CHAPTER VI

THE INFLUENCE OF LAY SPECIALISTS
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Local Catholic communities are called “Parishioners” from the 2nd century A.D. The word ‘Parish’ comes from the Greek word, ‘Paroikia’, meaning “those living near.”¹ It means people living in the same area, under the leadership of a Parish Priest. Before the Vatican Council II, much attention was given to the boundary of the Parishes, to the Church buildings, and to the Parish Priest’s role and rights in the Parishes. Now, the Parish is seen as a community of people. The Catholic Church defines the Parish in the rule of the Canon Law as:

“a defined community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular Church”²

The word, ‘community’ is used here in a more general meaning than as a social system in which everyone knows everyone else and their interactions are personal. The community (1) Develops a sense of belonging and loyalty, (2) Makes people to work in common, and (3) Strengthens values and standards for the people as part of their life. The above three things are achieved in different levels as the community continues to exist. The Parish people’s participation in the Parish communities differs. Accordingly, the Parish people are divided into four types.³ (1) “Nuclear” – the most active and loyal Parish members, (2) “Model” – the large

majority of ordinary practicing Catholics, (3) “Marginal” – those whose religious practice is minimal, (4) “Lapsed” – those who do not practice their religion. Thus, a Parish community is the one whose members have different degrees of participation and mutual interaction and commitment.

For a very long time in the Catholic Parishes, it was the Parish Priest in central focus. Everything was focused on Parish Priest’s duties, his rights, and his income. The Parish community as a territory was entrusted to him. He alone did all the work in the Parish and everyone else was relatively passive. However, this situation is changed after the Vatican Council II. The Parish work is shared among the Lay people in the Parish communities.4 Many Lay people play active roles in the Parish, such as Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Council, Planning Committee, Fund Raising Committee, Social Justice Committee, Construction Committees, Bible Study Group, Altar Servers, Readers of the Bible, Prayer Group, Ritual Celebration Committee and Family Support Groups. Besides, the Lay people, who are actively involved in the activities, there are Lay Specialists, who are holding a different status in the Parish communities.5 They have special status, because of their specialization of knowledge in a particular field, their recognition by the Parish Priest and community, and sometimes the remuneration that they receive for their specialized services in the Parish communities. They are respected as professionals among the Parish people. They are approached by Lay people, who need their specialized services.

5 Broholm, D., Empowering Laity for Their Full Ministry, Newton Centre, MA, 1981, pp. 48-54.
The impact of Lay Specialists on Parish people is very significant. They seek help from the Lay Specialist, on all human problems such as communication, conflict between husband and wife, loneliness and depression, and self-esteem, in-laws, work issues, and responsibility and commitment. Lay people in the Parishes look up to the Lay Specialists, as examples of how to be actively involved in the Parish, and how to find connection between life experience and Religious beliefs. Lay Specialists interpret the meaning of the human problem in Religious terms. It is in particular a new practice in the Catholic Church, that a Lay Specialist gives interpretation to problems in Religious background. Formerly, the Parish Priests are the only Religious Specialists in the Parishes to interpret the meaning of problems in Religious terms. Now, this help is sought by the Parish people from the Lay Specialists, whose influence or impact on the Parish people is very strong. In the very process of helping the Lay people, with human problems, the Lay Specialists share their own Religious experience in coping with the problems. All this happens from a point of one Lay person to another Lay person. Such sharing of experiences strengthens the positions and impact of Lay Specialists among the Parish people.  

All the Religious and social activities in a Parish community is done in a collaborative way among the Parish Priest, Lay Specialists and Lay people. However, the Lay Specialists show leadership skills in the following five categories of Parish, Religious and Social activities:  

1) Activity Related to the Word of God in

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6 Coriden, James, *op.cit.*, pp.95-97.

the Bible: It is the primary duty of the Parish Community to listen and learn the word of God in the Bible. The Lay Specialists plan for this activity at different levels. They plan with the Parish Priest, parents, teachers and deacons. They carry out this duty through preaching, instructions of Catholic beliefs, education of children and young adults, and reaching out to those who have stopped practicing their belief. 2) Activity Related to the Ritual Celebration: The most important ritual celebration in the Parish community is the Sunday Mass celebration. Lay Specialists educate the Parish people on the importance of Sunday Mass and encourage them to participate in it actively and prayerfully. The Lay Specialists organize it in such a way that everyone participates, responds, sings and prays at Sunday Mass. The Lay Specialists train the Choir, Altar Servers, Bible Readers and Donation Collecting Team involved in the celebration of the Sunday Mass. 3) Activity Related to Social Work: The Lay Specialists along with the Parish Priest of the Parish take efforts to know the people of the Parish and to visit their families. Thus, they share the people’s worries and grief, and try to strengthen them in their religious beliefs. They visit the sick people, especially those who are about to die. They assist those who are poor, lonely, and overburdened. They give support to the parents in rearing their children and help families to grow as good Christians. The Lay Specialists give special training for various categories of people in the Parish as volunteers to visit homes, to welcome new members in the Parish, to counsel troubled individuals and families, to assist the poor and to help those who are widowed and divorced. 4) Activity Related to Christian Witness: Everyone in the Parish community has the duty to give Christian
witness in the society. Lay Specialists live a life of Christian witness, by their commitment to the people. They show their beliefs and convictions in the involvement of training Lay people for various activities, especially through associations in the Parish. Associations involve in activities that relate and influence the surrounding communities by bearing witness to the values and beliefs that they hold. Thus Lay Specialists play vital roles in the Parish communities to give Christian witness by showing concern and being of service to those around them. 5) Activity Related to Coordination and Administration: The Lay Specialist assist the Parish Priest in fostering and coordinating all the religious and social activities of the Parish. The rule of the Canon Law of the Catholic Church has empowered the Lay Specialist to do everything that a Parish Priest does in the Parish, except those things that require the ritual of ordination, such as celebrating Mass, hearing confession, and celebrating the rituals of confirmation and anointing the sick.8

Lay Specialists function in the Parish community in a united manner. Their collaborative way of working with the Parish Priest, volunteers and Lay people in the Parish can be viewed under the following ten issues: 1) Authority: Earlier times, the authority in the Parish was only with the Parish Priest. His authority was based on his ritual of Ordination as Priest. The more year of service in a Parish give him more power. Now, the authority is shared among the Lay Specialists with particular roles such as Ritual Specialist, Music Specialist, Youth Specialist and Spirituality Specialist. These, Lay Specialists recognize their power or authority in a

collective team. Lay Specialists encourage equal participation and allow ideas to develop from the team, and they take a team approach to solve problems. 2) Information: From the perspective of power, information is considered power. Traditionally, the Parish Priest alone had all the information in a Parish. He released information on need basis. And this made the Parish Priest to maintain authority and control. Now the Lay Specialists in a collaborative manner share information in the Parish. This open sharing information enables the Lay Specialists to focus on the goal of the Parish community. 3) Producing Ideas: The Parish Priest rarely called for suggestions from others. All ideas came from the Parish Priest alone. His ideas are considered important. In the team work of the Lay Specialists, everyone has a voice and their suggestions from different background bring deeper understanding. 4) Solving Problem: The Parish Priest gives solutions to the problems. His decisions are taken in his office, approved by himself and given to others. Now, the problems are discussed in the team of Lay Specialists. The discussion may be guided by the Parish Priest. But, the Lay Specialists as collaborative team members recognize the power of team approach to solving problems. 5) Responsibilities and Rules: The Parish Priest has fixed rules and regulations to work in the Parish. He enforced those rules with those who volunteered to help him. This often destroyed the creative process of growth in the volunteers. In a team work, the Lay Specialists work together and share information, knowledge, time and efforts. This helps responsibilities and rules to become fruitful for the good of the Parish. 6) Solving Issues: Earlier times, when the issues came, the Priest dealt it with it on individual basis without much consideration
for the root cause of the issues. Lay Specialists as a team look at the root cause of the issues and find solutions to end the issues. Since, Lay Specialists are given more responsibility for their roles; they are actively involved in the process of finding the root cause of the issues. 7) Common Purpose and Goal: The Priest has a common purpose and goal namely to promote the individual and common good of the Parish community. This general goal is often hidden in the several responsibilities of the Parish Priest, whereas, the Lay Specialists in order to work for the common goal, they review their plans, discuss, why they are working as a team, allow each team member to express commitment and use the common goal to give importance to their actions.

8) Clarifying Roles: The Parish Priest has several volunteers, who help him with the Parish activities. There was no fixed role for the volunteers. The Lay Specialists have their own roles in the Parish. They are very familiar with the responsibility of those roles. They often review team members’ roles, clarify responsibilities, when they do the action plan, learn what others do on the team, and help each other. 9) Appreciate Differences: The Parish Priest often functions in the Parish on his own Knowledge, background and understanding. However, the Lay Specialists come from different background and understanding. They apprehend the differences and learn as much as they can from others. They evaluate new ideas in the team, based on its merits. They pay positive attention to a person’s unique qualities. 10) Review and Evaluation: The Parish Priest as an individual person had no means to measure and evaluate the activities, he provided in the Parish. The Lay Specialists regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of team activities. They celebrate
collaboratively the results they achieved. They praise individual efforts and success. They pay special attention to evaluate the needs for activities and mutual relationship.  

**Spiritual Services**

Lay Specialists in Catholic Parishes involve in spiritual services to help the Lay people to feel more connected to a higher being – God. Spiritual services are associated with religious beliefs and practices. The very important Catholic beliefs that the Lay Specialist present to the people in the Parish are:

1) The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, (Communion)
2) The Virginal conception of Jesus
3) The bodily resurrection of Jesus
4) Life after death, and
5) The eternity of hell.

When the people have problems in the above beliefs the Lay Specialists interpret and give proper explanation for the need of such beliefs. Such explanations are given by the Lay Specialists through seminar, retreats and personal counseling. The most important religious practices are:

1) The Holy Mass
2) The Rituals and
3) Other devotions.

The Lay Specialists give training to the people to participate with devotion and joy in the religious practices as it is recommended by the Vatican Council II.  

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The Holy Mass

The Lay Specialist in rituals gives elaborate explanations about the Holy Mass for the people. The Holy Mass is the most important and most visible art of worship in the Catholic Religion. It is also known by several other names such as “The Lord’s Supper” “The Breaking of Bread” and “The Holy Sacrifice”. All these names signify the essential meaning that the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ is ritually celebrated in the Holy Mass, and the Lay people who participate in the Holy Mass are sent to give witness to God’s love and fulfill God’s wish in their daily lives. Though, the Holy Mass has four sections such as:

1) Gathering
2) The ritual of the word of God in the Holy Bible
3) The ritual of the bread and wine, and
4) The Mission to go out, all these make one single act of worship.

The Holy Mass, the central ritual of the Parish, requires the presence of the Parish Priest. However, since the Vatican Council II, involvement of the Lay people in the Holy Mass increased. There is more interaction between Parish Priest and Lay people in the Holy Mass. Trained by the Lay Specialists, Lay people are reading the Bible in the Holy Mass and distribute the Holy Bread (Communion) to the people.\(^\text{11}\)

The Rituals

There are seven Catholic Rituals, which are called as the “Sacraments”. These Rituals are considered sacred, significant and important for the Catholics. These Rituals touch all the stages and all the important moments of the Parish people. Therefore, the Lay people are given proper preparations to celebrate these rituals. The more the Parish people learn about these rituals, they are enabled to celebrate them more fully. The obligation of teaching the Parish people on these Rituals falls on the Lay Specialists. The seven rituals are:

1) Baptism
2) Confirmation
3) Holy Communion
4) Confession
5) Anointing of the Sick
6) Marriage and
7) Holy Ordination (Holy Order).\textsuperscript{12}

The Ritual of Baptism is the first step in a Catholic life. It brings a spiritual rebirth to those who are baptized as children or adults. Generally, the Ritual of Baptism is given to children, who are presented in the Church by the parents. These parents are prepared by the Lay Specialists to realize their duties and obligations towards children. The baptized children become members of God’s people. They obtain the rights to receive the other Rituals in the Catholic Church.

Confirmation as a ritual is believed to deepen a person’s relationship with God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is called confirmation, because it confirms and strengthens the blessings received in Baptism. This Ritual celebration involves the use of the Holy Oil and Laying of hand on the person to be confirmed. Normally, the Bishop performs the ritual of confirmation. The Lay Specialists prepare the candidates for the Ritual of confirmation several weeks before the arrival of the Bishop, for the Ritual celebration. Lay Specialists teach the students on the nature, duties and usefulness of the ritual of confirmation. They conduct spiritual retreat for the candidates.

The Ritual of Holy Communion in the Catholic Church is a “Sacred Meal” of the Holy Mass. In this sacred meal, Catholics receive the body and blood of Jesus, and participate in his sacrifice on the cross. Receiving Communion in the Holy Mass is recommended as a more perfect form of participation in the Holy Mass.13 A serious preparation is given by means classes in the Parishes given by the Lay Specialists for the youth, who receive Communion first time. It is the traditional belief that when the Lay people receive communion, they share in the blessings of the sacrifice, renew their relationship with Jesus and anticipate in hope the eternal meal (heaven) in the life to come. The Catholic Church believes that the unity that is signified already by the Ritual of baptism among the Lay people is further strengthened by this ritual of communion. In practice, the Lay people are expected to have good disposition in order to receive communion. ‘Good – disposition’ means

the absence of serious fault. Anyone who is aware of serious fault could not receive Communion without receiving forgiveness in the Ritual of confession. Lay Specialists assist the individuals through counseling to have proper good dispositions of mind and heart.\textsuperscript{14}

It is the Catholic belief that the Ritual of confession gives God’s forgiveness upon the Lay people for their sins. The term ‘Confession’ is said to imply an essential element of this Ritual, namely the disclosing of sins to God through a Parish Priest. After the Vatican Council II, this Ritual is known by several other names: (1) The Ritual of conversion – that seems to stress Jesus’ invitation to conversion and a return to God, (2) The Ritual of penance – that express the individual’s personal role of doing penance for the sins, (3) The Ritual of forgiveness – that seems to imply the pardon and peace given to the individual by the Parish Priest’s forgiveness, (4) The Ritual of reconciliation – that signifies the meeting between God and the individual through the ritual of confession. Lay Specialists play a vital role to make the individuals feel the need for this Ritual of confession in their life. Lay Specialists assist the Lay individuals to turn within themselves, and discover, who they really are through dialogue, conversation and counseling.\textsuperscript{15}

The ritual of anointing of the sick is celebrated for those who are sick or those at stage of death. Traditionally, this Ritual was known as the “The last Ritual”, because it was celebrated only for those at the point of death. Now this ritual is celebrated for any Lay individual, who is sick or old. This ritual gives the sick and

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\textsuperscript{14} Sweetser, T., \textit{Leadership in a Successful Parish}, Harper & Row, San Francisco., 1987, p.48. \\
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old the necessary strength and spiritual health including the forgiveness of sins. Lay Specialists visit the homes of the sick and aged in the Parishes and prepare them and the whole family to celebrate the ritual of anointing of the sick.16

The ritual of marriage establishes between a man and woman, a permanent bond, sealed by God. It gives them blessings they need to create a joyous, meaningful and authentic life. This ritual is in fact conferred by the couples on one another. The Parish Priest performs some prayers and acts as an official witness of the Catholic Church in the ritual of marriage. The couples confer the ritual of marriage on each other by their mutual consent. Keeping in mind the present conditions of marriages and their problems, the Lay Specialists play vital roles to marriage preparations in the Parishes. They give training to the future couples on family values, conflict – resolution and personal commitment.17

The ritual of Holy Ordination is a Ritual of official Church activities. This official Church activity is called ‘Apostolic Ministry’ in the Catholic Church. Those who receive this ritual of Holy Ordination are allowed to continue the work of Jesus on earth with the authority granted through the Rituals. The essential parts of the Ritual of Holy Ordination consists of (1) Placing of handing on the head of the Deacon, (2) Offering the prayer of dedication. There are three levels of Clergy, who receive the Ritual of Holy Ordination: (1) Bishop, (2) Priest and (3) Deacon. The Lay Specialists do not have anything to do with this Ritual. However, when the Ritual

16 Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, op.cit., No: 73.
takes place in their Parishes, they co-ordinate the volunteers and the Lay people for a meaningful celebration of the Ritual.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{Other Devotions}

The other devotions are Religious actions or objects used in the Catholic Church for the spiritual growth of the Lay people. These devotions are established by the Church in order to help the Lay people to make themselves good and Holy in different circumstance of life. The following are the devotions that are in practice among the Lay people.

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<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Devotions</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Benediction (Blessing with the Holy Communion)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Rosary</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Stations of the Cross/Way of the Cross</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Novena</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Prayer at Meals</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Bible Reading</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Spiritual Reading</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Spiritual Retreat</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Charismatic Prayer</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Fasting</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Liturgy of the Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Personal Reflection on God</td>
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\textsuperscript{18} Chapman, Geoffrey, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.348-350.
Participation in these devotions would increase Lay people’s participation in the ritual celebrations. For example, the practices of benediction (blessing) or Stations of the Cross or Rosary are expected to increase Lay people’s participation in the ritual of the Holy Mass. Lay people promote these devotions among the Lay people with proper teaching and practical guidelines. For example, Lay Specialists lead the devotion of Rosary that consists of repeating a prayer (Hail Mary) 150 times while meditating on the 15 events from the Bible. Lay Specialists give appropriate explanations of those 15 events for the Lay people to reflect connected to their life experience. Novena is another popular Catholic devotion. This Spiritual practice can be either private or public. Lay Specialists conduct novenas for the Lay people to receive favours, such as good health, of examination etc. Generally, novena prayers are offered to God through a Saint, who is known to obtain special favours.19

Stations of the Cross are a Catholic devotional practice that came out of Catholic pilgrimages. Pilgrimages were considered as a way to purify the Lay people, who would receive blessings from God. The Holy Land (Jerusalem) was one of the Primary places for pilgrimages because Christians wanted to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. When situations became difficult to go to the Holy Land, the Stations of the Cross came into use as a substitute to represent the events in the life of Jesus. There are fourteen stations that are fixed on the walls of the Churches. Lay

Specialists present a brief explanation in each station for the people to meditate and obtain blessings from God.\textsuperscript{20}

Prayers at meals are one of the traditional practices of devotion. Prayers are said before meals to request God to send blessings upon the food and the people, who share the food. Bible reading and other spiritual reading have become increasingly important to Catholics, after the Vatican Council II. Every Catholic family possesses a copy of the Bible. In order to encourage this ‘Bible spirituality’, Lay Specialists in the Parishes are giving Bible classes to their Parish people. Besides the Bible, the Church recommends the reading of the life of Saints for spiritual growth. Spiritual retreat is a period of time that is spent in prayer and reflection. Normally, retreats take place for three days. It is guided by Lay Specialists. Charismatic prayer meetings are part of the devotional practices. These prayers are meant to help the Lay people to have direct experience of God through the Holy Spirit. These prayer meetings include loud prayers, singing, constant reference to Bible and personal witnesses. In the Parishes, organizing these prayer meetings is mostly in the hands of the Lay Specialists and volunteers.\textsuperscript{21}

Centering prayer is based on the assumption that God speaks to people not only through the Bible, but also through the whole creation. This prayer enables the people to listen to God and respond to God in quietness. Centering prayer takes place from 20 minutes to an hour. The essential of this prayer is relaxation and


quietness in deep meditation on the love of God as experienced by the individual.\textsuperscript{22} Lay Specialists train the people on the techniques of relaxation, quietness and meditation. Personal reflection of God is an ancient tradition in the Catholic Church. This devotion helps the people to experience the presence of God in one’s life and see where one has responded to God’s spirit and where one has failed. Spiritual services have great impact on the Parish people, who meet several problems under various situations. Spiritual services give the tools and insights to help the Parish people, not only to solve their problems, but also to discover, who they are in their relationship with God, and others in the Parish.

**Developmental Services**

Developmental services in the Catholic Church have their deep roots in the Bible. Caring for the poor, widow, orphan and homeless is at the heart of the Bible. This was the teaching of Jesus as it is stated in Saint Mathew’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{23} Jesus spoke about the last judgment that would happen at the end of the world. People would be judged how they treat Jesus by finding Jesus among the hungry, homeless, sick and poor. In the first, one thousand years of the history of the Catholic Church, the developmental services were done by the monks, who lived in their monasteries. They cared for orphans, sick, the elderly and poor. Later, from monasteries, these developmental services were carried into the cities by Religious women and men who built orphanages for the orphans, for the sick and elderly and


\textsuperscript{23} Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *op. cit.*, No.63.
many other centers of health. Much later, Lay people’s associations, such as Saint Vincent De Paul, expanded these developmental services. Many Saints in the Catholic Church are known for their developmental works to the poor and the sick: Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare, Saint Peter Claver and Saint Catherine of Siena.\(^{24}\)

Traditionally, the Parish Priests in the Parishes did some works of development individually. Development work as a social mission was not integrated throughout Parish life. It was not an essential part of the religious life of Catholics. Therefore, for the social development of the people, a need was felt to organize the developmental services in the Parishes. The Parish Priests appointed Lay Specialists to organize various works of development in the Parishes. The main goals of the Lay Specialists are: (1) To increase the effectiveness of Parish developmental services, (2) To increase the level of participation of Parish people and (3) To assess the changing needs of the Parish and (4) To assist in developing appropriate services.\(^{25}\)

The primary task of the Lay Specialists in the Parish is to educate the Parishioners on the need of developmental services. The Lay Specialists use the following guiding principles in order to educate the people.\(^{26}\)

1) **Sacredness and Dignity of the Human Person:**

The final reason for development services in the Catholic Parishes is the belief in the sanctity and dignity of human person. Every person is created in the

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image of God. All human life is sacred and possesses a dignity that comes directly from God. Therefore, every human person is to be respected, loved and cared.

2) **Rights and Responsibilities:**

Every human person has basic rights for food, shelter and cloth, and responsibilities that flow from the human dignity. The rights are those that make life truly human. Each Catholic has duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others, and to work for the common good of all.

3) **Social Nature of Humanity:**

Human persons are social by nature. They live in community with others. Our full human potential is realized in community with others, how people organize their communities is important to achieve their full human potential.

4) **The Common Good:**

A certain social system is needed within society for all people to grow and develop fully. This is the common good. To achieve the common good, several situations such as economic, political, material and cultural situations affect human ability to reach their full potential.

5) **Solidarity:**

Every human person is a member of the same human family, irrespective of national, racial, religious and economic differences. Because, human beings are living in an interconnected world, helping each other has global dimensions.
6) **Choose the Poor:**

In every social service decision in the Parish, a real attention and concern is given to the needs of the poor and weak. By choosing the poor, the entire community is strengthened. The poor are important part of the Parish system.

The Lay Specialists are involved in the following categories of development services in the Parishes.²⁷

**a) Charity and Relief:**

Earlier, the charity and relief work was done by individual Parish Priests. They could not reach the needs of all those people, living in non-human living conditions. Now charity and relief works have become the Mission and responsibility of Parish communities. This charity and relief works took a good shape at the Catholic Relief Services in the national level. Now, the Lay Specialists function even as Directors to such an organization, that is Catholic Relief Services with its headquarters at New Delhi. Under this service, food, clothes and household items are supplied to the poor. At times of natural calamities, emergency relief services are given to the victims.

**b) Health and Welfare:**

Lay Specialists organize health programmes for the weaker sections of the Parish communities, such as mother and child health programmes. Health of an individual as well as the total health of a family could be achieved, if only the women

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are made aware of their health problems. The target families are motivated through health education by health professionals in order to make the best use of the available resources. People of the Parish are educated on nature cure methods, nutritional food preparation and a total health plan.

c) Economic Aspect:

Programmes are planned to improve the economic conditions of the people. Some of the programmes are: the Fishermen Co-operative Societies or Sangams, introduction of fishnet, importing and developing improved fishing technologies. These programmes have made great impact on the income of the fishing groups. And self – employment programmes, micro-credit schemes and employment generation programmes are undertaken by various diocesan units, such as Rural Motivation Programme, Women Self-confidence Programme and Coastal Peace and Development Programme.

d) Training:

In order to benefit from the above programmes, people in the Parish level are trained under the direction of the Lay Specialists. In the training period, some important values are taught to the people such as respect, compassion, dignity, integrity, spirituality and excellence. People are trained to discover the root cause of their social needs and demands. They are guided how to meet such needs and demands in life.
Lay Specialists play vital roles in discharging of the development services. Their vital roles are associated with the following responsibilities:\textsuperscript{28}

(1) They function as a connecting bridge among the Parish Priest, Parish people and the development services.

(2) They develop practical procedures for the Parish development services.

(3) They recruit, train, counsel, evaluate and empower the volunteers to achieve the goals of the development services.

(4) They develop and maintain Parish development services files.

(5) They develop and implement a system to evaluate the effectiveness of all the programmes in the Parish.

(6) They implement a system to recognize the participation and contributions of Parish people in the various programmes.

(7) They investigate, address and report to the Parish Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council, when the problems arise in any programme.

The Parish people, who are trained by the Lay Specialists, have healthy integrated social development services into their life. They experience their own lives with more vitality. They are more empathetic, more generous and connect themselves with everyone in the Parish.

**Impact on Economic condition**

Economic condition of a Parish depends on the financial contribution of the Parish people. When the Parish people give financial support generously, the

Parish is in a good position to have several religious and social programmes. In the catholic tradition, financial contribution by the people to the Parish was not encouraged earlier. Catholics realize that they have not been given clear teaching on their financial contribution and responsibility to the Parish. Usually, the Parish Priest speaks on the generosity of giving to the people. But the Parish Priest, being a priest have no economic pressures that are felt by the families. In the opinion of the people, the Parish Priest does not understand the financial responsibilities that are faced by the Parish people. Therefore, his appeal for the financial contribution among the Parish people is not effective. However, the Catholic Church has developed a programme called “Stewardship” to invite the Parish people for financial contribution.\(^9\) Stewardship programme invites people to see their life as a life of total, accountability and responsibility for realizing God as owner of everything. People are the stewards and they see themselves as caretakers of all God’s gifts. And people’s gratitude for all God’s gift is expressed in prayer, worship and offering by sharing these gifts. Stewardship is a way of life, a way of thanking God for all His blessings by sharing a part of God’s gifts to the people. Stewardship has all the elements of belief, trust, worship, and belonging. These elements are explained:

- **Belief** – Because people see themselves belonging to God and all that they have are God’s gifts.
- **Trust** – Because people place their life in God’s hands, and makes him their only treasure.

Worship – Because people worship God as the giver of all good gifts.

Belonging – Because each person in the Parish offer money with the rest of the Parish people, so that together the Parish cares for the needs of one another, especially for the poor people.30

Lay Specialists have vital roles to play in the stewardship programme of the Parishes. When the Lay Specialists speak in the background of their own financial pressures, people in the Parish understand well on their obligation to financial contribution. The Lay Specialists invite the people of the Parish to be faithful in stewardship. They establish a group of people to manage all aspects of fund raising in the Parish. They invite Lay people to witness at-least once a year on the blessings received from God and how they share those blessings for the Parish community. They plan special Sunday Holy Mass with proper Bible readings to encourage the benefits of Stewardship. With the permission of the Parish Priest, Lay Specialists form a committee namely, Stewardship Committee for fund raising. The Committee supervises all the activities associated with Parish fund raising. First of all, the Committee keeps a list of Parish activities and organizations. This list gives the people the chance to become aware of the number and type of volunteer opportunities that are available in the Parish. Then the committee under the leadership of the Lay Specialists work with appropriate Parish Commissions and Associations to make sure that those who volunteered to give their time and skills and money are involved in the activities. The Committee recruits individuals or couples

to share their personal witness about stewardship with the Parish people. The witness of Lay people is the most educational, most motivational and most important part of fund raising. The Lay witness speeches make stewardship programme very real and practical for the people in the Church.\footnote{Callaham, Kannon, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.20-22.} These Lay witness individuals are from the Parish, who believe and practice the idea of Stewardship. These individuals give their time, skills and money for the common good. The Committee evaluates the fund raising efforts on an annual basis. They review comments and questions from the people about fund raising in the Parish. They monitor prayers with a stewardship message that are done in the Sunday Holy Mass. They plan to take the fund raising programme beyond the Parish. They approach Institutions and Organizations in other cities and towns. They go to rich persons in the villages with appeal to help the Parish development activities.

The Lay Specialists with the help of some volunteers visit each family in the Parish to make the entire family to be actively involved in the fund raising. The visit of each family gives an opportunity for the Parish to have personal contact, and get valuable ideas from each family. This also provides for the Lay Specialists to conduct a Parish census. Taking the time to visit each house gives the message to the families that the Parish pays attention and care on them. The Lay Specialists and their volunteers as a team welcome all members of the Parish. They believe that everyone has something to contribute. This warm spirit of welcoming and their personal vital beliefs inspire the Parish to participate in the Parish activities and to be generous in
their financial support.\textsuperscript{32} The Lay Specialists and the stewardship committee focus their efforts on being accountable to their Parish people. They show the Parish people, where the money is used, and how various activities are carried out. This kind of accountability to the Parish people, leads to a broader understanding of stewardship and a greater sense of fulfillment. This accountability is given to the Parish people generally in the Sunday Holy Mass through the Parish Priest. Lay Specialists and the team seek financial contributions not only on the basis of needs such as to build a shrine or a house for the Parish Priest called as Parochial House, but also they seek from the Parish people an annual financial commitment.\textsuperscript{33} This annual financial commitment encourages the Parish people to reflect how God has in a special way blessed them with money. This makes them to decide and plan to share money with God and Church. The economic conditions of the Catholic Parishes are improving due to the stewardship programme under the leadership of the Lay Specialists and a team of Lay volunteers.

\textbf{Guidance on the Life of the People}

Several studies indicate that religion and religious belief can play an important role in the amount of problems in a person’s life, and the way they choose to cope with it. Religious belief gives persons strength to find support personally through a relationship with God. It is also a place to find social support from others, who have same beliefs. Ultimately, spiritual guidance is the idea that a higher source


of power exists that can offer guidance and relief from problems.\(^3^4\) In the Catholic Parishes, people are seeking help in the areas of family relations, social relations, work responsibility, educational difficulties, and worries and stress that come from social and domestic violence. People want help with prayer and worship activities in the home, family life and work places. Families in the Parishes want the Church to affirm the value of marriage and family and to support family life.\(^3^5\) They want guidance with parenting young children, with roles of husband and wife, with support for children who are victims of divorce, and in dealing with the handicapped, the old aged and other special groups. They seek guidance for better communication within the family members and among the Parish members. Families are seeking help from the Parishes to deal with the pressures that destroy the family today. Television movies, alcohol, unemployment, and the changing attitude toward women are making pressure on families. People in the Parishes recognize their need for guidance, and asking the Parishes to give them Christian values. They see the need for a lifestyle with simple living, kindness and service to others.\(^3^6\)

The Catholic Parishes respond to the needs of the people. In the past, it was the Priest, who functioned in the Parish as a guide to help the people in their problems. Often, the help given by the Priest was of spiritual nature with prayers and blessings. The Priest as a spiritual person was not qualified to give professional Counseling to the problems of the people. However after the Vatican Council II the

situations in the Parishes have changed. Many Lay people qualified themselves as professional guides to help the people with problems. Now, the Lay Specialists are the professional persons, who give guidance for the Parish people to deal with problems. Lay Specialists connect with Parish people in real ways. They give guidance to the people by taking interest in their lives and families, by finding commonalities with them and by serving to their needs. The needs of the people differ from family to family, and person to person. However, the following needs could be indicated for which the Lay Specialists give proper guidance. The people’s needs are based on family: family conflict, family communication, family violence, parenting, youth behavior and divorce. There are other needs, for which the Lay Specialists give guidance on individual basis: anger management, anxiety, depression, stress management and alcohol abuse.

Lay Specialists recruit volunteers and train them to help them in their services of giving guidance. They make the volunteers very effective in their help for the following reasons:

1) Lay Specialists make the volunteers feel that the Parish really needs them.

2) They make the volunteers realize that their services make a difference in the Parish.

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3) They make the volunteers feel always welcomed.

4) They teach the volunteers to understand the mission of the Parish which is to care for the total welfare of the Parish.

5) They offer the volunteers constant training, and

6) They make the volunteers to feel that they are part of the Parish community.

The training given to the volunteers by the Lay Specialists empower them to develop leadership skills, and to feel that their services are meaningful and useful for the development of the community. Those volunteers who work with the Lay Specialists benefit equally from their experience. For example, when the volunteers work with Lay Specialists on marriage problems, the problem solving processes help not only the families, who receive guidance, but also the volunteers as to how to deal with the same problems in their own family situation. These benefits are considered as rewards for the volunteers for working with the Lay Specialists.  

One of the challenges of the Lay Specialists in the Parish is to give guidance on parenting skills to the parents who need to guide their teen-aged children. One of the most important parenting skills needed for bringing up good teens involves positive attention. Parents are encouraged to spend time with their teen aged children to show them that the parents care for them. Regularly having meals with teen aged children is the good way to connect with them. Being near to the children could lead

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to start the conversation between the teen aged children and parents. Lay Specialists guide the parents not to give pressure saying that “I was not like you at your age”. It is natural for the teen aged children to rebel and then to express themselves in ways that are different from their parents. Therefore, parents are given guidance to minimize pressures with their teen aged children. They are however encouraged to set limits as to what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable at home and school. Lay Specialists give a few points as to set limits:

1) Do not challenge them with final decision
2) Be clear and short in setting limits
3) Be prepared to explain the decisions
4) Be reasonable,
5) Be flexible. Parents are guided to grant more freedom to their teen aged children, when they show more responsibility. Parents, who have received the above guidance on individual basis from the Lay Specialists, find it easy to deal with their teen-aged children at home.

Within the area of marriage, Lay Specialists offer valuable guidance to the Parish community. Their valuable guidance can be stated in the following points:

1) Communication

In the Parish community, many married couples think that they communicate, but in reality they do not. They may use empty words that mean

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nothing to their relationship. Instead of communicating to understand their spouse closely, they seem to talk to their spouse as if they are one of their friends. Lay Specialists guide the couples to communicate with their feelings and emotions, and thus to safeguard their marriage.

2) **Leave the Ego at the Door**

It is a known fact that ego damages marriages. Couples are guided to leave their ego outside the house, and to communicate freely with the spouse.

3) **Act on the Promises**

Several couples seem to forget the promises they make in the ritual of marriage celebrations. They promise each other to be faithful and caring for the life time. Lay Specialists guide them to remember their promises and to live out those promises in everyday life.44

4) **Be the Looser**

Several married couples seem to treat their marriage more like a competition, and not like a partnership. Both spouses like to win every argument and want to prove a point. Lay Specialists teach them that in order to build a marriage relationship someone has to be a looser. They guide the couples to understand that one cannot always win, and one cannot always be right.

5) **Open the Real Issue**

Married couples are inclined to allow the small issues, block the main issues that are really a problem. Therefore, couples are guided to talk first what is really a problem and address that problem with real communication.\(^{45}\)

6) **Listen**

Studies of human communication show that, when people stop talking and allow their spouse to speak, they are only thinking about what they are going to say next, instead of actually listening. Therefore, couples are guided by the Lay Specialists to listen carefully to their spouses.

7) **Break down Obstacles Preventing Proper Communication and Relationship with each other.**

Couples are given guidance as to how to break obstacles in order to strengthen their mutual relationships.

8) **Show Compassion**

Showing compassion is the most important step to save a marriage without problem. Lay Specialists insist the need for compassion in marriage as a sign of care and love for a long and healthy marriage.\(^{46}\)

Lay Specialists give guidance to the Parish people on individual basis. However, they also use the guidance more effectively in small groups. In small

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groups the participants are able to identify their problems with others in the same group. In group guidance, Lay Specialists use time to help five to fifteen people simultaneously than to spend the same period in helping one individual. The Lay Specialists, who engage in group guidance in facts support, for developing small group relationships. Group guidance invites and attracts many people, who may not go for an individual help. A person, who would not go to any Parish Priest for guidance, finds group guidance influencing his life deeply. Lay Specialists encourage group guidance, because it allows the participants to help each other. The participants are ‘helper’ and ‘helped’ in the same group guidance. The group as a whole becomes an instrument of healing and growth. Lay Specialists use the group guidance, when they have the obligations to prepare the people for the celebration of Rituals in the community. The guidance given by Lay Specialists in the Parish community creates an atmosphere of meaningful and real life. They heal the negative beliefs and fears that usually prevents from fulfilling people’s true strengths. They make the Parish community to experience deeper levels of compassion and happiness as the people integrate their spiritual life into daily life.