

The Spiritual and Professional Development Needs of Catholic Parish Ministers

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It is no secret that Catholic priests generally lack the inclination and training to be effective managers. This has been highlighted in recent years by a number of studies (for example, see Conway, 1992, 2002 and Hoge, 2002). Few men join the priesthood with the ambition to successfully manage a parish. But that is exactly what they are ordained to do! The exercise of the office of teaching, sanctifying as well as *governing* (*munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi*) by the sacred ministers constitute the essence of pastoral ministry. Moreover, several Vatican congregations and pontifical councils have promulgated an instruction, approved by the Pope in 1997, that specifically recognizes that these diverse functions (teaching, sanctifying and *governing*) proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated one from another. (*Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests, 1997*).

Governing is a function intrinsic to the essence of ordained ministry but it needs to be understood in light of the common priesthood of the faithful as well as the ministerial priesthood. The common vocation to holiness and true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful is building up the body of Christ, the Church. The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, though they differ essentially and not only in degree are none the less ordered to one another, since each in its own proper way shares in the priesthood of Christ.

The ministerial priesthood is rooted in the Apostolic Succession and vested with the sacred power (*potestas sacra*) consisting of the faculty and responsibility of acting in the person of Christ, the head and Shepherd. It is a priesthood which renders its sacred ministers servants of Christ and the Church by means of authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and the pastoral direction of the faithful. The ordained ministry therefore is established on the foundation of the Apostles for the building up of the Church, and is completely at the service of the Church. This ordained ministry established by Christ is indispensable and essential for the very life of every ecclesial community.

Necessity and expediency within the Church require the lay faithful to collaborate directly with the ministry of the Church's pastors. Pastors can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of orders. Catholic theology identifies two spheres: spiritual order and the temporal order. Collaboration between the ordained and non-ordained exists in both orders. For the consecrated clergy, their constitutive responsibility is to the spiritual order of the message of Christ. The appropriate role of laity is the evangelization and sanctification of the temporal order. These come together in many places including the life of the parish.

In the U. S. in the last 20 years, the need for collaboration among the ordained and non ordained has been compounded by the twin trends of an increasing and dispersing Catholic population and a decline in priestly and religious vocations. An expanding Catholic population, no longer concentrated in the urban areas of the

Northeast and Upper Midwest, requires new, typically large, appropriately staffed parishes in the suburbs throughout the country and in the growing Sunbelt states. At the same time, the availability of younger priests and religious women and men as a resource to staff parishes has been shrinking. The burden on pastors (many of whom are the only priest in the parish) to provide pastoral services can be overwhelming.

Partly in response to these trends, there has been an explosion of lay ecclesial ministers serving in church ministries in recent years. Between 1992 and 1997, Philip Murnion and David DeLambo found that the number of lay ministers paid for at least 20 hours per week increased 35% from 21,569 in 1992 to 29,146 in 1997. Over the same period “the profile of the parishes ministers changed; where in 1992, 42 percent were religious and 59 percent lay; in 1997, 28.9 percent were religious and 71 percent lay” Half of the positions occupied by the lay ministers were directors of religious education (25.5%) or general pastoral ministers (24.2%). (Murnion and DeLambo, 1997)

By 2005, the number of parish lay ministers increased another 5% to 30,632. The overwhelming majority are paid and 74% are full time. The religious employed in parish ministry is now 16 percent of the total; 84% percent are lay. The percentage of lay ministers with master’s degrees dropped from 52.8 percent in 1990 to 48.1 percent in 2005. A little over half completed a ministry program and report that they feel at least “somewhat prepared” in the areas of spirituality, catechesis and evangelization, Scripture, liturgy and worship, catholic social teaching theology and Church history. They are least likely to feel very prepared in canon law, church history, Catholic social teaching, theology and Scripture. (Delambo, 4-8)

In the 1997 study, the most commonly needed skills, reported by over 90% of the respondents, were: communicating one on one, planning, recruiting volunteers, collaborating, facilitating events/meetings, organizing projects, public communication and leading prayer. More than 70 percent identified motivating involvement, supervising others, ministry training (adult education), administration, and managing conflict as necessary skills and over half identified administering a budget as necessary. (Murnion and DeLambo, 30)

The focus of these studies has been on the role of the non ordained in the spiritual order. They have not addressed the question of what the presence of this developing parish workforce might require of the ordained ministers in the parish. They also do not address the characteristics of those employed in other parish functions more appropriately associated with the temporal order but that complement the pastoral ministry such as business manager, development, information and communication staff, and other administrative staff.

Church workers have varying levels of formation, education and training, and commitment to serve the Church. While many of these new lay ecclesial ministers and others who are employed to provide a service to the Church are highly trained, having received degrees or certificates in lay ecclesial ministry, some are not. Some have been appointed to their position because the pastor needed someone to take on a task and they

were willing and able to take it on, frequently on a volunteer basis. Some view their ministry as a component of their spiritual life; for others, it is a job.

These same patterns can often hold for parish business managers and other administrative staff. There is a growing need for professional expertise in the area of temporal affairs as parishioners increasingly insist on financial transparency and accountability in all areas of parish decision-making, especially in financial matters. The appointment of parish business managers is seen by some Bishops as a way to relieve the pastor of some of the burdens of the temporal administrative duties and improve the functioning of the parish. But as more variously formed and prepared workers become employed in parishes and dioceses, the governing role of the pastor becomes increasingly complex. Pastors are asked to balance the theology of parish and the appropriate vocational roles with the requirements of human resource management and managerial administration of complex organizations.

The purpose of this study is to examine both pastors and parish business managers as they carry out their parish administrative and leadership functions. We will be analyzing a variety of responsibilities in these areas, focusing on each group's view of the importance of each task as well as the degree to which they feel prepared to effectively handle the task. In addition, we will be considering the extent to which parish business managers engage in a variety of spiritual activities.

Data

The data for this study was gathered from surveys sent to a random sample of parishes in spring 2005. A pastor questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 537 usable parish addresses, and a business manager's questionnaire was sent to a different set of 537 usable parish addresses. A total of 141 pastor surveys (representing 60 different dioceses) were returned (26.3%) and 119 business manager surveys (representing 51 dioceses) were returned (22.2%). A handful of pastors sent a note indicating that there was no business manager in their parish. We have no way of knowing, but it is certainly possible that the lower number of business manager returns simply reflects that fact. A description of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

In addition to asking about background information, the survey asked both pastors and business managers for their opinion concerning 36 different parish skills -- how important they thought each one was to their role in the parish, and how well prepared they thought they were in each skill area. We've divided the skills into three categories: Administration, Ministry, and Leadership. The survey also listed twelve spiritual activities and asked each respondent to indicate how important each of the activities was to them in sustaining their spirituality in their ministry.

Parish Administration

Table 2 shows the administrative skills that each respondent was asked about, along with the mean values for the importance, level of preparation, and the difference between how important each skill was ranked and how prepared the respondent to utilize that skill.

Overall, pastors regarded only 5 parish administration skills to be important (rating of at least 3). They considered planning to be their most important administrative skill, followed by administering a budget. They believed that promoting and church marketing were their least important administrative skills. Those were also the two skills that they judged themselves least prepared to perform although they considered themselves unprepared (rating of less than 3) in all 11 parish administration skills. The greatest gap between the importance and level of preparation was in administering a budget, followed by staff performance appraisal.

Parish business managers only indicated that six parish administration skills were important (rating of at least 3). They identified administering the budget and financial reporting as their most important administrative tasks. Understanding canon law and promoting the parish were deemed to be their least important administrative tasks, although a total of six parish administration tasks received a preparedness rating of less than 3. The largest discrepancy between a task's importance and the level of preparedness were in the areas of computer skills and an understanding of the theology of administration.

Of the eleven administrative tasks listed, parish business managers gave 8 of them a higher importance rating than did pastors. In 9 cases (all except understanding the theology of administration and canon law) parish business managers rated themselves more highly on their level of preparedness than pastors rated themselves. The mean difference between importance and preparedness for pastors was .56, while for parish business managers the mean difference was .33.

To the extent that one might expect the pastor and the parish business manager to possess complementary parish administration skills (the skills that one lacks the other possesses), it is instructive to identify those skills that neither feels to be particularly prepared to handle (preparedness rating less than 3). This occurs in six instances: the marketing and the promotion of the parish, appraising staff performance, and understanding the theology of administration, canon law, and civil law. Of these, the greatest concern would be with the lack of preparedness to appraise staff and to understand civil law.

Parish Leadership

We asked our sample of pastors and parish business managers about 12 parish leadership skills. The mean values for their ratings of importance and level of preparedness, along with the differences, are found in Table 3.

Pastors generally thought that all 12 skills were important (rating of 3 or higher). They gave their highest importance rating to communication-related skills: communicating one on one and public speaking. On the other hand, they felt unprepared (rating of less than 3) to perform nine of the leadership skills. They considered themselves to be least prepared to perform human resource tasks such as dealing with volunteers, supervising staff, and managing conflict. The largest discrepancy between importance and preparedness occurred in these same three areas.

Like the pastors, the parish business managers believed that all twelve parish leadership skills were important. They felt relatively unprepared to perform five of them. As with the pastors, the business managers thought that communicating one on one was the most important parish leadership skill. They judged themselves to be least prepared to manage conflict and motivate involvement. These were also the two skills with the greatest gap between importance and preparedness.

There were four parish leadership skills where neither the sample of pastors nor the sample of parish business managers felt prepared. All of them were concerned with human resources: managing conflict, motivating involvement, dealing with volunteers, and team building.

Parish Ministry

We asked our sample of pastors and parish business managers about their ministry skills. The results are shown in Table 4.

Parish ministry is an area where one would expect the pastors' importance ratings and level of preparedness to outpace those of the business managers. We asked about 13 parish ministry areas. Pastors deemed 10 of them to be relatively important (average rating of 3 or above). The most important were understanding scripture, preparing liturgy, and leading prayer. The three that were regarded as relatively unimportant were leading retreats, leading small faith-sharing communities, and leading a bible-study group. Surprisingly, pastors only thought that they were relatively prepared to perform six of the parish ministry functions. They considered themselves especially unprepared to work with youth and to lead retreats.

The biggest gaps between the importance that pastors placed on an activity and their level of preparedness were in the areas of youth development, working for justice, elderly concerns, and counseling. In two cases (leading retreats and leading bible-study groups), pastors believed they were more prepared than was necessary.

One wouldn't expect parish business managers to be highly involved in the other parish ministries, and for the most part they weren't. None of the ministry activities held any importance to them (average rating of 3 or greater). They considered themselves to be unprepared for all of the ministry activities listed, although in a number of cases, they rated their preparation for an activity more highly than its importance.

Spiritual Activities

We provided our sample of pastors and parish managers a list of 12 different spiritual activities and asked them to indicate how important each was to them in sustaining their spirituality in their ministry (we didn't ask them how prepared they thought they were). Their responses are presented in Table 5. The activities were drawn from Davidson, et al who reported that parish business managers tended to be the least involved in participating in spiritual activities of any of the ecclesial lay ministers that they had studied.

Pastors indicated that six of the activities were important (average rating of 3 or greater), led by helping or serving others and performing well in their ministry. Business managers also rated these as their most important spiritual activities, although the only deemed four of the activities listed as important. Both groups rated writing in a journal and finding spirituality on the internet as the least important spiritual activities on the list.

Correlations

In order to learn if there are any patterns in the preparation of pastors and parish business managers, we correlated a measure of the preparedness in each of the categories studied with the respondent's personal characteristics. The preparedness measure used was an index calculated as the sum of the responses to the questions on preparedness for each skill in each respective category.

Pastors

The correlation coefficients for the sample of pastors are shown in Table 6. Considering first the two categories of administration and leadership, there are no significant correlations in either category. But even this non-finding has some important implications. In general, younger pastors feel no better nor no worse prepared for skills in each of these two categories than do older pastors. The same is true for diocesan priests as compared to religious order priests, and for priest pastors as compared to pastoral coordinators.

In the ministry category, three correlations were significant. Older pastors felt less prepared to carry out their ministerial duties. Caucasian pastors also thought they were less prepared than minority pastors. Pastors who possessed at least a master's degree (about two-thirds) considered themselves to be more prepared to perform ministerial tasks than those with less education.

Three correlations were also significant in the spirituality category. Older priests were significantly less likely to believe that the spirituality practices that we had listed were important. The same was true for religious order priests. On the other hand, pastors with at least a master's degree were significantly more likely to rate the spiritual activities as important.

Business Managers

Table 7 shows the correlation coefficients for parish business managers. Considering first the administration category, two characteristics, which are somewhat related, were negatively correlated with the respondents' perceptions of their level of preparedness. Parish business managers whose highest degree was in theology, and those who were vowed religious, deemed themselves to be less prepared for their administrative duties. Those who have a business degree felt neither no more nor no less prepared than the others. Business managers who worked fulltime also were no more likely to consider themselves prepared in the administrative area.

Four variables were significantly related to the leadership index. Caucasians believed they were less prepared for the leadership skills. Those with more education, and especially those whose highest degree is in the field of education or pastoral ministry, were more likely to think that they were prepared in the area of leadership. Factors such as age, ministry status, and fulltime status were not significantly related to the leadership index.

As noted above, one wouldn't expect parish business managers to have ministerial responsibilities. Nevertheless, eight personal characteristics were significantly related to the ministry index. Two were negatively related. Lay persons, and those whose highest degree was in a business field, were less likely to believe that they had adequate preparation for the ministry skills listed. On the other hand, somewhat predictably, those with at least a masters degree, those whose highest degree was in education, theology, or pastoral ministry, and vowed religious and deacons, were more likely to consider themselves to be prepared in the ministry skills.

Finally, in the area of spirituality, only two characteristics significantly correlated with the index. Parish business managers whose highest degree was in education or pastoral ministry were more likely to believe that the spiritual practices that we had listed were important.

Summary and Policy Implications

In this study we examined the attitudes of pastors and parish business managers on the importance and their sense of preparedness for 38 skills in three categories: administration, leadership, and ministry; and their attitudes towards the importance of 12 spiritual practices. Parish business managers tended to rate administrative skills as more important than pastors did, and also to consider themselves more prepared for administrative tasks. Both pastors and parish business managers rated the leadership skills as important, although business managers tended to feel more prepared to undertake them. As might be expected, the reverse pattern held for parish ministry skills, with pastors both deeming them as more important than did business managers and believing that they were better prepared to execute them. Overall, pastors felt that the spiritual practices that we had listed were more important than the business managers did.

What policy implications can we reach based on these findings? The data suggests the following:

- Pastors need training in leadership which they feel is important but for which they are relatively unprepared. This training could occur in the seminary (unlikely) or as continuing education after ordination. At a minimum, it should occur before a priest assumes his first pastorate
- Pastors need less training in specific administrative skills, but should have enough of a background to perform their governing office as required in *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*. Again, this might be acquired through continuing education
- Even parish business managers feel themselves to be inadequately prepared for many of the administrative and leadership tasks which they are called upon to perform. This is not surprising, since many of them come to their positions without a formal business background. The ministry of parish business manager needs to be professionalized.
- Confirming the finding of Davidson, et al, parish business managers tend to disregard the spiritual aspects of their positions. But if they are to serve in a faith-based community, they need to possess a certain degree of spirituality. This needs to be a criterion for the position as much as technical business skills are a criterion.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

	<u>Pastors</u>	<u>Business Managers</u>
1. Mean Age	56.6	54.7
2. Sex		
Percent Male	97.9	48.3
Percent Female	2.1	50.9
3. Mean Years in Ministry	26.0	13.1
4. Race		
Percent Caucasian	91.5	92.4
Percent Hispanic	5.0	3.4
Percent African American	2.1	.9
Percent Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4	0
Percent Native American	0	.9
5. Highest Education Level		
Percent High School	.7	2.5
Percent Some College	2.1	22.9
Percent Associates Degree	0	8.5
Percent Bachelor Degree	5.0	18.6
Percent Some Graduate Work	10.6	16.1
Percent Masters Degree	64.5	29.7
Percent Doctorate/Law Degree	.9	14.2
6. Area of Highest Degree		
Percent Theology/Religious Studies	66.7	18.5
Percent Education	4.3	3.4
Percent Liberal Arts/Social Sciences	7.1	14.2
Percent Philosophy	7.8	.8
Percent Pastoral Ministry/Liturgy	5.6	7.5
Percent Counseling	5.7	2.5
Percent Business	.7	37.8
Percent Engineering	.7	0
7. Pastors		
Percent Diocesan Priest	83.0	
Percent Religious Order Priest	7.5	
Percent Pastoral Coordinator -- Deacon	.8	
Percent Pastoral Coordinator -- Vowed Religious	3.7	
Percent Pastoral Coordinator -- Lay	2.2	
8. Business Managers		
Percent Fulltime Paid		76.5
Percent Part-time Paid, >20 hours		12.6
Percent Part-time Paid <29 hours		5.0
Percent Volunteer		3.4

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