

At home alone



Questions for discussion

1. How important is the community aspect of your church to you as a Christian?
2. What is the role, if any, of ordained ministry in your church? What are the clergy's different ministries, services and functions?
3. To whom are priests and pastors accountable? For whom are they responsible? With what power, if any, should they exercise their holy calling?
4. What is the ministry or calling of laity in the church? What are their different ministries, services and functions?
5. What role do young people play in your church? Is the church relevant for youth? Are they active in the leadership of liturgy or community life? What is the role of women?
6. Reflect on the passage from 1 Corinthians 12: 4-31. How do you relate this to your own church and the role each person plays? What does this passage tell us about working for Christian unity?

On Ministry...

Pastor Gardiner stood thinking for a long while in front of Muriel Johnson's home. He was certainly not looking forward to this particular visit! How, he wondered, can I say what I want to say without sounding defensive?

The last time he called on Mrs. Johnson she made it very clear why she stopped coming to church worship: she had found a "deeper religious experience" by watching a popular evangelist on television. From him she received comfort and inspiration. He had also convinced her that going to church wasn't nearly as important as your own personal relation to Jesus.

And that, she decided, was something she could have at home alone without being disturbed in church by all those rowdy children and radical college students and continual demands to help with this charity programme or that fund drive. I can pray very well in my own living room, she told Pastor Gardiner, without needing any minister to lead me, thank you. Besides, some of your sermons aren't very spiritual when they try to "mix religion and politics".

As the pastor walked up to the door, he recalled that Mrs Johnson's daughter and son-in-law had also stopped coming to church. Your services are "too stiff and formal for us", they told him. Why do you repeat those same things week after week, with the same people leading the same worship out of the same book? Frankly, they said, we far prefer our occasional prayer meetings with a small circle of close friends where there is no "expert minister to preach at us".

They're right, the pastor thought, when they say that our church community isn't always as lively as it could be. And it's also true that prayer groups, like Muriel's personal prayers, are an important part of our Christian life.

But yet, he countered, isn't the Church the body of Christ, more than the sum of its isolated scattered parts? Doesn't the Holy Spirit make something special happen when all those people gather together as God's family around the Table of the Lord? Without their common effort, how could we even have begun to support three refugee families? Christianity isn't a private affair; didn't Christ come to bridge our isolation from each other as well as our separation from God? And isn't it my special vocation, he wondered, to build up and guide our community life with Christ's help? But how could he say all that in a way that would somehow make sense to Muriel Johnson?

In any case, he concluded, it's important that I come here, if only to show that we care enough to listen to her. That, too, is a big part of my role. As he rang the doorbell, Pastor Gardiner took a deep breath. A front window was open and he could already hear the voice of the TV evangelist.

Adapted from the book "[Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry—A Study Guide](#)," William H. Lazareth. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982, pg. 85, 86 & 91.