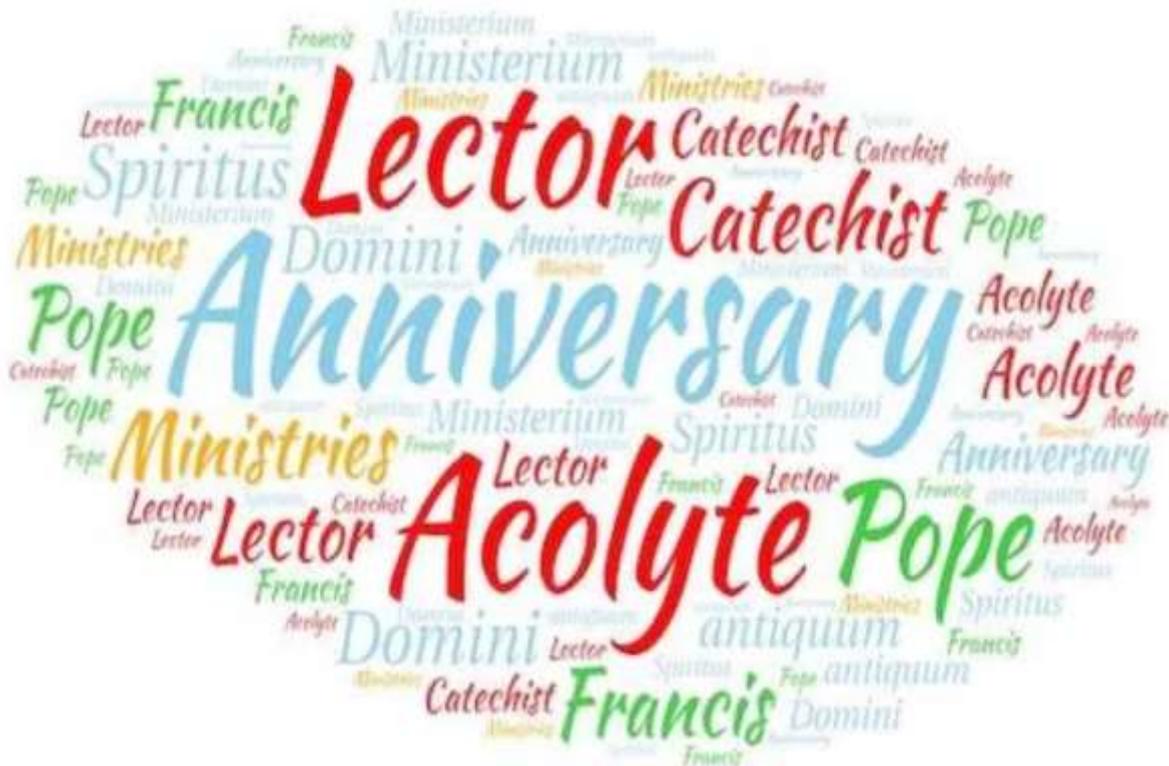


What a difference a year makes... or maybe not



This week marks the first anniversary of *Spiritus Domini*. This "motu proprio" -- which Pope Francis issued on January 15, 2021 -- changes canon law to allow for women "to be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte". When the change was first announced many reacted as if it was a flash in the pan. After all, they argued, it was no more than saying women and lay men could read during the Liturgy of the Word, which has been widespread since the major reform of the liturgy in 1970. And what was the big deal about allowing laypeople to assist in sharing the broken loaf and common cup in the Liturgy of the Eucharist? This has been happening in many places for decades. However, the real significance of the document lay elsewhere. For the first time in over a millennium, women -- and men not preparing to become clerics -- could be instituted formally as ministers (*ministri* rather than *ministrantes*) for the liturgy. While those on the liberal wing of the Catholic Church wondered what the fuss was about, many on the conservative wing quietly tore their hair: this was a direct challenge to the dominance of the clergy as ministers. They raged quietly because, as several remarked to me at the time, the less said about these new ministries the better: they might just disappear in the same way as so many good ideas perish through careful silence and neglect. The fears of the conservatives were further heightened later in the year with another papal document, *Antiquum ministerium* (May 10, 2021), which re-established the ministry of catechist as a formal instituted ministry. Once again, this was opened to women and men who were not preparing to become clerics.

But what has happened? Now, a year on, it is time to take stock of what has happened. It is too soon to decide if these new ministries are good ideas or not, but it is time to ask if anything has happened. In other words, what has been happening in dioceses and parishes to turn the new potential ministries -- made possible by the two documents issued by Pope Francis -- into reality?

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