

²⁰ The practice of the so called 'Fürstbischöfe' in the German speaking areas from around 1300 where bishops had 'official' worldly and ecclesiastical powers as nobles is a clear example of this. Cf. Hedwig Röckelein and Dietmar Schiersner, eds., *Weltliche Herrschaft in geistlicher Hand* (Berlin: De Gruyter Akademie Forschung, 2017).

²¹ See Cooke, *Ministry*, 274-280; 581-583.

of Erasmus on ‘man being the centre of all things;’ from the culture of the investiture debates and the great scandal of the 15th century where popes and bishops fought for this office; and above all from the culture of stark negative domination of the polity by clerics and the institutional church which gradually took hold of the society from around the 7th century onwards.²²

All these features do not directly constitute cultural or historical experiences for Africans. Christianity in Africa and, Nigeria in particular, was born mostly into secular states with pluralistic religious environments and a general culture saturated with religion.

This differentiates the history of Christianity and Catholicism in Africa from the history of Christianity and Catholicism in Europe and America. While we belong to the same Church, the immediate societal, cultural and ideological histories of these different churches have influenced them differently and led to different ways of looking at ministry and collaboration to the extent that what is often described as clericalism and problems of collaboration cannot be interpreted in the same terms.

Collaboration in Liturgical Ministry in Minna Diocese Nigeria

One thing that we could say with confidence when dealing with the Nigerian disposition to ministry is the fact that the consciousness of most ecclesial communities in the country is quite young. All the various developments that have been shielded above do not constitute a collective cultural memory for us—at least not experientially—since the church experience and ministry in Nigeria are relatively young. There is a certain extent to which most of what constitutes functional memory for the church in Nigeria, is largely based on the provisions of the Second Vatican Council, in which, most of the anomalies of European history which bothered on the exaggerated position of the clergy had already been addressed. Vatican II in various documents, therefore, emphasizes the sacramentality of the

²² Bishop Vincent Long van Nguyen has traced the beginning of this culture even as far back to shortly after Constantine. See, Vincent Long Van Nguyen, “Being a priest in an Unprecedented Time of Change,” Address to the National Council of Priests, Canberra, Australia, 11 September 2018 and to the National Assembly of Diocesan Priests, Christchurch, New Zealand, 13 September 2018; <https://parracatholic.org/address-to-priests-in-australia-and-new-zealand/> [Accessed April 12, 2022].

Church to the extent that every member of the church—the clergy, the religious and the laity—are *bona fide* participants in the evangelizing and pastoral mission of the church; though each according to how he/she has been given. Thus, “each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole church so that the whole and each of the parts is strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by a common effort to attain the fullness of unity.”²³ Moreover, as has been stated by Pope John Paul II, in the life of the Church, “It is hard to see how the Church could make her presence and action felt without the help of the laity.”²⁴

It is from the above that the ecclesiology of the Catholic Church in Nigeria has its inspiration. While one cannot claim that everything is perfect, to a large extent, one could say that there is harmony in the relationship between clergy and laity, especially concerning liturgical ministries.

Overview of Minna Diocese

Minna Diocese was erected as a Prefecture Apostolic on the 9th of November 1964 and was raised to a diocese in 1973. It covers an area of about 56,229 square kilometres.²⁵ Presently, there are 78 parishes and quasi-parishes, 32 chaplaincies and 4 Mass centres. The diocese has over 80 diocesan priests with 23 of them on either mission or studies in various places within Nigeria and the world at large, leaving 57 priests as the present workforce of the diocese.²⁶ The record we have from 2013 indicates that there were 373 outstations.²⁷

The Parish as the Centre of Liturgical Ministries

The parish functions as the centre of activity for the diocese. It is the pastoral unit. As it is with the nature of the parish, the whole spiritual life of Christians flows from the Mass as they place themselves on

²³ Vatican Council II, “*Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 21 November 1964, in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Mumbai: St. Pauls 2013), I: 320-397.

²⁴ Vatican Council II, “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity,” in *Vatican Council II*, ed. Flannery, II: 670.

²⁵ Cf. Catholic Diocese of Minna, “Diocesan Directory 2013,” 4.

²⁶ Catholic Diocese of Minna, “2021 Directory and Liturgical Calendar,” 14-17.

²⁷ Catholic Diocese of Minna, “Diocesan Directory 2013,” 3.

the Altar and offer themselves with Christ to the father,²⁸ for as SC 10 states, “the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s supper”.²⁹

A. The Role of the Parish Priest

The Parish Priest is entrusted with the pastoral and liturgical life of the parish. The following functions are “especially entrusted to him” (Cf. can 530): the administration of baptism, the administration of confirmation to those in danger of death, the administration of Viaticum and the anointing of the sick, the assistance at marriages and nuptial blessing, the performance of funeral rites, the blessing of the baptismal font at Easter time, leading processions outside the church, solemn blessings outside the church and the more solemn Eucharistic celebration on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation.³⁰

But he cannot carry out these functions on his own. In Minna Diocese, especially in the rural areas where there are many outstations, some parishes having as many as 50, the priest requires assistance to be able to organise the pastoral life of the parish centred around the Eucharist. The whole people of God are usually involved in this, with the integral participation of all; however, since the sense of sacrifice in the Traditional African Religions is still pervasive in the minds of the people—sacrifice which requires the headship of the priestly class and their expertise—the priests are not only regarded as heads of worship assemblies but as the real leaders in matters of worship.³¹ What we see here, therefore, seems to contradict the works of many authors in the past who have criticized the African church for its clericalism in the mode of what we have described

²⁸ Tim Cullinane, *Preparing for Priesthood, Spirituality for Seminarians* (Abuja: Pauline Publications Africa, 2015), 123.

²⁹ Vatican Council II, “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on the Liturgy,” December 4, 1963: AAS 56 (1964), 97-138 in *Documents on the Liturgy* (DOL 1; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 4-27.

³⁰ Roman Catholic Church, *The Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001), 96.

³¹ Cf. Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan: Longman 1970). Also John Onaiyekan, “The Priesthood in Owe Traditional Religion,” in *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, ed. E.A. Ade Adegbola (Nairobi - Kampala: Uzima Press - CPH, 1993), 26-54.

above from the western culture. The claim here is that this “clericalism” is “a residue of the missionary church.”³²

From the vantage point of the practice in Minna Diocese, however, this is different. Collaboration and mutual respect among those who exercise ministry has been the hallmark of the pastoral scheme. Already the Pastoral Plan of 1977 recognized the need for this collaboration and set up a machinery to facilitate such when it stated that if the church is to be planted and Christian communities are to grow, various ministries and ministers were needed and these ministers were to be chosen from the lay faithful and their vocations carefully fostered and nurtured.³³ At the time, certain roles were identified: the head Christian, prayer leader, the women’s leader, the leader of songs and the community Catechist.³⁴ Thus the Parish Priest has an array of Lay collaborators. Apart from the collaboration he enjoys with such groups as the Laity Council, the *Zumuntan Mata* (Women’s Organization), the CYON, and several other pious organizations, he has close collaborators in the liturgical life of the parish: the Catechists, the *Masu Waazi* (Association of Lay Catholic Evangelisers), the *Mawakan Hausa* (the Hausa choir) and the *Zumuntan Mata Katolika* (Catholic Women’s Organization). The Parish Priest serves as animator, coordinator and leader of all these pastoral-liturgical agents, delegating responsibilities as has been established by order.

B. Order of Delegation of Leadership in the Liturgical Assembly

There is a hierarchy of delegation of leadership in the liturgical assembly. The standard is to have the Eucharist celebrated in as many of the communities as possible on a Sunday. The Parish Priest would usually, on the strength of the provisions of the Apostolic Constitution, *Christus Dominus* of Pius XII, by which permission was grant-

³² Cf. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Benezet Bujo, “On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology: Reflections on the Synod,” in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, ed. Maura Browne (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), and Emmanuel Orobator, “Leadership and Ministry in the Church-as-Family,” *Studia Missionalia* 49 (2000): 295-313. All these authors—who are well respected—seem to suggest that the way the priestly ministry is exercised in African churches is oppressive and typified by ‘clericalism.’ The experience we are about to present shows that the discourse cannot be generalized.

³³ Samuel P. Gwimi, ed., *Catholic Diocese of Minna 1977 Pastoral Policy* (Minna: Diocesan Publications 2016), 16

³⁴ Gwimi, *Catholic Diocese*, 17.

ed to anticipate Sunday Masses in the evening of Saturday (AAS 45, 15-24), celebrate the Sunday Mass on Saturday evening so that those going to the outstations would have communion to take for the following day. Usually, the first person in the order of delegation here is the catechist, who celebrates Communion Service with the People in the outstations.

The next line of delegation is the *Masu Waazi* (Association of Lay Evangelizers). Usually, the outstations are grouped into zones to which a catechist is appointed for direct pastoral supervision. Each of these outstations, however, is led by a *Mai Waazi* (Evangelizer), those referred to as ‘Prayer Leader’ in the Pastoral Plan of 1977. They function as organizers and leaders of the morning and evening prayers in the outstations, as well as for rudimentary catechetical activities. In the absence of the priest and catechist, they lead the Sunday Service of the Word. If the catechist is around, the *Mai Waazi* automatically steps down and when the priest is around, the catechist also does not celebrate. This rule is taken for granted and observed without complaint from anyone.

Below is the organogram of the pastoral-liturgical delegation in the parish.

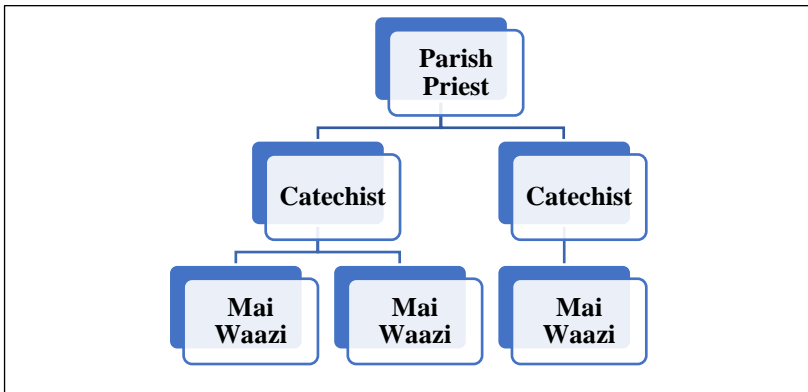


Fig 1. Organogram showing the order of delegating liturgical leadership

Apart from these, the *Zumuntan Mata* (Catholic Women's Organization) and the *Mawakan Hausa* (the Hausa choir) also perform liturgical ministries.

Mawakan Hausa (the Hausa choir): The Hausa choir is a group of young talented singers who have dedicated their time, efforts and talents to the singing and coordination of liturgical music in Minna diocese and indeed throughout all the northern provinces of Nigeria. They translate liturgical songs for all the seasons into Hausa language, they also compose liturgical songs and other Christian music in different local dialects of the people. They accompany their songs with musical instruments of all kinds, traditional and modern ones. Because they exercise "a genuine liturgical function" as has been designated by SC 29, it is customary for the choir to join in the procession on Sundays from the beginning of the Mass.

The *Zumuntan Mata Katolika* is the Fellowship of Catholic Women and they usually like to distinguish themselves from the Catholic Women's Organization (CWO) and the Christian Mothers. Apart from the fact that Hausa is the basic language of communication among this group, their organization resembles a socio-cultural faith preservation body. They are present in all communities, especially in the rural areas and their impact was recognized in the Pastoral Report in 1977 for the Nanati Parish, one of the oldest rural parishes in the diocese. It was stated that,

The women are more active than the men and I think the hope of the church here rests with the women. If the women are instructed and encouraged, they influence their children. Zumuntan Mata meetings in the parish are well attended and the women are keen to have instruction and courses. So I would see more work done with the women.³⁵

The members, apart from organizing themselves into this socio-cultural faith-based organization sing at liturgical ceremonies. They compose songs in Hausa and in the various dialects of the diocese which they sing at liturgical ceremonies. If the Hausa Choir takes care of the other parts of Mass, the *Zumuntan Mata* are specialists at singing the Offertory songs which they accompany with specially

³⁵ Minna Diocesis, "1977 Pastoral Report of Nanati Parish," Minna Diocesan Archives.

choreographed dances that fit the rhythm of the music.³⁶ Despite the high class of women in this group (Ambassadors, University Professors, etc) they perform this ministry in the most dedicated and docile manner and real collaboration with the Priests, the catechists and the *Masu Waazi*.

The Catechist: In May 2021, Pope Francis in the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum ministerium*, instituted the lay ministry of catechists.³⁷ However, long before this, the catechist for us in Nigeria, particularly in Minna diocese, has been viewed as very important in the Parish ministry of Evangelization. The Catechist as we have already indicated above, substitutes for the priest and he or she (there are two female Catechists in the Diocese) is, in effect, a link between the community and the universal Church. The catechist preaches and prays on Sundays in the absence of the priest; they preside at funerals; they are permitted to distribute Holy Communion in certain rare instances; they normally baptize persons in danger of death; they visit, counsel and settle minor disputes; they keep registers, look after the church fabric and collect church tax.³⁸ The catechist had always understood their role as being closer to the people for the sake of bringing the gospel and sacraments closer to them under the direction of the priest.

C. Other Ministers and their Participation

Other ministries are active within the parish. Deacons in Nigeria, also in Minna diocese, are usually transitory deacons; in other words, those ordained as a ministry on the road to becoming priests. Though the permanent diaconate was introduced into Nigeria in 1970, we know up till today only four permanent deacons have been ordained and served in Nigeria, all for the diocese of Lokoja.³⁹ As of 2019,

³⁶ See, Alice Aladi Jonah, "Women in Evangelization in Minna Diocese: The Past Twenty-Five Years," in *Jesus Mary I Trust in You: A Festschrift in Honour Most Rev. Dr. Martin Igwemezie Uzoukwu*, ed. Samuel Gwimi (Minna: Project Office 2021), 145-154.

³⁷ Francis, "'Antiquum ministerium,' Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio Instituting the Ministry of Catechist," May 10, 2021; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html

³⁸ Cf. Alyward Shorter, "The Catechist Research," *African Ecclesiastical Review* 12, no. 3 (1970), 196.

³⁹ "Catholic Diary and Church Directory" (Iperu-Remo: Ambassador Publications 1997), 222.

they are two as no others were added since 1976.⁴⁰ The diaconate is a ministry of its own right and has been held in high regard in the Church even from the time of the Apostles.⁴¹ Concerning the celebration of the Eucharist, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002 says that,

At Mass the deacon has his own part in proclaiming the Gospel, in preaching God's word from time to time, in announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful, in ministering to the priest, in preparing the altar and serving the celebration of the Sacrifice, in distributing the Eucharist to the faithful, especially under the species of wine, and sometimes in giving directions regarding the people's gestures and posture.⁴²

There is hardly anywhere in Nigeria where deacons would complain of being marginalized concerning the concessions that accrue to them as has been shown here to be given. Collaboration and harmony, therefore, are never in doubt.

Lectors and Acolytes are also groups of ministers who read and serve respectively. They know their functions, appreciate it and do their part in line with what has been allotted to them. Others are the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, the Church Wardens or Ministers of Hospitality and the Lay Readers, all of whom perform genuine liturgical functions and appreciate their roles as such. It is good to note that in some places in Minna Diocese the Church Wardens are no "small people"; some of them commissioners, some principals of secondary schools, and some professors, but they do these ministries as a part of their contribution to the ministry of the Church without showing any frustration or desire for more.

Evaluation of Collaboration

The following presentation has been targeted at tracing the basis for the exercise of ministry and evaluating this in the light of the practices in the Minna diocese. The reason for undertaking the study is also to underscore the quest of the synod on Communion, Participa-

⁴⁰ Cf. Catholic Hierarchy, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dlkja.html>. [Accessed April 18, 2022].

⁴¹ Cf. Paul VI, "Apostolic Letter *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*," June 18, 1967: AAS 59 (1967) 697-704.

⁴² Roman Catholic Church, "General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002," 3rd Edition (Nairobi: Pauline Publications in Africa, 2012), no. 94.

tion and Mission. As we have seen, ministry, whether clerical or lay flows from the example of Christ who is the first minister and the prototype of all ministry. The essence of ministry is not to seek one's self (that is if we accept Christ's position as a prototype) but to seek to serve—to do the will of God. Based on this understanding of ministry—as something which one does not struggle for, but one which is done for the sake of the community and by the community that collaboration is possible in the church of Minna diocese. A consideration of the situation in the Minna diocese, and extensively, of the Church in Nigeria, especially the parish communities one realizes that the Church in Nigeria, though still a missionary Church, is living already the mind of the Church universal concerning collaboration, despite the challenges still involved.

Positives from Minna Diocese

In the Minna diocese, the exercise of liturgical ministries, as well as sacramental ministrations are taking place in the most harmonious manner and with the priests performing their sacramental and pastoral roles fully. Much here is owed to the efforts of the many lay co-operators, who perform their roles accepting it as a service done to the master without complaining or wanting to be anything more (Cf. Phil 2:14). It is like the *episkopoi-diakonoi* relationship of the NT, where all appreciated their roles and went ahead to carry them out without any annotations. This is how, today in Minna diocese, for example, 160 catechists and hundreds of *Masu Waazi* (Lay Evangelizers) are on hand to always cooperate with the priests.⁴³

Areas for Further Improvement

There are problems, however, with the welfare and remuneration regimes that are allotted to these co-operators, especially those on the payroll of the church. Not only are their pay meagre; their welfare, as well as retirement, are not taken care of concretely. Those who are treated a bit better are always at the mercy of the initiative of the benevolent Parish Priests. This should not be so. Some might want to place this on the level of clericalism, but it is not. The same problem that these co-operators have is the same one that priests have who are

⁴³ Fr. Clement Onyilokwu, chaplain to Catechists, interview granted the researcher, April 17, 2022.

not directly involved in parish management: those in seminaries, institutions of learning, chaplaincies, hospitals, chanceries, etc. In any case, this is an area where something must be done urgently.

There is also the issue of proper training of personnel. This must be done in such a way, however, that preserves the hierarchical but collaborative nature of the Church within the true interpretation of the provisions of *Lumen Gentium* chapter three and SC 26-32. As SC 28 says, “Each person, minister or layman who has an office to perform carrying out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy.” Ordinary ministers must remain ordinary ministers and extraordinary ministers must also remain as such. No one should abdicate their roles for others nor should some clamour for more than what has been given to them “by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.”

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the exercise of liturgical ministry in the Catholic Church. It argued that liturgical ministries, from their origins in Christ and their expansion in the early church, are founded on service and collaboration. Collaboration in liturgical ministry, whether as lay ministers or as clergy represents the only authentic way to follow the mind of Christ. Collaboration does not mean that the clergy denigrate the ministries of the Lay Faithful or that the Lay People take over the ministry of the clergy or denigrate them. Rather they all exercise their function in mutual respect and acceptance because each ministry, regardless of who leads and who follows, amounts to participation in the mission of Christ.

The study has shown that liturgical praxis in Minna diocese and other dioceses in the northern ecclesiastical provinces of Kaduna, Abuja and Jos reflect the spirit of the Synod on Synodality proposed by Pope Francis, which calls for greater collaboration and mutual respect in the exercise of ministries in the Church. Notwithstanding some challenges in implementation, there are positive outcomes. A recent study reveals that collaborative ministry is yielding positive results in dioceses in Eastern Nigeria.⁴⁴ To continue the collaborative effort in the exercise

⁴⁴ See Ernest Obodo, “Forms of Assigning Pastoral Care: Its application in the Nigerian Context in the Light of the Instruction of the Congregation of the Clergy, ‘Pastoral Conversion,’” *Nigerian JORAS* 11 (July 2022): 108-111.

of liturgical ministries, the Church should try to avoid what John Paul II called “the tendency towards the clericalization of faithful and the risk of creating, in reality, an ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the Sacrament of Orders.”⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ John Paul II, “Christifideles Laici. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” December 30, 1988, 23; https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html