

ORDAINED AND UNORDAINED MINISTERS

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The following discussion paper was prepared by Bishop Leslie Boseto of Munda, Solomon Islands, for participants at the 1984 Synod of the United church.

Introduction

In our 1983 Synod, the following resolution was passed:

“That we ask the Bishop to draw up clear guidelines on the relationship between lay and ordained ministry, and that the draft be circulated to circuits for comments, which should be sent to the Bishop, to be compiled for next Synod.”

Let me, first of all, say here that I have not been able to prepare draft guidelines for circuits to comment on before this Synod. Secondly, I want to say that, even if I had prepared guidelines, without understanding the whole question of “Ordained and Unordained Ministries” of the whole church, probably the guidelines can easily become a barrier and legal code that we must fulfil. And, if we cannot fulfil them, then the result can be that we create isolationism. This means that we isolate ourselves from one another, and will never reach relationships at a deeper level of acceptance of growth.

1. We are all Ministers

- 1.1 The word “minister” is from the word “ministry”, which translates the Greek work “*diakonos*”, meaning “one who serves”.
- 1.2 The New Testament speaks of the “laos”, the people of God, and it refers to the *whole church*. “For Christ is like a single body”, Rom 12:4-5. Lay people only apply to “non-professional or non-clerical” in special areas of knowledge or orders.

- 1.3 The church is a “gathered” community of faithful individuals. When Peter the apostle calls the people who are touched by God’s Holy Spirit, he says: “*Each one* of you must turn away from his sins . . .” (Acts 2:37-39). Again, in his letter, 1 Peter 2:5, he says: “come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests – to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.”

Note: “Priest” means an ordained minister of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches; in church structure, one above deacon, and below bishop, with authority to administer sacraments, and pronounce absolution.

- 1.4 There are many ministries for all people of God, but ordained ministers are ordained for the ministry of administering sacraments and preaching the pure words of God. Therefore, the ordained minister, by virtue of his training and experience, does have a particular expertise. But there are other areas where the expertise rests with the laity, and where the ordained minister is a lay person.

QUESTION:

1. If we are all ministers (ones who serve), how do you see this with regard to the question of the authority of the church?

2. One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church

The above is a very fundamental statement. I want to give a very brief explanation of each of the above words.

- 2.1 *One church:* This refers to the unity of the Body. The church is likened to the Body of Christ. It is not one organisation, but one organism (1 Cor 12:12).
- 2.2 *Holy church:* The word “holy” here is not to be understood from pagan uses of the word. Holiness means being set apart from and for. The church is holy because it is set apart by God

in Jesus Christ for proclaiming the wonderful works of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).

- 2.3 *Catholic church*: Catholic means “according to the whole”. It means that every person within the Body of Christ, the church, must be a gifted person. The gifts of the Spirit are distributed among the whole community, and every person is given a place – women, men, children.

Revd Dr Ian Frazer says: “Catholic implies everybody sharing, everybody building up, and being built up, specialists in scholarship, and specialists in living brought together.” Another word often used for the word catholic is “universal”. The church can only be catholic, or universal, when everyone is touched by the gospel, and is functioning for the sake of the same gospel. Jesus said to His disciples that they must wait to be filled before witnessing (Acts 1:8).

- 2.4 *Apostolic church*: Apostolic means “sent out”. To be apostolic is to be ready to leave where we are when we know this is the truthful thing to do, knowing that God will be with us in our pilgrimage. It is to be on the move – never static or stationary. When we hear the term “apostolic community”, it refers not so much to the established community but to a moving, dynamic, and militant community, because every person is on the move for the sake of the gospel of peace, justice, unity, reconciliation, forgiveness, and so forth. Let us also note here that apostolic community must also be Pentecostal community.

- 2.5 *Church*: The church is “ecclesia”, a public meeting place for all to gather, a believing community. M. M. Thomas has said: “The church should never be defined by its boundaries so that fences can be erected around it. It must be defined by its centre, Jesus Christ.”

QUESTION:

1. How do you see “specialists in scholarship and specialists in living brought together” in their work?

3. Ordained Ministers and Unordained Ministers for Christ's Ministries

- 3.1 From the traditional point of view of the gospel, ordination is usually interpreted so as to continue, and to insure within the Christian community, a sign of Christ's presence.
- 3.2 Roman Catholic and Anglican churches have three levels of ordained ministries, namely priest, bishop, and deacon. The office of priest is a continuing reminder to us of Christ our intercessor. The office of bishop is a reminder to us of the servanthood of Christ, i.e., to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to set free the oppressed, etc.
- 3.3 Our United church has a tradition of believing there is only one order of the ordained ministry. We only induct our bishops, and dedicate or induct again, the other church leaders. We believe that the ordained minister is expected to fill the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. This threefold office can be acknowledged as follows:
- (a) To preach the word as a prophet.
 - (b) To administer the sacraments as a priest.
 - (c) To give orderly discipline as a king.
- 3.4 The above functions belong to the whole church, and should be shared with every gifted person. Read Rom 12:3-8 and 1 Cor 12:4-11, 27-30.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are your comments on "ordination is usually interpreted so as to continue, and to insure within the Christian community, a sign of Christ's presence"?
2. Read the Biblical references in 3.4 above, and make a list of different gifts, and how these were to be shared.

4. The Ministry of the Church is the Ministry of Christ

- 4.1 Those who allow Christ to live in them become His ministers. Ministry is an act undertaken in the name of Christ (Luke 10:17). This means we cannot make a minister of Christ.
- 4.2 Although the minds of the professors of theology, Old Testament and New Testament are important, they cannot give us, or make a mind of Christ, for us. This is a matter of “whoever believes in Me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart” (John 7:38).
- 4.3 It is the work of the Holy Spirit alone to make “us capable of serving the new covenant, which consists, not of a written law, but of the Spirit. The written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).
- 4.4 The starting point of the relationship between ordained and unordained ministers is Christ. This was the experience of Peter with Cornelius (Acts 10:34), and also Paul’s experience (Gal 3:28).

QUESTION:

1. How can ordained ministers and laity (all people of God) share more of their faith?

5. We must enable or equip one another

- 5.1 Jesus was an enabler. Jesus’ life, words, and approach were enabling His followers. The phrase, “And He began to teach them”, recurs again and again. “Jesus appointed a further 72, and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place He was going to visit Himself” (Luke 10:1).
- 5.2 The task of the church’s ministry is to equip one another, so that all might live as Christ’s servants in the world (Eph 4:11-14).
- 5.3 As the *laos* – the people of God, ordained, and not ordained – we have been sent into the world to exercise ministry according to the gifts given us by the Spirit. The task of the whole congregation, therefore, is to enable these gifts to be put to use.

We must be good managers of these gifts. Read 1 Corinthians 12:6-7, Hebrews 8:10-11, 1 Peter 4:7-11.

QUESTION:

1. The ministry of enablement starts from a personal renewal of individuals. How can you see this being done?