

# **THE CALL TO WITNESS TO CHRIST**



**EVERY  
CATHOLIC  
HAS IT!**

**You did not choose me, but I chose you.  
And I appointed you to go and bear  
fruit, fruit that will last. – John 15:16**

*A Catholic Booklet for Free Distribution*

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## Misconceptions of the word ‘vocation’

In the present era, our lack of understanding of the word ‘vocation’ has resulted in various negative consequences, one being that zeal and fervent love for service in God’s Kingdom has reduced among the Laity (referring to non consecrated Catholics). People mistakenly tend to associate the word ‘vocation’ with only the religious life and consecrated life, that of priests and nuns. The Catholic Church however, clearly teaches us that the **vocations** are the life as layman in the world, either married or single, the ordained life and the consecrated life.

All Catholics in each of these categories are called to follow Jesus closely and live out their vocation by serving God in their respective state with evangelistic zeal, desiring to be a labourer in the vineyard and bearing a Spirit-filled witness to the gospel. This is a universal call. God has personally chosen each of us for a divine purpose. Jesus says,

**You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. – John 15:16**

When we yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit and sincerely place our lives in God's hands, we can experience the joy of being an instrument which God uses for His glory. God does not call the qualified, but He qualifies those who are called!

## The Universal Call to Mission

*“Missionary activity has one purpose – to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.”*

– Pope John Paul II (Mission of the Redeemer)

Both the married life and the single life provide opportunities to give glory to God. This is what God truly desires for one and all! In the different states of life and in varied circumstances, each and every Catholic is chosen for partaking in this work of reaching out God's love to others. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are led into effective evangelisation. This cannot be replaced by good and charitable works, any type of service to the poor or working towards the welfare of society, though all these are very important.

The proclamation of the gospel message is actually what allows one to truly encounter Jesus and leads to an authentic relationship with God. What comes to the foreground here is the eternal aspect of one's salvation, sharing of our faith in Jesus and the wonderful results of His Life, Death and Resurrection. Along with the proclamation, all the Laity are called to bear witness to the gospel by living out a holy and inspiring life of Christian virtue. This balance is very important.

**Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.** – Matthew 5:16 [words of Jesus]

*“No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty; to proclaim Christ to all people.”*

– **Pope John Paul II** (Intro, Mission of the Redeemer)

As we respond in obedience to the Lord, He gives us the necessary graces to live out this missionary mandate. Through our co-operation in sincere prayer and action, we can receive the strength and wisdom that is required for the task that God is asking of us.

## **The Family and the Church**

The family is the building block of human society. As goes the family, so goes the community and the nation. The world at large is thus affected. The family is referred to being a ‘domestic church’. The spiritual growth of the worldwide Catholic Church is highly dependent on the role played by the laity in families.

**“Give me holy Catholic families and I will give you a holy Catholic Church.”**

**– Pope John Paul II**

**The Christian family is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ and it has an evangelizing and missionary task.**

(No. 2205, Catechism of the Catholic Church)

It is amongst the children of the present day Catholic families that most of the future priests and nuns of the Catholic Church will arise from. Their upbringing in childhood will affect their religious calling, either positively or negatively.

Even for those children who later in life choose to get married, their faith formation as children will play a strong role in the sanctity and holiness of the married life and their role as parents. Pope Francis strongly exhorts families to be examples of holiness and prayer. In this way, the family has a beautiful place in God's plan for humankind and for the evangelisation of the human race.

## **The specialised role of the Laity in the Church**

It is unrealistic and incorrect to assume that the religious and consecrated people are the only ones called to evangelisation. While they do have a specialised role in the Church which the Laity cannot fulfil, the Laity also have a specialised role which cannot be fulfilled by the religious. Simply put - these roles are irreplaceable!

**“Since they are members of the Church by virtue of their Baptism, all Christians share responsibility for missionary activity.”**

**– Pope John Paul II (No. 77, Mission of the Redeemer)**

The contribution of the Laity in the growth of the Church is indispensable. In their secular circumstances of family, social setting and work life, they reach out God's saving message to souls who otherwise may never come to know the life changing gospel of Jesus.

For example, in connection with the spiritual growth among children, we need to understand that faith formation begins at home. Children first need to experience God's love and the importance of prayer in the daily lifestyle of the family. When this is laid as a foundation, then the Catechism classes and further faith formation outside the home can bear fruit and lead them to encounter the Lord tangibly.

Hence, the parents play a  
**CRITICAL** role in the family  
which no outsider, teacher or  
catechist can replace!

Similarly, a lay person, whether single or married, is called to bear witness to the Lord in situations where the religious or consecrated may not be called to be a part of. These situations include the secular workplace of job or business, certain get-togethers of family and friends, events in the neighbourhood and various aspects of being a part of society. Even in connection with spiritual activities like a bible study, prayer meeting, Small Christian Communities, counselling and conducting of retreats and seminars, the Laity are called to offer their talents and contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God.

***So, on a documented basis, what does the Catholic Church say about all of this?***

The following pages outline what the Church teaches officially about the expected role of a Catholic in the world today. It includes a few quotes from Vatican documents and Popes.

## **A few lines from the Vatican-2 Document “Lumen Gentium” (1964)**

**The Lay Apostolate is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their Baptism and Confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. (No. 33)**

**The Laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. (No. 33)**

**Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. (No. 33)**

**The laity must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way, the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfil its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfilment of this duty. (No. 36)**

**Even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelisation of the world. (No. 35)**

**Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. (No. 38)**

**All Christians are called to radiate the Word of Truth that the Lord Jesus left us. – Pope Benedict  
(The Door of Faith, 2011)**

**We cannot keep the joy of the faith to ourselves. We must pass it on.  
– Pope Benedict  
(Papal Address, June 2006)**

## Answering the Call of Jesus

**You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. – 1Peter 2:9**

All these lines give us, the laity, a clear direction on what God desires to accomplish in and through us. In his document called *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II expounds on the Laity's role in the Church today. He reminds us that the call - "*You too go into my Vineyard*" (Matt 20:4) is for one and all, and not just for the clergy, pastors or any assigned staff. He says that every lay person is "*personally called by the Lord*" (#2) and that "*every disciple is personally called by name*" (#33). We need to journey towards the realisation that - It's a call from Jesus, the vineyard is the world, there is "*no place for idleness*" (#3) and it is a call associated with urgency (#16). We need not be afraid (#34) but on the contrary, let us be uplifted and privileged that we are called by God into a noble and joyful duty (#17).

**A few lines from the Vatican-2 Document**  
**“Christifideles Laici” by Pope John Paul II (1988)**

**The Re-evangelisation activity of the lay faithful is revealed in these days as increasingly necessary and valuable. - #35**

**Indeed, as a person with a truly unique life story, each is called by name to make a special contribution to the coming of the Kingdom of God. - #56**

**The gospel image of the vine and the branches reveals to us another fundamental aspect of the lay faithful’s life and mission: The call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit. - #57**

**To respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ. - #17**

**The lay faithful ought to feel more strongly the Church's responsibility to obey the command of Christ. "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation*" (Mk 16:15), and take up anew the missionary endeavour. A great venture – both challenging and wonderful, is entrusted to the Church – that of a re-evangelisation, which is so much needed by the present world. The lay faithful ought to regard themselves as an active and responsible part of this venture, called as they are to proclaim and to live the gospel. - #64**

## **Conclusion**

Here then, is a universal call to witness to Christ. This is not a mere intellectual task or job. It is an invitation to share in the work of Christ Himself. It is a loving expectation from a divine Master to all who desire to follow Him. Our Baptism imbibes us into the Catholic Church and provides us with sufficient graces which we can stir up and activate in our adulthood. During Easter service, when we renew our Baptismal vows as adults, there is a fresh anointing of the Spirit and we can become effective witnesses to Jesus.

This is a part of the spiritual journey which cannot be avoided. With a fervent “yes” and with hearts enflamed with the love of God, let us respond to this calling!

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**Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. – Colossians 3:17**

## **PRAYER**

*Lord Jesus, I truly desire to be a witness to your love in this world today. Give me your Holy Spirit and lead me in your plan for my life. Teach me the way you want me to go and help me walk in obedience. I want to know you more, love you more and serve you more. Use me as an instrument so that your name is known and glorified. Amen.*

*The Call to Witness to Christ*  
*- Every Catholic has it!*

**Are only priests and nuns supposed to work towards the growth of the Church?**

**What does God expect of the lay people who are married or single?**

**A Catholic viewpoint is addressed here, along with a short note on the word “vocation” and its misuse. Also included are a few inputs from Pope Benedict, Pope John Paul II and the Vatican document, Lumen Gentium, 1964.**

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