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Ministry in the Life of the Church

No. 4 In the New Testament it is the life and sacrifice of Christ that perfectly express what it is to serve God and man. From this source and model all Christian ministry flows and takes its shape. The reconciliation of men to God and to each other was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the response of faith it is realised in the life of the Church. Although the Church itself is still in process of sanctification, its continuing mission is to proclaim this reconciliation in Christ and to manifest his reconciling love.

No.5 The Christian Church began with the communities where the apostles exercised their ministry. It is difficult to deduce from the New Testament use of apostle for the Twelve, Paul and others a precise portrait of an apostle, but two primary features of the apostolate are clearly discernible: a special relationship with Jesus Christ, and a commission from him to the Church and the world. (Mark 3:14). The Church is apostolic not only because its faith and life most reflect the witness to Jesus Christ given in the early Church by the apostles, but also because it is charged to communicate to the world what it has received. Within the whole history of mankind the Church is to be the community of reconciliation.

No. 6 All ministries are used by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church to be this reconciling community for the glory of God and the salvation of men (Eph. 4: 11-13). Within the New Testament ministerial actions are varied and functions not precisely defined. Explicit emphasis is given to the proclamation of the Word and the preservation of apostolic doctrine, the care of the flock, and the example of Christian living. At last by the time of the Pastoral Epistles and I Peter, some ministerial functions are discernible in a more exact form.

With the growth of the Church the importance of these functions led gradually to their being assigned to specific officers of the community. Since the Church is built up primarily but not exclusively through these ministerial functions, some form of recognition and authorisation is already required in the New Testament period for their legitimate exercise in the name of Christ. Here we can see elements which will remain at the heart of what today we call ordination.