



Developing a Pastoral Plan for Parish Staffing: A Proposal

Proposal: To set up an Archdiocesan commission to study parish staffing issues and needs.

Rationale:

The Archdiocese of Boston has a long history of planning for the mission of this local Church and providing for the formation, training, certification, and ongoing development of its pastoral ministers. The Archdiocese is blessed with three major seminaries providing human, academic, spiritual and pastoral formation for the men who will serve the Archdiocese as priests. It also has an intensive program of formation for those who will serve our parishes as permanent deacons. In the fall of 1992, a task force on lay ministry formation was established to “develop a concrete plan of cooperation among the many agencies and offices of the Archdiocese which are responsible for the formation of persons in ministry.”¹ That task force report studied the then current situation regarding lay ministry in the Archdiocese and offered several recommendations for the proper formation of those who would volunteer or work in pastoral ministry. Since then, the Archdiocese has initiated several innovative and effective programs and offices to promote the formational needs of its lay ministers. Among these programs or offices are *AIM, Together in God’s Service, MAM, The Office of Pastoral Ministries and the Office of Lay Ecclesial Ministries*.

Several factors suggest that it may be time to revisit the issue of pastoral staffing of our parishes. The formation, supervision, oversight and appraisal of our parish ministers are dispersed among various departments and individuals, with little coordination and opportunity to ask about the over-all functioning and direction of leadership and service in our parishes. It may be timely to ask– what is the vision that should guide the clerical and lay ministers of our parishes? What are the emerging needs and concerns regarding the staffing of our parishes? What are the best ways to meet those staffing needs? What services can the Archdiocese, through its various agencies and departments at the Pastoral Center, provide for the formation of our parish staffs?

The factors suggesting a review of pastoral staffing of our parish are the following.

1. **Changes in our parishes.** The Archdiocese has recently undergone a significant period of reorganization and consolidation at the parish level. The recent report on pastoral planning in the Archdiocese cited the “changing nature of parish staffing” and spoke about the “complicated” nature of contemporary staffing and suggested that parishes need “sound and workable criteria for a vibrant parish and to utilize effectively its limited resources.”² The report did not specify those criteria, but spoke of a “realistic workload

¹ *Lay Ministry Formation Task Force Report* (May 12, 1994), p.1.

² Archdiocese of Boston Pastoral Planning Committee Report (May 2007), p.4.

- for all parish ministers,” “standard practices” for pastors, deacons and lay ministers who provide pastoral care. It spoke as well of shared training sessions for seminarians, deacon candidates and lay ecclesial ministers, without providing specific policies.³ The number of pastors with multiple parishes or multiple worship sites is growing. Effective guidelines for work across parish boundaries or in multiple worship sites are critical. There is a need to study the “best practices” and “standards of excellence” for parishes and worship sites in transition.⁴
2. **Shifts in the clergy.** There have been significant changes in the clergy since the Lay Ministry Formation Task Force Report was published in 1994. Among them are the following:
 - a. The number of priests available for active ministry has dropped significantly. The time a priest will serve as associate pastor before being considered for a pastorate of his own has been shortened considerably. In some cases, it is now two years from the day of ordination. The average age of our clergy has increased and priests have been asked to defer a request for retirement until the age of 75. There are increasing demands on the fewer priests available for active ministry, with a recent national study indicating that priests work an average of 70 hrs. per week on ministry alone. We need a clearer understanding of the reasonable expectations that can be placed on our pastors and parochial vicars.
 - b. Increased demands in ministry, changes in ministerial partnerships, priorities and worldviews have resulted in considerable anxiety, which has led, in some cases to a growing polarization among older and younger clergy.⁵
 - c. There is an increasing demand for “standards of excellence,” best practices, transparency and accountability, as well as skills in conflict management for pastoral ministers.⁶
 3. **A new directory for permanent diaconate.** In recent years, the universal Church has focused its attention on the development of the permanent diaconate. In 1998, the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy published a joint report on “Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons and Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons.” In 2004, the US Bishops published a “National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.” In this document, the American bishops set out new norms and criteria for the formation and work of deacons in four dimensions: human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral. The pastoral staffing of our parishes with permanent deacons should conform to these new insights and theological priorities of the universal and local church.
 4. **History of pastoral associates.** A simple review of the history of lay ministry formation in the Archdiocese reveals an enormous legacy of pastoral zeal, innovation, creativity, sacrifice, hard work and a practical response to developing needs and issues over the course of many years. Whereas the early years of lay ministry formation concentrated necessarily on the formation of volunteers (i.e. catechists, lectors and extraordinary

³ *ibid.*, p.9.

⁴ The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, cf. www.nlrcm.org.

⁵ The study of Dean Hoge is reviewed in D. Couturier, “At Odds with Ourselves: Polarization and the Learning Cultures of Priesthood,” *Seminary Journal* (Winter, 2003) pp 64-71.

⁶ Cf. “Managerial Excellence: Engaging the Faith Community in Leadership in the Church Today: National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management Annual Conference (2008). http://www.nlrcm.org/Wharton/2008/2008_NLRCM_Report.pdf.

Eucharistic ministers), increasing attention has been paid to the formation and training of “professional” or “full-time” pastoral ministers in various areas of pastoral service, including administration, worship, outreach, and youth ministry. The task of lay ministry formation is in many hands and is the responsibility of many departments: religious education, the office of new evangelization, health care ministries, etc. There is no centralized clearinghouse for the development of criteria and for oversight. There is no general coordination of standards and no place at the present time to consider the issue of “staff development.”

5. **A culture of planning.** There is a growing recognition of the need to develop a “culture of planning” in the Archdiocese. This means the articulation of the mission of the local church of Boston at this time in history. It also means a mutual recognition of the challenges to that mission, as well as a shared sense of purpose and direction.
6. **Emerging values.** The 2007 Pastoral Planning report emphasized the need for greater “cooperation and collaboration among priests and staff members in neighboring parishes or among those formally associated in new ways.”⁷ The Cardinal has highlighted the need for *transparency* in our reports on the condition of ministry. These new values, along with the values of equity, solidarity, participation-dialogue, and simplicity, provide a new way to enliven our mission and evaluate our staffing of parishes.
7. **A new economic climate.** The world is presently suffering from a global economic recession and, in poorer countries and even in parts of our own country, a true economic depression.⁸ The Barna Group recently published a report indicating that churches in the United States stand to lose upwards of 3 to 5 billion dollars in collections this year alone.⁹ At the present time, the Archdiocese is developing a new strategy to improve the financial relationship between parishes and its centralized ministries. We are facing a new economic climate and increasing pressures on compensation and benefits at every level of church ministry. We need to review our pastoral staffing in the realistic light of these emerging economic realities.

There are several other reasons to look at pastoral staffing issues. We will simply highlight them here:

1. **increasing workloads** for priests and other ministers. How do we continue to provide excellence in ministry without overburdening or overtaxing our pastoral ministers?
2. **shortages in pastoral coverage**, including in the areas of health care ministry and in chaplaincies (i.e. prison). In some cases, responsibilities in other areas of ministry (i.e. health care, hospitals and nursing homes) have been transferred over to parishes. We may be seeing shortfalls in this approach. New approaches may be needed to meet the needs of Catholics in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and assisted living facilities.
3. **changes due to multiple parish pastoring** and multiple site ministries. New levels of cooperation and collaboration are needed and new skills in planning.

⁷ Pastoral Planning Report, p. 6.

⁸ David B. Couturier, “Franciscans and the Financial Crisis: What we can do to Help,” http://www.franciscanaction.org/Upload_Module/upload/Franciscans%20and%20the%20Financial%20Crisis_Couturier_Feb%2009.pdf

⁹ D. Couturier, “Pastoral Planning in Hard Financial Times,” Keynote at the Conference on Pastoral Planning and Council Development (April 29, 2009).

4. the need for **parish council formation and training in pastoral planning**.
5. new and **emerging roles in ministry** (i.e. new evangelization, young adult, business management, etc.)
6. **compensation issues**. Although we live in a salaried world, there are pockets of the archdiocese that still live with a “stipend mentality” and practice.
7. **multiple languages, diverse cultures**. Ministry in the Archdiocese is increasingly required in multiple language and across diverse cultures. Staffing doesn’t always reflect the diversity of our parish populations.
8. **inequitable distribution of resources**, schedules, programs and opportunities. There appears to be an inequitable distribution of talent and treasure in the Archdiocese.

For these and many other reasons, it may be time to take a general look at the issue of pastoral staffing of our parishes. I would suggest a four-step process of analysis.

1. What’s **changed and changing** in the pastoral staffing of our parishes? This would include a thorough look at pastoral demographics.
2. What are our **assumptions** around these changes? That is, how do we understand these significant changes? What do they mean to us?
3. What **direction** would we like to move in with regard to pastoral staffing? What options are available to us? What new models are available?
4. What **strategies or changes** in policy, procedure or practice will get us to where we want to be?

This proposal is premised on the critical need for **coordination** among the various pastoral and leadership ministries in the parish. The Commission would be charged with finding ways to provide vision, direction, and unity among the leadership ministries at the local parish level, after a thorough analysis of the changes and needs of pastoral staffing. Commission members should be charged with the task of imagining where we would like pastoral staffing to be five to ten years down the road.

Members of the Commission: I would recommend that the Commission be composed of representatives of the following groups:

- ✓ Pastors and Parochial Vicars
- ✓ Directors or Coordinators of Religious Education
- ✓ Pastoral Associates
- ✓ Permanent Deacons
- ✓ Business Managers
- ✓ Youth Ministers
- ✓ School Principals
- ✓ Pastoral Councils
- ✓ Pastoral Planning
- ✓ Seminarians

Time-Line: September 1, 2009- March 1, 2010. Initial Report due to the Cabinet Secretary for Parish Life and Leadership.

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