

Earlier this month, I went to a conference entitled “Called & Co-Responsible: Exploring Co-Responsibility for the Mission of the Church.” This conference was sponsored by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The director of the institute, John Cavadini, pointed out that during his pontificate, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI “called for a change in how we think about the role of lay people in the Church, using the new word ‘co-responsibility’ to refer to it,” and that Benedict taught that the laity “are really ‘co-responsible’ for the Church’s being and acting.” Cavadini further highlighted that “Pope Francis built on this charge, calling for renewed energy for the mission of evangelization on behalf of all the faithful, including and especially the laity,” particularly by citing the Holy Father’s encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, §102:

Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority—ordained ministers—are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities.

These ideas are in accord with my last pastoral reflection, in which I wrote that since “we are members of Christ’s body, the Church, each of us must participate *according to our*

proper function, in order for the entire body to be healthy. Consequently, we have to seriously discern where God's made us to 'fit' into the Body of Christ." When we discern our God-given gifts, "and thoughtfully consider how God intends us to use them – whether in our parishes, in our families, in our jobs, in volunteer positions, etc. – then we'll be more focused, energized, and fulfilled in our service, and the Lord will ensure that the Church's needs are met, and the entire Body of Christ will be healthier as a result."

As I write this reflection on March 16th, we're unable to come together as a larger church community to celebrate Mass or gather for other activities because of the coronavirus pandemic. In a sense, at this time a greater focus is being placed on the "domestic Church," and the laity's co-responsibility for the Church is being concretely fulfilled, since you all are currently only able to practice and teach the faith in your own homes. When we are able to be together again around the Holy Eucharist, may we gather our individual efforts to practice our faith together and even more fully realize our co-responsibility for the Church, so that it may continue to spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God bless,

Father Keith