



The CARA Report

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate | Georgetown University | Vol. 22 No. 4

Spring 2017

HOW TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN A GREAT PARISH

A new book called *Great Catholic Parishes* presents suggestions for improving vitality in parishes. The author is William E. Simon Jr., founder of Parish Catalyst, which is a nonprofit organization that “specializes in providing support to parishes and priests to create vibrant Catholic parishes.” Simon and his colleagues adapted a concept developed by the Leadership Network, a Protestant non-profit, to the structure of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Their study revealed four essential qualities that characterize the most successful Catholic parishes, listed below with a summary of the “crucial takeaways”.

1. *Great Parishes Share Leadership.* Pope Francis is modeling shared leadership for these pastors: one in three spontaneously mentioned his influence during interviews. Shared leadership is the optimal model of parish leadership. Vibrant parishes take pride in their strong, professional staffs and programs for volunteer leadership. Sixty-seven percent of the pastors named lay leaders as a parish asset. They are disciplined about prayer and exercise, participating in priest support groups, and in general provide time for their indispensable roles as pastors.
2. *Great Parishes Foster Spiritual Maturity and Plan for Discipleship.* Ninety percent of the pastors identified the spiritual growth of their parishioners as the number-one strength of their par-

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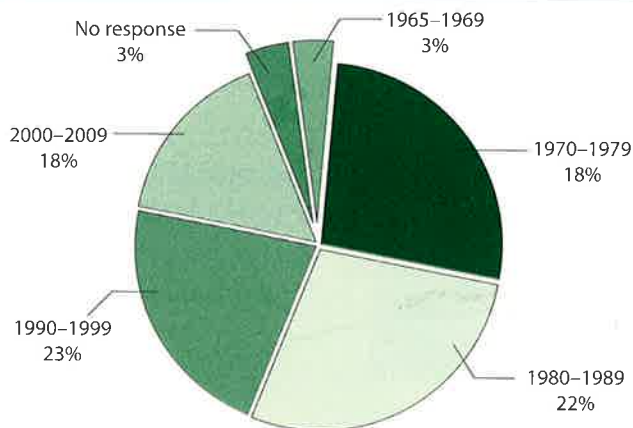
Emerging U.S. Communities of Consecrated Life

Hints of an answer to the question of the future of consecrated life in the United States may be seen in the numerous communities of consecrated life and lay movements which have been emerging in this country and around the world over the last few decades. In 1999, CARA compiled the first directory of new and emerging communities founded in this country since 1965. A second edition was compiled in 2006. Now the third edition, released by CARA in early 2017, serves as an update. It does not claim to be all-inclusive, since it lists only communities reported by a diocese and others may well exist.

During May-July 2016, CARA contacted each of the 194 territorial dioceses of the USCCB, asking for information on new or emerging religious communities and lay movements founded in or moved to its jurisdiction since 1965. For inclusion, the community must be in good standing in the diocese, have at least three members, and be founded since 1965 in the United States. Communities founded outside the United States, such as the Missionaries of Charity, were not eligible unless they have established a U.S. province that is recognized by a U.S. bishop. All but three dioceses responded to the request.

After screening out those not eligible for inclusion, the present directory contains the names, addresses, and membership information for 159 emerging lay movements and communities of consecrated life founded in the U.S. since 1965. Not all reported membership information, but of those who did, the gender makeup of the communities was 52 percent women only, 22 percent men only, and 26 percent open to both men and women. The communities are distributed across the country in 86 dioceses in 36 states and territories. This represents a net gain of 38 communities (a 31 percent increase) over the number in the 1999 directory. Their total reported membership in 2016 was more than 4,200 full members and another 1,000 in formation.

DECADE OF FOUNDING OF EMERGING U.S. COMMUNITIES



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Improving Parish Communication and Collaboration

The co-authors of a new book, *Creating Parish Leadership*, were participants in Project INSPIRE, funded by the Lilly Endowment as an institutional partnership of the Archdiocese of Chicago and Loyola University Chicago. INSPIRE's purpose was to form collaborative leadership teams in the archdiocese through building local cultures of collaboration in parishes among ordained, lay professional, and volunteer staff members.

In a chapter called, "Collaboration in a Pastoral Key," Father Clark recounts the leadership skills the authors observed and recorded as participating pastoral teams developed their "pastoral excellence" and emerged as true leadership teams. The following is excerpted from the chapter:

- **Express Longing.** The first steps are taken as one or more parish staff members admit and share a sense of longing. "We could sure communicate better." "We really need to get organized." "We have the same meeting over and over." "Sometimes it seems like we're working very hard, but not working together."
- **Build Safe Space for Discussion and Learning.** Pastors and staffs find ways to talk about how to move from longing to discoveries of new ways to serve together in faith. While initial conversations are usually problem-focused, successful sessions keep the subject matter open and move toward sharing preferred scenarios.
- **Bring in the Safe Outsider.** An accomplished facilitator, someone who understands group dynamics and is trusted to hold confidentiality, becomes a vital asset.

- **Grow Spiritual Integrity.** Spirituality as a requisite personal practice and as a corporate discipline is most often the gateway and sustaining resource for pastoral teams
- **Talk.** Easily the number one presenting problem of pastoral staffs was difficulty with communication. When communication episodes are restricted to work-focused meetings or to texts and emails, staffs will avoid learning and practicing skilled conversations.
- **Talk Mission.** When pastoral teams grew collaborative competencies, they didn't simply talk, they talked mission. Higher forms of communication, conversation, and dialogue got them away from the focus on themselves and their tasks, and to consideration of what all this programming and ministering was really about.
- **Imitate the Apostle Paul in Calling People to Take on Roles of Witness and Service.** Pastoral leaders can bring charisma to parishes and model the way. Their roles are crucial. When their charisms are strong and ordered to mission, persons engage with them.
- **Proclaim and Call Everyone to Take Up the Mission.** Pastoral leaders own the difficult work of calling attention to themselves, but only as reflectors of the mission, and sometimes as accountants of failures to live the mission.

Collaborative Parish Leadership: Contexts, Models, Theology, edited by William W. Clark, SJ and Daniel Gast, was published in 2017 by Lexington Books (www.rowman.com).

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- ishes. Engaging the spiritual hunger of parishioners increases their participation in parish community life and outreach. Forty-one percent of the pastors have used existing renewal programs, processes, or consulting services to nurture spiritual growth and commitment. Discipleship flourishes where people experience a deep sense of belonging. A parish culture rooted in fervent prayer creates tight-knit communities focused on spiritual maturing and discipleship.
3. *Great Parishes Excel on Sundays.* Vibrant, welcoming Sunday liturgies require thorough staff planning and a well-organized network of volunteer ministers. Seventy-six percent of the pastors identified this as a crucial strength of their parishes. Attention to the needs of the children in the community is a critical success factor for vibrant parishes. Hospitality begins with a parish's online presence, which must be kept fresh and relevant to the expressed needs of both parishioners and newcomers. Flourishing parishes have pastors who love being present to their people and who are highly disciplined about setting aside long

hours of time and attention for homily preparation. And significant time, talent, equipment, and money must be budgeted in order to deliver great liturgical music.

4. *Great Parishes Evangelize.* More than half of the pastors saw evangelization as an area needing growth, a little more often than they mentioned it as a strength. The whole parish community needs to be on board in order to create and sustain an evangelizing culture. Evangelizing parishes intentionally create an attractive culture of invitation and structured reaching out using service programs, social events, celebration of the sacraments, and mission work. The leadership witness of Pope Francis is opening new avenues for parish-level evangelization.

Great Catholic Parishes: How Four Essential Practices Make them Thrive, by William E. Simon Jr., was published in 2016 by Ave Maria Press, PO Box 428, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556 (www.avemariapress.com)