

Editor's words

In line with the renewal of ecclesiology, *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Council clearly defined the role of the lay faithful. The identity and role of laity need to be understood in the context of the church. These lay faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. Every lay faithful has to learn from Jesus Christ how to fulfill his divine ministry and to participate actively in the mission of the Church in the world. In *Apostolicam actuositatem* (the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity), another document of Vatican II, the various fields and forms of lay apostolate and related methods of training and formation are discussed more thoroughly.

Although both documents emphasize the mission of the lay faithful in the secular world and sanctify the world through bearing witness, we can also see the development and changes of lay ministries based on the experiences of lay apostolate over the years.

In addition to bearing witness in society, the participation of laity in the operation and structure of the church has been strengthened. They hold diversified positions in various forms and fields. It can be seen that

the laity have changed from passive cooperation in the past to active commitment, participating concretely in the communion life of the church, responding to the call of the Lord, and making good use of the charism given by God. Together with the clergy, they involve in the development of pastoral work of the church.

As for Pope Francis, since the very beginning of his term as the pope, he has emphasized and promoted the full and active participation of laity in the life of the church and the practice of Christian values in the world. Synodality proposed by him is a new way of living and working in the church, advocating that laity must participate in the process of discernment, decision-making, planning and implementation, and become “fellow workers for the truth ,” so that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry complete each other.

Of course, the roles and level of participation of laity are not the same in different local churches. The understanding and actual participation of laity in the Hong Kong, mainland China, and even in Asian churches is worthy of examination and reflection. This issue of Tripod will explore this theme, reflecting on the role of laity in the Catholic Church and the practice of a synodal church.

There are five thematic articles in this issue. The first article was written by Dr. Mary Yuen, examining the meanings and impacts of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* on the Asian Church. By analyzing the activities and documents of

the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, as well as the lay organizations and movements of various local churches in Asia, this article discusses the understanding, interpretation and implementation of some important themes in this document by the Asian Church. The author points out that under the Asian context, the Asian Church believes that concrete actions must be taken to inspire, train and integrate the deep relationships between laity and clergy. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the formation of the lay faithful, with the focuses on the church's social teaching, the building of a participatory church, and the roles of youth, women and families. The article points out that it is crucial to strengthen the spirit of a participatory church and emphasize the leadership experience of the "servant model."

In the second article, based on the Canon Law, Miss Han Anqi, a doctoral student of Canon Law, examines the issue of lay faithful's participation in the governance of the Church. This article explores the conditions for laity to practice Church governance, and discusses the scope of laity's assistance in Church governance from the legislative, administrative and judicial perspectives. The author points out that the purpose of active participation of lay people in the Church is not to replace the clergy or to strive for their own rights, but to enhance the participation of laity in Church life and to strengthen the mission of evangelization. This is the spirit of synodality, that is, everyone participates in the mission of evangelization according to his/her ministry or charism. The author also emphasizes that all powers in the

Church aim at serving the communion of the Church, and the ultimate goal is to glorify God and for the salvation of human souls.

The next article discuss the spirit of synodality and the relationship between laity and clergy. Based on his own research in mainland China, Fr. Bruno Lepeu brings in the notion of the relationship of brotherhood in Chinese culture which can deepen our understanding of synodality and the community of brotherhood and sisterhood in fraternity. He points out that the concept of synodality is broader than that of collegiality because it includes the participation of all in the Church and that of all the Churches, while collegiality focuses on the communion among bishops in the unity with the bishop of Rome. This in turn implies a full participation of laity in the Church and counters clericalism. A synodal Church is characterized as listening, fraternal, participatory and co-responsible, so as to better fulfill her mission of evangelization.

The two articles which follow are the theological reflections of two lay faithful from their personal experiences. They are Mr. John Sun and Miss Victoria Au, from mainland China and Hong Kong respectively. They are lay people with rich pastoral work experiences in the church.

Apart from the thematic articles, based on her field work and research result on cross-regional marriages, Prof. Kang Zhijie's article investigates the experiences of conversion to Catholicism of the migrant wives, the impact of faith on

their lives, and other issues. The research reflects the positive response of the Chinese Catholic Church to social problems arising from social changes. Besides, this issue provides a review and analysis of the major events of the church in China in the year 2023.

Mary Yuen