

Jesus initially chose 12 leaders for His Church to renew Israel, later adding more (such as Paul) as evangelization spread. His Church was not amorphous, but evidenced a specific structure for the covenant family of God. The apostles served as the highest order of the Church hierarchy as designated primary teachers of the faith and celebrators of the sacraments. They oversaw the spread of the Church, as led by the Holy Spirit.

Additional leadership roles developed as the Church grew to meet specific needs. In Acts 6:1, the Hellenist (Greek-speaking) Christians claimed their widows were being neglected in the daily food distribution. The 12 Apostles met to problem-solve the issue, as taking care of the poor was a mandate of the Church. The Apostles felt they could not neglect their prayer, preaching, and sacramental duties to wait on tables; thus they selected seven “reputable men, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3) from their midst. The Apostles laid hands upon these men and ordained them. These were the first deacons (the Greek word *diakonia* means “to serve”), meeting the needs of the Church. Stephen and Philip, two of the first deacons, served expanded roles; Stephen preached with great power and worked great wonders and signs among the people (becoming the first martyr); Philip evangelized the Samaritans, the Egyptian eunuch, and worked miracles, (Acts 7; 8:4-7; 26-40).

In Acts 14:23, the role of presbyters (or elders) was added to the Church, as Paul moved on to further evangelize, establish another church, and appoint elders to serve in his place. Paul claimed that his life was an example for new Christians to see how the Holy Spirit worked through him; by God’s grace, he had selflessly served God in his commission to evangelize. Paul did not hold back anything; he preached the uncomfortable truths of sin necessitating repentance, and the truth of the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. Paul admonished the elders to be guardians of the flock to protect members from false teachings that distort the Word of God. He encouraged the elders to embrace the great responsibility as the Holy Spirit gives elders grace to carry it out (Acts 20:25-32). God does not call the equipped; He equips those called. The three hierarchies established by the authority of Christ to lead the Church are the bishops that succeed the Apostles as overseers, the elders who serve as priests, and the deacons.

Other critical aspects of church leadership include decision-making, plus determining and implementing doctrine. In Acts, predominant questions the apostles

needed to address were: Does a person need to be a Jew to become Christian? Do males need to be circumcised? Do converts need to obey all the Jewish Torah laws? This was a defining moment in the Church. In essence, is the Church a sect of Judaism, or does the Church serve as the Body of Christ, bringing salvation to the whole world? Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to discuss these questions (Just as now local churches seek doctrinal authority resolution through Mother Church). After much debate by the Apostles and elders, Peter concluded that God, who reads the hearts of men, had shown His approval by granting the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles just as He did to Christian Jews. Peter further asserted that just as the Jews were saved by the favor of Jesus Christ, so were the Gentiles. It was not by law or anything earned, but by the grace of God (Acts 15:3-20). James, the bishop of Jerusalem, further addressed the issues by giving pastoral direction: Scriptures foretold the Gentiles being added to God’s family, and the doctrine became implemented as James said the Gentiles are not required by ritual laws of the Torah but by moral law to follow the 10 Commandments and 4 laws determined in the Book of Leviticus to prevent cultural forms of idol worship so Jews and Gentiles could sit together at the Eucharistic Table. This doctrinal decision was significant for the universal Catholic Church, as doctrine determined by the Holy Spirit and church leaders (Acts 15:28).

What about lay leadership in the Church? They were co-workers of the Apostles. Initially Jesus sent the apostles in pairs to evangelize; thus they could pray together, encourage and support each other, correct mistakes, and bear witness to the gospel. In servant leadership, Paul valued every unique role that followers offered to the Church. Paul’s belief was all Christians are an apostolate and valuable to send on missions. For example, Paul took Timothy under his wing and mentored him, as Timothy watched and listened to Paul. Later, Paul observed Timothy preaching and evangelizing, with Paul critiquing when necessary, before Timothy ministered on his own.

The Second Vatican Council defined the crucial role of the laity of evangelizing the world like leaven from within, through lay people serving as Christ’s hands and feet in all aspects of the secular sphere, to Christify the whole culture. Pope Francis envisioned the roles of the parish as forming, equipping, preparing, and mobilizing all of us to bring Jesus to the whole world, just as Jesus and His apostles did. In what way are we doing this?

How many of us reverently attend Mass, gratefully receive the Eucharist, and thank God for the essential fuel to make it through another grueling week of our careers, activities, home and family responsibilities?

Pope Francis encourages another possible approach for our spiritual lives: *"Ours is a hopeful perspective, but one that is also demanding. The temptation is always within to resist the Holy Spirit, because He takes us out of our comfort zone and unsettles us; He makes us get up and drive the Church forward. It is always easier and more comfortable to settle into our sedentary and unchanging ways. In truth, the Church shows her fidelity to the Holy Spirit in as much as she does not try to control or tame Him. We Christians become true missionary disciples, able to challenge consciences, when we throw off our defensiveness and allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. He is freshness, imagination, and newness"* (2014 Cathedral Homily in Istanbul). In Acts and the New Testament, the Holy Spirit bestows gifts upon Christ's followers: prophecy, tongues, evangelization, preaching, teaching, healing, miracles, and more.

In 1 Cor. 12-14, Paul defined charisms as supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit that are freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit onto members of the Body of Christ. They are distinctly different from natural gifts or talents. Instead, charisms either enable one to do what is humanly impossible like performing miracles, or enhance natural gifts to supernatural efficacy. Every time a person exercises his charism, God supernaturally touches another with love; it is a supernatural interaction between God and you for the well-being of others in the building up of the Body of Christ.

How is this different from sanctifying grace bestowed upon us in the sacraments? The Holy Spirit grants that grace for the growth and holiness of the one receiving it. Charisms are gifts to be given away as the Holy Spirit wills, to different members of the Body of Christ. Charisms strip us of individuality to help us to depend upon each other so all parts of the Body of Christ work together in harmony and build each other up in love. We rejoice in the charisms of others and they rejoice in ours. Every Christian has and needs to use at least one charism. There is marvelous variety in charisms; unity (not uniformity) is diversity working in harmony! Recipients of charisms do not need to be "holy" to help others through their charisms; in Acts 3 Peter healed the lame man outside the temple not through his power or piety, but through the gift of God. Charisms can flow through us freely if we are prayerful and close to God, however.

In the early Church, charisms were considered part of normal church life. After early Christians received the sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and

Eucharist), they began to perform charisms, such as the gift of tongues, healing and prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul directs converts to seek spiritual gifts, just as Tertullian, who wrote the earliest text on the sacraments, entreated followers at Baptism to seek the Lord's special graces and gifts. St. Hilary of Poitiers encouraged Christians to have God touch the hearts of others through us, as the *"gifts enter us as a gentle rain. Little by little they bear abundant fruit."* St. Augustine initially claimed that in the maturity of the Church (4<sup>th</sup> Century), miracles were no longer needed for the spread of the gospel, until he realized that 70 recorded miracles in his cathedral at Hippo had occurred over the past two years! One of those miracles involved Innocencia, who suffered from breast cancer. Her surgeon ordered an emergency mastectomy, at the same time claiming that she would only have a very limited time to live. After fervent prayer to God, a dream told her to seek out the first woman who would be purified by Baptism at the Easter Vigil, and have her make the sign of the cross over the cancerous breast. Following these directions, Innocencia was cured. St. Augustine encouraged those who experience miracles to inform others to give glory to God and to build up the faith.

In recent centuries charisms have not been given the encouraging focus they deserve to help the Church thrive and flourish: both Vatican II and Pope St. John Paul II have channeled spiritual energy to revitalize this life-expanding aspect of our faith.

The wind of the Holy Spirit blows where it wills (cf Jn 3:8). The institutional hierarchy of leadership and the sacraments from above mesh with the winds of the Spirit from below. Over the past several centuries, the laity had become passive in their focus on reception of the Spirit. Recently a reawakening has helped the Church realize charisms are crucial to lay people SERVING in the Church. The allotment of gifts to everyone is outstanding as received with THANKSGIVING and CONSOLATION. The charisms are the manifestation of Jesus alive and active in our Church. The institutional hierarchy and charisms co-exist as they work together to do the work of the Church. Since the time of the apostles the charism of prophecy has been redirected as Jesus came as prophesied in the Old Testament. From then on, prophecy enabled the followers to understand God's plan of where to go and what to do in spreading His Word. How are charisms initially recognized? Church leaders who know their congregation encourage strengths that become evident in service to the Church. Do we know what our charisms are? Are we developing them through prayer, reception of the sacraments, and through service to each other?