

The Church 40 years on

No. 3

Learning to Appreciate our Shepherds

The Church is Hierarchical

Chapter Three

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Second Vatican Council, 1965

A Small Group Reflection

Inside:

1. How to use this reflection.
2. Our Life
3. From Scripture and the Church
4. A Step Forward

How to use these reflections

Contents: The guide provides texts for reflection and brief supplements on the texts. At the end, there are questions suggested for reflection and sharing.

Method: There is no fixed method. Groups that meet regularly may use their established ways of presenting the materials, reflection and sharing. For others, it is suggested that a facilitator leads the reflection and sharing.

One suggestion takes the following format: opening prayer (include an optional hymn), introduce the theme (facilitator), read the texts, take a pause for reflection, share experiences and understanding, summary of the sharing, and closing prayer.

[Note: The texts are not easy to read. Have the reader(s) prepare. After each reading, pause and give time for the others to read the texts quietly on their own. The reflection questions provided are only suggestions – do not be limited by them].

Comment: It is good to have available the document itself (Lumen Gentium), and a Bible.

Caution: This is the third of a series of eight reflections on the Church. Try to stay focused on the aspects of Church discussed in each chapter.

Learning to Appreciate our Shepherds

The Church is Hierarchical Lumen Gentium Chapter III

A. Our Life

(20 minutes)

Invite someone to read the following story.

The Wong family decided to do something special on their holiday this year. Wanting to be close to nature and to be adventurous, they booked a week long jungle-tour in Malaysia at the *Taman Negara* forest reserve. After arriving in Kuala Lumpur, the Wongs were ferried by boat up a river to their campsite in the jungle. The guide who was to lead the tour promised to meet them the next day at 7:00am.

The Wongs were eager to start their trek at daybreak next morning, and found the guide waiting for them. Before they set off, he carefully instructed the group on safety precautions to observe during the journey. The guide noticed that Mr. Wong wore two shirts and advised him to remove one, explaining that in the hot jungle it is important for the body to cool down properly through perspiration to prevent heat stroke. The journey began after he ensured that enough water was brought, and that everyone had repellent to protect against biting insects. The youngest in the group was 8 years old and the guide paid particular attention to him.

Although the route was sometimes dangerous, the guide helped the group to stay together, overcome steep slopes, and avoid holes in the path. Along the way, he taught them the names of the native plants and animals they encountered. He called for rest whenever he noticed anyone looking tired, and ensured that everyone drank enough water to prevent dehydration.

At the end of a long day, they arrived at a lodge deep in the jungle where they would spend the night. The Wong family was thankful for the guide who took care of them while they made the journey.

Questions for reflection

1. Why was the guide an important part of the Wong's holiday? What were the qualities of the guide?
2. Recall an experience in your life when you were guided by someone. Can you share that experience? How did you feel?

B. From Scripture and the Church

(40 minutes)

Invite someone to read John 10:14-16.

Question for reflection

Do you see any similarities between the guide in our story and the Good Shepherd?

About the Bishop

Invite someone to read the following, taken from Lumen gentium #27:

Sent as he is by the Father to govern his family, a bishop should keep before his eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve¹ and to lay down his life for his sheep.² Taken from among human beings and subject to weakness himself, he can sympathize with those who are ignorant and erring.³ He should not refuse to listen to his subjects whose welfare he promotes as of his very own children and whom he urges to collaborate readily with him. Destined to render an account for their souls to God, by prayer, preaching and all good works of charity he should be solicitous both

¹ See Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45

² See John 10:11

³ See Hebrews 5:1-2

for their welfare and also for that of those who do not yet belong to the one flock, all of whom he should regard as entrusted to him in the Lord. Since, like St. Paul, he is duty bound to everyone, he should be eager to preach the Gospel to all,⁴ and to spur his faithful on to apostolic and missionary activity.

Questions for reflection

Let us share our reflections in the whole group

1. How is the bishop called to serve in the example of the Good Shepherd?
2. Look at recent events; in what ways has our bishop exercised his ministry of being a shepherd to the Church in Singapore?

Supplement:

Let us read the following points and discuss those points which were missed out in your reflections.

- The bishop's ministry consists of three dimensions: to teach, to sanctify (make holy), and to govern the People of God
- He unites the faithful by inviting them to co-operate with him in his ministry, and encourages them by offering his support and prayers.
- He takes responsibility for the spiritual good of all the people; not just for Catholics.
- Occasions when the bishop exercises his ministry include visiting the parishes to celebrate the sacrament of confirmation, celebrating the rite of election with catechumens of the diocese, ordaining priests to serve the faithful, supporting the various apostolates and church organisations, deliberating on pastoral matters with priests and people, and so on.
- The bishop also shows concern for current events. Two recent examples: comforting and assuring those who suffered during the Asian tsunami, voicing concern about the social-spiritual consequences of establishing a casino.
- The bishop also attends the conference of regional bishops to remain aware of the needs and concerns of the Church in neighbouring countries.

About the Priests

Invite someone to read the following, simplified from Lumen gentium #28.

Priests depend on the bishops in the exercise of their proper power, the priests are associated with them by reason of their priestly dignity. By virtue of the sacrament of Orders, they are consecrated in the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest, to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament. On the level of their own ministry sharing in the unique office of Christ the mediator, they announce to all the word of God. However, it is above all in the eucharistic worship or in the eucharistic assembly of the faithful that they exercise their sacred functions. Then, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the prayers of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head..."

Questions for reflection

Let us share our reflections in the whole group.

1. How are priests connected to the bishop?
2. Can we name some ways that our priests are ministering in our parish as shepherds?

Supplement:

Let us read the following points and discuss those points which were missed out in our reflections.

- Priests are ordained by the bishop through the sacrament of holy orders to share in his ministry. In a sense, they can be regarded as the bishop's representatives or executives in their local communities.
- United with their priests and the bishop, local communities manifest the universal Church. They become a sign of communion; the body of Christ is made present.
- Priests help the bishop to shepherd the People of God in many ways, including instructing the faithful, presiding at liturgy, visiting the sick, proclaiming the word, and caring for the various pastoral needs of the people.

⁴ See Romans 1:14-15

C. A Step Forward

(30 minutes)

Invite someone to read the following:

God instituted the hierarchy in the Church to guide the People of God. The power that God entrusts to our bishops, priests, and deacons at their ordination is to be put at the service of truth and unity (communion). The ordained priesthood is God's gift to the Church and through it we experience the presence of Christ and are assured of God's continued guidance in the tradition of the apostles.

Question for reflection

Let us reflect in prayerful silence.

How do we value our bishop and priests and the service that they render to our diocese, community/parish?

Invite those who wish to share their reflection with the whole group.

Conclusion:

Let our group make a commitment to show appreciation and support for our priests, so that we may become a visible communion that truly reflects the body of Christ.

Suggestions for group action:

- Write a letter of encouragement or affirmation to our bishop/priests.
- Express our appreciation for the sacrifices made by our priests in choosing their vocation.
- Practice open communication with our priests, avoid speaking ill behind their backs, and keep criticisms constructive and non-judgmental.
- Cooperate with our priests in the running of our parish by contributing to the parish pastoral council.
- Pray as individuals and as groups for our priests, they need our spiritual support.

Invite someone to close with a prayer or a hymn.