



Episcopal Diocese  
of Washington

## Supporting the Ministry of the Laity

*By virtue of baptism, every member of the church is called to ministry. The role of a clergy is to be the spiritual leader of a congregation engaged in ministry with the entire congregation in its ministry. In a model of mutual ministry, the clergy and the lay leadership work together to cast a vision for mission and carry out that vision and mission.*

*Lay and ordained leaders are charged with seeking ways to inspire and support the entire congregation in its ministry both within and outside the parish. While clergy play a particular role in formation, liturgy, and preaching, the ministry of every person is needed to fulfill God's mission. Here are a few ways to support the ministry of the laity:*

1. **Engage in caring conversations.** Ministry is about relationship. Through conversation we come to know one another more deeply and grow in our sense of belonging and commitment. We are people with concerns, joys, families and demands on our time. Caring conversations can happen over lunch, with coffee, at people's homes, in the parish office, or over the phone.
2. **Listen for passions and gifts.** A necessary skill of congregational leaders is to listen to what God is up to in a person's life. This requires listening for the gifts of members. Gifts are not the same as skills. One of the differences is that using one's gifts is life-giving and while a person might have a particular skill in spades, skills tend to be energy depleting. It is critical that people have the opportunity to offer their gifts in a congregation in life-giving ways.
3. **Offer congregation-wide gifts discernment.** God has gifted every community with the gifts it needs to fulfill God's mission. Every person has gifts to offer, and no one person has all the gifts. All the gifts of all are needed. This means always being open to discerning gifts of new members and the shifting gifts of existing members. Having an opportunity to discern gifts as a community will help a congregation claim its diverse gifts and pave the way for new energy.
4. **Invite people into ministry.** We can be confident that God has given a congregation what it needs to fulfill its mission. Through caring conversations and gifts discernment, listen for people's passions. Consider inviting people to take the next step to begin contributing to or to lead a ministry in an area that brings them

joy. Service is an opportunity to put faith into action and deepen relationships. When making invitations, remember that intentional and personal invitations are significantly more effective than general requests for help.

5. **Take time to celebrate.** Sometimes we focus so much on tasks that we forget to pause, look, and listen to the success of our efforts. It is critical to take time to celebrate life's joys with one another, just as it is important to attend to one another's needs. Celebrating affirms ministry and can provide the energy for renewed commitments.
6. **Be alert for burnout.** Burnout often comes when there is a lack of focus, or an accretion of responsibilities on capable individuals. Establishing job descriptions with clear expectations and tangible goals with a timeline for passing on responsibilities to another person or period review is essential. This is especially true for volunteers.
7. **Pair new and experienced members.** Pairing new and existing members based on shared passions will help to create a sense of shared ministry and establish systems of mutual support.