



## LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY IN THE PARISH TODAY (Version 2)

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### Introduction

To understand how to serve parishes and parish leaders, two significant projects were established as part of the Lilly Endowment's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project. One, of course, was INSPIRE, the project that has called us here today. The other was the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project (EMP),<sup>1</sup> a ten year study of parishes and parish leadership. While the two projects have the same focus, they were conducted differently. INSPIRE worked with parish teams in Chicago, learning from those encounters. The Emerging Models Project conducted quantitative and qualitative research projects, including regional symposia of pastoral leaders. In this paper, I am bringing you findings from the Emerging Models Project studies that can either affirm or provide additional clarity to the findings from INSPIRE.

So first we must understand the context in which we are working. Today, we are living in a time of intense change and transition. We are moving from a world of nations to a trans-national world. The church is facing changes as well, with new realities and new ways of understanding parish and parish ministry. In the United States we have seen the numbers of Catholics climb to an estimated 78 million who are more culturally diverse and younger than one would have imagined even 20 years ago. The number of active clergy is rapidly declining with 65% over the age of 65.<sup>2</sup> We see bishops turning to deacons to provide sacramental ministry, ordaining over 18,000 in the United States alone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership" was a project conducted by the National Association for Lay Ministry, the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, the National Association of Deacon Directors, the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, the National Conference of Pastoral Planners and Council Development, and the National Federation of Priests' Councils. For more information see: [www.emergingmodels.org](http://www.emergingmodels.org).

<sup>2</sup> Neil A. Parent, "Final Report: Executive Summary," Emerging Models (June 1, 2013):5. [http://emergingmodels.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Final-Report\\_Executive-Summary.pdf](http://emergingmodels.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Final-Report_Executive-Summary.pdf). [Acc. 10/2/13].

<sup>3</sup> Ibid..

In the midst of this change, our understanding of parish structure is changing as well. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) identified five parish types, albeit with many variations:<sup>4</sup>

- The traditional parish with one pastor/one congregation with or without parish staff
- The Canon 517.2 parish administered by a deacon, vowed religious, or lay person installed by the bishop
- Consolidated parishes which are two or more parishes have been merged into one
- Multiple, linked, or clustered parishes where one pastor serves two or more parishes that are connected in any number of ways... or regional “communities” of parishes, with or without shared staff
- Multicultural parishes that are more ethnically and culturally diverse than not

I would add one more to this list, the “mega” parish which is traditional in the sense of having its own pastor, but also has a very large congregation, sometimes in the tens of thousands. (I just placed a youth ministry intern in a parish that has 9000 registered households, roughly 27,000 people!)

Staffing these emerging models of parish calls for creativity in how we provide ministry, a need which has been one of the driving forces of the development of lay ecclesial ministry. Responding to pastoral need is nothing new. The church has consistently and faithfully responded to the pastoral needs of her people, often with new lay ministries. In our age, Vatican II developed our understanding that the church’s mission is *in totus Christi*,<sup>5</sup> belonging to us all. And just as the mission of the church belongs to the entire body of Christ, so too, the mission of the parish belong to the entire parish - pastor, parish staff, and parishioners co-responsible for their parish and its mission. Benedict XVI reminded us of this when, speaking to parish priests in Rome, he said:

I believe that this is one of the important and positive results of the Council: the *co-responsibility* of the entire parish, for the parish priest is no longer the only one to animate everything. Since we all form a parish together, we must all collaborate and help so that the parish priest is not left on his own, mainly as a coordinator, but truly discovers that he is a pastor who is backed up in these common tasks in which, together, the parish lives and is fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in the early 1980s, we saw lay and religious providing much needed ministry in rapidly growing parishes, a ministerial response not unique to the United States, but found around the world, although with a variety of different titles and expressions. While there is no formal definition of lay ecclesial ministers, the most concise descriptions indicate that these women and men make a vocational commitment, rooted in baptism, to leadership in the name of the church, *as laity*, in public, authorized, ecclesial, pastoral ministries.<sup>7</sup> In order to live out this

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2003): 57.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, “Meeting with Clergy” *Origins* 37, no. 11 (August 16, 2007): 19.

<sup>7</sup> See also Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries*, 83. The term “vocational commitment to significant public ministry in the community” comes from Dr. Hahnenberg, who has made a significant contribution to the theology of lay

commitment, what is needed, according to the United States bishops' document, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, is *authorization* of the hierarchy to serve in the local church in positions of *leadership* in a particular area of ministry. Lay ecclesial ministers work in *close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, and should have *preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned.<sup>8</sup> They are, therefore, formally serving *in the name of the church*.<sup>9</sup> [Emphasis added.]

### **Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Who They Are**

According to the most recent Emerging Model's research, conducted for the Project by CARA,<sup>10</sup> there are an estimated 38,000 lay men and women ministering at least half time in parishes in paid, pastoral positions. On average, 800 lay ecclesial ministers have joined parish staffs annually over the past two decades, and an additional 12,000 hold these positions as volunteers. 14% are vowed religious. The vast majority, 80%, are female. 88% of lay ecclesial ministers are non-Hispanic white, this percentage unchanging over the past 15 years. Nine percent are Hispanic or Latino/a, 2% are African American or African, and 2% are Asian or Pacific Islander.

Studies done on workplace conditions for lay ecclesial ministers indicate that the average salary for a full-time position is approximately \$31,000,<sup>11</sup> although there are large fluctuations based on role and responsibilities, relative wealth of the parish, and geographic region. Age and gender also factor into decisions about salaries and benefits. The church as employer must consider its responsibility to ensure that lay ecclesial ministers have just and commensurate wages and other workplace benefits normally accorded employees.<sup>12</sup>

And they are not young. Only 7% of paid lay ecclesial ministers are under the age of 30, and 18% (6,800) of the 38,000 lay ecclesial ministers are under the age of 40. The Research as shown that young adults in ministry, while very committed, find significant difficulties in following this path. They can be discouraged by the lack of peers in ministry positions and critical about some aspects of parish life.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, their elders in ministry do not always accept the gifts that they bring or the way in which they have learned to work as part of a team and in a cyber world.<sup>14</sup> Yet, with the large numbers of retirements on the horizon of both lay and ordained in ministry, we need to explore the new pathways into ministry that these young people are showing us, some following in their parents' footsteps, others seeing this as a normal career path and moving through college and graduate programs in ministry.

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ecclesial ministry. I have added the emphasis on doing this *as laity* to emphasize the fact that there are vocations ordered to the church that pertain to the laity.

<sup>8</sup> USCCB, *Co-Workers In The Vineyard of The Lord* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005): 10.

<sup>9</sup> Edward P. Hahnenberg, "Serving in the Name of the Church," *In the Name of the Church: Vocation and Authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, ed. William J. Cahoy, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Grey, Mary L.Gautier, and Melissa A. Cidade, "The Changing Face of Church," *Emerging Models* (2011): 58-61. <http://emergingmodels.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Parishes-Phase-One1.pdf> (Acc. 10/2/2013).

<sup>11</sup> The Final Report, 7.

<sup>12</sup> NALM. "Working in the Vineyard: A Position Statement on Employment Practices for Lay Ecclesial Ministers. Nalm.org, (November, 2007), <http://www.nalm.org/position-statement-working-in-the---> [Acc. 10/2/13].

<sup>13</sup> Final Report, 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Final Report, 7.

It is essential that lay ecclesial ministers are educated and formed with the proper theological knowledge and appropriate skills for the ministry they undertake. CARA conducts an annual study of ministry formation certificate and degree programs. The latest data (2012-2013) indicates 22,564 men and women are in these programs, 74% are working toward a certificate in ministry and 26% are working toward a graduate degree in ministry. This number represents a 30% increase from the 17,452 candidates reported in 2011-2012.<sup>15</sup> There are some new trends beginning to appear in the populations of these programs:<sup>16</sup>

- Only 3% are religious men or women and this decline is expected to continue.
- There has been an increase in the number of men preparing for lay ministry with approximately 40% of the candidates male.
- One third are under the age of thirty. As mentioned above, there is some anecdotal evidence that young adults are seeing this as a normal career path.
- 40% are Hispanic and half are Anglo. When looking at degree programs only, the number of Hispanic students declines to 12%. For a future in which the parish is increasingly Hispanic, these numbers point to the need for serious consideration of including pastoral Spanish classes in all programs and intentional recruiting of Latino/a students in degree programs.

### ***Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Their Ministry***

Lay ecclesial ministers have primary responsibility for the day-to-day pastoral work in the parish.<sup>17</sup> With a variety of titles, the more common of which include pastoral associate, director of religious education or catechetical leader, youth minister, and director of worship, they are called upon to oversee the planning, organizing, and implementing of parish programs. This reality is addressed in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, the United States bishops' document on lay ecclesial ministry.

[Lay ecclesial ministers] are to use their gifts and leadership roles always for the good of the Church, equipping the community for every good work and strengthening it for its mission in the world.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to their specialization many lay ecclesial ministers, especially in smaller parishes, are called to be 'generalists' carrying out the many duties that accompany parish life such as hospital visits, working with parish finances, outreach, planning funerals, or coordinating volunteers. They focus is on the individuals of the parish, both animating the gifts of the community and meeting their ministerial needs. Described by EMP symposia participants:

... The vision of the staff's role is to work alongside and provide resources for the lay leaders in the parish. The model of leadership they employ is a grassroots

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<sup>15</sup> "Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollment Study: Statistical Overview for 2012 – 2013," Center For Applied Research In the Apostolate (April, 2013: 30, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/Publications/Overview2012-13-FINAL.pdf> [Acc. 10/2/13].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>17</sup> Marti R. Jewell and David A. Ramey, *The Changing Face of Church: Emerging Models of Parish Leadership* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010): 87.

<sup>18</sup> *Co-Workers*, 26.

approach. The people closest to the needs... who are ministering to those needs are enabled and empowered to find the solutions and ways to best meet the needs. (Pastoral Associate/Mid-Atlantic)<sup>19</sup>

The staff provides well-educated individuals in specialized ministries (liturgy/music, pastoral care, religious education/youth ministry, etc.) to serve and empower the community in implementing the mission and respond to the needs of the parish. (Pastor/Southeast)<sup>20</sup>

There are many factors that impact the ability of parish staff to fulfill their ministry. To start with, it is very important that they are appropriately formed and educated. Theirs is not just service, but service in the name of the church, and the church community has the right to expect them to bring the gifts of the tradition to their ministry. Second, there is evidence that parish environment can impact the ability of lay ecclesial ministers to be effective in parishes. In the EMP research, when the ministry of lay ecclesial ministers is described as being healthy and done well, that ministry is most often described as being done in a collaborative team atmosphere where lay ecclesial ministers are given strong leadership roles.<sup>21</sup> These effective lay ecclesial ministers find that their ministry and authority are recognized, and regarded as such, by both parishioners and pastor. EMP studies also showed that ministers, both lay and ordained, who felt the ministry of the staff was hindered also indicated there were one or more of the following factors present: weak team dynamics, a controlling or micro-managing leadership style on the part of the pastor; and unfortunately all too often a lack of financial or physical resources.<sup>22</sup> It is not coincidental that where respondents also indicated there was a lack of parish vitality, one of the three causes named was a dysfunctional pastor, dysfunctional staff, *or their relationship with each other.*<sup>23</sup>

The pastor is in charge. A few lay leaders were hired out of necessity. The associate priest is following the letter of the law. Deacons are unsure of their role. Lay leaders are discouraged by the lack of true collaboration. (Diocesan Representative/Mid-Atlantic)<sup>24</sup>

Incidentally, the other two factors were inability of parishioners to grow and parish trauma.<sup>25</sup>

A third source of tension has come with the infusion of business supervisory roles and models into parishes. Lay ecclesial ministers focused on the practice of pastoral ministry can clash with supervisors, used to the business world, who may insist on 9-to-5 schedules or other bottom line options that may conflict with ability to be effective in ministry. “Significant pastoral issues can arise when the business

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<sup>19</sup> *Changing Face of Church*, 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,90.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,90.

manager is second in charge (supervisor, manager) of the parish but does not possess training and development in theology, spirituality and pastoral relations.”<sup>26</sup>

### ***Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Their Parish Roles***

The primary role of the lay ecclesial minister is on the parish staff. In a positive finding, the EMP research evidenced little, if any, role confusion between the roles of pastor and the staff. While this confusion can happen, depending on an individual’s perspective or maturity, pastors and staff have unique, specific, and different roles to play in the parish. The research discovered pastors focus on the parish as a whole and the direction it needs to take, ensuring processes and programs while animating and leading the community - as a whole - through change. The parish staff focuses primarily on individual parishioners and groups, animating their discipleship and responding to immediate need.

Where there are issues between lay ecclesial ministries and ordained ministry, it appears a distinction is not always being made between what flows from parish roles and that which flows from ordination. The Emerging Models Project asked respondents to talk about the leadership role of the pastor and the leadership roles of parish staff. The results shed some very interesting light on these distinctions. For example, while only the ordained can preside over the sacramental life of the parish, when both lay and ordained were asked to speak about the leadership role of the pastor, there was very little mention of sacramental ministry. This is a significant finding and, initially, confounding until it began to be clear that people were differentiating between functions which flow from ordination and those which append to a specific role in the parish. While the church has a clear and theologically nuanced preference for an ordained priest being the pastor of a parish, we know that lay ecclesial ministers (either lay or religious) can fulfill the *pastoring* function in a parish, short of sacramental ministry (under Canon 517.2). If a priest or deacon is serving in a staff position, then their ministry pertains to that position. They may provide sacramental ministry in the parish, but not as a result of holding a staff position. Pastors are the supervisors of the parish staff, because of their designated role, not because of their ordination.

Lay ecclesial ministers are, by definition, not ordained. Their ministry flows from the sacraments of initiation and their functions flow from their specific role in a parish, filling the wide range of roles and functions permitted by Canon Law. Their commitment is vocational and the many ministries they perform in the parish flow from the stable, authorized roles in which they find themselves.

The largest confusion encountered by the EMP was with permanent deacons, who described their leadership in the parish in many different ways, some of which flowed from ordination and some of which flowed from parish role. While permanent deacons are called to ministries of word, worship, and service by virtue of their ordination, the church has not clearly established their *role* in the parish. Technically they are on the parish staff. If their only ministry assignment is sacramental that flows from their ordination. However, if they are hired as a director of religious education or as a pastoral associate, or are assigned to provide a ministry such as RCIA, they

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<sup>26</sup> “Emerging Models Consensus Report: Business Managers and Finance Councils,” Emergingmodelos.org, (January, 2013): 1. <http://emergingmodels.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Symposium-Consensus-Report-on-Managers-and-Councils.pdf> [Acc. 10/2/13].

have been so assigned because they are competent to fulfill that function, not because they have been ordained. This lack of clarification can cause tension between permanent deacons and lay ecclesial ministers. Lay ecclesial ministers are not responsible to the permanent deacon *because of their ordination*. If, however, the deacon has been given a supervisory position in the parish as a staff function, then that relationship *flows from that role*. I could continue but the point is when we distinguish between what follows from parish positions and what follows from ordination some of the tensions around who does what might be resolved.

It also became clear through the EMP research that some of these tensions between lay and ordained are not really about who does what, but about how people work together. One of the most frequently asked questions seemed to be, “How do pastor and staff collaborate?” When asked to be more specific the questions became: How do men and women work together (gender issues)? How do pastor and staff work together (supervision and management issues)? Attention to training around these practical issues can lessen some of the tensions that may appear in parish ministry. We need clarity regarding ministerial structures, relationships, and roles, to allow collaboration to flourish and flower. It is demonstrably significant that the vitality of the parish depends on the effectiveness of this collaboration. In the words of one diocesan leader:

Without collaboration/working together, the mission for the future will be overwhelming. No one person has the vision or energy to accomplish change for the future. The spirit has gifted each of us and unless we are open to each person’s gift, the future of the church will be hindered.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

Lay ecclesial ministers come prepared to offer their gifts in order to strengthen the church for its mission in the world. They need the assurance that comes from authorization and the support of their bishop and pastor. And, finally, they need to know that their contribution to the life of the church is meaningful, welcomed, and will provide them with a reasonable lifestyle. It is up to the church leadership of today – all of us – to ensure they have what they need to be co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project: Mid-Atlantic Regional Symposium Report,” emergingmodels.org November, 2005): 61, <http://emergingmodels.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Mid-Atlantic-symposium-final-report.pdf> [Acc. 10/2/13].

<sup>28</sup> Marti R. Jewell, “Lay Ecclesial Ministers and the future of Parish Leadership,” emergingmodels.org ( June 27, 2006), <http://emergingmodels.org/lay-ecclesial-ministers-and-the-future-of-parish-leadership/> [Acc. 10/2/13]