



BUILDING COLLABORATION, BUILDING CHURCH? EXPLORING THE INSPIRE LEGACY

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Summary

The work of INSPIRE was assessed in three selected parishes using a mix of in-depth personal interviews and focus groups with INSPIRE archives. The data suggest that the most critical background variable for INSPIRE's success is the support of the pastor and pastoral vision. The most critical interventions that INSPIRE provided were consultants, access to networks, and financial resources, in that order. These elements depended on the staff's conduct of regular meetings, cultivation of mutual respect, and engagement in contextually appropriate collaborative practices. As such, INSPIRE has critically enhanced parish pastoral staffs, in turn producing more vibrant parishes. The study suggests opportunities for continuing what INSPIRE began, particularly for academic institutions interested in partnering with dioceses and parishes. Such work offers new ways to cultivate networks of potential students, consultants, and thought leaders.

Project Background

INSPIRE Origin, Mission, and Vision

INSPIRE was designed to Identify, Nurture, and Sustain Pastoral Imagination through Resources for Excellence (INSPIRE). Funded by the Lilly Endowment, the project began in 2003 and will formally conclude in 2013. INSPIRE was designed to advance pastoral team effectiveness in parish ministry within selected parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The project was itself a collaborative effort between the Archdiocese of Chicago and Loyola University Chicago, particularly between the Office of Human Resources of the Archdiocese and the Institute of Pastoral Studies of Loyola University Chicago. INSPIRE's mutual grounding in the Archdiocese of Chicago and Loyola University Chicago itself modeled the project's vision of collaboration from its earliest stages. Contemporary ministerial skill sets, including those for which Loyola University Chicago's Institute of Pastoral Studies is particularly known, strongly emphasize collaborative skills and teamwork. The strategic plan of the Archdiocese of Chicago, developed toward the final years of INSPIRE's work, also reflects such a focus.¹

After completion of an initial grant totaling \$2 million from 2003 to 2008, the project was awarded a Sustainability grant for \$1 million that was matched by the Loyola University Chicago

¹ See <http://www.archchicago.org/strategicpastoralplan/>.

and Archdiocese of Chicago pledges of \$500,000 each. The project received no-cost extensions from the Endowment that will end 2014.

INSPIRE's mission has been to make parish pastoral ministry teams more effective. This goal of pastoral team effectiveness was understood as related to the collaborative, interdependent utilization of talents, insight, and initiative of all team members in promoting parish mission.² Such a goal is particularly appropriate goal for contemporary church life, marked as it is by fewer but larger parishes with relatively larger and more complex parish teams than in the past. These teams are increasingly comprised of fewer priests and more lay ecclesial ministers, some of whom are part-time and most of whom serve in specialized ministries. Staff turnover tends to be relatively frequent, particularly for priests other than the pastor.

INSPIRE's vision has been to build pastoral team effectiveness through a combination of external consultants and programming with strong internal communication and commitment. The parish pastoral teams in INSPIRE committed to accountability in exchange for modest financial support at the individual and team level. The program was designed to fund each participating parish for up to \$20,000 over two years, or \$10,000 per year, to be used for personal and team development goals as identified in personal and team learning plans.

The INSPIRE vision flows from contemporary research on team building, leadership, and management in general. It resonates with emerging spiritualities and theologies of collaborative ministry and leadership. Individual parish team members were therefore expected to develop themselves and their gifts for the good of the pastoral team even as the team worked to reflect best practices. At the same time, church leaders are discovering that the best-run companies today are themselves frequently turning toward a team approach. As new forms of parish life and ministry emerge, parish staffs might learn from new forms of leadership and team-building in other work and community environments – the kind in which many parishioners, children, and friends live or experience in their working lives.

INSPIRE's vision from the start was to integrate critical skill sets, theologies of ministry, and leadership research so as to build a new collaborative model for invigorating parish life. Since its beginning, INSPIRE has resourced pastoral staffs, offering opportunities to cultivate shared self-understanding around ministerial vocation and spirituality, while at the same time cultivating specific skill sets to promote team functioning. Skill sets fostered include pastoral planning, conducting meetings, developing mission statements, and advancing personal development so as to promote more effective team functioning. Much of the training and modeling of these skills

² This phrasing reflects wording in an interim presentation created by Brett Hoover (unpublished and not dated), which referred to the cultivation of practices for “fostering interdependent leadership and promoting parish mission.” His findings emphasize a typical parish staff context of an overriding task focus, ministerial isolation, intercultural challenges, and disruption of personnel transitions, among others. He concluded that INSPIRE parishes tended to respond most effectively to these realities with practices such as cultivating a common pastoral vision, going on team retreats, sharing responsibility, conducting regular meetings well, and using instruments such as the Myers-Briggs to know each other's gifts better. Though this study is quite different from Hoover's, findings generally mirror his.

has been provided through the work of INSPIRE consultants in facilitating and coaching parish teams.³

The two funding periods of INSPIRE served somewhat distinctive purposes. The first, initial five-year phase of INSPIRE tested and refined systems for advancing the work of pastoral teams, developing accountabilities and processes.

The second and final phase of INSPIRE developed that work further, adding practical theological and ecclesiological questions to the existing mix of organizational and skills-based concerns, deepening the focus on best practices within contemporary parish life and leadership. INSPIRE helped connect the emerging reality of Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago with national and international level research on large congregations and the challenges they face. This scholarship leads to opportunities for practical theological work in ecclesiology and other areas. As a result, INSPIRE now has a strong data source for the study of parish staffing and church leadership.

Research Goals and Design

This research project is designed to serve the needs of an INSPIRE-sponsored conference scheduled for October 24-26, 2013. Presenters at the INSPIRE's Milestone Conference will speak to the operation and vision of INSPIRE, practical theological aspects of pastoral staffs serving within merged parishes, and challenges for staff effectiveness in multicultural parishes. Drawing from these various focal points, the conference will offer an overall synthesis of INSPIRE and its contributions within the context of emerging patterns of parish life and lay ecclesial ministry. This conference is meant to celebrate and assess the INSPIRE model of enhancing collaboration among selected parish staffs in the Archdiocese of Chicago as well as to suggest ways that learnings from INSPIRE may be carried forward after the project's formal conclusion.

The primary question guiding this summative qualitative evaluation was to identify critical practices and narratives related to pastoral staff collaboration within INSPIRE parishes. The goal was to understand the nature of INSPIRE's contributions and how those contributions might be replicated for other parish staffs in the future. Research methods were qualitative and based on semi-structured interviews, both one-on-one and group interviews. The design called for selection of three different parishes where INSPIRE had been successful, presumably in somewhat distinctive ways within these different parish contexts. These parishes differ considerably among themselves in both demographic factors and their specific goals for INSPIRE.⁴ This sort of analysis depends on an assumption that the three parishes whose staffs

³ The staffing challenges for which INSPIRE was designed, as well as the horizontal resourcing relationships it built, may be relatively typical for non-Catholic megachurches and parachurch groups. However, most Catholic parishes are unfamiliar with these realities. INSPIRE's success suggests that external resourcing agencies and consultants may offer a valuable means of addressing contemporary challenges for Catholic parishes, similar to what is offered within other Christian traditions, particularly large parishes with large pastoral staffs.

⁴ INSPIRE's approach to staff development relied on commitments to respect the distinctiveness of each parish and each pastoral team.

were selected for interviews represent some comparable practices observed in many parishes that partnered with INSPIRE. Such a claim is theoretical, not statistical, and no claim of statistical representativeness is given.

The primary data in this evaluation project were interviews with individual parish staff members at the three selected parishes, supplemented with a focus group type interview of available staff members at each parish. Additional data included INSPIRE's files regarding each parish's participation in INSPIRE, as well as materials maintained locally by the various parish teams. Interviews were arranged by INSPIRE leadership to include those persons INSPIRE staff deemed integral to the study. A total of 17 interviews were conducted, three of which were focus group interviews, and which together resulted in a total of 363 transcribed pages.

Evaluators also had access to all INSPIRE data maintained in NVIVO, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis program. This includes all interviews and analyses conducted by INSPIRE from the beginning of the program. These sources provided background data for the research and significantly informed its work.

Interview topic areas were three-fold. The first set of topic areas explored a variety of practices and skills, from the intentional integration of ministerial vocation and spirituality to team building exercises, parish pastoral planning, meeting facilitation, mission statements, and personal development for improved team functioning. The second set of topic areas revolve around the effectiveness of INSPIRE's model of enhancing staff collaboration within each of the parishes under study and stories that illustrated enhanced staff collaboration. The third set of topic areas seeks insight into how INSPIRE's work might be carried forward into the future. These needs are in turn related to emerging patterns of resourcing in terms of parish life and ministry within the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond.⁵

Focus groups were designed to take place after the individual interviews, thus allowing an opportunity to explore issues that arose in the individual interviews within a context of group dynamics and sharing. Focus group questions focused on who was involved in INSPIRE and INSPIRE-related training, and how decisions were made about whom on the staff to include in INSPIRE.⁶ The focus groups explored practices of collaboration already identified by individual members of the teams, giving an opportunity for team members to name and describe additional practices or stories of collaboration in a manner that gave the interviewers insight into the level of sharing and engagement that may have been typical of their interactions as a team. Each focus group was asked what was being carried forward from INSPIRE within the parish. This led to discussion about how the work of INSPIRE might best continue. A typical lead-in was "INSPIRE is ending, but needs of parishes such as yours continue. How do you think that what worked in INSPIRE might be carried on in other parishes that might need something like INSPIRE for the very first time?"

⁵ A copy of the interview protocol is given in the Appendix of this report.

⁶ This is important because most staffs have personnel whose ministry is of a more administrative or managerial nature. Each parish included these people in the staff team and INSPIRE-related work in different ways. This provided a useful indicator of underlying dynamics and perceptions within each parish and parish staff.

Critical Contextual Factors for INSPIRE's Success

Three critical contextual factors were identified as foundational to INSPIRE's success. The first reflects a need for effective leadership in the face of change. This is relatively common to Catholic parish life in the United States today, certainly within the parishes of the Archdiocese of Chicago where INSPIRE was located. The second and third factors are unique to particular parishes but yet absolutely essential for improving collaboration and effectiveness in parish pastoral ministry teams. These are the commitment of the pastor to valuing the benefit of a project like INSPIRE, and the vision or expectations of the pastor and the parish pastoral team with regard to desired outcomes and collaboration.

Parish Life and the Church Today

When INSPIRE was first planned in 2002, challenges for parishes and pastoral leadership in the Catholic Church in the United States had grown particularly acute: parishes were merging and the remaining parishes were getting larger, even as parish teams were larger, less stable, and with a greater mix of people of different backgrounds, skill sets, and combinations of full-time and part-time employment. All of this was against a backdrop of the sexual abuse crisis and declining credibility for the church, coupled with dramatically diminishing numbers of priests in active ministry.

The truth is that the talent pool of the priests and the numbers are diminishing, without INSPIRE, we're headed for trouble. I really mean this: that we're sending guys ordained one year to become pastors—one year.... [W]hen you're named pastor, they don't ask you what your experience is and how do you like to handle the finances. You go in with all kinds of assumptions. I think these guys who are being named and if they don't have a process like this – if they don't have some type of mentoring – if they don't have [someone who] says, “You know what? You need to spend money on staff development,” that is going to be a real problem. That's going to be a real problem because we're already sending guys in who have language barriers. We have guys who have lack of experience. It's going to be a problem. They have got to get some support somewhere.

When those who are in the front lines of pastoral engagement have an opportunity to openly and honestly reflect on the challenges they see, they come back to questions of leadership capacity and credibility in the church today. This is long after the spring of 2002, when priestly sexual abuse dominated the news. Today, these challenges are seen as chronic, ones that will not go away and that need to be faced with an appropriate response, one that includes seeking new sources of leadership who can partner with clergy for the sake of the Church's mission in the world.

Where is this future leadership, where is it going to come from? I don't think it's going to come from the [usual sources]. I think the consequences of the child sexual abuse stuff will be long term. I think in terms of priests' public integrity, in terms of trust, public to the priest, that will go on for as long as memory lasts. It will go on for another generation yet before it dies out of living memory. So I think priesthood is compromised. I think leadership today has to come from a

sense of the laity and its mission in the church and in the world. I think there's some very capable people to do that.

The Pastor's Leadership

A critically necessary, though not sufficient, factor in INSPIRE's success in the three parishes studied was the role of the pastor. Pastors had a sense of commitment and investment in INSPIRE in part because they chose to do it and to lead their staffs into it.

We had a shared sense of purpose... and we had a pastor who was the focal point. This was his grant and he wanted this.

I think the key thing... you have to have a leader who's open to this. If we didn't... I think the dynamic would have been very different and the outcome could have been very different. Not necessarily negative, but different. [The pastor] was anxious to—it was an efficient way to get to know his staff right away, but also then to sculpt it a little bit because then he was able to share in a very non-threatening way to us what his perception is of what he needed on a staff. Instead of... saying, this is what I want you to do; or this is my vision, which is not maybe as positive or as easy to take. You tend to be defensive or whatever because this is what we always did. This way it was very exciting.

In each of the three parishes where interviews were conducted, pastors initiated the relationship with INSPIRE and the staff followed the lead of the pastor.

An examination of INSPIRE archives suggests that this was the case in general: these three parishes are the norm, not the exception. This finding suggests that the pastor's buy-in and commitment are crucial aspects of the process.

The Pastor's and Pastoral Team's Vision

The role of the pastor and the pastor's commitment to moving forward is critical for beginning the work of improving pastoral staff effectiveness. Another, related element is tied to how far this work of improving pastoral staff effectiveness might go. The pastor's vision as to what enhanced staff effectiveness looks like marks the boundary to which work on improving pastoral staff effectiveness might go. In every case, diminishment of engagement in INSPIRE seems to have occurred when the pastor felt that the needs for which he engaged INSPIRE had been largely addressed. This is not to suggest that this was the single decision of a single person. Rather, the vision of the pastor seems to become connected with that of the pastoral staff as a whole through the INSPIRE process, even if the pastor's vision is relatively separate from that of the staff at the beginning.

Neither pastors nor other parish staff members will be excited about participating without first having a strong interest in the possibility of participating. Engagement requires a sense of commitment to the possibilities for enhanced pastoral team effectiveness. This means that offering something like INSPIRE gives pastors and parish staffs as a whole an opportunity to renew their commitment and vision.

I think the staff has to be on board because they're the ones who are going to—they have to see the need for it. They have to—so the need has to be articulated...

Thus, success in INSPIRE is not merely through the support of the pastor, but also from the direction of the pastor and the pastor's vision of an effective pastoral team. Further, this vision is reflected in the team itself.

[W]e were hungry for change, so INSPIRE had willing participants. We were ready to do something. We had the support and the direction of our leader, of our pastor. ...[T]hose two things were instrumental.

Kudos to our pastor because he set the tone. He set the tone for open, honest communication and a trusting environment. He also empowered us... we were his colleagues. We were his peers. It wasn't like he was above us, like he was our superior. He truly set a team atmosphere. ...I think it was that he was leading by example, so by setting that tone of team leadership, then we in turn, witnessed that and see the benefit of it and then we would do the same thing in all our own ministry.

INSPIRE only works with, if the people that are going to be a part of it are serious about it; see the value in it; they're honest, because we—I guess we were all honest pretty much in sharing—so there's a trust. Our issue was oftentimes we'd get together and have these great events and growth, but then to implement it; I think that's where our downfall was. It's like, oh yeah, we need to do this and this is what's missing in the parish. Then we'd get back in the business of our lives and parish life, sometimes would not allow us to implement the great ideas that we came up when we gathered. So if there's any myth for us as a parish, it was not that we didn't collaborate and not that we didn't appreciate and focus on each other's strengths; it was just getting the ideas to—implementing the ideas that we came up with... I just think, I've always felt like the staff meetings, like oh my gosh; I've been here for how many years and we're still taking about whether we should do baptism separately on Sunday; or as part of the mass; or something like that...it's hard to change things in a parish; or to make things—to get new ideas across to the parish and really I guess, we realized that. We knew it and so we started trying to get steps. Like “OK, who's going to be in charge of that? Who's going to do step one, two and three, so we could get to four, five and six?” So we did address it, but it was easier to talk about than to actually implement.

In other words, the vision sets the pace for the team to move forward, which is critical because the team is inevitably affected by a natural tendency toward the fragmentation in the direction of individual, task-based approaches that lead toward separate, specialized ministries. The pastoral vision also provides a sense of an endpoint for the parish pastoral team as they move toward greater teamwork and collaboration.

Well, INSPIRE kept sending us invitations for an Advent Day, for a—they sent us an invitation for a Spring Day and those days, early on, helped us in the process of

team building and reflecting. Then there was an invitation that came and a couple people went. Then the next invitation came and we said, I think we're okay.... When we would go to those meetings, we were hearing things that we had done. We had heard the things that—we were hearing from other staffs, okay, we've been through that; we've done that. We've done that. That's a new idea, but we were kind of hearing the same things over and over again. And we decided, I think we've run the course.

This endpoint is as important as the starting point. Programs to enhance the effectiveness of parish pastoral staffs would do well to work with an understanding of how vision and outcomes can motivate collaboration and how a new phase is entered when the initial vision is achieved.

External Resources Provided by INSPIRE

INSPIRE worked because it provided a number of resources to parish teams that they could not themselves provide. While the commitment of the pastor and the pastoral vision was essential, it was the provision of these external resources that facilitated the building of more effective parish pastoral teams. The three most critical external resources, in order of importance as indicated by the majority of the interviewees, are consultants, networks, and funds.

Consultants

The consultants were the single greatest source of INSPIRE's influence on the parish staff. As consultants, they brought outside expertise and provided a certain critical distance from parish relationships and diocesan structures. INSPIRE consultants tended to serve over a relatively long duration, allowing them to develop a personal feel for enhancing parish staff effectiveness. Consultants were highly regarded by parish staff and particularly important for dealing with conflict, helping in times of grief, or modeling new tools and behaviors for effective collaborative ministry. This includes modeling a certain kind of confidence in pastoral ministry – the consultants by their very presence modeled effective stances as ministers. Women in ministry were particularly likely to refer to women consultants as providing excellent models of being a strong, confident minister.

The consultant moved parish teams forward in a way that they simply cannot do for themselves.

I think a lot of it was the initial partner meetings we had with [the INSPIRE consultant]; the ones that focused around on “How do you work as a team already?” “Where are your strengths?” “Where are your weaknesses?” ...I think a part of it was targeting what our goals were. Like I said, the overarching mission of bringing closer to God is there, but what are the goals that support that? What are we going to do? ...Could you do without the consultant? No. ...[I]t really targeted for us things that we can't do for ourselves...

This was due in part to the consultants' considerable talents. Many of them had worked on parish staffs or in some similar function, and so understood the challenges as an insider, which gave them strong credibility. The consultants modeled appreciative inquiry styles, something some

interviewees noted specifically, and commonly remarked on the affirming stances taken by the consultants.

[The consultant] had a way... that was so very nice with people. [The consultant] was able [to] ask a question or give us an idea, but put it in such a way that you almost think it's your own. Pushy, [the consultant] wasn't pushy. [The consultant] had a good way... in working with people, I believe. I believe if you ask them directly questions about that, I bet you'd get people saying, yeah, [the consultant] was very good. ...[The consultant] was prepared for it. [S]ometimes people don't want you to go one step away from what they have on their agenda, but [the consultant] listened.

[The external consultant from INSPIRE] really had a good way of helping us get to the core of things and how we could improve ourselves as a parish staff. I did feel that [the consultant] really was good at getting to the core of it; helping us identify it; and then when [the consultant] stepped away, we had a momentum and then you see it fade a little bit.

As someone from outside the staff, the consultant could see and say things that staff members cannot.⁷

I think that [the consultant] was also a third eye [who] could see things that we couldn't... the trees through the forest; whatever the saying is. Like [the consultant] listened to all of our stories and say, oh my gosh, the repeating theme is lack of appreciation; or burnout; or whatever the case was, [the consultant] could see it. [The consultant] could help us name it and then we would know what to do with it once we named it.

So part of what I think INSPIRE was about was helping our staff to look at how they had been operating as a staff and how we wanted to operate as a staff and kind of balance that with what were the needs of the parish. [The consultant] uncovered some...of the ghosts or some of the elephants in the room that nobody was talking about. [The consultant] helped us to name some of the things that hadn't been talked about for some time.

Part of the consultants' effectiveness is due to their being located outside diocesan structures.

⁷ Thus, by having the consultant external to the parish staff and diocesan structures, the staff was free to take ownership for change. The absence of role conflict in the work of the consultant – being a “third party” – was seemingly very helpful. “Again, just being a third party, listening to us, then [the consultant] could write down what we were saying we needed and what we wanted. Then again, it was up to us to implement it. ...We're still working on that, but it's having very much improved through INSPIRE.”

...I think [having a consultant who is not part of the archdiocesan structure] is a huge plus. I think whenever you are sitting there with somebody who is going to judge your work, it's hard to be free.

The role of the consultant, however, is far more than as a disinterested observer. Parish pastoral staffs gave considerable trust to the consultant, who played an important role in decision-making as the pastoral team moved forward in its goals. Though outside of parish and archdiocesan accountability structures, they were part of an alternative accountability structure which INSPIRE participants freely and mutually accepted.⁸ In this sense, the consultants functioned as “spiritual directors” for the staff.⁹ This role gave the consultants wide latitude for the effective exercise of remarkable personal authority.

Well, you need the consultant for the mission purpose. I think what [the consultant does is that]—we had our mission, but [the consultant] really guided us to our action steps. So I think that does need to come first. ...You have no idea how many times [the consultant] reviewed our... plans. [And] kept saying no!

The consultant facilitated team-building exercises that helped move beyond conflict and fragmentation toward mutual respect and collaboration. This modeled behaviors that the team could later implement themselves, while launching them on a pathway to greater team effectiveness.

[The consultant] got all of us to talk about the ugly stuff [together with the consultant], but more importantly... had us do exercises that you write down one gift that you see of each person around the table and we shared that then with each other, once all that got written down. So we began acknowledging the good that was there; began to create some common ground for working together; more cross referencing of ministries; instead of the kind of protecting my turf. So I think [the consultant] was very helpful with that.

Many referred back to tools shared and modeled by the consultants, such as “Strength Finders”¹⁰ or the Myers Briggs. The consultants clearly transferred many important tools and techniques to parish staffs. However, the most critical aspect of the work of the consultant was not about specific techniques but rather initiating a process and modeling relationship.

It intrigued me that it wasn't about doing a project. It was about the process and not the project. The project was important. They held you accountable for the expenditure of funds for the project, but it was the process of what happened while you were doing the project.

⁸ In other words, the role of the consultant was horizontal and chosen, not vertical and part of a ready-made structure.

⁹ Some interviewees, in fact, even called the consultants “spiritual directors.” In the sense that the consultants heard things from the staff that allowed them to grow and yet could stay in the “internal forum,” this concept of consultants as “spiritual directors” illustrates how they were received and one of the consultant's most helpful contributions.

¹⁰ More than one parish reported keeping the notes from a facilitated sharing on the strengths of their parish staffs. Those notes are kept in a prominent place in their office or home.

Networking Across Parishes

INSPIRE created a new opportunity to network parish staff as learning organizations, linked one to the other, horizontally.¹¹ Dioceses naturally relate to parishes in a vertical manner – diocesan offices push things “down” to the parish level, and parishes take things “up” with downtown. However, vertical relationships are not the only ones, and are often not the best means to provide the networking capacities that most pastoral staff lack.¹²

INSPIRE did something different. It built horizontal forms of relationship, one to which parishes freely committed and from which they could learn from each other. By creating the possibility to gather together parish staffs committed to enhancing staff effectiveness, new learning communities could be built. These networks were highly valued, even when parish staff members could not always attend meetings across the archdiocese.¹³ Further, not all successful INSPIRE parishes, including the three where the interviews took place for this study, regularly reported and analyzed their goals. When they did, however, they almost always focused on how learning was becoming part of staff culture and the parish in general. Learning was central, and the building of learning networks key.¹⁴

You need something to bring together people from parishes, because depending on what’s been successful at a parish, it’s great to get some new ideas.... So relationships could be set up between people to go help...

Networking is seen as a critically important need that was met by INSPIRE and which helped enhance the effectiveness of parish staffs.

[It was so important] to be able to network early on here with other parishes who have gone through their own struggles, similar or different and dealing with their own successes and how did they get there. So that network of conversation... there’s still a great need for it. Bringing parishes together, bring staffs together, lay and clerical, to look at staffing; look at mission; look at physical realities of declining numbers and rising costs and all that stuff. ...So I think INSPIRE certainly nurtured those kind of things.

¹¹ “Learning organization” is a reference to the work of Peter Senge, among others. See, for example, Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006/1990), 3-4.

¹² INSPIRE introduced parish staff to new forms of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.

¹³ Future possibilities should explore the use of webinars for sharing across parish staff as well as timing meetings in a central location when staff is relatively more free. The start of the school year, or Advent, or Lent, or May, are not good times for parish staff networks to meet. The early summer, after the events of the year have mostly concluded but before vacation time begins, might be better, as is October, a time when everything has begun but the demands of the various seasons have not taken over.

¹⁴ Networks are voluntary and organic in nature, rather than top-down structures. Commitment cannot be enforced but is constantly constructed and nourished, often in waves across the network ecosystem. The INSPIRE-created networking opportunities, including its large scale gatherings, as well as its personal development plans, are no exception. Even though these elements are deeply valued and highly praised by the participants, not all participated as INSPIRE envisioned or as these staff members would have hoped. Further evidence of this organic element is that the interviews revealed that the pastoral staffs and their individual members, including the pastor and key INSPIRE coordinators, had no precise idea of exactly when they started or ended INSPIRE. This suggests that the life of INSPIRE melded into parish life.

[The INSPIRE meetings that we attended [were] very refreshing... you would get away from the office, set the date and pray together as a parish family or among other parishes and with the speakers they brought in and the experiences. Also we were able to, during that day, to switch tables and kind of, with different parishes, be able to know them and also to, I guess, interchange thoughts and ideas. So I think it was very helpful.

Sometimes these networks shared books on pastoral ministry as a way of learning together.

Now the other thing that I remember [was a book]. [E]ach [of us took] like a chapter of it and that we were supposed to really, thoroughly study it and be able to report on it, to give different ideas of parishes and some of the things that—to get some new ideas for us. That was a—the one that I had, the chapter that I had was wonderful and I happen to know the sister that was the pastoral associate there. I was very inspired by it... The chapter I read and I even went to that sister and told her how impressed I was with what she was doing in that parish.

These networks did more than share ideas: they helped inspire staff about new possibilities.¹⁵

I think for me, there's another dimension to it, other than just learning. To be in those meetings, it was not difficult to be inspired, no pun intended. That's an important part of being a staff, being leadership is that we continue to be inspired by their stories and how they move through things and celebrate successes and grieve over failures and some of that kind of stuff. So I, to listen to other people in that kind of a forum, was very helpful. Again, it's nothing the diocese normally provides.

[S]ome of the talks that were given were very inspiring.... [T]he talks challenge you and then also you get this—you can feel the spirit in parishes that are really getting something out of the program. That spirit is an inspiration...

INSPIRE did more than simply network parishes during occasional large scale meetings. It helped parish staff resource each other on an everyday basis.

It put us in touch with other... parishes that were working on similar things... So that just to kind of bring them together into a room with some focus questions, or a theme to deal with, was very helpful. To listen to each other's experience was very helpful. Presenters, sometimes they were very good, sometimes missed the mark, but they became the platform for discussion to take place in the larger group itself and that became very helpful. And there's no other forum like that in the diocese that puts parishes in touch with parishes. Deanery meetings... are all

¹⁵ Many references were made to the name “INSPIRE” as being particularly appropriate, and simply feeling “inspired” through INSPIRE.

reports from offices downtown. We don't engage one another and we don't work on things together that are within our competency and with our abilities.

[T]he potential that's here around the table for us to resource one another; kind of cross-fertilization stuff. ...So there's this trying to think beyond just my own agenda or my own issues or my own areas of responsibility and try to think in terms of what are other people on staff, pastoral staff looking for, in terms of resourcing. What kind of things are kind of out there, but we're not able to put our finger on? So we kind of watch out for each other; things we're looking at; or things that, ways to do things. ...So it could be around deferred maintenance; it could be around celebrations, but I had noticed over the years that they've become very comfortable about approaching me and saying, "What do you think about this?" "I know you're concerned about this; have you ever thought about doing this, this and this..." So if they'll do the same thing and cross-fertilize and ... resource one another...

The learning network aspect of INSPIRE was highly valued by all participants.

We did go to that one meeting where they had the mini-report of what was the results. We were the first year when they did that. ...I think it would be nice just off the top, as we're speaking here, to—if they could have like a 'best of the best' and have everybody come together as parish teams, walk around and see what people are doing, whether it's in terms of mission; whether it's in terms of liturgy, young adults, whatever the age, so that you'd be able to say, gee I want to do something with the elderly. These four parishes do a really great job. Let me go over there and find out what they're doing and what was their successes and what were their mistakes.

Funds

Along with the consultants and networking, INSPIRE provided funds to participating parishes for a collective project and personal development for each staff member. The common parish project became an opportunity for the staff to model collaboration, and the individual personal development piece helped staff members to feel valued and special, giving them opportunities to do something outside of ministry they would not otherwise do.

Overall, INSPIRE funding helped develop a sense of accountability or stewardship. This was particularly the case for those who had personally applied for INSPIRE, signed the papers, and acknowledged receipt of the funds.¹⁶

Well, I do think we felt accountable... I would say too... that I was invested. I was invested. I wanted it to—I saw a need and I wanted it to happen. I wanted to improve what was going on in our staff. I saw potential and I wanted to improve it.

¹⁶ This was the case, as noted above, particularly with pastors. It was also the case, secondarily, with those who served as INSPIRE coordinators. These persons kept the INSPIRE-related files and made sure that the INSPIRE-required reports were submitted on time.

[I]NSPIRE gave us money, so we felt accountable to them. ...If there is money involved, there has to be accountability to them. If there is no money, I think what there has to be are some witness stories [from pastors who have been through it and trust the process] that this can make a difference. If you invest into this, it will make a difference, a positive impact on the future of this staff and the future of the parish.

In two of the three parishes where interviews were conducted, the funding that INSPIRE provided was specifically mentioned as not crucial for their participation or central to what INSPIRE meant to them, as valuable as it was. The core gain for these parishes was in the consultation and learning networks, though the funding facilitated this to some extent. In the case of one of the parishes, however, it was different. This parish has particularly limited finances. In this parish, INSPIRE helped to make things otherwise impossible, possible.

[T]he inner city parishes, they just don't have it. I've been in a number of parishes and they just don't have the funds to do something like that. They just don't have it. ...And it just can uplift them. Sometimes when they're trying to do something and there's no way they can afford it and you have to let things like that go... but if they can have something that can help them to be inspired, I think that makes life so much better.

In these three areas – consultants, networks, and funding – INSPIRE provided resources that would otherwise not exist. It was up to the participating parishes, however, to be open to the consultants, networks, and funding. This openness and commitment is what the role of the pastor and the pastoral vision provided. By themselves, the presence of these external elements was necessary, but not sufficient. Before the gains of INSPIRE could be realized, there had to be specific developments within the pastoral teams.

Critical Internal Elements Catalyzed by INSPIRE

Three major internal changes were critical for the external interventions offered by INSPIRE to take root. The most important was developing effective, regular meetings as a staff. The second has to do with mutual respect and affirmation across the staff, and the third is about the identification and adoption of collaborative practices appropriate to particular parish contexts and challenges.

Staff Meetings

Many parishes do not have regular staff meetings, and when they do, the meetings are often not effective or even counter-productive. This was the case for all three parishes where interviews were conducted. The intervention of the consultants was critical in modeling how good meetings can be conducted, but the staff had to actually begin meeting regularly and doing so in a way that was productive.

Effective meetings have to involve putting everything on the table rather than holding back and then having “side meetings” or gripe sessions. Effective meetings allow the development of a

shared vision and practice of a shared spirituality. By building unity within the staff, positive meetings can help the parish as a whole – and model effective meetings that may be replicated in other parish groups.

INSPIRE parishes seem to have discovered that there are three elements of effective meetings that enhance staff effectiveness. First, such meetings are goal and priorities oriented. Rather than simply receiving a report, staff members have an opportunity to engage together around common goals. Second, such meetings must involve scheduling. Parish life runs around specific events, and the degree to which those events are known and discussed in advance, within the entire staff, is the degree to which communication will be effective and collaboration possible. Third, good meetings involve an opportunity for all to collaborate in planning and initiatives – as appropriate, given each person’s role, gifts, and experience. The various events of the parish can be seen as involving simply a single specialized minister – or an opportunity for all to contribute ideas and support, building a sense of collaboration and encouraging initiative.

I would start with saying that truly I think it is our weekly team meetings [that is key]. Our weekly staff meetings have helped us in many ways; what it is to incorporate another person into our group; or to share ideas; or it’s a matter of, I got this in the mail and what do you think about this idea; or I kind of saw this, don’t really like it, but if you want—it opens up that dialogue on a regular basis for all of us to share new ideas; new thoughts. I think that opening and dialogue has made, I think—altered the relationships I think, a lot of us have with each other and made it more collegial, more family; versus structure.

Good meetings allow for good communication, which includes breaking down of “silos.”

Sometimes, my thought back then was, sometimes it was we weren’t working together. Not in competition with each other, but just not moving in the same direction. So I think that’s where some of this came from. Everybody was kind of dealing in their own silo and a lot of the times the problems come from, as you said earlier, is lack of communication. If we can be clear with each other—I know we changed the structure of the staff meetings in order to better communicate and have since changed them again. So that’s my recollection that it was just everybody was in their own silo and there was no kind of common vision.

Through INSPIRE, particularly its consultants, parish staff came to see that new ways of conducting meetings were helpful. Though they might take an investment of time, the benefit they yielded in creating efficiencies and in building a sense of unity and mutual support was remarkable.

We really looked at each other’s strengths. So if I was having something for [my ministry area], but I, my strength is not music, then I would know that the music director; or maybe I needed help. Like with the food, I knew who to go to for that. So it really helped us to reach out to other staff to find what their strength was and know that they could help us in our ministry. We went from saying—and I know I

personally tried to get us to do different language—it's like [my ministry] was not 'my' ministry, it's 'our' ministry... So even just changing our language and how we looked at ourselves.

Normally we have weekly meetings... because of INSPIRE [consultants] taught us how to improve the meetings; how to talk about problems; how to solve problems. So for me, it was very, very helpful... So even small things like how to organize it... how to lead, what kinds of prayers I can use. So it was really also helpful. And we had fun.

Mutual Respect

These meetings built up a sense of mutual respect and affirmation between staff, but the meetings themselves were not the only source of mutual respect and affirmation. The work of the consultants opened up new ways for the staff to affirm each other and develop a sense of mutual respect. Without the staff doing these things, the meetings themselves could not have become as successful as they did. This element of helping each staff person to feel valued was particularly facilitated for some by the investment represented by the INSPIRE funds for personal development goals. For others, it came from the sense of trust that developed over time, and a growing willingness to be vulnerable in staff meetings and interactions. Leadership moved from an expectation of a top-down approach to one that embraced initiative and mutual support and teamwork. Individual staff members came to be recognized for their gifts and talents, and the wide range of gifts that they could offer.

Pastoral staffs who participated in INSPIRE tend to associate significant peak experiences of staff mutual support with INSPIRE, as well as collaborative aspects of staff culture in general.

I think what INSPIRE did was it offered us an opportunity to name the strengths, the weaknesses, the growth areas of our staff and our team and our parish. I think that's what it allowed us to do. If we wouldn't have had that time, that money, that personnel that provided us assistance, we would not have been able to take time to look at ourselves; to look at the parish; and by looking at ourselves individually, but also as a team; absolutely, if we would not have had that.

This element of mutual respect that seemingly marked staffs who participated in INSPIRE inevitably had positive effects on staff morale and personal self-esteem.

I can tell you, because of INSPIRE, I started my [advanced academic program]... because they really inspired me to do something. Because of this program, I started to believe I can do something.

[W]e all listen to each other. We all support each other and we all understand that we are together, working together towards one goal. We are—we feel—I feel free to express any opinion I have; or new idea I have. I know it will be listened to and then taken into account and I think that's very important.

[T]he staff previous to that did not have that trust on every level. Many of us on the staff had long relationships and trust levels, but just to kind of throw it all out there in the room and say, we are a staff. We have to trust each other. The assignment was to say one positive thing about everyone and you had to take your Post-It and put it on that person's chart and explain it to the group. It was a very emotional thing for some people, but it was good because you think I don't think you like me. Maybe you don't like me, but you find some positive things to say about me. So it was again, it was an example of how this can go forward and how it can be very positive, without the games that you have when you get a group of people together who tend to be maybe a little bit defensive. It's a technique that Father has used continually as our staffs have evolved. So when we have our August meeting, to a degree, we introduced this, okay, let's all go around the table and talk about why we're here, whatever... So it's really quite dynamic, I think, and full of a lot of energy.

In developing this sense of mutual respect, a kind of virtuous cycle was created whereby staff came to relate to each other and communicate more effectively, and in more meaningful ways.

[I]n telling our stories, sharing our stories and then working together, I think we felt stronger personally. Maybe some of them looked stronger because they were doing their personal plan too. I don't know this, but I think we all had a little bit more—we would bless each other and these different things were powerful, I think. Writing down a kind note to someone else about how much you love what they do for you and for the parish. I think I still have these things at home. The positive words, affirmation words on a sheet of paper. I think those things all made us each feel more valued and more critical to the parish growth and the staff... We aren't just there, out in space. We are [each important] and we are a team and we need to know each other.

Staff members found the experience of coming to have new levels of mutual respect for each other as transformative. Just like the consultants, staff members modeled good listening when they listened, and modeled new techniques as they used those techniques. It was mutual.

We sat in a room and actually I still have the paper in my folder. ...the staff sat around in comfortable chairs. [Our consultant] had us take a few moments to sit down and jot down a note for every person in the circle; a note about what their gifts were or what they appreciated. We were to take those then and then went around the circle and took the time to address those to who we wrote it. The sharing was very good. It was very confirming and that got people talking to one another with kind of a different level of trust that hadn't been there before.

This experience of mutual respect developed a sense of teamwork and relationship among the staff. When asked to give a few key words about the spirit of the parish that emerged through INSPIRE, one said: "engaged, committed, connected." Further, mutual respect led to collaborative action.

It just, not knowing all that went—what it was like before, just hearing from some of the people who have been on staff of how different it was now. We just—I think we just gelled as a team. ...If they needed assistance, always just teamwork. So like if I wasn't there, [ministry colleagues] just instinctively knew, I believe, through just INSPIRE and seeing that teamwork approach to ministry would be there to pick up the pieces and stuff and do that thing and just pick up where I left off.

Other Collaborative Practices

Conducting regular, effective meetings and affirming the gifts of fellow staff members are both specific practices of collaboration. These two practices are critical in every context. The third internal element is also about collaborative practices, but has to do with specific ones related to particular contexts of ministry and staff teams.

Thus, some but not all staff used “Strength Finders.” Those who did, however, found it very useful in meeting their need of identifying their personal strengths and those of all the members on the parish pastoral team.

So each of us got this book, “Living Your Strengths” and within it was this little access code to do a survey online, random questions and then the results were given. It was just a great, I think, tool for us to know each other's strengths as a staff. So when we could—if it was a particular need that we needed, we knew who had that particular strength. ...I think it just, it helped—it improved, I think positivity among the staff; the communication. I think a better understanding of the strengths of everybody and then it helped continued to create an inter-dependent team. It was just a great, great exercise.

Others used the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Regardless, these practices fit the context and helped the staff grow in critically important ways.

I thought it was supposed to be for the people that were on the staff in a parish to help them to be—you might say their best self, whatever they—if there was something that they needed that could help them to be their best self, so that they could be a greater service to the people of the parish. That's what this was trying to accomplish. ... We started out with a Myers Briggs Type Indicator.

They key is that all these various practices are seen as part of a move toward collaborative practices. As such, they had a common goal – helping staff to break out of a default mode of separate, specialized ministering “for the sake of ministering” rather than for a common mission.

I think everybody on this staff is very competent in their own areas and they do a great job of running what their responsibilities are, but put that group together around the table and there's going to be some fireworks. It's just the nature of the beast. It's just some of the personalities involved. ...There's still too much turf protection and not enough “we” rather than “my” or “I.” So I think that, in terms of staff development, who do you call? ...It's how do we get ourselves out of

thinking that a certain way, we thought this way for so long and begin to think about cross-referencing each other. Because everybody's competent in their own area. I think what potentially we have will lead to free each other. It's not all about feeding those folks out here; it's also about how do you do the cross-referencing stuff and that's a difficult piece.... who I am on staff and all that kind of stuff.

Some of these collaborative practices were specifically spiritual in nature, and reported learning a great from the consultant's sensitivity to spirituality. Some pastoral team members, for example, report having learned to use meditative music in their prayers and reflections as a result of a consultant's modeling of such a practice.

Well, again for me, [it] was refreshing way these days of recollections where especially INSPIRE for me, it was prayer for the... parishes to be together as one and pray as one and share as one; not just prayer, but also our experiences and have opportunity; our food, the tables, sit together. ... If you have a bad battery in your car, you're not going to buy one. So you need to energize to be able to do the task...

Individual staff members report growing personally through INSPIRE as leaders and as persons, even as the pastoral team was developing as a team.

Yeah, I think—I think INSPIRE, interestingly it had never dawned on me before, but the wisdom of INSPIRE, of having both a personal goal and a team goal or a group goal—yes, I have grown, I think.

Getting to know themselves and their personal gifts led staff to make choices about the kinds of collaborative practices that were appropriate for them.

So I just think we got to know each other; became more comfortable with one another and that just, again, the depth to which people went, I think depended on their personality, but I think just that cohesiveness, all the teamwork that we had done led to that, our having those discussions.

These three elements that depended on the actions of the team itself – effective regular meetings, cultivating mutual respect and affirming each other, and additional collaborative practices appropriate to the context and person -- were critical to INSPIRE. By itself, neither a context of an engaged pastor was sufficient, nor were the three major INSPIRE interventions of consultant, networks, and funds. The team itself had to engage in simple but critically important practices of meetings, affirmation, and other appropriate collaborative practices.

Healthy Staff, Healthy Parish

There appeared to be a direct relationship between the effect of INSPIRE on the staff, and the effect of the staff on the parish. In short, respondents indicated that INSPIRE made for a more healthy and effective staff, which in turn made for a more healthy parish. The results of transformation in one part of the system connected to transformation in other parts.

Overall Impact of INSPIRE on the Parish Pastoral Staff

The greatest net effect of INSPIRE was build up more effective, collaborative parish pastoral teams.

... So about the most—the best benefits what we received is helping us to work together like a team. I can tell you, we have a very good team, very good... So I'm so happy.... It's better.

I really think that is the fruit of the INSPIRE Program, bringing us together in doing teamwork.

Pastoral teams developed a new, much deeper value for collaboration.

This way of being collaborative is highly valued. I just think the need to be collaborative... to work with parish staffs, because I just think as church continues to evolve, it's just going to be so important.

They also came to strongly see the value of bringing in outside help. "I have no hesitation today because I know what getting a facilitator can do for us."

INSPIRE was a remarkable catalyst for so many parishes. Members of parish pastoral teams saw this very clearly.

I think the seeds are planted in INSPIRE about bringing people together to look at gifts; address our issues and envision a better future. I think that's moved us along that path.

As staff members looked back, remember the time before INSPIRE and after, the gift that was INSPIRE came readily to mind.

Well, in regard to meetings, the staff told me here that they had not had a staff meeting in ten months [prior to INSPIRE]. So there was no regularity with the last person that administered the place. It was such a battle royale and shouting matches would occur; they just quit meeting. So there had not been a meeting for almost a year. So we then set up a calendar for meetings. We took turns running the meetings or facilitating the meetings. We all contributed to the agenda of the meeting; took turns leading prayer. So those kinds of skill sets, we did not do shouting matches.

So I feel like INSPIRE, instead of having all these endless issue meetings with no resolve, I feel like we finally made progress on moving forward on some of these things that were stifling, that came up again and again.

We would have the staff meeting and then we'd have the real staff meeting... [W]e'd end up in someone's office and say 'Well, we didn't talk about this,' and 'What about this?' Then we'd—and not everybody would be present and it would be more of a venting. It would be more in maybe a negative light.¹⁷

The impact was clear for all to see within the parish. Parishioners noticed and appreciated the change within the pastoral team.

So I do think INSPIRE brought that about and I do think it made a change and I do think parishioners noticed. I really believe it.

I do feel like our parishioners are very thankful for our staff because they do see a team. They aren't just like, I deal with this person and that's what I do at that parish. I think they really do see us as a team. They see us together a lot in different things and they see us overlapping more. We had these just separate ministries; we do overlap a little more, which is nice and kind of be present for the different ministries. ...Just that feeling like we are a parish, not we have all these individual programs that we run. So I do feel that that occurred through INSPIRE because we really did gel. So I feel INSPIRE brought us together and the parish noticed it. The parishioners really could identify a change and knew a little more of the overall parish staff, not just individual people.

Overall Impact of INSPIRE on the Parish

The effect of INSPIRE on the parish team was just the beginning, however. The goal of the grant behind INSPIRE was not simply to have the staff feel like a team, but to foster excellence in the parish as a whole.

One clear effect on the parish was the transfer of INSPIRE-related learnings from the staff to the parish as a whole.

[I]t came out in different ways, but I think one of the most helpful things we did, first as a staff and then I believe... took ... to parish council and then to the school, the faculty, staff and administration. So we did this first as a staff. It was a thing called Strength Finders. Again, this is I think, all the fruits of INSPIRE.

As another put it:

¹⁷ The staff member continued: So we're like, okay, we need to bring these issues up at the staff meeting. So that's when we went—so at the next staff meeting we said, what should our staff meetings look like? ...We brought it to [the consultant] when we realized that that's an issue that we have, that we are not having successful staff meetings and [the consultant] helped us.”

...Strength Finders is something that we came upon—I probably heard it at one of the INSPIRE workshops.... So we sent one of our parishioners away who is a personal coach and had her train and then since then, she has done that for the staff. She's done a couple of in-services for the staff. She's done it for the faculty and staff. She's done it—we did a Marriage Enrichment out of Strength Finders. One evening we had about 16 couples; so each new staff person that comes in does Strength Finders and I think that's where we found out about building engaged church and Strength Finders...

No matter what the particular element, INSPIRE went well beyond the staff. It became a crucial means of transforming the parish. Many participants noted that the move of the staff toward mutual respect, collaboration, and teamwork led the parish as a whole down the same road. Each of the parishes has their own particular context, but all have become transformed.

But INSPIRE also impacted our parish council; INSPIRE gave structure and some rationale to our parish council. So it impacted that.

Just from that experience, the importance of creating an interdependent team. I think as parishes grow, whatever the future looks like, understanding what are the gifts of the parish, but what are the individual gifts that each of the staff members brings and how can that go about transforming a parish.

Ultimately, INSPIRE is not simply about organizational development techniques, but theological understanding. The transformation of which the work of INSPIRE is a part should best be seen as ultimately rooted in God's action and plan, as understood by the Christian tradition and theological concepts, including theological anthropology, the working of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of church as a community of disciples.

Opportunities for the Future

The transformative effect of the work of INSPIRE on both parish staffs and parishes as a whole both make a strong case for carrying on the work of INSPIRE. The need for a network that can replicate the most critical aspects of INSPIRE's service to the Church is strong. The case for the success of INSPIRE is clear.

It is also clear that parish pastors and parish staffs as a whole have massive pent-up demand for the kind of work done by INSPIRE. As such, the work of INSPIRE, no matter how it is carried on, offers considerable opportunities for those who would be involved. There are considerable opportunities for academic institutions interested in partnering with dioceses and parishes. These opportunities in turn suggest new ways to cultivate networks of potential students, consultants, and thought leaders.

[INSPIRE] brought something that very few people in this country can have and I would love to see it go forward because the dynamics of trying to be a group that ministers with the needs that we have and a couple times its come up, well, if we could have [our consultant] come back. It's something that's ongoing. I'd love to

see it be an agency for people to tap into... So that to me and the skills that I'm looking for in terms of what INSPIRE could bring to the group was people who were familiar with ministry and the landlines that come with ministry in terms of burnout; in terms of territorialness; in terms of single mindedness; in terms of those kind of things that it just addressed...

Demand for Training and Consultation

While some parish staff members are prepared in formal training programs with extensive field supervision and advance training, this is not true for many parish staff members. Parish staff, with and without formal initial training, will continue to be formed through on the job training even while being overwhelmed with the day-to-day task orientation of parish ministry. This need is no less strong for priests than lay ecclesial ministers. In the minimum of six years of seminary training that each newly ordained priest has typically experienced, very little is spent on the actual everyday skills of conducting meetings, dealing with staff conflicts, and effective management and communications.

These challenges are built into the reality of ministry and parish structures today. Precisely because these challenges are chronic and cyclical, diminishing and then reappearing, they are an on-going challenge that sometimes needs to be addressed directly with considerable energy, and sometimes not, in waves. In this sense, the work of INSPIRE is for all parishes, all pastors, all parish staffs – but at various points rather than as a constant need.

Those who completed INSPIRE are sensitized to the benefit of this sort of work and therefore have ongoing and long-term demand for this kind of work.

Great investment for the results we got. I definitely feel it really helped us through difficult times, it really pumped us up. I really—I would say a little stronger investment would be a revisit after a year. ...“How you guys doing? Where are you? Remember those goals we talked about?” A little poke in the arm is never a bad thing. So I think maybe a little further investment would be a recheck. I think a recheck could go a long way.

I could see [INSPIRE related meetings facilitated by an INSPIRE consultant] being monthly for maybe the first six months and then kind of as needed. See, once we fell off, that's when we stopped—had trouble implementing and that's when we could have—if we would have kept going, we would have maybe gotten to the point where we had the affirmation and the support and the encouragement. I don't think it should really ever end, but it could be quarterly; or on an as-needed basis.

Opportunities for Institutions of Higher Education

INSPIRE has been a bold and innovative project within Loyola University Chicago's Institute of Pastoral Studies (IPS), in partnership with the Archdiocese of Chicago. It has trained pastoral leaders to see IPS, and Loyola University Chicago more generally, in terms of the expertise it can offer to parishes.

There are clear opportunities here for any university or institution of higher education that can deliver the kind of expertise with which IPS and Loyola Chicago have become associated. This could include assistance of faculty, staff, graduate students, and related persons in facilitation and consultation. It could also include offering a steady cycle of seminars, including webinars, along with other well-timed offerings and events, so as to regularly recruit students in degree and certificate programs.

That's why I went to school at Loyola [Institute of Pastoral Studies] because the question was asked, do you have the skill set for what you're doing. Well, no one really cared about that before. So you could just see this whole new sense of taking pride in what you do and just asking if you have what you need to do your job well done. Just the asking of the question was huge for all of us. Like what we did was validated.

Many on parish staff are bewildered by the lack of investment that Chicago-area institutions of higher education make in offering resources that meet the needs of parishes. They are astonished by the lack of fit between the demand they perceive and what these institutions actually offer.

Hello? How many Catholic universities do we have in the diocese? Geez Louise! ...Try and develop a relationship with them as a parish. Forget it. They're not interested. [A high school] has just partnered with [one university] as kind of their feeder school or their adopted school. So there is possibility for relationships and drawing on each other's resources. What kind of resources could be available to our school and religious ed program? [Why don't] we... have a relationship with DePaul University or with Loyola University...? ...Programs of formation exist in religious communities. They exist in colleges. They exist in seminaries. What about formation for lay leaders? Is the Lay Ecclesial Ministry program the only thing that we've got to offer? ...Are there other ways of doing this? There are. Loyola's Pastoral Studies programs might offer some suggestions; their summer programs, that kind of thing. So I think we've been really slow and stupid about not developing a network of relationships with some of the biggest learning teaching institutions that are our treasures. Some kind of informal network, or even a formal network that parishes could tap into by way of fee or by way of mutual service.

Parish staffs are very aware of the emerging patterns in ministry and parish life, but have few resources to respond beyond the everyday, task-oriented reality of ministry. Institutions of higher education, particularly universities that can mobilize offerings and specialists across disciplines, may have a strong opportunity here. Clearly, Loyola's Institute of Pastoral Studies enjoys strong name recognition through the INSPIRE project as well as its decades of presence within the community.

IPS is much more than a school. It's very much, where is our church going and how can we make sure we still have a church. So for me, on the other side, what I would say is, the potential to bring in staffs or individuals for summer seminars... We need church management stuff. How can you get this? So people come to IPS

and get a counseling degree, but maybe they need a degree—or they get their Type 75 for the school on how to manage a school.... Or, to send a business manager there, not just clergy, but a business manager, because they know how to run a business, but they don't know how to run a church. ... So there is a payback for Loyola, possibly, or within the program to have something like that...¹⁸

Such universities, particularly Catholic universities that are sensitive to the challenges at hand, can offer opportunities for the conversations that so many pastoral leaders seek.

Put on the table what [clergy are] not allowed to talk about these days. That stuff needs to be talked about. Clergy are hamstrung. ...Lay people, they aren't constrained by that. So laity can say, thank you for your input, we'll consider that in our discussions. So I think INSPIRE certainly nurtured those kind of things.

This demand for conversational space includes one for training and practical expertise. These are the sorts of things that a university-based institute focused on ministry and pastoral life could uniquely provide, and for which demand appears to be strong.

Well, I think to have presentations or like a seminar [on] 'What does an effective parish look like? How do I know if I am meeting the needs of my parish?' ...I know they have that little parish symposium thing—not little, it's big, but you get like parish leaders and things like that to go to it, but I think, almost like NCEA for the schools. You need something to bring together people from parishes, because depending on what's been successful at a parish, it's great to get some new ideas. Also, giving directions about service; or how to organize, in this society today, with all the litigation, how to organize a service project and not give yourself; or the archdiocese an exposure that we can't deal with. That's why I see—I look at Loyola and you can pull in people from the Law School, the Business School, the Education School, the Psychology Department and there's just all these things and that's what Loyola does. Get the Student Services people to talk about how they get kids engaged. It's a resource... But to help the school even and provide internships. So you've got people who want to be—that are in these either a certificate or a master's program and they need real life experience, but you also want it to be a positive learning experience. So relationships could be set up between people to go help...

Naturally, the examples given have to do with Loyola University Chicago, since it was associated with INSPIRE. However, these opportunities could be tied to any institution of higher education, whether in Chicago or not, whether Loyola University Chicago was interested or not. The data suggests that the demand is there for both coursework and continuing education opportunities.

¹⁸ The same comment continued, noting the need for the Archdiocese to diminish its structure due to financial reasons and the possibility that institutions of higher education could help to more efficiently provide some of these needs for training and consulting.

Well, like I said, for the new hires and the people that come here, yeah it's like... for everybody to be on the same page or to be able to have the same experience yeah, you would have to say they have to go through the experience that we went through.... Oh definitely, take a course or you took classes or you graduated. You think you know it all, but there's always and I think this is why it's continuous education because you're continuing to learn all your life.

Opportunities for Building Networks

Organizational entrepreneurs, whether within a university context or not, have an opportunity here to build new networks across parishes, something for which there appears to be high demand. INSPIRE networked committed and relatively high performing parishes across geographies and cultural groups, facilitating a learning process across parish staffs. This is the basis of good innovation – learning and adapting lessons from other contexts. Any successor of INSPIRE needs to connect excellent consultants and parish needs, but it is more than that. A core part of the work of any network that would carry on the vision of INSPIRE would link parishes desiring to learn and grow to each other, that they might share with each other and learn together.

Well... the beauty of INSPIRE was meeting with other parishes and listening to the challenges and the successes that they had and how we could help them and what we could learn from them. So it wasn't just the speakers and the tools from INSPIRE itself, but it was really meeting, having days where we would gather in the city and meet with other parishes in INSPIRE and hear from their staff. That was really helpful for us.... So all of us would kind of find the person in these other parishes who had similar roles and share information. I know also, that a rolling admission, I guess, for lack of a better term. So sometimes we...would meet new teams—new parishes just coming on—and they would hear how it had helped us and they would see us working together and laughing together and really appreciating each other. They would want that. They would hope that they could get to that place with their staff. So not only did we learn from others, but we were also mentor and a guide for the new parish teams coming on.

Opportunities for Consultants

Whether Catholic or other universities make an effort to serve the needs of the church in this way, and in doing so to add to their student base, is hard to predict. It is equally hard to predict if an organizational entrepreneur will respond to the need by crafting a network of parishes. In both cases, there are clear incentives, both financial and missional.

There are no less clear incentives, however, and perhaps even stronger ones, for connecting consultants to parishes in need of consultants. The key for any organization that carries on INSPIRE's work is to connect parish staffs with excellent external consultants who would serve for a limited time and sufficient fees that would facilitate this service for both parishes and consultants.

[I]t could happen without a lot of resources and without a structure, if they were intent about having—first I think, it's so important is to build a trusting relationship and maybe that's easier said than done in some parishes. So that

would be the first thing is how they could have a safe, confidential, trusting environment to lay out their goals. It might just take a facilitator, a spiritual director, a life coach; I don't know who that person would be, to just meet with them at their parish; or maybe not at their parish. It seemed to work better for us, if we just went [outside the parish] to facilitate such a meeting, maybe on a monthly basis.

Well, I think that we were all leaders, but we needed someone to lead us. So [the consultant], independent third party coming in, that we could confidentially share our—any problems that we had, but you really just bring us together and provide an environment where we could list what are the issues we have; or what are our priorities. So just to gather in a room and have a big board that we wrote our priorities or our strengths or things that we wanted to do and just have that done.

External consultants can be particularly helpful for new pastors who want to be a change agent. This is because consultants outside the parish staff as well as diocesan structures are in a position to introduce new ideas in a neutral open-ended way, without a sense of imposition. The external consultant allows the team to freely choose its future, and to therefore become that much more committed to it. The skills of such a consultant are very similar to those of a well-trained pastoral counselor, and Loyola University Chicago's Institute of Pastoral Studies has a strong pastoral counseling program. However, here as elsewhere, this opportunity is not limited to one institution. It would instead be a function of those institutions with leaders who possess the vision and creativity to respond to the needs of the church effectively, turning these needs into new markets.

Opportunities for Retired Pastors and Others with Pastoral Experience

There may be a possible role for retired pastors, among others, in providing the kind of external consulting outside of formal archdiocesan structures that parishes need.

I think the asset would be, I think, if it was non-archdiocesan, people might be freer to speak... I think the biggest plus would be somehow that the people—and guys would have to be trained, but pastoral ministers, I think, would be the more effective consultants than like a professional consultant that would come from the business world because that particular style or model might not fit the style or model of the church. I think using guys who, and it all depends on their time commitment, but it would be nice to see... where you involve retired pastors, guys who are good. Get good pastors involved in this, where they could work with parishes or work with staffs to utilize pastors' experience and training them as consultants or to do that type of stuff, because they know what it's like to work in a parish; to be engaged in pastoral ministry. ...I think it could be someone retired; someone currently in engaged in pastoral ministry, a pastoral associate and associate pastor. It would have to be someone experienced. To use those people, men and women, in that capacity to serve as consultants. They know in life—they know the heartbeats, the pulse of a parish, of ministry.... To meet the needs of the parish, do a team approach. I just—we've got to think outside the box.... I just think we need to think outside the box.

Or someone to go sit down with to talk to about this stuff, who understands what you're going through and might have some resources themselves to kind of point you in directions to go. There's nobody like that right now... Well [priests] could be a consultant when [they] retire... we don't make good use of—we're after funding like nobody's business, the diocese and all that, but we are not smart about tapping into some of the resources [right here, among ourselves] that deal with mission and ministry and business that come together in parish.

Connecting parishes with consultants is the single most critical value-added activity of any future network that would carry on the work of INSPIRE. Part of the value of such a network, however, is not simply technical knowledge, but rather personal gifts and skills that fit a parish context or need. Any future effort to connect parishes to consultants must know that parish and know the consultant. The fit between the consultant's personal qualities and the profile of the staff and its needs is critical. Interviewees could readily name these qualities.

Oh, [the consultant's] sense of laughter. [The consultant would] laugh at us. [The consultant's] sense of enthusiasm for everything we were doing. When you're warmly encouraged, you want to do more. When you're feeling successful... [The consultant really helped us in] seeing ourselves in relation to the team and seeing the team by itself, as a necessary thing for the success of the parish to function.

Opportunities for Managing Value: Interventions of Limited Duration

The most pressing needs of parish staffs may well be met in a relatively short period. Parish staffs know when that point has been reached. For this reason, short term consultancy assignments will likely be the norm, perhaps much less than the two year period for which INSPIRE was originally designed. The staff knows when their needs for seeking a consultant area are met. Efforts to meet pastoral staff's needs for greater effectiveness should show great sensitivity to this. Investments from the outside that go beyond what the parish staff is prepared to do – whether in terms of additional study, participation, or pay – face starkly diminishing returns. Understanding the signs can be quite simple.

I think for us, we were going through some tough times with [staff] and I think we were more on an overall goal of being more of a parish, not these satellites. I think we accomplished it.... I think it was the new pastor and the staff feeling very gelled. I think it was a gelling of a staff.

Looking back on it, INSPIRE parishes could tell when the value-added component of the interventions began to decline.

[When] we started out, it was like we were just on fire about INSPIRE, but it was definitely then as we—then it definitely weaned off. We noticed like in the beginning, all of use went to every event and participated in anything INSPIRE related, but towards the end, I don't know if we felt like we had achieved our goal, but then ... only a few staff members would attend each event.

The same holds for the parish focus on its goals and regularly evaluating its goals. This happened in different parishes in different ways, reflecting the skills, context, and particular needs and direction of each parish. There was a certain natural unevenness in this. This is not a bad thing: it is natural to all learning organizations. Organizations that take their own growth, challenges, and character seriously will simply not be alike in their needs and levels of participation. Any successor to INSPIRE needs to expect this reality and to work with it, as INSPIRE did.

Opportunities for Managing Value: Funding and Financing

Parish staff involvement in any successor to INSPIRE depends not only on creating means of instilling interest and commitment, but on viable, sustainable financial models. Such models depend on controlling costs but even more so on institutional and organizational leaders with the vision to make the strategic investments, however modest.

The critical importance of investing in something such as INSPIRE was clearly understood by the participants. Such an investment was seen not only as a critical means of building up the future of the church, but also as a means of improving efficiency: reducing costs of time and money in parish life while meeting critical ministry goals more effectively. Taken together, these relatively small gains could add up to significant increases in building up the church.

Fund it... I think certainly the archdiocese would have to fund part of it. I think parishes as needed, like when we would pay [a consultant] for that. People manage to pay the cable bills... One of the things I've always appreciated and more places are doing it now, Loyola [Institute of Pastoral Studies pays a third; we pay a third; [the staff person being educated] pays a third, to help get these degrees. I think there's things like that you need to look at, I think if the archdiocese is committed to having successful parishes, they should be committed to doing part of this. I think it would actually cut down on some of their overhead, in terms of trying to fix things.¹⁹

Besides the mutual gains to parishes and potential partnering institutions in higher education, there are also the savings produced by parishes that invest in consultants, since consultants can help a parish save time and money, thus returning value on the investment by reducing waste and increasing effectiveness with the limited staff resources at hand.

In some parishes... they have a wonderful team and they are working together, it's good. But always, even, we were working well, but we discovered a lot when [the consultant] came, because we didn't think about some things. [The consultant] showed us different ways and helped us. ...Of course, you can, if you have money, you can do many things, but you can also waste many things. So they... know how to plan; how to use this without wasting time and money.

Of course, some parishes have more limited means than others. The question for any future manager of an effort to serve the needs of parishes will be how to raise and administer funds for

¹⁹ The support program described here is currently suspended for new candidates in the Archdiocese of Chicago due to financial limitations.

those parishes and persons that truly need the cost discounting that grants and donors might make possible.

[In] the inner city parishes, they just don't have it. I've been in a number of [those] parishes and they just don't have the funds to do something like that. They just don't have it. ...And it just can uplift them... there's no way they can afford it.

Appendix Interview Protocol

Opening

First, let's explore the INSPIRE project in your parish. What would you say INSPIRE has been about within the parish and parish staff more particularly?

If appropriate:

What did you know about INSPIRE in general before you began?

What did you later learn about INSPIRE's work in other parishes?

Moments to Celebrate

How did INSPIRE contribute to staff collaboration?

INSPIRE's work, in part, has been about helping enhance staff collaboration and team effectiveness. Thinking back to the situation before INSPIRE, and then during INSPIRE and after, what particular successes, steps forward, or other developments in staff collaboration come to mind? How might you say INSPIRE helped enhance staff collaboration? How did INSPIRE help enhance pastoral team effectiveness?

If appropriate:

What three specific successes or kinds of developments come to mind?

Could you tell me about those?

We also want to know how skill sets to promote team functioning increased during INSPIRE. So, for example, in what ways might you or the staff in general have increased in:

Pastoral planning skills and use of pastoral planning tools?

Skills for the conduct of meetings?

Or in the development of mission statements?

Or in personal development for more effective team functioning?

○ Personal learning plans

○ Team learning plans

How did collaboration impact staff?

We've talked about how INSPIRE contributed to greater collaboration.

How did this collaboration affect you? How did it affect others?

How did collaboration impact the parish?

What do you see as impact of this collaboration on the parish?

What stories of success from increased staff collaboration come to mind?

How did this collaboration contribute to the vitality of the parish?

If appropriate:

What do you mean by parish vitality?

Spirituality

Another thing we would like to understand is how as sense of shared self-understanding of vocation and spirituality might have increased over time. In what ways might you say that has happened?

Could you tell me more?

How has the change in spirituality influenced/interacted with collaboration?

Culture

How would you describe the culture of the parish in terms of its demographics? How would you describe the culture of the parish in its way of doing things?

How did INSPIRE fit these parish cultures?

Evaluation

How would you assess the effectiveness of INSPIRE's model of enhancing staff collaboration?

What made INSPIRE successful? What made it less successful?

What sorts of practices were developed that helped increase pastoral staff collaboration?
(Name each practice mentioned, describe each practice)

For each practice:

Could you share a story or two of life here in the parish that might show what that practice/technique/skill/way of doing things looked like?

Retrospective

INSPIRE was not as successful in all parishes as it was here.

Looking back, what made INSPIRE more successful in your parish?

What strengths was this parish building on within the INSPIRE process?

Looking back now, were there things your parish or parish staff had been through or experienced that helped create success with INSPIRE?

Moving Forward

The most important thing now is not to look back, as we have been doing, but to look forward.

What learnings through INSPIRE do you think will most be carried through in the parish?

INSPIRE is ending, but needs of parishes such as yours continue. How do you think that what worked in INSPIRE might be carried on in other parishes that might need something like INSPIRE for the very first time?

Finally, let's consider the big picture in terms of emerging patterns of parish life and ministry within the Archdiocese and the Catholic Church in the United States in general. How would you relate practices of collaborative parish staffs and increased team effectiveness, a deeper sense of personal vocation and ministerial self-understanding, and more developed skill sets that have developed in your parish to those patterns?