

CCOC

Catholics for Change in Our Church

What Is CCOC's Definition of Clericalism?

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Clericalism is a set of attitudes, practices, and structures that set ordained ministers apart from the rest of the faithful in ways that obstruct the mission that Christ has given to all of us.

We see clericalism in action when the interests of the clergy or of the Church as an institution are put ahead of the mission of the Church.

Something analogous to clericalism can be found in the military, in the police force and in many specialized professions such as medicine. In each, there is a temptation to put loyalty to the group and its accepted practices above the group's true mission.

Clericalism can manifest itself in:

- an attitude of superiority by clerics toward laity;
- practices of unilateral decision-making by clerics;
- clerics being exempted from accountability.

We endorse what Pope Francis has said: "Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a *power* to be exercised rather than as a free and generous *service* to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen. *Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church: we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated.*"

(Address at the opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, 3 October 2018)

"The faithful Holy People of God," Pope Francis has further written, "is anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and thus, as we reflect, think, evaluate, discern, we must be very attentive to this anointing....Clericalism forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belong to all the People of God, not only to the few chosen and enlightened."

(Letter to Cardinal Ouellet, 19 March 2016)

Lay people also participate in clericalism; for example, when we fall into a habit of deferring to priests and other ordained ministers (even as we may complain behind their backs).

During the abuse scandal, excessive loyalty to the clerical culture and the desire to protect the reputation of the Church impeded good decision-making. We do not exempt ourselves as lay people from culpability. Our deference helped to sustain the clerical culture.

The main remedy for clericalism is *co-responsibility for the mission of the Church carried out through processes of shared decision-making* (synodality). As Pope Francis has pointed out, these processes will involve humility in listening, boldness in speaking, and truly shared discernment. Processes of shared decision-making may not be easy, but they are necessary for the viability and sustainability of the Church.