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Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

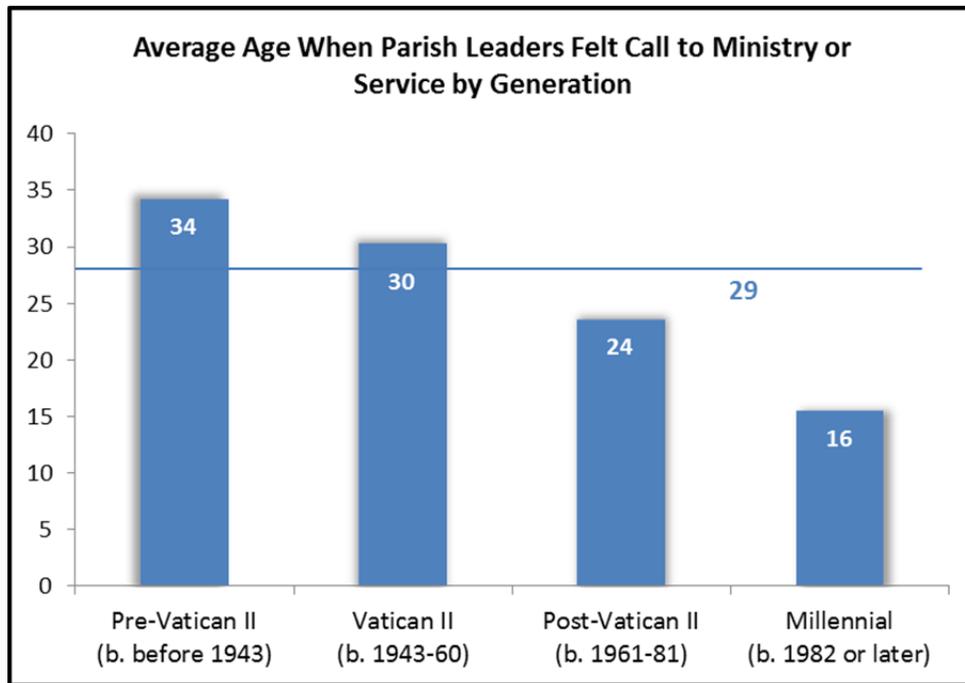
***Study Reveals Comprehensive Portrait of
Those Serving U.S. Catholic Parishes***

Although the numbers of diocesan priests and Catholic parishes in the United States has declined in the last two decades, the number of deacons and lay people serving in parishes has continued to grow along with the overall Catholic population. Because many parishes have consolidated and now contain larger communities, on average, parish staffs have been growing in the United States as well. The number of professionally trained lay ecclesial ministers increased by 76 percent between 1992 and 2010 and the number of permanent deacons serving the Church expanded by 62 percent.

The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership project, a Lilly Endowment Inc. funded collaboration of five Catholic national ministerial organizations, commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct a series of surveys in parishes nationwide. These were designed to examine important changes in parish life—including a study to better understand who is serving America’s parishes, what brought them there, and what their needs are in the 21st century. Between May 2011 to April 2012, CARA surveyed 532 parish leaders including parish staff members, finance and pastoral council members, and others serving their parish—both paid and volunteer, pastoral ministers and those with other duties—in 246 of the parishes from the original 846 randomly selected parishes participating in the multi-year project. The full report of findings for this survey, *Perspectives from Parish Leaders: U.S. Parish Life and Ministry*, is available at: www.emergingmodels.org

The study finds that parish leaders are an aging population (average age of 59). A majority, 54 percent, are members of the Vatican II Generation (those born 1943 to 1960). One in five is of the Pre-Vatican II Generation (those born before 1943). Nearly one in four is of the Post-Vatican II Generation (those born 1961 to 1981) and only 3 percent are Millennials (born 1982 or later).

Many have expressed concern about the “next generation” of parish leaders. The survey results indicate that this next wave is likely to emerge this decade. The average age when parish leaders say they first felt the call to ministry in any setting (e.g., parish, school, hospital) is 29. This means *current* parish leaders of the Millennial Generation have answered a call to ministry a bit *before* the norm of previous generations. Those in ministry now are essentially “early adopters.”



Parish leaders are less diverse than the general Catholic population. Nearly nine in ten parish leaders self-identify their race and ethnicity as Non-Hispanic white. Six percent identify as Hispanic/Latino(a), 2 percent as Asian or Pacific Islander, 2 percent as black, African American, African, or Afro-Caribbean, and 1 percent as Native American. This distribution is strongly related to the age of parish leaders and the racial and ethnic composition of the Catholic population within these generations. In parishes identified by the project as multicultural (i.e., those with more racial and ethnic diversity among parishioners) there are greater numbers of non-Anglo parish leaders.

Nearly all parish leaders—98 percent—say they use English in their ministry. One in ten also uses Spanish. One percent uses Latin. Two percent report some other language such as French, Creole, Italian, Tagalog, Polish, Czech, German, or Portuguese.

Parish leaders are most likely to say these motivations first led them to enter ministry:

- To be of service to the Church (75 percent)
- As a response to God’s call (56 percent)
- A desire to be more active in parish life (55 percent)
- To enhance their spiritual life (51 percent)

A majority of leaders indicate they entered ministry after being encouraged by a priest (53 percent). Others noted encouragement from fellow parishioners (34 percent), friends (29 percent), and spouses (27 percent). Millennials are less likely than others to report encouragement from a priest (39 percent) and were more likely to note receiving this from friends (54 percent) or a teacher or professor (46 percent).

Three in four leaders (75 percent) agree “very much” that their ministry or service to their parish is a calling or vocation rather than just a job. Those involved in pastoral ministry were especially likely to respond as such (86 percent).

Leaders are most likely to evaluate their parishes as “good” or “excellent” in the following aspects: celebration of the sacraments, Masses and liturgies, efforts to educate parishioners in the faith, and promoting important Church teachings and causes. The area where respondents were *least* likely to provide a “good” or “excellent” or evaluation is in their parish’s effort to spread the Gospel and evangelize.

What Parishes Do Best	
Percentage of parish leaders responding that their parish does each either “good” or “excellent”:	
Celebration of the Sacraments	95%
Masses and liturgies	91
Efforts to educate parishioners in the faith	88
Promoting important Church teachings and causes (e.g., protecting life, helping the needy)	88
Encouragement of parishioners to share their time, talent, and treasure	86
Sense of community	85
Hospitality and sense of welcoming to all	84
Vision provided by parish leaders	81
Spreading the Gospel and evangelizing	69

About half of all leaders agree “very much” that their parish has undergone significant changes in the last five years. However, most do not see this as a change for the worse. Just 13 percent of leaders agree “very much” that things were *better* in their parish five years ago.

Eighty-five percent of responding parish leaders are lay persons (excluding religious brothers and sisters involved in parish ministry).

About this Study

The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project was founded to address a variety of issues facing U.S. Catholic parish leadership in a rapidly changing social environment. These issues include multicultural and generational diversity; ministry in linked parishes; and various roles and dimensions of lay ecclesial ministry. The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project is a collaborative undertaking of the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM), the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD), the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators (NACPA), the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA), and the National Federation of Priests’ Councils (NFPC).

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