

Sacrament of Holy Orders

I was ordained in 1972 when the teaching of the Second Vatican council was still unfolding and being implemented in the parishes that I've served over the past 50 years. It's been my great honor and delight to see the Spirit at work in the community of Faith. More and more people came to understand but they weren't going to church to fulfill an obligation but that, in fact, they are the church! This is a solemn teaching of the Catholic. Empowering people to use their gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ and calling them see themselves as part of that body has been my delight.

It is the teaching of the church that the Spirit of God blesses the communities of faith with all the gifts necessary for the strengthening, healing and growth of the Body of Christ. We are all God's holy people and we're called on a journey of faith to use our gifts and putting them at the service of one another. What a blessing to minister in a church whose members know they are valued and treasured, not only for whom they are, but for how they relate to one another as parts of the Body of Christ.

Some of the gifts of the Spirit are recognized and are clear but sometimes other gifts are not recognized even though they're present. Many people for example have the gift of praying for one another in a world in which there is so much need. We can feel overwhelmed by what needs to be done and sometimes we stall in our efforts because of the sheer magnitude of the healing that's needed. But the Spirit has blessed us with people whose gifts are to pray and to bring hope to others. Their prayer helps us all believe in one another so that God's work can continue through our hearts and hands. Other gifts in the community are very clear and evident, like preaching and teaching and pastoral care.

I see the Sacrament of Holy Orders as a powerful gift to the church. Those who are ordained are called in a special way by God to help others recognize their Baptismal call to use their gifts. I see myself as the conductor of the orchestra. I can play some of the instruments but certainly not all of them. My job is to bring forth the beauty of all the instruments that are played by members of the orchestra. The church has its hierarchical structure, but this is for the sake of the building up of the Body of Christ, not the control or domination of it. Rather the Sacrament is to bring order to the many many gifts with which God has blessed the community.

This call to ministry is powerful and present in so many ways today. It's up to us to recognize the ways in which God's Spirit continues to work in our midst and to call them forth. The Sacrament of Holy Orders that I am privileged to exercise is the sacrament of order not the sacrament of control.

My prayer that all God's holy people will recognize their gifts and acknowledge them and allow them to be put at the service of the body of Christ. My vision of church was shaped by the Second Vatican Council and remains firm and clear as the future unfolds. I'm filled with hope and that hope gives me courage for the future.