

# AM I JUST A PASSENGER...?

by Lucille Dass & Gregory R. Warrier

## Our identity as laity

The word 'lay' comes from the Greek word *laikos* meaning "of the people". We Catholic laity, clearly form the majority of ordinary members of our church in every parish and diocese. It simply follows that we cannot be idlers, we should be more involved in the life of the Church. Are we? The conferment of baptism embodies the entrustment to play our foundational role in and outside church. This role, inherited through baptism, transforms us into ONE BODY with Christ as co-sharers in His priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions. These roles are actualised in the Church and in the world through our relationship with Jesus (our role model) and with support from our priests and faith communities.

Pope Francis assures us in *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* that we are no substitutes; the lay people “participate, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ Himself.” We are clearly not “‘second class’ members, at the service of the hierarchy and only executors of orders from on high,” states the pope. “But as disciples of Christ who, by force of their baptism and their nature inserted ‘in the world,’ are called to animate every space, every activity, every human relation according to the spirit of the Gospel.” Lay people, he states, bring “the light, hope, [and] love received from Christ in those places that, otherwise, might remain unknown to the action of God and abandoned to the misery of the human condition. No one can carry out better than them this essential work ‘to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city,’” the pope reminds.

## Our Call in the Gospel

The scriptures abound with calls to “... follow in His steps,” and we cannot plead ignorance as Jesus was an excellent teacher who left as “an example” (1Peter 2:21), an action plan. What is so special about this call? “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit...” (Jn15:16). How to say ‘No’ when chosen? My spouse and I feel both humbled and privileged that “He called [us] to this (the different ministries we serve) through our gospel, that [we] might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Thess 2:14). The process begins by becoming aware that we have to rise from being just pew-warmers, mere passengers who do no justice to their endowments – God’s personal gifts to us – be these spiritual, material or physical. “We have different gifts... if it is to lead, do it diligently...” (Rom 12:6-8) because we serve God when we serve others (Gal 5:13). You ask, what’s in it for me (WIIFM)? Read on to see how in giving we may receive ...

## Greg: He Called ... I answered

*Greg shares...* I was called to be part of the team to begin the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) in my parish and ended up heading it. Initially, I was reluctant and worried because I felt I was not equipped with enough “knowledge and skill” to share Jesus with the inquirers, often a reason why many lay people shy away from involving themselves in church ministries. Laity are usually happy to be left in their comfort zones, for fear of being criticised otherwise. Somehow, with guidance and support from team members, I have prevailed and continue to play my leadership role to this senior age! It is in this role that I found my mission - sharing the Gospel with those who seek Jesus. Being part of the RCIA has enriched me spiritually as it has encouraged me to attend formations and seek further bible knowledge. My role in RCIA has enabled me to guide, encourage, and integrate the catechumens into the church community as active members. I feel happy to see and say that many of the RCIA “graduates” are now playing active roles in the parish.

Being a ‘passenger’ is misleadingly simple: pray, pay, and obey. If you are in just for the ride but no involvement, there is no sense of belonging. My sense of belonging increased as I got called upon to take additional roles in other ministries, leading me ultimately to chair the parish pastoral council and to become a member of the parish animating team. These roles exposed me to greater responsibility and commitment. This is how I was given the opportunity to play my part in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ in my mission. I realise that one cannot truly be a Christian by merely ‘attending’ Mass. We need to be doers of the Word (James 1:22-25), not just bystanders/pew-sitters listening in (Mt.7:26-27). Lay leaders in the Church are natural bridge builders between the parish and the domestic Church in our homes and the neighbourhood.





### Lucille: I want change? Let it begin with me...

Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher left us this time-tested, oft-used quote, "Change is the only constant in life." Just look at our own life situation – where we were and where we are presently and how we keep growing and becoming. The same dynamics apply to life of, and in the church, to enhance worship and spirituality of the faithful. I was nudged into active ministry in the 80s both by parishioners and priest with a call not unlike that of Jeremiah 1:10, "...to uproot...to tear down ...to build and to plant" seeds for the art of effective liturgical lectoring. I spearheaded and helmed it "diligently" and "consistently" (Rom.12:8) for more than twenty years by providing formation and training – both spiritual and technical – to imprint in the minds and hearts of all proclaimers, the privileged signature image of a lector as God's herald so beautifully reflected in Isaiah 52:7. When positive comments were received on the improved quality of liturgical lectoring in my church, I was soon invited to other parishes to similarly assist them. As leaders we are called to groom others (Proverbs 27:17).

Next, I added usefulness to my professional expertise through being a member of the Malaysian Catechetical Commission. I had a hand in the publication of our very first Malaysian Catechetical Series and in the pedagogical training of our catechists. Hark the words of Lk.12:48, "... and from him who has been entrusted with much, more will be demanded," which can be cross-referenced with a cautionary from Mt.13:12...that one stands in peril of losing what one has, if not put to good use! So, as a result of subjecting myself to the community-collective process of building a vibrant church I was steered by the Spirit to multiply my fruits by briefly leading the liturgy team, where I gained more spiritual insight as to what informed and defined our worship celebrations in line with the Catholic liturgy calendar.

Once again my professional know-how directed me towards the parish formation team to invest in and enrich my spiritual know-how. My love for words booked me a writer's spot in the church media ministry especially since both my spouse and I have been long-term Herald correspondents. And hey! There comes an

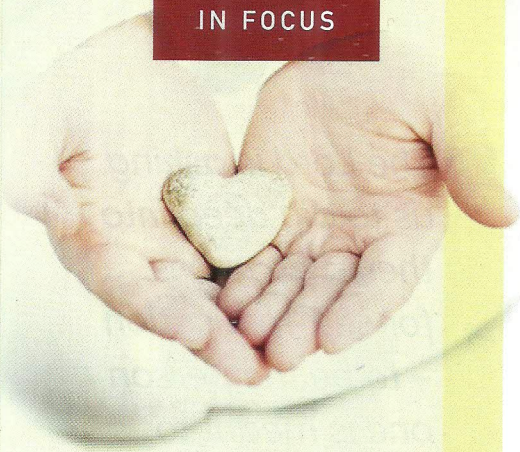
occasional invite from *CANews* too! I recognise that the extent of my involvement in church ministries has kindled further my desire to deepen my faith. While I fervently sought to get ahead in my career through my professional expertise, little did I realise I could put the same to good use in God's House for His people, until nudged. Isaiah 55:8 admonished me: God's ways are way different from my ways! My participation serves to remind me that every gift is God-given (James 1:7) and in sharing the same with His people, I honour the Giver. Why be just self-serving? If my endowments end with me, to what avail then? So you see, by becoming God's particle I learned more about myself, my usefulness, my little image in His Big Picture.

### **We become what we repeatedly do**

Allow me to appropriate the above part-quote attributed to Aristotle that applies here. Human excellence is achieved when we repeatedly put to good use the best of our human qualities – all that is outstanding in us – collectively termed, our virtues. These are God-given and meant to be nurtured. The Lord is asking us to dig deep into these resources for self-realisation – to be the person one is meant to be by giving due honour to God (Proverbs 3:9) because our life is shaped by our actions (Gal. 6:7). George Eliot is actually reiterating God's principle of life in Gal. 6:7 when she says, "Our deeds will travel with us from afar, and what we have been makes us what we are." Reality: life is dynamic, always in flux; but if we choose to remain static, trapped in our old nature, we deny ourselves the gift of life to nurture.

A commonplace saying, "What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God," must be taken to heart. Function like a thermostat and not like a thermometer that merely registers the temperature in its environment but can do nothing to change it! There is much humility involved when we function within the area of our own God-given gifts, even at a micro level, for the benefit of the whole body of Church. Even as a 'seenager' I adhere to Gandhi's quote,

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“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Let us be a parable in action – a story in the making that is instructive, inspiring, and indicative of God’s endowments well invested to continue to pay forward to magnify Him and perpetuate His goodness (Mark 10:18).

### Let us count the ways ...


Are you beginning to feel numb in your behind and in your mind from prolonged passive pew occupancy? Sensitise! Become an active occupant by taking “ownership with God” (Acts 9:6). See yourself and your church come alive in God through your participation. Delight in the tremendous sense of belonging by taking up dwelling in the house of God (Ps.27:4)!

Make your way to your church office, study the list of ministries available for your pick! Some pathways to participation are:

- *Join the hospitality ministry. No formal training required, just a welcoming disposition. Good place to begin for neophytes.*
- *Altar society, anyone? Help out with floral arrangements and decorations according to liturgy.*
- *The church maintenance team.*
- *Are you musically attuned? Check out the music ministry.*
- *Tech-savvy, photography enthusiast, a logophile? Join the media/communications ministry.*

- *Youth ministry; senior society; prison ministry; homebound ministry; ministry to the sick; become a member of ERT (Emergency Response Team).*
- *Seasoned Catholics – become involved in any of the sacred rituals – as sacristans, holy communion ministers, lectors, commentators, faith formators, intercessory prayer groups, prayer leaders... the list goes on.*

A submission: before recruiting members for certain ministries, catechetical ministry, being one – have potential candidates go through an apprenticeship programme, at the very least, and not be thrown into the deep end to flounder. Pope Francis reminds catechists to BE just that – a catechist! Not merely to do the work of a catechist but to be a practising role model. All catechists must first make the pedagogy of God their vocation-essential.

All said, here's a thought – since God's covenantal love and blessings upon us are infinite, shouldn't our deeds unto Him be limitless...? Go trade your passenger-seat for active ownership! 

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## Catholic Asian News

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everything except  
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you learn nothing.

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– St. Bonaventure

