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Benedict XVI: Church Needs Change of Mentality

Calls on Laity to Recognize Pastoral Responsibility

ROME, MAY 28, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Laypeople are not merely the clergy's collaborators, but rather share in the responsibility of the Church's ministry, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope called on the laity to become more aware of their role when he inaugurated Tuesday an ecclesial conference for the Diocese of Rome on "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility." The conference is under way through Friday.

"There should be a renewed becoming aware of our being Church and of the pastoral co-responsibility that, in the name of Christ, all of us are called to carry out," the Holy Father said. This co-responsibility should advance "respect for vocations and for the functions of consecrated persons and laypeople," he added.

The Pontiff acknowledged that this requires a "change of mentality," especially regarding laypeople, shifting from "considering themselves collaborators of the clergy to recognizing themselves truly as 'co-responsible' for the being and action of the Church, favoring the consolidation of a mature and committed laity."

The Bishop of Rome suggested that "there is still a tendency to unilaterally identify the Church with the hierarchy, forgetting the common responsibility, the common mission" of all the baptized.

"Up to what point is the pastoral responsibility of everyone, especially the laity, recognized and encouraged," he asked.

Referring to laypeople committed in the service of the Church, the Pope said there should not be "a lessening of the awareness that they are 'Church,' because Christ, the eternal Word of the Father, convokes them and makes them his People."

Benedict XVI thus asked priests to transmit to laypeople a "sense of belonging to the parish community" and the importance of unity. He further encouraged that laypeople draw close to sacred Scripture, through means such as *lectio divina*, and carry out missionary activity, in first place through living out charity.

The Holy Father contended that preparations for the Jubilee Year 2000 in Rome helped "the ecclesial community to enhance awareness that the command to evangelize is not just for a few, but for all the baptized."

That's how the Church has lived for generations, he added, while "so many baptized" have "dedicated their lives to educating young generations in the faith, to care for the sick and to help the poor."

"This mission is entrusted to us today, in different situations, in a city in which many baptized have lost the way of the Church and those who are not Christians do not know the beauty of our faith," the Pope stated.

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On the other hand, he cautioned against a tendency to see the People of God from a "purely sociological" point of view "with an almost exclusively horizontal perspective that excludes the vertical reference to God."

The Pontiff looked at the distinction between "People of God" and "Body of Christ," affirming that both concepts "are complementary and together form the New Testament concept of the Church."

He explained: "While 'People of God' expresses the continuity of the history of the Church, 'Body of Christ' expresses the universality inaugurated on the cross and with the resurrection of the Lord."

"In Christ, we become really the People of God," which, he affirmed, means everyone, "from the Pope to the last child."

"The Church, therefore, is not the result of a sum of individuals, but a unity among those who are nourished by the Word of God and the Bread of Life," the Pontiff noted.

And the Church "grows and develops," he affirmed. "The future of Christianity and the Church of Rome is also the commitment and the testimony of each one of us."

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