

THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE PARISH

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Abstract: *There is no commonly accepted definition of what constitutes the characteristics of a parish. The first step in classifying them is to recognize two perspectives: nature and mission. While the first perspective reveals the essential features of a parish, the second describes the gifts and goals emanating from its essence. And although the parish's nature and mission are distinct, they are not to be separated and should thus be simultaneously considered in discussions relating to parish. This article is therefore an attempt to set forth the key essential characteristics of a parish.*

Keywords: parish, church, community of baptized, Eucharist, koinonia, priestly mission, prophetic mission, royal mission.

Discussion over the parish's identity, structure, rights, duties and other related features remains relevant to modern theological debates. On the one hand, the Church as a human institution should be adequately represented and described in language relevant to moderns. Otherwise, its role and mission will become veiled and misunderstood. On the other hand, the Church as a divine institution cannot change its foundation and, consequently, cannot be viewed outside its traditions. Therefore, rediscovering its main characteristics and purposes becomes necessary. Many theologians, such as William Rademacher, Cardinal Roger Mahony, Phillips Kariatis and others, have focused their thinking on the parish's nature and mission with regard to traditional views found in the official teachings of the Catholic Church. Hence the aim of this article, which is to scrutinize their views and argumentation concerning the essence and role of the parish as a local ecclesial community within contemporary Christianity.

In terms of methodology, among the different approaches and classifications elaborated by several authors on parish life, some common perspectives will be pointed out. The first part of this article will focus on the nature of a parish. The main goal here is not to elaborate an encyclopedic definition of a parish, but to stress the main perspectives upon which its nature and identity can be described. The second part will draw a link between its theoretical background and practical realization, thereby portraying the mission of parish and parishioners within the frameworks of community and the world in general. The material presented in this article is a result of previous analysis and comparison of contemporary scholars' ideas on parish life.

Based on a synthesis of this material, this article is structured in such a way as to represent the common points and perspectives regarding the nature and mission of parish with special accent on the role of the laity.

The nature of a parish

As already mentioned above, there is no agreed definition of what the parish is. Different approaches towards looking at the parish lead to different definitions. On the pages that follow, such approaches will be analyzed with the aim of affirming the constitutive place and role of the laity in the parish. In official Catholic teaching and mainstream publications, with ample references to Holy Scripture and Christian tradition, the parish is most often considered as a local Church, a juridical person, the community of the baptized, the Eucharistic centre, the „people of God”, and the *koinonia*. Each of these dimensions will be further examined below.

The local Church. The essence of the parish can only be acknowledged within the context of the Universal Church. A particular parish is not an isolated institution. Being founded by God and comprising all people, the Church has spread around the world over millennia. Having been structurally organised by the apostles, it has obtained an institutional dimension. Therefore, speaking of the nature of parish within the universal community of Christians is necessary.

Etymologically, the term *ecclesia*, as used in Holy Scripture, generally means „assembly”, and especially in the New Testament, it denotes the community of Christian believers.¹ Following James Coriden, since early Christianity the church was considered as a „community of communities”: „*It existed as local congregations of baptized, gathered together in communities and linked to other local congregations in other places in a network called communion*”.² Within this context and with regard to the increasing the number of Christians and smaller communities, the Greek term *paroikia* denoted the local groups of Christian believers who are subjected to a bishop.³ This usage of the term „parish” corresponded to

¹ Cf. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm> [accessed 13.02.14].

²James Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology, and Canon Law*, New York, Paulist Press, 1997, p. 9.

³ Cf. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05001a.htm> [accessed 13.02.14].

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

the contemporary „diocese”. Moreover, according to Coriden, Latin translations of *paroikia-paroecia* or *diocese*-were used as synonyms.⁴

There is also another more spiritual meaning of this Greek term. Coriden emphasises that *paroikia* simultaneously meant „resident aliens” or „settled foreigners”. This notion is used as an indication of earthly life that is not endless. Therefore, all Christians are only pilgrims who seek their true homeland in heaven.⁵ Indeed, some biblical texts and writings of early Church Fathers contain this meaning. Israel’s sojourn in Egypt and Babylonian exile are clear examples of such non-geographical or rather spiritual application of the term.⁶ However, this secondary meaning soon dwindled in usage and the term itself became more closely associated with the local communities of Christians.⁷

Early Christian communities were centred in cities, so bishops and clergy rarely visited the faithful who were living on the margins. Owing to the increasing the number of Christian believers in the fourth century AD, small communities were then organized into countries. This was carried out by „priests and bishops of villages” who took care of communities’ property and conducted local administration. Such changes were observed both in the East and West. In the West, such communities, which appointed priests and their properties were called *ecclesia rusticana* (rural Church) or *parochitana*, were later called *parochia*.⁸ This partial independence could not presume absolute independence, because the parochial priest was still subordinated to his bishop.⁹ This model of Church structure and service to a local group of people were similar to the current structure and meaning of the „parish”.

Nowadays, the parish as an institutional structure and community of Christians is subordinated to the diocesan bishop.¹⁰ This kind of subordination demonstrates not so much complete independence as mutual reciprocity between the local parish and other parochial communities on the one hand and the universal Church on the

⁴ Cf. Coriden, *The parish in a Catholic Tradition*, 19.

⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 19.

⁶ Cf. Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, London, Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 1042.

⁷ Cf. Coriden, *The parish in a Catholic Tradition*, 19.

⁸ Cf. John M. Riddle, *A History of the Middle Ages, 300–1500*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 186.

⁹Cf. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11499b.htm>, [accessed 13.02.14]

¹⁰ CIC (Codex Iuris Canonici), c. 515, §1; CCEO (Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium), c. 280, §2.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

other.¹¹ Thomas Green, in considering the nature of the parish, claims the following: „*The parish is in a very real way the Church in a given locality even if it is surely less fully ‘Church’ than the diocese; but it is not simply an administrative subdivision of the diocese. This is true even though it may lack certain foundational elements such as the presence of the bishop and the witness of ‘religious.’ In a certain sense all dioceses are basically the same as foundational ecclesial realities; yet what notably differentiates them are the varied parishes making them up*”.¹²

Thus, a definition of parish as the „local Church” can be legitimate. John Piderit and Melanie Morey define parish as the basic unit of the whole Church.¹³ Being the smallest component of the universal Church, the parish can be described as the local Church because it represents the communitarian dimension of Christ’s Church in a very particular place and time.

There is no strict association of the expression „local Church” only with the parish community. Gregorius Subanar emphasizes that in Vatican II documents, for instance, this expression is used with reference to Patriarchal Churches, dioceses and sometimes to parishes. In this sense, he appeals to the strict meaning of this expression which is a „community of Christians called by the Holy Spirit and under the leadership of the bishop, priest and other ministers, that proclaims the Word of God, celebrates the Eucharist and other sacraments, and continues the redemptive work of Christ in the world”.¹⁴ However, even identifying this expression with particular Churches or dioceses does not underestimate the role of the parish. Within this context, Thomas Green speaks of the fundamental role of the parochial community within the Universal Church, stressing that this same diocese finds its realization in parishes, because it does exist *in* parishes and *for* parishes. Following this line of reasoning, all the parishes belonging to a certain diocese constitute the „diocesan common good”.¹⁵ In other words, there would not be any diocese (in the modern understanding of the term) without existing parishes.

¹¹ Cf. CIC, c. 209; CCEO, cc 12; 201.

¹² Thomas Green, „The parish: Theological and Canonical parameters”, in *The Jurist* 69, 2009, p. 225.

¹³ John Piderit, Melanie M. Morey, *Renewing Parish Culture: Building for a Catholic Future*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁴ Gregorius Budi Subanar, *The Local Church in the Light of Magisterium Teaching Mission: A Case in Point : the Archdiocese of Semarang, Indonesia, 1940-1981*, Rome, Gregorian Biblical Book Shop, 2001, p. 89.

¹⁵ Cf. Green, *The parish*, 226.

Parish as juridical person. As can be seen from the above discussion, a parish can be considered as a structural component of the whole Universal Church. Being a structural community presupposes some clear clarification of the parish's status within the Universal Church. For this reason, taking a look at the Codes of Canon Law¹⁶ becomes necessary. The 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC) and Code of Canons of Oriental Churches (CCEO) both grant parishes the status of „juridical person”.¹⁷ In the paragraphs that follow, the main features of a parish will be discussed from the perspective of it being a juridical person.

According to the aforesaid documents, only collegial persons or aggregate of goods could be validated as juridical persons.¹⁸ CCEO provides a clear example of such category of persons in the Church: „By the law itself Churches *sui iuris*, provinces, eparchies, exarchates as well as other institutes expressly established as such in common law are juridical persons”.¹⁹ In this way, the parish is a lawful juridical person which consists of believers, parochial priest and all material goods that belong to the parish.²⁰ The priest plays a representative role but he himself is not a juridical person *per se*.²¹

Both CIC and CCEO declare that the parish is established by a diocesan bishop, who has competence to modify or discontinue the parish's existence only after consultation with his council of priests.²² It should be clarified that a bishop does not possess absolute power, but his role is to carry out the decision of the priests' council. Therefore, the parish's juridical personality is not validated by a diocesan/eparchial bishop, but out of subordination carries out certain duties and obtains certain rights according to its nature.²³ It affirms that a parish is intrinsically juridical and this is its core attribute.

From this perspective, some essential features of a parish can be ascertained. Firstly, the parish is a lawful part of a diocese/eparchy.²⁴

¹⁶ As this research has twofold focus on Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic Churches, both Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church and Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches will be scrutinized here.

¹⁷ CIC, c. 515; CCEO, c. 280, §3.

¹⁸ CIC, c. 115; CCEO, c. 920.

¹⁹ CCEO, c. 921, §2.

²⁰ CIC, c. 515, §1.

²¹ CIC, c. 520, §1; CCEO, c. 280, §3.

²² CIC, c. 515, §2; CCEO, c. 280, §2.

²³ CIC, c. 113, §2; CCEO, c. 920.

²⁴ CIC, c. 374, §1; CCEO, c. 279.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

Thomas Green explains this characteristic via several criteria that have their roots in the Codes. A parish should be determined by a concrete territory which embraces the Christian believers living there. In special cases, a certain parish could be determined by additional criteria such as language, nationality or liturgical rite.²⁵ According to Green, this principle is not an essential dimension of a parish, but such diocesan structure provides better pastoral care.²⁶ Such territorial boundaries presuppose better pastoral service in different geographic, political, economic, and other contexts. At the same time, this principle highlights the parish as a concrete reality, and not some sort of canonical abstraction.²⁷ Cardinal Francis George points out that this statement clearly differentiates Catholic parishes from Protestant or Jewish communities based on the criterion of permanently residing in a particular territory, and not only voluntary membership as it is in the latter denominations.²⁸

Another of Green's criterion is that of a „*hierarchically structured community*”. As was mentioned above, a parish is established by the local bishop and has a proper pastor. Such organization provides for qualitative community-pastor-bishop interdependent communication.²⁹ The role of the parochial priest is to serve as a steward by taking care of the spiritual and material well-being of a parish.³⁰ This partial independence and simultaneous continuity in parish-diocese relations affirm the principle of unity and diversity as well as the legitimate place and role of a parish within the Universal Church.

Secondly, all parishes enjoy the same dignity and status. The CIC declares a fundamental equality among all believers: „*Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful*”.³¹ Thus, all parishes as local communities of Christians possess the same status. This feature simultaneously creates the rights and duties of a parish. Being equal requires equal-regard relationships with faithful from another parish and presumes similar expectations of

²⁵ CIC, c. 518; CCEO, c. 280, §1.

²⁶ Green, *The Parish*, p. 219.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 220.

²⁸ Francis George, „The parish in the mission of the Church,” Thomas A. Baima, Lawrence Hennessey, *What is a Parish?: Canonical, Pastoral, and Theological Perspectives*, Chicago, Hillenbrand Books, 2011, p. 34.

²⁹ CIC, cc. 517; 519; 477, §1; CCEO cc. 287, §2; 281, §1; 247, §1; Cf. Green, *The Parish*, p. 224.

³⁰ John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, New York, Paulist Press, 2000, p. 681.

³¹ CIC, c. 208.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

another local community. This principle, following the CIC, is essential for building up the global Christian community as the one mystical Body of Christ.³²

Thirdly, „like any other juridical person, the parish is capable of acquiring, retaining, administering, and alienating temporal goods according to the norms of law”.³³ It creates the space for autonomy in the acquiring and use of money, buildings and other fixed material goods, because these are not diocesan but parish property. For a qualitative management of goods, the existence of an economic council is desirable.³⁴ It requires a number of documentary procedures, archives and even other committees.

This is not an exhaustive list of features that characterize the juridical personality of a parish. However, on the basis of those already mentioned, several statements concerning the nature of parish can be detected. The parish is a local community of Christian faithful which is part of a local diocese/eparchy. At first, it is restricted by territory and established by a bishop, who also appoints a priest as his representative in this community. Being a juridical person, a parish can possess some material goods and manage them in its own way independently. The most important feature of the parish is that the status of juridical person belongs not to the pastor but to the whole parochial community. The question of who belongs to such a parochial community will be discussed further in the later parts of this research.

Community of the baptized. After considering the locality and official juridical attributes of a parish community, a clarification of the community’s members seems necessary. The question of who belongs to the parish will lead to discovering the ties between its members. Pope John Paul II spoke of parish as follows: „*The meaning of the parish is precisely this: a family in which one seeks, one recognizes, one realizes one's vocation which the Lord has given to every human being. One could say that the parish is truly a parish when it helps each and every individual to discover and realize his Christian vocation*”.³⁵

Such a view amounts to a more theological view of parish and prevents an overemphasis on its institutional and juridical dimension. The following analysis will describe the meaning of baptism as the fundamental basis for each Christian community’s existence, especially the parish.

³² CIC, c. 208.

³³ CIC, cc. 1255-56. Also see Beal, Coriden, Green, *New Commentary*, p. 681.

³⁴ CIC, c. 537; CCEO, c. 295.

³⁵ Baima, Hennessey, *What is a Parish*, p. 5.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

If the familial characteristic of parish is one of those at stake, the moment that gave birth to this community must be defined. In analysing John Paul II's view on parish, Thomas Baima and Hennesy Lawrence emphasize that as the family celebrates the birth of its new member, so does the Church when it welcomes its new member at baptism. Accordingly, the origin of the parish is sacramental and lies in baptism. For that reason, each Christian parish is „*the community of the baptized*”.³⁶ This essential requirement clearly confirms that there is only one way to become a member of Christ's Church and simultaneously a parochial member.

Being a member of an ecclesial community means not only receiving but also giving. Thomas Green emphasizes that the baptized person not only have rights but also numerous duties. Taking into consideration his/her age, marital status, social position and other factors, each individual should strive for the common good of the whole community.³⁷ The interactivity among its members becomes an essential characteristic of any community. It can be noted from a definition of diocese and parish in the Codes of Canon Law. Thomas Green points out that when speaking of diocese, the codes define it as a „*portion of the people of God*” while parish is described as a *community of Christian faithful*”.³⁸ John Paul II considers parish as the realization of a community's vocation: „*You must undertake to grow in Christ not only as individuals, but also as a parish*”.³⁹ Therefore, each parishioner has a duty to work for the neighbour's salvation.

Speaking of a community based on baptism means speaking of a community with a special identity. The identification with Christ is the core point of a Christian community which finds its mission and vocation in following Jesus and living according to God's commandments. Putting the stress on baptism should prevent a mere human foundation for the Church but affirms its simultaneously divine and human origin. Therefore, it is legitimate to speak of the parish as a local community existing in a very particular place and time, but one which ultimately finds its origin in God. Recognizing the parish as a community of the baptized is the preliminary and key step towards understanding its nature. Baptism opens up the possibility of receiving Communion and other Sacraments which are made available in the local

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁷ Cf. Green, *The Parish*, p. 216. See also CIC c. 216; CCEO, c. 226.

³⁸ Cf. Green, *The Parish*, p. 217. See also CIC cc. 369; 515 §1; CCEO cc. 177 §1; 279.

³⁹ Baima, Hennesy, *What is a Parish*, p. 5.

Church community. Being baptized presupposes being a member of „*Christ's mystical body*” and belonging to a hallowed community-the people of God. This feature will be scrutinized further.

Eucharistic centre. Speaking of a parish is impossible without focusing on the role of the Eucharist. Vatican II provides a clear explanation of the Eucharistic dimension of the local Christian community: „*No Christian community, however, can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist. Here, therefore, all education in the spirit of community must originate*”.⁴⁰ Thomas Baima and Lawrence Hennessey similarly emphasise that avoiding the Eucharistic dimension is inadmissible in drawing up a theology of the parish.⁴¹

The Eucharist is the most essential element for the existence of the whole Universal Church. Zizioulas highlights this sacrament as constitutive with regard to the Church: „*It was an event constitutive of the being of the Church, enabling the Church to be*”.⁴² Nicholas Afanassieff develops his reflection in the same way by stating that „*wherever the Eucharist is, there is the Church*”.⁴³ Critical to the Church's existence, this sacrament must be the basis for every communal or personal spiritual life. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church affirms that Eucharist is „*the source and summit of the Christian life*”.⁴⁴ Therefore, each Christian should consider the Eucharistic dimension of his/her whole life.

Being a Christian community, the parish is by definition a Eucharistic community. Celebrating the Eucharist is the fundamental duty of each parish and the main purpose of its existence. Baima and Hennessey both affirm the uniqueness of parish life. Accordingly, there is no other community or institution with the mission of celebrating the sacrament of the Eucharist. In this sense, it is logical to deduce that it is not the diocese but the local parish which can be called the „*Eucharistic community*”.⁴⁵ In this context, the theology of parish finds its point of departure. The Catechism of the Catholic Church accentuates that all other Sacraments are oriented towards the Eucharist and have unbreakable ties with it.⁴⁶ It leads to the parochial community being defined as the place and space for encountering the visible presence of

⁴⁰ PO, 6.

⁴¹ Baima, Hennessey, *What is a Parish*, p. 15.

⁴² Cited in Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia*, Hindmarsh, ATF Press, 2011, p. 14.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibidem*, 14.

⁴⁴ LG 11.

⁴⁵ Baima, Hennessey, *What is a Parish*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ CCC, 1324.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

God's invisible grace. As such, each member of this community can experience growth in faith and fulfil his/her spiritual needs. In such a context, Baima and Hennesey call each parochial community a „*spiritual home for the faith*”:⁴⁷

Eucharistic parochial communities celebrate the Sacraments not only as a group of people limited by territory, but by actively joining in the universal prayer of the Church at large. The Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on the Sacred Liturgy declares that the most important mission of parishes is to „*represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world*”:⁴⁸ It renders the local parish as a core element of the universal Church. Celebrating the Eucharist happens in certain churches with local priests and parishioners who mystically unite themselves with all Christian believers around the world. These dynamics and continuity are well described by Patrick Granfield and Peter Phan: „*The individual local churches are not something distinct from the universal Church but represent it, realize it, bears its image in the sense that what makes the one Church the Church makes them churches*”:⁴⁹

Hence, recognising the parish as a community that possesses clearly defined rights and comprises the baptized would not be sufficient. The central point that unites a community must be considered. That is, celebrating the Eucharist is this core purpose of each parochial community which fulfils the commandment given by Jesus: „*Do this in remembrance of me*”:⁵⁰

Koinonia. All previously considered dimensions of parish lead to a profound understanding of parish as a community where the common faith and sacraments constitute its basis. Phillip Kariatlis highlights the difference between the Church and any other non-ecclesial community. According to him, what is at stake in any ecclesial community is the Eucharist which renders it more than just a sociological phenomenon. Moreover, this sacrament bears a new essential feature of the Church-„*eschatological feature*”-which is what substantially differentiates the ecclesial community from mere sociological ones.⁵¹ However, attention to sociological features of the parish as a local ecclesial community is also necessary. In this way, James

⁴⁷ Baima, Hennesey, *What is a Parish*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ SC, 42.

⁴⁹ Patrick Granfield, Peter C. Phan, *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield*, O.S.B, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 82.

⁵⁰ Lk 22, 19.

⁵¹ Cf. Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, xii-xiii.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

Coriden stresses the two main characteristics of parish as a „communion”: religious character and reciprocity.⁵² In such a perspective, a particular parish as well as the Universal Church are both regarded as a communion between created human beings and an uncreated God. This is the general meaning of the Greek term *koinonia* or Latin *communio*.

Many theologians speak of ‘communion’ (English translation of *koinonia*) as a specific theological term. Phillip Kariatlis considers it as an expression applicable to the Church’s existence in the world: „*Ininitely greater than an institution, the church essentially was life-God’s communal life passed on in the world throughout the ages*”.⁵³ With reference to Bulgakov, he criticizes the mere abstract connotation of *koinonia* by stating that although it takes its roots from the eternal Trinitarian communion, „*the Church [is] the pre-eternal purpose and foundation of creation*”.⁵⁴ Therefore, the term *koinonia* is a dialectical one.⁵⁵

Etymologically speaking, the terms *ekklesia* and *koinonia* have much in common but were not always used interchangeably. Based on Hauck’s investigation, Kariatlis emphasizes that both Old and New Testaments present a different meaning of *koinonia*. Accordingly, in the Old Testament this notion had a more secular connotation, stressing basically interpersonal relationships in terms of having something in common, whether it be material things or some relational ties. However, the New Testament redefines this term as „*communion with God*” through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and this is the essence of the Church.⁵⁶ Further, Kariatlis also deals with one indisputable feature of the ecclesial community as a communal being: „*The communal mode of the church’s existence was the result of God’s effective calling in the first place since it was God who had initiated the salvific plan (divine economy) by having called the church into communion with him through his Son, Jesus Christ*”.⁵⁷ It forces one to conclude that *koinonia* is one of the essential characteristics of the Church which delineates the singularity or rather the uniqueness of the ecclesial community.

Parish as a local church is also considered as *koinonia*. E. Duffy refers to Vatican II’s vision of the Church as a „*community of communities*”.

⁵² Cf. Coriden, *The parish*, pp. 14-15.

⁵³ Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, „The Orthodox Church,” Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Cf. Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 40-42

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

He argues that this communal dimension of the Universal Church is realised in the very particular life of the local Christian communities. Therefore, according to Duffy, such a communion is experienced at the very beginning within the context of local parochial communities: „Whenever a community assembles to celebrate the Eucharist it is already sharing in the Banquet of Life prepared by the Triune God. It is an assembly of people who are continually striving to grow in communion of life among themselves, through their common worship and their efforts to support and encourage one another in various social and material ways beyond the Eucharistic gathering”.⁵⁸

Continuing in this line, Duffy argues that the relationships between the local Christian communities, bounded by the Eucharistic Sacrament, lead to a consideration of the communal character of the Universal Church, but not vice versa.⁵⁹ The same integrating aspect of local ecclesial communities is described by Avery Dulles in terms of being members of the Body of Christ who are gathered together and united with the head-Jesus Christ. It presupposes of course the obvious vertical relationship with God.⁶⁰

Considering the two relational dimensions of the parish community, ecclesial *koinonia* can be the key point in understanding the expression „people of God”. This formulation is used in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when speaking of the Church.⁶¹ This document also provides some characteristics of the people of God: „It is the People of God: God is not the property of any one people. But he acquired a people for himself from those who previously were not a people: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. One becomes a member of this people not by a physical birth, but by being born anew, a birth of water and the Spirit, that is, by faith in Christ, and Baptism. This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is the messianic people”.⁶² Three elements here are of great importance: being chosen by God; being born of water and Spirit; and having Christ as the head of one body. These characteristics recapitulate and sum up all previous statements concerning the nature of parish. Theologically speaking, becoming a member of the ecclesial community is a free act of response to God’s call to join the community that happens through

⁵⁸ Eugen Duffy, „Clustering Parishes: Theology and Practice”, in Eugen Duffy,(ed.), *Parishes in Transition*, Dublin, Columba Press, 2010, p. 104.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ Cf. Avery Dulles, „The Ecclesiology of John Paul II”, in Granfield, Phan, *The Gift of the Church*, p. 95.

⁶¹ Cf. CCC, 782.

⁶² CCC, 782.

Baptism. What makes the unity of the baptized is Christ Himself as the head of the body. It leads to consideration of another expression of Church identity-, „*the body of Christ*”. Viewing the Church as the people of God and as the body of Christ affirms the equal significance of ordained ministers, laity and spiritual persons. Based on his reflections on these two expressions, Phillip Kariatlis formulates the mission statement of ecclesial members in this way: „*As a united body, God’s people had to strive together towards a greater and even more profound unity which would have as its culmination God’s eternal kingdom*”.⁶³ In describing the Universal Church as the mystical body of Christ, the particular local parish is legitimately considered as part of the same body.

It leads to the conclusion that the local parish might and must be regarded as a communion-*koinonia*. Encountering the living Christ starts with the parish gathering around the Eucharist – as the real presence of Christ. Moreover, the expression „*community of communities*” can be addressed to the parish as well because of the existence of smaller communities therein, or brotherhoods and other organizations that belong to it. Notwithstanding their number, they become one community in celebrating the Eucharist. Therefore, the parish is the first place that creates space for a twofold dimension of communication-horizontal and vertical-space for encountering both the neighbour and God. This is a space for reciprocal self-giving, self-sacrifice, and opening towards the other. This is the deepest meaning of *koinonia*, which is simultaneously obvious and explainable on the one hand, while remaining mystical on the other hand. Based on Kasper’s view of *koinonia* as „*a fundamental reality and a fundamental human longing*”, Kariatlis accentuates the twofold perspective of the Church’s communal dimension: as a gift, which is established by virtue of the church’s real existence, and as a goal, to which every Christian should strive.⁶⁴

What has been described above constitutes a theology of parish. Unfortunately, such a theology frequently appears veiled to a majority of people, especially to lay members of a parochial community. Therefore, searching for strategies that reaffirm more clearly these characteristics relating to the nature and mission of a parish is necessary. In this context, John Piredit makes a strong case by acknowledging the essence of a parish: „*Parishes cannot be vital and vibrant and make a cultural impact if*

⁶³ Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 29-31.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

their very existence is threatened".⁶⁵ All basic statements analysed above must be explained more clearly to modern Christians and reformulated in line with the modern world. This basically involves the idea of parish renewal.

The mission of the parish

Speaking of the nature of the parish without discerning its mission would be counterproductive. What has been described above is rather theoretical but the time has come to proceed to an investigation of the *praxis* of parish community. In this perspective, the latter concept can be acknowledged as the first. Defining the nature of parish provides an understanding of parochial identity as well as answers to the questions of what the parish is and who are parishioners. Considering the parish's mission concretizes the very practice of the community's members or provides answers to the question: in what way must the parishioner act.⁶⁶ Recognizing both the nature and mission of parish should unveil the identity of the parish and all the members of this community. Both of these aspects are mutually interconnected and cannot be separated from each other when speaking of parish.

There is no unique common point among modern theologians when it comes to a systematic description of the parish's mission. William Rademacher speaks of six missions: being a Eucharistic community, proclaiming the Gospel, worshiping through the parish liturgy, building a Christian community, ministering to the Church and to the world, interpreting the signs of the times.⁶⁷ Mary Ann Gubish and Susan Jenny put the emphasis on one specific mission of the parish which is evangelization, stressing the duties of proclaiming and witnessing to the Word of God.⁶⁸ Robert Hater also considers evangelization as the most important mission which is nothing other

⁶⁵ John Piderit, Melanie M. Morey, *Renewing Parish Culture: Building for a Catholic Future*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Cf. William J. Rademacher, „Pastoral Theology of Parish”, in William J. Rademacher, John S. Weber, David Jr. McNeill, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007, p. 50.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 50-58.

⁶⁸ Cf. Mary Ann Gubish, Susan Jenny, *Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council: A Workbook*, New York, Paulist Press, 2001, p. 15.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, numãr 7, 2016

than following Jesus' own mission.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is rather impossible to speak of a classic mission of the parish community.

The mission of the parish is recognized in the Church's own mission. John Paul II silhouetted its mission by considering it in terms of the salvific mission of the Trinity. Peter McGregor summarizes the Pope's view on this issue and states that the mission of the Church is a direct realization of God's mission. Therefore, its basis lies not in the Church's institutional character, but in the very nature of the Church which is derived from the Trinitarian being.⁷⁰ Continuing his analysis, McGregor emphasizes the following: „*Everyone [according to Pope John Paul II] is in a state of mission, not merely functionally, but by their very nature. Every Christian shares in the divine mission*”.⁷¹ The role of faith is crucial here. Following John Paul II, understanding the divine mission is only possible through the acceptance of God's revelation, which is possible only through faith. Faith, according to him, must be dynamic and requires a persevering witness. This witness is the manifestation of God's salvific desire for humankind which was realised through Jesus' serving as a priest, prophet, and king. According to McGregor's analysis, the pope referred to Vatican II's teaching on the threefold mission of Christ and linked it to all Church members who take the same threefold mission by being „clothed” in Christ.⁷² It leads one to conclude that the Church's mission can be defined in a threefold manner-priestly, prophetic, and kingly-which is not unlike the salvific mission of Christ. Taking into consideration that the parish is the local ecclesial community, its mission might be regarded in the same way.

It is necessary to remember that the direction of the parish's mission is twofold: internal and external. William Rademacher also refers to the teaching of Vatican II on the mission of the Church and points to the distinction between the *church ad intra* and the *church ad extra*. He claims that members of the parochial community must consider serving their neighbours within the parish and simultaneously must be oriented towards people outside: „*It can be a warm, welcoming sacrament to the stranger or it can appear to be a hypocrite, self-serving, money-grabbing institution. So when we concentrate on the parish's outer mission, we cannot forget its inner ministry*”.⁷³

⁶⁹ Cf. Robert J. Hater, *The Catholic Parish: Hope for a Changing World*, New York, Paulist Press, 2004, pp. 75-83.

⁷⁰ Cf. McGregor, *Priests, Prophets, and Kings*, „The Mission of the Church According to John Paul II”, in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, February 2013, vol. 78 (1), p. 63.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁷² Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁷³ Rademacher, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, p. 51.

Therefore, the following analysis of the threefold mission of the parish will be made without neglecting both aspects of its realisation.

Priestly mission. Celebrating the Eucharist is the central point of the Christian community's life and is simultaneously the starting point towards acknowledging the mission of the parochial community. William Rademacher stresses thus: „*The parish has a mission to be what it celebrates*”.⁷⁴ If the Eucharistic celebration is an essential and constitutive concept of the parish, then each parishioner has a duty to fulfil it. The problem that parishioners could encounter is a lack of understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist, which is often limited to a particular place and time where it is celebrated. No less problematic is the understanding of who celebrates this sacrament and what the role of parishioners is. Therefore, the concept of priesthood must be scrutinized.

The notion of priesthood is most often associated with the person who, being ordained, performs the sacramental rituals. However, the priestly vocation is not restricted to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Each person in his/her baptism receives this vocation. Therefore, speaking only of the ordained ministry would not be correct with regard to the priestly ministry. Cardinal Roger Mahony emphasizes that the ministry of both ordained and lay persons has its roots in Christ's servanthood.⁷⁵ Therefore, all Christians, as members of the Church, have one common vocation and responsibility, which is to build up the Body of Christ, like He did, through sacrifice, regardless of whether the person belongs to the lay or ordained priesthood.

The common priesthood can be understood by acknowledging the difference between ordained ministrants' and lay people's participation in the Eucharistic sacrament. Peter Cazarella clarifies that the priest performs the service in persona Christi and, therefore, represents Christ in sharing the Eucharistic bread.⁷⁶

There is a significant difference between ordained and common priesthood; however, the first cannot be separated from the second. The Vatican instruction *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest* defines two main characteristics of the ministerial priesthood: 1) having roots in the Apostolic Succession; and 2) authoritative serving of Christ and the

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

⁷⁵ Roger Mahony, *To reconcile God's people: Our Ministry and Mission*, New York, Paulist Press, 2013, p. 2, I.

⁷⁶ Cf. Peter Casarella, „Eucharist: Presence of a Gist”, in Roch A. Kereszty, *Rediscovering the Eucharist: Ecumenical Conversations*, New York, Paulist Press, 2003, p. 215.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

Church in the proclamation of the Gospel, administration of the Sacraments, and pastoral care of the believers.⁷⁷ At the same time, the document also states that the ministerial priesthood cannot be considered as a continuation of Christ's priesthood, because the latter cannot be divided. Ordination presumes rather the *mode* of participation in this priesthood: „*While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace,-a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit-the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood... and directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians'. Consequently, the ministerial priesthood 'differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful'*”⁷⁸

This clarification leads one to conclude that lay people do not have inferior status within the common priesthood rooted in Christ' priestly mission. Therefore, a way to realise the common priesthood must be discovered.

While the ministerial priesthood is performed basically within the context of a particular community, the common priesthood must be considered within the scope of mission *ad extra*. Peter Casarella argues that lay people performing consecration are not less worthy and spiritual than priests in their service.⁷⁹ The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* states that lay people, due to their common priesthood accepted in baptism, have a vocation to perform even special consecration: „*For all their [laity] works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne-all these become 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' [...] Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God*”⁸⁰

In considering this way of serving in the world, Casarella argues that both ministerial and lay services are complementary towards performing one Eucharistic consecration.⁸¹ This is what is meant by the description of serving in the world or being oriented *ad extra mission*.

Both kinds of priesthood may be distinguished but can never be separated. Moreover, they are mutually dependent. It is the mission of each Christian faithful to encounter Christ in Eucharistic consecration

⁷⁷ Cf. IQC, 1997. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_int_erdic_doc_15081997_en.html.

⁷⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1547, 1592 in IQC.

⁷⁹ Cf. Casarella, *Eucharist: Presence of a Gist*, p. 217.

⁸⁰ LG, 34.

⁸¹ Cf. Casarella, *Eucharist: Presence of a Gist*, p. 217.

performed in a particular community by an ordained minister and bring Him to the world. This is the mission of the parish-to break bread and share it. While the first one is performed by the parochial priest, the mission of sharing belongs to all the faithful in their daily lives.⁸² Rademacher emphasises thus: „*There are no passive observers. We don't just go to Mass. We become one with Christ in offering ourselves, heart and soul, to be a living part of the mystery [...] Our mission is to celebrate both who we are and what we do*”.⁸³ Therefore, the meaning of the parish priestly mission involves performing the sacrifice and becoming sacrificial with regard to the world. It is not to be self-oriented, but to provide universal serving. This is the heart of the prophetic mission of the parish.

Prophetic mission. Considering that the parish's mission is rooted in the mission of Christ, His prophetic ministry will thus be analysed. The constitution *Lumen Gentium* speaks of Jesus as a great Prophet whose main prophecy was the proclamation of God's Kingdom.⁸⁴ Peter McGregor refers to John Paul II who stresses that the prophetic mission of Christ constitutes „*expressing the Divine truth in human language*”.⁸⁵ Therefore, continuing with the pope's reflections, „*a prophet is one who speaks in the name of the Lord, who knows the truth contained in the word of God; he bears it in himself, imparts it to others and guards it as his dearest heritage*”.⁸⁶ It leads to the conclusion that each Christian faithful is rooted in the same mission of preaching God's word to the world. This is the essence of the Christian's prophetic mission which can also be called evangelization.

The mission of evangelization has to be a part of all parochial activities. Robert Hater emphasizes that proclaiming God's word is the core of all catechesis, which must be supported in different ways by all parochial committees.⁸⁷ In this context, the mission of smaller communities and organizations that make up a particular parish can be rediscovered. Economic and pastoral councils, youth and children communities, brotherhoods and sisterhoods in their very specific goals all contribute to one of the main tasks of a parish-proclamation of the Good News in word and deed. With regard to this commonly duty,

⁸² Cf. Rademacher, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, p. 51.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, pp. 52-53.

⁸⁴ Cf. LG, 35.

⁸⁵ Cf. Karol Wojtyła, „Sources of Renewal”, in McGregor, *Priests, Prophets, and Kings: The Mission of the Church According to John Paul II*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, February 2013, vol. 78 (1), p. 65.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Cf. Hater, *The Catholic Parish*, p. 74.

Hater defines the „*four pillars of parish life*” which must be taken into account when speaking of evangelization: „*Evangelization permeates every segment of parish life, but its dynamism is focused in four essential dimensions. They are a parish's mission, members, ministry, and management [...] When these dimensions mutually interact in the spirit of Christ's gospel, the parish becomes a loving community*”.⁸⁸ Therefore, each institution and smaller parochial community, in doing their best for parish sustainability, contributes to the realisation of the prophetic mission of the parish.

As well as the parish's priestly mission, its prophetic mission is performed not only by the priest in his preaching, but also by the laity as a duty. Following *Lumen Gentium*, Jesus Christ has yet to complete his prophetic mission, and so continues to realize it not only through the ordained hierarchy, but also through the laity in their everyday witnesses.⁸⁹ Robert Hater emphasizes that Christ's mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God basically involves revealing the love of God. Consequently, in continuing the same mission, contemporary Christians are to proclaim and spread this love in all spheres of their lives: „*Parish evangelization communicates love flowing from the love that inspired God to create the universe and redeem humankind. It urges parishioners to develop an attitude of evangelization when they prepare a liturgy, work at a fish fry, or coach an athletic team*”.⁹⁰ In this way, evangelization is a task that makes all Christians missionaries. This conclusion clearly affirms that missionaries are not those preaching from the pulpit, but rather those who realise this preaching at home, at the work place or elsewhere. In other words, these consider everything they do with respect to God's commandments and their mission to proclaim the word of God. William Rademacher emphasizes thus: „*All parishioners are missionaries. This may mean that within a few blocks from their parish church [they] may clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, feed the hungry, or welcome the stranger*”.⁹¹ This is the most direct realisation of God's commandments.

The prophetic mission of a parish is realised in two ways: to those who already acknowledged God, and to those who are not familiar with God's good news. William Rademacher accentuates the significance of the Sunday homily as a necessary means of spiritual growth. At the same time, he mentions the duty of bringing the words of the gospel beyond the frameworks of the parish to all individuals who have not yet

⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁸⁹ Cf. LG, p. 35.

⁹⁰ Hater, *The Catholic Parish*, p. 84.

⁹¹ Rademacher, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, p. 52.

encountered God's message.⁹² The missionary character of the Church and its faithful is described in the same manner in Vatican II's *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*: „It is plain, then, that missionary activity wells up from the church's innermost nature and spreads abroad her saving faith”.⁹³ This way of *ad extra* mission depicts the parish as open to the world community and not focused merely on the internal life of its members. The prophetic mission aims to build up the parish community but not create a kind of isolated sect.

The prophetic mission cannot be separated from the one previously described—the priestly mission. For in the Eucharistic consecration, all parishioners take part not only in sharing the bread, but also in listening to the Word. Therefore, proclaiming God's message is an adequate response to what has been accepted. In the priestly mission, there is an encounter with Jesus; in the prophetic mission all the faithful do their best to ensure others experience God and acknowledge His mission. What must be clarified further is the realisation of Jesus' preaching—the kingdom of God.

Royal mission. The royal mission of the Christian faithful flows from the core of Christ's mission—proclaiming the Kingdom of His Father. *Lumen Gentium* here recapitulates the significance of this mission: „To Him [Christ] all things are made subject until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father that God may be all in all [...] The Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God”.⁹⁴

Accordingly, each human being possesses a special royal dignity which can be acknowledged by faith. Therefore, each Christian faithful in his/her baptism takes part in the mission of Christ—proclaiming the kingdom of God. This mission cannot be separated with the two previously described, even though has its special characteristics.

A lot of attention has been drawn to the royal mission of the Church by John Paul II. Analyzing *Lumen Gentium*, he discovered two aspects of Christians' participation in realising this mission. The first one is being called to a „royal freedom” or freedom from sin.⁹⁵ Peter McGregor explains it as being called to an absolute freedom like a kingly freedom

⁹² Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁹³ AG, 6.

⁹⁴ LG, 36.

⁹⁵ Cf. Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, p. 263.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

which makes the person holy and destroys any bounds of sin.⁹⁶ This way of treating God's kingdom reveals the mercy of the Creator and His gift to humanity. The second aspect has a twofold interpretation. From one perspective, according to Wojtyła, sharing the kingdom means active participation in its building, i.e. „*„serving Christ in others”*.”⁹⁷ In other words, the royal mission of the Christian faithful must reveal in praxis the serving of the neighbor with the aim of building a kingdom of „*justice, love, and peace*”. William Rademacher goes the same way in explaining the royal mission of a parish. Here, he uses the Greek term *diakonia*, and describes its meaning as Christian service.⁹⁸ According to him, Jesus Christ was himself an example of *diakonia*. This was clearly manifested during the Last Supper in the washing and wiping dry of his disciples' feet. According to Rademacher, Jesus represented a new kind of ministry: „*Foot washing, of course, serves as a symbol of the kind of humble service Christians are called to offer to the world around them. This symbol highlights the Christians' inner motivation, their selfless, tender care in offering service*”.⁹⁹ Consequently, God's kingdom must be built on daily ministry to the other. Peter McGregor explains it as the „*transformation of the world*”.¹⁰⁰

Another perspective on participation in God's kingdom from John Paul II's reflections is the „*promotion of the dignity of the human person*”. It requires the protection of human rights and dignity in the world. For instance, it can be realised in defending the right to live or the rights to realize personal freedom in social, cultural, political, economic and others spheres of life.¹⁰¹ This explanation is compatible with Rademacher's description of the mission of the parish as interpreting the signs of the times. He argues that this mission demonstrates the relations of any parochial community to the world around it. He undoubtedly considers this kind of mission to be the most difficult.¹⁰² This difficulty in contemporary reality can be explained by many philosophical, cultural, political and other tendencies which often dissent from moral ideals. In this context, the mission of the Universal Church, and consequently that of the particular parish, is about acknowledging, interpreting, and giving proper guidance to its members on how to live and behave in order to participate in the kingdom of God.

⁹⁶ Cf. McGregor, *Priests, Prophets, and Kings*, p. 66.

⁹⁷ Cf. Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, 263 in McGregor, p. 66.

⁹⁸ Cf. Rademacher, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, p. 54.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁰ McGregor, *Priests, Prophets, and Kings*, p. 66.

¹⁰¹ McGregor, *Priests, Prophets, and Kings*, p. 66.

¹⁰² Cf. Rademacher, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, pp. 55-58.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, număr 7, 2016

Generally speaking, the royal mission of a parish is realised when parishioners are true to their vocation of pursuing the mission of Jesus Christ-proclaiming the kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of justice, peace, and love. This is only possible through listening and responding to the Word of God, which must be spread to the ends of the earth. This serving must be performed in a sacrificial way-through self-sacrifice in the parishioners' daily life. It leads to the conclusion that not one of the three constituent mission's dimensions can either be separated or isolated. No one can be apprehended without considering the others, as all three create one unique mission in three dimensions.

After a detailed analysis of the concrete dimensions of the parish's nature and mission, some conclusive statements and remarks can be formulated. Any research on parish cannot be conducted without a clear understanding of the nature of parish as such. Only by considering the different dimensions of parish life will there be a clear understanding of the mission to which each parishioner is called. The analysis made above forces one to conclude that the parish is basically a local particular community that is independent on the one hand, and is a constitutive part of the Universal Church and is considered a structural unit of the diocese on the other. After being ordained by the bishop, the parish receives a permanent minister who serves the Sacraments and leads the parish's life. At the same time, the parish must be viewed as a communion of the baptized. By their baptism, each person is bestowed with the dignity of belonging to such a community, and this is the basic criteria that grant all members the same dignity and prevent any injustice. Being gathered together around the Eucharist, the parish can be viewed as the Eucharistic centre for encountering the real and living Christ who through His presence in each liturgical sacrifice gathers together all parishes around the world into one mystical body where He is the Head.

Parish is the place for the first encounter with the Eucharistic Christ. Each newly baptized person is baptized *in* and *into* the local ecclesial community. Celebrating the Eucharist is also possible only in a particular and concrete place. Therefore, new Christians are born not in dioceses, but in concrete small ecclesial communities-i.e. in parishes. Dioceses and decanates are essentially institutions while the parish, despite its institutional character, is a concrete place and space where Jesus Christ is really present in body and blood. Moreover, these institutions would never exist (in the modern understanding of these terms) without such particular parishes.

Astra Salvensis, an IV, numãr 7, 2016

Parish is an institution where all services are performed as simple formal duties. Being a Christian does away with any kind of passivity. Being truly Christian is an active involvement and the parish is a centre that generates this activity. Of its very nature, the parish already has the goal of its existence. Being baptized into Christ, each Christian receives the ministry of Christ, which comprises the threefold ministry of priest, prophet and king. In the priestly mission, the parish realises itself in performing the Eucharistic sacrifice and receiving the Sacramental Jesus. Moreover, the whole Christian life has a sacrificial character and it is the mission of each baptized individual to offer up the world to God through their personal lifestyle. The parish realises its prophetic mission by listening to the Word of God, accepting and proclaiming it to the whole world. Listening alone is not sufficient, because it does not produce any fruits. The royal mission is realised in proclaiming the kingdom of God after the example of Jesus-through personal efforts to transform an unjust and vicious world into God's kingdom of justice, peace and love. This is the mission of a parish: performing the sacrifice so as to become sacrificial, listening and proclaiming, receiving and giving. It affirms that a parish which is closed to the world is not a true local church. On the contrary, it must have a twofold orientation: being open towards community members and towards those who have never heard of the Good News.