

National Ministry Summit

Keynote Address: Major Findings of the Emerging Models Project

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Introduction

Welcome to the National Ministry Summit! Bienvenido!

I welcome you on behalf of our six organizations: the National Association for Lay Ministry; the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development, the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, the National Association of Diaconate Directors, the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, and the National Federation of Priests' Councils.

We are here to share the findings of the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project, and celebrate the work of the past five years. Our thanks go to the Lilly Endowment, for their significant grant and ongoing support. Because of their generosity, we have been gifted with the opportunity to witness the pastoral life and leadership of Catholic parishes in the United States and what is emerging there.

Over the past five years the Emerging Models Project has conducted 11 symposiums, with nearly 800 people; 3100 online surveys; extensive written and phone surveys; focus groups of bishops; and diocesan consultations. When we began the Project we assumed we were looking for new organizational and leadership structures. We met creative pastoral leaders – men and women of integrity and authenticity – who are experiencing both significant hope and significant challenge. We began to understand the depth of the challenges, tensions, and change facing pastoral leaders of this country, and how leaders are finding responses to them. What we discovered is that the Spirit is inviting us into an unanticipated future.

We have moved from the stability of the 40s and 50s where everyone knew their role and what they were supposed to do, through the changes following Vatican II. In the past few years we have experienced much change in our country and our world and gone through unexpected challenges in our church. In the process, structures are changing, leadership roles are evolving, and pastoral practices are being adapted. As we move through this change, something new is emerging.

We are living out what Pope John Paul II called us to, in his letter to the Church at the turn of the millennium: “It is in the local churches that a pastoral plan can be identified which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.”¹ Throughout the Church’s history we have focused on the ministerial needs of God’s people. In order to respond to this invitation, today, pastoral leaders are being asked to have the courage to be creative and adaptive.

The Project began by asking lay and ordained leaders, across the country, to talk about parish life, and we listened deeply to what they said and to the *language* people chose to describe their reality and their hopes for their parishes. I have been asked to share with you what we found. For those who like to

know the end of the story before they begin, I will tell you. Parish life, as we have known it is changed. And what is emerging is very hopeful!

Community

In order to understand the parish today, we asked, “What makes a parish spiritually vital and alive?” Over and over the answer came back: these are welcoming Eucharistic communities.

What are the *communities* we are serving? There are more than 18,000 parishes in this country, and we know that the Catholic population is growing and moving south and west.

- In the Southern tier, California, and on the Atlantic seaboard, mega-parishes are growing, serving as many as 10,000 families in a single parish.
- In the latest wave of immigration, Spanish-speaking people have moved into virtually every diocese, along with people from Asia, the Pacific Islands, and those of African cultures.
- Many parishes have multiple language bases.
- Where populations are diminishing, such as in Northeastern dioceses that once served thriving immigrant populations, parishes are being closed, merged, or clustered.
- Parishes in small towns and in rural areas often share a pastor, have small staffs or maybe none at all and are led by parishioners.
- Many rural parishes serve large immigrant worker populations. I remember the surprise that rippled through the room at a gathering in Atlanta, when a woman religious explained that her parish served 1200 Anglo and 20,000 Spanish-speaking Catholics!

These are the challenges facing pastoral planners today. In this country there are approximately 20,000 diocesan priests available to pastor these parishes, 70% of whom are over the age of 55. Two-thirds of our dioceses have more parishes than active diocesan priests. Religious priest do provide sacramental ministry but some religious orders are pulling away from pastoring. The primary strategy being used by U.S. bishops to deal with the diminishing number of priests available for pastoring is clustering parishes under the care of a single pastor

Multiple Parish Pastoring

The Emerging Models Project studied this emerging model of leadership, called multiple parish pastoring. Nearly half of U.S. parishes share their pastor with one or more parishes or missions. These may be adjoining parishes in a city. They may also be a series of parishes and missions that require a priest to cover a circuit over a given period of time, sometimes living in different residences, sometimes only reaching a parish once or twice a month. Increasing demands bring significant challenges as pastors are asked to lead three, four, or more parishes.

I can imagine this scenario going on in many chanceries -- two pastoral planners are talking: *“The pastor of St. Mary’s is retiring and there is no one available to take his place. Perhaps we can let Fr. Joe, take it on. He’s in the next parish over. He’s a good pastor. He may have to work a little harder, but he can do it.”* Then a few months later, another parish comes open. *“Well, we can give that to Fr.*

Joe, he is doing a great job with two. He will just have to work a little smarter. And he won't mind the three missions attached to that parish. He's a great pastor!"

The truth is multiple-parish pastoring entails unique, identifiable skills that cannot be reduced to providing the same ministry in more places. Yet only a handful of dioceses are providing formal training for this emerging form of leadership. After one workshop on this topic, a pastor said to the group, "I thought it was hard because I was dumb. Now I know it is hard because it is *hard!*"

It is hard. And yet we found that many pastors who are in multiple parish settings are highly creative and energized by the challenge.

HR

The project studied how parish communities are being supported, conducting twelve diocesan human resource and lay ministry consultations. It is clear that these emerging models are having a significant impact on human resources. . The growing presence of laity in leadership roles is calling for appropriate and adequate education and formation.

And we are moving, in terms of personnel, from a solely clergy based system to a system based in partnership. We have a growing and significant awareness of the legal and civil implications of being an employer. The focus of human resources has significantly shifted to civil law, with parishes and dioceses needing to know employment law.

In studying the HR function of dioceses, over 1500 people were asked to respond to questionnaires on human resources. More than 75% of those responding were well aware of the civil obligations of the church as employer. At the same time, however, less than 40% indicated adequate attention paid to the development of employees in terms of continuing education, evaluation, retirement, sabbaticals, and so on. The need to address just practices in employment was addressed in the bishops' document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*, following our strong tradition of Catholic social teaching and is going to require greater attention.

Communities of the Future

What you told us was that the communities of the future will be:

- Vibrant and welcoming with smaller faith-based communities
- Total ministering communities with increased lay leadership
- Mission-focused, justice oriented communities
- Inclusive of diverse peoples and forms of leadership

Marks of Excellence

While we were studying organizational structures, we were also studying the leaders themselves. Pastoral leaders were asked to tell us what are the marks of excellence in pastoral leadership? Two of the 'marks of excellence' studied, which impact community life were 1) being ethical, and 2) being collaborative.

We have come a long way in understanding ethical leadership. However, the mark of excellence that people were most interested in finding our more about was that of being collaborative. How do we work together as a team? How do men and women work together? What does it mean for ordained and professional staff to work together?

Welcoming Communities

We are a ministerial people and our language is charged with meaning! It became clear that when we speak of community we are using the language of *communio*, seeing community as the place where we are rooted in baptism, in discipleship and evangelization.

And we see our communities as ‘welcoming’ communities. When people talked about being ‘welcoming,’ they were not just talking about having greeters and hospitality committees. They were using the language of the radical inclusion of our Judeo-Christian heritage:

- Abraham and Sara welcoming the three strangers into their tent;
- The language of Isaiah: What is the fast I ask of you? ... To bring the homeless poor into your house.
- The language of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

We have a history of diversity from the earliest times. It may be religious diversity. The Eastern and the Latin rites have learned from each other. It may be the diversity of the marginalized in society... the poor, the handicapped, the elderly.

Multicultural Diversity

The demographics of parish life are changing rapidly. Emerging models of parishes are ministering to a Catholic population of 64 million and growing. The majority of Catholics are now under 50. Half of those under 30 are Hispanic. While the most significant numbers of immigrants are found in the coastal states and in the South, these changing demographics are found everywhere. Diversity is the reality of life today. Parishes in the cities, especially the larger cities, are also experiencing a growing multicultural population. The dioceses of Los Angeles and Newark each celebrate Sunday liturgy in more than 60 different languages.

Nearly half of the pastoral leaders we met in the south and west speak Spanish. 15% of those studying for the priesthood, 16% of those being formed for the diaconate, and 28% of those in lay ministry formation programs are Spanish-speaking. Vietnamese is a required language in some diocesan gatherings. One pastor told us there are 135 language bases in his school and the principal speaks Portuguese!

Large numbers of immigrant Catholics are found in rural areas, whether documented or not, inviting new models of ministry, needing those who can go out to them, providing sacramental and pastoral care, *consejo y consuelo*, along with the basic needs of food, housing, and clothing.

The truth is ministry in a multicultural church is not simply a matter of speaking another language – though very important. It is rather a matter of learning from one another, receiving the rich gifts we offer one another from our various traditions. We need to learn how to call forth leadership from diverse communities. We need training for ministry in a multicultural community. We need to invite the gifts of one another and allow them to inform our strategic planning.

Next Generation

And diversity is also generational. The Project studied the Next Generation of pastoral leaders. In a nationwide study, 1600 active Catholic young adults in their 20s and 30s told us of their interest in ministry. Half of the College students and young adults from dioceses indicated that they had at one time seriously considered becoming a lay minister. And 1/3 have considered priesthood or religious life. They were asked about the diaconate and said they could be interested but felt that was something for later in life. It is not surprising that what is keeping them from ministry is either the desire to be married, or if married, the need to support a family. Most young women told us no one had ever asked them to consider religious life.

The next generation of leaders is active in church today. But we have some homework to do. While most said they talked to family and friends about their interest in ministry, few had talked to vocation directors, especially about lay ministry. And we need to find ways to connect with young adults who are culturally diverse or who haven't continued their education beyond high school.

When asked what they would like church leaders to know, they asked us to tell the church to reach out to young adults. Tell them "we want to know more about our faith." Future leaders need to be courted now – and we need to find them where they are. Does your parish have a dynamic website? Is your webmaster a young adult?

Marks of Excellence

The two marks of leadership in welcoming communities that we studied included: being prophetic and welcoming. Prophetic leadership is rooted in the Gospel and in social justice. Pastoral leaders told us this was the hardest, of all of the marks, to do, and yet we discovered that social justice was part of the very fabric of pastoral leaders. And we looked at the ability to be welcoming. This was the mark of excellence leaders told us they are the *least* successful at.

Welcoming Eucharistic Communities

But we are more than welcoming communities! We are Eucharistic communities. We are a sacramental people. What we encountered everywhere, spontaneously and unscripted, is the depth of our identity as a sacramental people. This identity pervades our imagination, our speech, our interpretation and understanding of leadership. We are a Eucharistic people. This is core to our identity as pastoral leaders.

However, in this country, our ready access to Eucharist is ebbing. We first heard the question about this concerned posed this way. "Can we be a Eucharistic people if we only have access to the Eucharist once a month?" Once a week? On a day other than Saturday or Sunday? Pastoral leaders are very clear. We do not want to lose access to the Eucharist and we want it presided at by the ordained. We know that we are being invited into a larger understanding of what it means to be a Eucharistic people.

As we look at pastoral leadership our primary focus needs to be on the real presence – the body of Christ. Pastoral leaders told us that they believe the future of Parish leadership is in total ministering communities, in communities of practice.

When asked to address the situation of multiple parish pastoring, Pope Benedict XVI told a group of Italian priests that the church is being called to co-responsibility: "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.”²

Pastoral leaders told us they see the future of pastoral leadership as:

- Collaborative, team oriented leadership
- Leading and sharing ministry in clustered parishes and small faith communities
- Increased dependency on the leadership of lay ecclesial ministers, deacons, and parishioners
- Recognition that all ministry is rooted in discipleship

There is hope for the future – it involves all of us work together.

Lay and ordained leaders also helped us to understand that our leadership roles are distinct. The language we use as pastors, parish staff, and parishioners is different. I remember one man saying, after listening to the different groups speak: Did we all answer the same questions? The lens we use to view our ministry is different.

Leadership of Parishioners

Parishioners are our greatest and largely untapped resource. We asked lay and ordained to tell us about the leadership of parishioners. Responding to a list of more than twenty indicators of healthy parish life, pastors indicated that the least attention is being paid to what the future of parish most needs – the formation of parishioners!

Pastoral leaders understand that each of us has a baptismal call to discipleship and speak easily of it. But when asked to describe what the leadership role of parishioners is, only half of those questioned were able to describe what that might look like. As roles evolve, parishioners are going to be called to minister to one another, often in small, faith based communities; to take on responsibility for the administration of their parishes. Parishes will need to provide training and formation for lay leaders.

Leadership of Parish Staff

We asked about the leadership role of parish staff. What we learned is that the role of the parish staff has evolved. Where people were seen as being responsible for a single ministry, parish staff now need to be generalists - available to provide much of the pastoral care. They provide the day-to-day ministry of the parish, running programs, and calling forth the gifts of the parishioners.

Formally addressed by the U.S. bishops in their document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, we know that there are some thirty-one thousand lay ecclesial ministers employed at least half-time in parishes. Their presence is essential to the ongoing life of the parish, and yet we are seeing a decrease in diocesan formation programs, down 25% in the past six years.

We know that most lay ecclesial ministers see their ministry as a vocation and not as a career. According to Dr. Edward Hahnenberg, lay ecclesial ministry is the fourth great ministerial wave in the Church, following in the tradition of the monastic movement, the mendicant orders, and the founding of women’s religious communities of the 19th century.³

And parishes depend on other lay staff – business managers, principals, teachers, and others. And increasingly, parish staffs include deacons. There are 16,000 deacons in this country, a growing and formed cohort of pastoral leaders. They embody the very heart of parish life, of *communio et missio* - going outside of the parish to care for the poor. The permanent diaconate reminds us of our absolute call

to preach the good news to the poor. And then to return to animate the community to service. More dioceses have deacon formation programs, but it is clear that, despite the documents on the permanent diaconate, there is no real clarity or consistency about how the role of the deacon *in the parish* is lived out, and of the work and witness they provide.

Leadership Role of Pastors

And finally, we asked about the leadership of those pastoring. Please notice how different the language is when lay and ordained leaders speak of the role of pastor. As pastors take on the responsibility of multiple parishes in addition to other assignments, and sacramental ministry in other parishes, their role is evolving. We have begun to speak of their role very differently.

Pastors are seen as the facilitator, the one presiding over the life of the community as well as over sacramental life. They have the gift of presidency, calling forth the gifts of the community, being the gate-keepers of change. The pastor holds the broader vision of the parish, a sense of its mission. They will talk about the whole community and where it needs to move.

As a church there is a growing concern about the number of men available for pastoring. We have heard of dioceses where only a few priest are under the age of 65. One priest casually mentioned there were ‘no priests’ in *that* part of the state. Others say they are the only priest in their region. Lay and ordained pastoral leaders are recognizing that the role of the pastor is evolving, honoring the unique and needed gift they bring to parish life.

Parish Life Coordinators (Canon 517.2)

The last study conducted by the Project was of the use of Canon 517.2 – the installation of deacons, religious, or lay people to provide the pastoral and administrative leadership of a parish where there is no resident pastor. This canon has been in use for over twenty years in this country.

Originally, parish life coordinators (one of over thirty titles for this position) were women religious. Today the majority continue to be women religious, with another 25% being deacons, and 25% being lay men and women. Under this canon, sacramental ministry is provided by priests who are either appointed by the bishop or recruited by the PLC. Some parish life coordinators have a list of over 50 priests they call on a rotating basis to provide sacramental ministry. Some begin calling priests in September to ensure there is a presider for the Triduum!

The single most important factor in the decision to employ this canon is the bishop. The single most important factor in the success of this role is – the bishop. Where the bishop formally installs a PLC, there is a positive impact in all aspects of their ministry over time. PLCs love their ministry, like many pastors, preferring the pastoral work to the administrative work. Collaboration between the sacramental minister and the PLC is one of the keys to success of this model, working together to help the community understand their roles.

But there is a growing uneasiness about this role. We interviewed over 50 bishops in focus groups about their understanding and use of this Canon. Overall they are pleased with the work of the PLCs in their own dioceses and feel good that the pastoral life of their parishes is being cared for. They are uneasy about having parishes that do not have a resident ordained pastor, and are beginning to show a preference for appointing deacons to this role.

Marks of Excellence

The last mark of excellence we studied was the ability to be pastoral. We clearly understand this role and do it well. What came as a surprise was that in excellent pastoral leaders there are two additional marks. Pastoral leaders are *creative*. They find new ways to work with what they have and make something new. And they are *adaptive*. Adaptive leaders are those who find themselves in situations for which there is no precedent, no experience, and conventional wisdom does not work. These leaders are willing to roll up their sleeves, sit with community and find new answers and work together to create what is needed.

Conclusion

In the end, the emerging model of pastoral leadership is found in the people we met. People who are faithful to their ministry, people who are deeply resilient even in the face tremendous challenge. Some of those we met along the way agreed to share a snapshot of their lives with us. In the first book of the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Series being published by Loyola Press, 22 pastoral leaders tell their leadership story. *Shaping Catholic Parishes* is about the emerging leadership roles of lay and ordained in our church in the United States. In his preface to the book, Bishop Blase Cupich calls it a “modern day act of the church in the United Sates.”

I have been humbled and changed in meeting them. I come away from five years of directing the Emerging Models Project more hope-filled than ever. I have come to believe that the only real limits to vibrant parish life are the lack of imagination and competence... not canon law or the tradition. I have heard the stories of pain and struggle along with the stories of success. I have come to believe that we must let go of our old models of parish and pastoral leadership and open to the invitation of the Spirit.

We are being called to provide leadership in the midst of transitions, tensions, and challenges. These are tensions not to be resolved too quickly in favor of one answer or another. Rather we are invited into the ongoing dance between the tradition, the needs of God’s people, and the invitation of the Spirit. The Vatican II bishops saw this time coming, although no one could know exactly what it would look like. But they knew it would take courage, telling us in *Gaudium et Spes* that, “The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.”⁴

The goal of this Summit is to create recommendations for the future of pastoral excellence. Responding to the call of the bishops in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* to consult with the body of the church, our time together will be part of the ongoing consultation on leadership. We are here to continue the conversations... to find answers together.

We are all being invited to open our eyes to new ways of being church even as we are being called to teach and pass on the tradition; to trust ourselves, and to realize that the community is gifted with all that it needs. Our task is to work together to find the courage to create vibrant parishes and pastoral leadership so we can encounter the risen Christ ... in welcoming, Eucharistic communities.

This Summit is not a traditional conference. It has been created using a format that you can replicate in your parishes and dioceses. So, think about the questions you brought with you. Listen for answers as you talk with one another. Someone you meet or hear will have ideas and experiences that will work for you. The answers are not out there somewhere with some expert. They are here, in this room, in the minds and hearts of those around you.

The Gospel tells us that after Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the summit and experienced the Transfiguration, he would not let them build tents, saying this is not a unique event, but he sent them back to their work. And when they didn't think they could do it themselves he told them they could – they knew all they needed to know.

So while we are at the Summit, let the conversations here break open your heart. Hear the invitation of the Spirit. And take what you have heard to your parishes, dioceses, and workplaces. Let us be, for one another, the hope to which we are called.

¹ John Paul II, *At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (Novo Millennio Invenite)*. January, 2001, 29

² Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Dioceses of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso, Church of St. Justin Martyr, Auronzo di Cadore, July 24, 2007

³ Edward P. Hahnenberg, Ph.D., "The Holy Spirit's Call in Ordering Lay Ecclesial Ministry in our Church," Talk given at the National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry, St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, August 2007

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 31