

2003
National Study
of
Parish Reorganization

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*A National Study of Recent Diocesan Efforts at
Parish Reorganization in the United States:
Pathways for the Church of the 21st Century*

*By Jeff Rexhausen,
with Michael Cieslak, Mary L. Gautier and Robert J. Miller*

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Foreword

The Lord *called* to Abram, “Leave your country, ... and go to the land I will *show* you.”
... So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; ... and they set out for the land of Canaan
–Genesis 12:1,4,5

“But you will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
–Acts 1:8

What do these stories have to do with the Catholic Church in the United States today? In our parishes and dioceses, like Abraham and the early Church, we are facing change. Like them, the pathways ahead of us may look different from what we are used to. But, like them, God is calling us, God is showing us the way, and God is empowering us.

The experiences and insights of those dioceses and parishes that have undertaken reorganization can illuminate the pathways for others and embolden them to embrace change.

Executive Summary

This study establishes several landmarks in research on parish reorganization:

- It follows up on a limited initial study of efforts at parish reorganization in 46 dioceses, carried out and published by the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD) in 1995;
- It includes the first nationwide survey of dioceses and eparchies to gather information on structural and leadership changes in parishes, receiving responses from 123 dioceses and six eparchies; and
- It contains the first systematic national investigation of pastors' experiences of parish reorganization, drawing on 273 parish survey responses and 25 in-depth interviews with selected pastors and parish directors appointed in place of pastors.

Major Diocesan Survey Findings

Extent of Parish Changes

- Of the 123 dioceses responding to the survey, 72 percent report having done some form of parish reorganization from 1995 through 2000. An additional 8 percent have formally planned for such changes.
- Parish changes have taken place in the majority of responding dioceses in all major geographical regions. Overall, some 14 percent of parishes in responding dioceses have been involved in reorganization.

Types of Changes Made

- Sixty-one percent of the dioceses that have made parish changes from 1995 through 2000 have linked or clustered parishes. Parish mergers and the establishing of new parishes have each occurred in just over half of dioceses making changes. More than 40 percent of dioceses replaced a pastor with a parish director, and nearly as many replaced a resident with a non-resident pastor.
- In the Northeast and Midwest, dioceses are more likely to have involved all their parishes in the reorganization rather than singling out individual parishes for reorganization. Reorganization in the South and West is more likely to have been on a parish by parish basis. Perhaps because the wider scope of reorganization, dioceses in the Northeast and Midwest are more likely than those in other regions to have experience with most of the different types of parish changes.

The Process of Reorganization

- As in the 1995 study, a declining or aging presbyterate is cited most frequently as the most important factor leading dioceses to consider reorganization. Population shifts, and the associated increases or declines in parish attendance, are a second important factor cited by respondents.
- Among diocesan goals or criteria for reorganization, the desire to ensure celebration of the Eucharist each Sunday in each parish is cited most frequently.
- Two-thirds of dioceses report that parishes were consulted "very much" in the reorganization process. Parishes are more likely to have been consulted in cases where the diocese included all its parishes in the reorganization process.

Major Parish Survey Findings

The parishes of nearly nine-tenths of respondents are in the Northeast or Midwest, comparable to the geographic distribution of the mailed surveys. Most respondents were priests; about one in seven were not.

Parish Input and Training

- Respondents who were at the parish before reorganization more often reported “very much” input than those who were appointed at the time of reorganization (58% compared with 28%).
- Diocesan leaders are most often seen as having “very much” input (61%), compared with one-third of parish pastoral councils and one-fourth report of parish staffs.
- Respondents from dioceses where the scope of the planning effort was diocesan-wide are more likely than others to say that they themselves, their pastoral councils, and their staffs had at least some input.
- Respondents were three times as likely to see special training as helpful for themselves, their staffs, and councils, as they were to report that such training was actually received.

Impact on Parish Staff and Workload

- Parishes that share a pastor are also much more likely to share other staff, as well.
- In general, an improved assessment of staff sufficiency is positively associated with changes in non-priest staffing, but not with changes in the level of priest staffing.
- Most respondents report that their time dedicated to administrative responsibilities increased with reorganization. Half also reported that the willingness of parishioners to volunteer also increased. Combined, these responses indicate an increase in the complexity of parishes and of pastors’ duties.
- Respondents whose parishes share a pastor or have been linked with another parish are especially likely to say that their time spent on administration has increased. These respondents identify pastoral assistants and business managers as being potentially the most helpful.

Difficulties and Results

- Respondents are most likely to identify “coordination and balance of time between parishes,” “finding enough lay volunteers,” and “unhappiness of parishioners with changes brought by reorganization” as the greatest difficulties accompanying or following reorganization.
- Overall, respondents whose parishes have been linked or share a pastor appear to have significantly more difficulty than average. Parish directors and pastors in new parishes report less difficulty.
- Although reorganization often includes a reduction in the level of priestly staffing, respondents were twice as likely to indicate an improvement in meeting parish needs, as opposed to a diminishment in meeting needs (18% to 9%). Improvement occurred most often where a parish director was assigned.
- Nearly nine-tenths of respondents believe the reorganization was carefully planned. Three-fourths agree that parish finances are currently healthy, and that ministry in general has been enhanced.

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- Where the diocesan pastoral council was involved in the process, respondents were more likely to see the process as carefully planned and to report that their parishes have a greater sense of purpose afterwards.
 - Positive parish outcomes are very strongly associated with respondents' assessments of their own effectiveness.

Role Changes

- In general, respondents observed that pastoring in a time of transition “demanded strong leadership and peace-making skills,” and helping people work through their loss, hurt, and fear.
- Some persons who are new to the role of parish leader, whether pastor or parish director, seem to be surprised by the amount of administrative work involved.

Major Interview Findings

The results of 25 interviews conducted with those who are providing the pastoral leadership in parishes throughout the U.S. that have experienced a restructuring offer a number of important learnings.

Parish Mergers

- A number of pastors of recently merged parishes indicated that the impact on them has been considerable. The pastoral needs of the people are usually greater than they had been prior to the merger. On the other hand, administrative responsibilities frequently are lessened, particularly when the pastor had been pastoring more than one parish prior to the merger.
- One of the more difficult situations reported is when the people perceive that one parish has become the “winner” and another, the “loser” as a result of the change. One of the greatest challenges is creating a balance among the traditions of each of the former parishes and the creation of a new community.

Parish Linkages and Shared Pastors

- Pastors who were given the responsibility to pastor more than one parish reported much more work and more complex work.
- In all cases, linking parishes has a significant impact on staff. Some pastors increase responsibilities for the existing staff, while others increase the size of the staff and create new divisions of responsibilities.

New Parishes

- Pastors of newly created parishes reported very different experiences, but many similarities were evident. All reflect a sense of hope and optimism that is not always present in the interviews with pastoral leaders in other circumstances. They also faced challenges similar to those of pastors in the two preceding categories, requiring pastoral sensitivity and attention to community building.

Parish Directors

- Parish directors come from backgrounds that are as widely diverse backgrounds as the situations in which they minister. They face a variety of struggles to learn new roles and bring new life to their parishes.

Findings of General Application

- These interviews produced an extensive list of skills, attitudes and traits that are required of pastoral leaders in these situations, including personal faith, hopefulness, and a love for all people.
- Training identified as critical by those interviewed included updated administrative skills (accounting, finance, computers), more leadership skills (motivation, conflict management, delegation, facilitation), and communication skills.
- Most interviewees expressed some concern that their dioceses are not doing all that needs to be done to learn from their parishes' experiences and apply them to similar situations.

Implications for Leaders

Factors Connected to Effectiveness of Parish Leaders

- Respondents who receive special training are five times as likely to report an increase in their own effectiveness. Those who were consulted in the reorganization process were also significantly more effective afterwards.
- Those who employed appropriate transition rituals and believed they were helpful in dealing with parishioners' grief regarding the change saw themselves as more effective. Perceived support from parishioners and from the diocese were also related to increased effectiveness.
- Having a more effective staff, having sufficient staff, and having one or more general pastoral ministers were characteristic of most respondents whose effectiveness increased. Effectiveness is also associated with an ability to balance time spent on administrative duties with time spent in direct pastoral care.

Advice for Parishes and Dioceses

- Four themes dominated parish leaders' advice for other parishes, including: a) plan carefully and well; b) establish effective two-way communication; and c) practice leadership and develop it in others. Finally, they stressed that the pastor is responsible for exercising his leadership in a way that ensures that the spiritual dimension of the change process is not overlooked.
- Parish leaders' advice to bishops addressed ways in which they can teach, govern, and sanctify in the context of parish reorganization, especially by providing training, engaging in a consultative process, and being present to and supportive of those at the parish level.
- Diocesan respondents had advice for other dioceses based on their own experiences. Collectively, their comments define a seven-step process: set goals; provide leadership; prepare; educate; collaborate and consult; move at a deliberate pace; and prepare for emotional difficulty.

Conclusions

1. Changes in Catholic demographics and the presbyterate, along with traditional pastoral priorities for Sunday Eucharist and effective parish ministry, are producing widespread parish structural and leadership change.
2. Approaches to change vary; half of all responding dioceses have involved all parishes in a planning process, while, in some dioceses, only one or several parishes are affected.

-
3. When diocesan leaders employ mandatory, consultative planning and focus on strengthening parish ministry, their efforts are more effective.
 4. Adequate consultation and training are key to well-planned changes and positive parish outcomes, yet many dioceses neglect these essential components for successful reorganization.
 5. All types of parish change produce parish staffing changes, with staff responsibilities and pressures tending to increase. In the future, the numbers and types of parish staff might be expected to grow and the kinds of preparation for people to assume these roles will be varied.
 6. Parish outcomes vary according to the different types of change.
 - a. Sharing a pastor imposes a great burden on priests, but it sometimes results in good pastoral ministry.
 - b. Merging initially imposes a great burden on parishioners, but it can produce more alive, vibrant parishes.
 - c. Establishing a new parish is generally a very demanding but positive experience.
 - d. Parish directors face unique challenges, but the outcomes in these parishes tend to be quite positive.
 7. The impact of these parish changes on parishioners is significant. The exact nature of parishioner discomfort is unclear, but meaningful participation, special training for parish leaders, and effective leadership at the parish and diocesan levels all help to reduce negative impacts.
 8. Good leadership, especially by the pastor, is essential. In addition to possessing strong communication skills, personal attributes that a pastor (or parish director) will find most useful are: self-confidence and trust, a passion for consultation, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Recommendations

Diocesan and parish leaders must learn how to strengthen the processes to bring about parish structural changes and improve the parish structures and staffing arrangements that effectively carry out the mission of the church.

1. If parish reorganization is to be successful, dioceses need to ensure that effective consultation and training occur. Both are essential.
2. Dioceses should give more attention to parish staffing issues, taking care to select leaders who are equipped for the particular challenges of each transition, addressing long-term challenges with appropriate formation programs for pastors and other staff, and establishing clearer job descriptions and qualifications for parish ministry positions.
3. Dioceses should take the time to conduct careful evaluation of their planning and reorganization efforts so that they can learn for themselves, and pass on to others, insights about what practices are most effective.
4. While good leadership cannot be fully defined or predicted, there are three steps pastoral leaders can take to foster personal leadership: develop a guiding vision; learn how to think strategically; and use the parish pastoral council as a tool of consultation and planning.
5. Dioceses should also be active in developing pastoral leadership. This includes giving greater attention to the process of selecting pastors for these assignments, preparing a pool of highly qualified parish staff to assist pastors in their work, and developing training programs specific to the leadership challenges of various types of parish reorganization.
6. Continue to undertake research into how good planning and consultation, combined with effective training and leadership, improve pastoral effectiveness and parish outcomes.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This report presents findings from the study of parish reorganization conducted by the Catholic Research Forum of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD) with the assistance of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The principal goals initially set out for the study were:

- To determine as closely as possible the total number of dioceses in the United States that have conducted parish reorganization since January 1995. Reorganization is defined as including both structural changes to parishes themselves (mergers, closings, establishment of new parishes, and “linking” or “clustering” of parishes) and changes in parish administration (change from a resident pastor to a non-resident pastor, entrusting to a team of priests, or assigning a parish director).
- To compare these findings to those from a previous study of parish reorganization, conducted by CPPCD in 1994 and published in 1995.
- To determine the specific kinds of parish changes made, as well as the principal factors leading to reorganization.
- To determine the kinds of staffing changes that have accompanied parish changes, especially changes involving the merging or “linking” of parishes and the replacement of resident pastors with other forms of parish administration.
- To examine the challenges accompanying staffing changes and determine what new staffing patterns work best.

Data collection began in October 2000 with the mailing of questionnaires to all U.S. dioceses and eparchies. This survey sought information about diocesan experiences with parish reorganization from January 1995 through October 2000. The findings from these diocesan responses are reported in Chapter 2 of this study.

In addition, respondents to the diocesan survey were asked to provide the names and addresses of priests or parish directors at changed parishes. This information became the basis of a mailing list for a second questionnaire designed to ask about staffing and ministry issues in individual parishes having undergone change. The second part of the study, presented here in Chapter 3, reports on the responses of pastors and parish directors at those parishes.

To gain additional insights about the changes, practices, challenges, and training that pastors and other parish pastoral ministers have experienced as a result of parish restructuring, researchers conducted follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of the parish respondents. The results of these interviews are reported in Chapter 4.

Considerable effort was invested in an analysis of the information and insights gained from the surveys and interviews, and the results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Among the major issues identified for those in parish and diocesan leadership positions are: factors contributing to pastoral leaders’ workload and effectiveness, and key dimensions of pastoral leadership at both the parish and diocesan levels.

Drawing on all of this work, Chapter 6 presents a number of conclusions and recommendations concerning parish change and how those involved in planning, training, and pastoral leadership can improve their effectiveness.

Special Challenges in Researching and Reporting on Parish Reorganization

Many dioceses and parishes have little or no experience with the conditions, issues, and structures that are encountered in the course of parish reorganization. The experience is frequently one of exploring uncharted territory and devising new ways to respond to these new situations. Not only do situations change, but so do the words used to describe them. As a result, certain terms are not used in a consistent manner. For pastoral leaders, language is in transition just as much as structures and staffing arrangements.

These challenges confront researchers as well. Terminology and conceptual organization that seem sensible at the beginning of a project are found to be inadequate or inappropriate at the conclusion of the study. Several such challenges for both respondents and researchers were encountered in the course of this project.

Research Design The focus of the researchers in the design of this project was describing experiences of parish reorganization. Accordingly, it sometimes gives more attention to understanding the sociological reality of a situation than to its juridic condition. For example, the inclusion of “clustered” parishes in the category of “structural change” came about because this was seen as a situation where the diocese decided that parishes were expected to work together in ministry, whether or not they shared a pastor. Thus, structural change does not refer to the canonical status of the parish, but to the structure of parish ministry.

In addition, in trying to come up with questionnaire wording that would be both concise and comprehensible, researchers sometimes described change options in a manner that did not provide clear differentiations and definitions.

Reporting Several issues became obvious in the course of analyzing the survey responses and interviews compiled during this project. In the area of parish structures, dioceses describe the relationships between parishes in a variety of ways. On top of this, there are sometimes differences between diocesan characterizations of changes and parish descriptions of them. Sometimes, a parish experienced more than one type of change (e.g., a parish merger that is later followed by assigning a non-resident pastor, or cluster of parishes that includes one with a lay parish director and two that share a pastor), and some categories are not mutually exclusive (e.g., a non-resident pastor may or may not be a shared pastor, and clustered parishes may or may not share a pastor)

Different respondents may use different words to describe the same reality or the same word to describe different situations. This was verified by subsequent contacts that were made in an effort to clarify certain responses. Perhaps the best example of this issue is the various descriptions of pastoral leadership of parishes by persons other than priests. Dioceses use a variety of titles for persons assigned by bishops under the provisions of Canon 517.2 to share in the pastoral care of a parish. These titles include: pastoral administrator, pastoral life coordinator, parish administrator, parish life coordinator, and parish director. On the other hand, in at least one case, a non-resident pastor has hired a general parish minister to provide on-site pastoral leadership in the pastor’s absence and given that person the title of pastoral administrator.

Occasionally, the questionnaires and interviews contain statements that appear to contradict current Church disciplines or standard practice. Because respondents are reporting on their efforts to devise new approaches to new situations, and because of different possible interpretations of their statements, it is not always possible to know precisely what a respondent is describing or advocating. These quotes from pastors and other parish leaders, whether they are reflective of an unusual experience, indicative of a need for formation and training, or

suggestive of changes in pastoral practice, are incorporated into the text because they all offer insights for evaluating past practice and shaping future approaches.

Finally, in working with the data, it became clear that some reworking of categories was necessary, partly because some responses didn't belong where they had been put, partly because reality was more complex than the initial categories, and partly because, in some places, the categories were making a distinction without a real difference.

Reading These challenges suggest three caveats that may be helpful to readers as they examine this report.

1. Wording and categories are continuing to evolve along with the realities of parish staffing and structures.
2. Even when respondents' descriptions are clear, the real world is more complex than some conceptual framework, so some responses or situations do not fit neatly into such a system.
3. Respondents may describe or advocate things that seem inappropriate or unworkable. While these parish and diocesan leaders have a variety of backgrounds and experiences, they also have a common love for the Church. Therefore, in reading such comments, it may be helpful to interpret them in the most positive way possible, assuming that something can be learned from each perspective.

Reaching Beyond the Scope of the Previous Study

As noted above, one of the motivations of this project was to respond to the interest and questions raised by the initial study of parish reorganization that was published by CPPCD in 1995. In the summer of 1994, CPPCD distributed surveys to leaders in 54 dioceses known to have conducted parish reorganization during previous years. Usable responses were obtained from 46 of those dioceses.

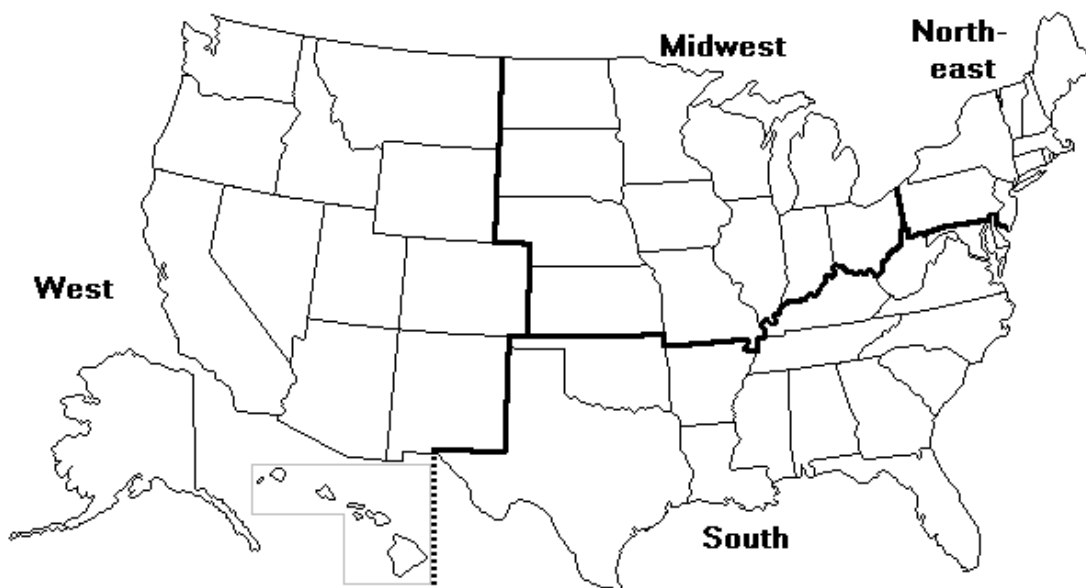
The present study included special follow-up efforts to encourage participation from those same 46 dioceses. In December 2000, telephone contact was made with every diocese that had participated in the 1995 study but had not yet returned a questionnaire for the 2000 survey, to further encourage their participation. The intention was to compare these dioceses' experiences prior to the summer of 1994 with their experiences afterward. Researchers obtained completed surveys from 35 of the 46 previously surveyed dioceses. In addition to these 35, completed surveys were received from 94 dioceses not previously surveyed.

Chapter 2 pays special attention to the responses of dioceses that took part in the previous study, and, where possible, this report makes comparisons between the 1995 and 2001 results. Appendix A summarizes all of the dioceses and their level of participation in the three phases of this study.

An analysis of the geographical distribution of the responses to both surveys reveals certain similarities and differences. The four major U.S. Census regions are used for this analysis. Each Census region includes three or four USCCB regions, as shown in the table below.

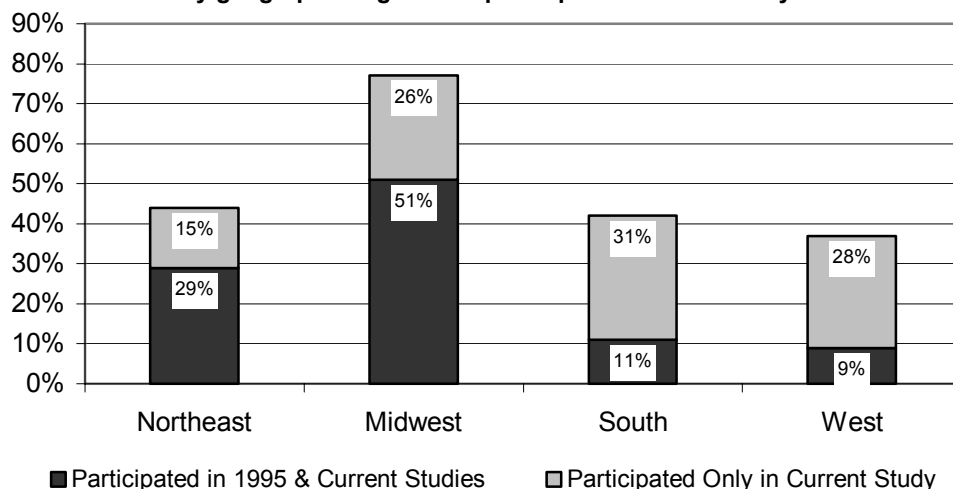
1.1: Census and USCCB Regions	
U.S. Census Region	USCCB Regions
Northeast	I, II, III
Midwest	VI, VII, VIII, IX
South	IV, V, X, XIV
West	XI, XII, XIII

1.2: Map of U.S. Census Regions



The following graph compares the geographical distribution of dioceses previously surveyed and those surveyed for the first time in 2000. As the graph shows, the dioceses previously surveyed are disproportionately concentrated in the Midwest and Northeast Census regions. Those participating for the first time are disproportionately concentrated in the South and West Census regions.¹ For example, 29 percent of the 35 dioceses that participated in both the 1995 and current studies are located in the Northeast. In contrast, 15 percent of the 94 dioceses that participated only in the current study are located in the Northeast.

**1.3: Distribution of Participating Dioceses and Eparchies
By geographic region and participation in 1995 study**



¹ St. Thomas (in the Virgin Islands) is also placed in the South.

Chapter 2

Diocesan Experiences

In October 2000, questionnaires were mailed to the offices of all 15 eparchies and 177 dioceses (all except the Military Archdiocese). A comprehensive three-stage follow-up procedure including a reminder postcard, a faxed copy of the questionnaire, and finally a follow-up phone call to non-responding dioceses ensured the highest possible response rate. The last questionnaire returned was received in March 2001. A total of six eparchies and 123 dioceses responded, for response rates of 40 and 69 percent, respectively.²

A cover letter accompanying each questionnaire asked that it be filled out by someone familiar with the diocese's current and previous planning efforts. Three fourths of respondents worked as chancellor or assistant chancellor (39%) or in an explicit planning position (36%). Most of the remaining questionnaires were returned by vicars general or by persons working in offices concerned with pastoral or parish affairs.

The first question asked whether the diocese had made any structural changes, as described in Chapter 1, to parishes during the previous six years (since the beginning of 1995). If the answer was "no," respondents were asked to return the questionnaire. If the answer was "yes," several follow-up questions asked about these changes, including the types of changes, the number of parishes changed, the reasons for change, and the goals/criteria guiding the reorganization. A copy of the diocesan questionnaire appears in Appendix B at the end of this report.

In addition, respondents were asked to provide the names and addresses of priests or parish directors at changed parishes, both at the time of restructuring and presently (unless the parish no longer exists). The names of 1,021 parishes in 89 dioceses and one eparchy that had undergone some type of change since January 1995 were identified.

Planning and Implementation of Changes

Seventy-two percent of dioceses report making structural changes to parishes between January 1995 and October 2000.

The first item in the questionnaire asks whether the diocese or eparchy had made structural changes to parishes or had formally planned for such changes since January 1995. This period of time was chosen to include the time elapsed since the previous survey. Only one fifth of responding dioceses and eparchies report that no parish changes or planning have taken place. Seventy-two percent have made changes since early 1995, and 8 percent have planned for such changes but not yet implemented the plans.

Only one of the six eparchies responding to the survey reports having made parish changes and its changes were limited to the erection of two new parishes. This difference from the diocesan experience could be anticipated, given the different geographical characteristics of eparchies and their parishes. In the remainder of this report, eparchy responses are not included in the statistical profiles of parish reorganization, but the information they provide on open-ended questions is included.

² In this context, discussion of margin of error has little meaning since statistical inference is based on the premise that a small random sample of a population is being used. Here, two-thirds of the entire population is represented.

At this point, it is possible to compare dioceses surveyed in 1995 with those participating in this study for the first time. Those selected for study in 1995 had all made parish changes prior to 1995, most through a formal planning process. Two contrasting expectations could be developed based on this fact.

One is that the dioceses previously participating are disproportionately likely to be experiencing ongoing strains that make parish change necessary – and therefore that they are once again more likely than those surveyed for the first time to be engaged in parish restructuring. These dioceses that gained experience in parish reorganization prior to 1995 may also have developed resources to help them do so again more easily than others.

Alternatively, since most dioceses in the country are facing similar strains on parishes due to declining numbers of priests and, in many cases, substantial demographic shifts and/or growth, it could be expected that dioceses making changes prior to 1995 simply happened to be “going first.” Based on this line of reasoning, one might predict that those not participating in the previous study are equally likely to have made parish changes since January 1995.

In reality, dioceses that experienced parish reorganization prior to 1995 are more likely to have engaged in further restructuring. Among the dioceses participating in the first CPPCD survey, 94 percent have made additional parish changes since January 1995. This compares to changes in 64 percent of those not participating in the previous survey.

Dioceses in the Midwest are more likely than those in other regions to have made changes to parishes since January 1995. This is the case both for dioceses that participated in the 1995 CPPCD study and for those that did not.

Eighty-three percent of responding dioceses in the Midwest report having made changes since January 1995. This compares to 76 percent in the Northeast, 71 percent in the West, and 58 percent in the South.

Among diocesan questionnaires coming from the chancellor or assistant chancellor, only 65 percent reported planning or having made changes, compared with 93 percent of those coming from diocesan planning offices, vicars general, or offices concerned with pastoral or parish affairs.

Types of Parish Changes

“Linking” or “clustering” parishes is the most common type of structural change to parishes among dioceses that have engaged in parish reorganization.

Nearly all of the 89 dioceses that made changes made structural changes to parishes, such as opening, closing, or clustering parishes. Only three of the 89 dioceses report making only pastoral leadership changes, such as assigning a non-resident pastor to a parish formerly having a resident pastor. Among the dioceses having made changes since January 1995, three-fifths (60 percent) have “linked” or “clustered” parishes. A total of 1,115 parishes (from among all 89 dioceses having made changes) were linked or clustered between January 1995 and October 2000.

Parish mergers and the establishing of new parishes have each occurred in just over half of dioceses making changes, and nearly 40 percent have closed parishes (besides those closed in mergers). More than 40 percent of dioceses replaced a pastor with a parish director, and nearly as many replaced a resident with a non-resident pastor. Fewer than ten percent of dioceses indicated that they replaced a resident pastor with a team of priests during the previous six years.

2.1: Types of Parish Changes Made

(Dioceses Reporting Each Type, Among 89 Dioceses Having Made Changes)

Changes in Parish Structures:

“Linked” or “Clustered” Parishes*	60%
Merged Parishes	54%
Closed Parishes in a Merger (included in previous figure)	45%
Established New Parishes	51%
Closed or Suppressed Parishes (not in a Merger)	39%
Closed Parishes but Maintained Physically as Chapels or Missions (included in previous figure)	12%

Changes in Pastoral Leadership:

Replaced a Resident Pastor with a Parish Director**	42%
Replaced a Resident Pastor with a Non-Resident Pastor	38%
Replaced a Resident Pastor with a Team of Priests ***	8%

* “Linked” or “clustered” parishes are those that are organizationally connected by the diocese for purposes of staffing and/or ministry. The most common types of this arrangement include: sharing a pastor, sharing staff, joint ministry programs, and joint planning efforts.

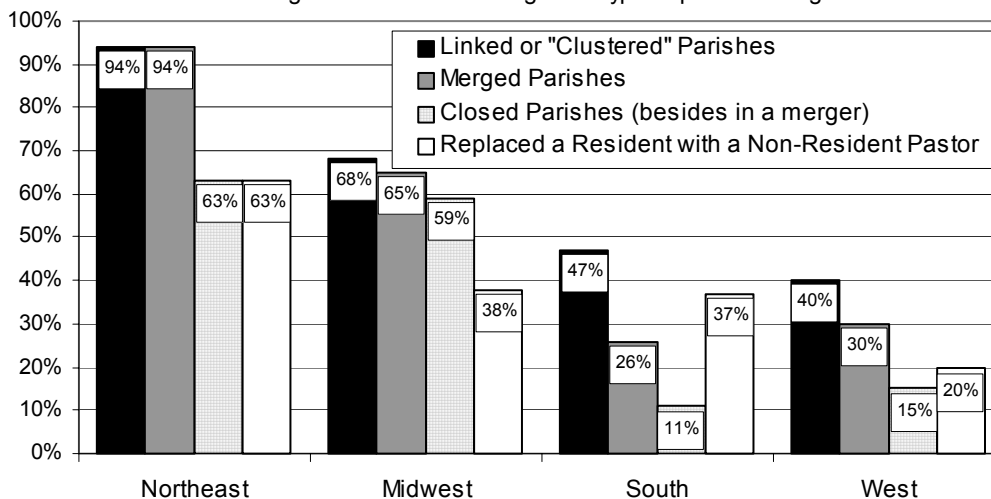
** Dioceses use many different titles for religious, other lay persons, and deacons assigned to parishes under Canon 517.2. These titles include pastoral or parish administrator, parish or pastoral life coordinator, and parish director. In general, the term “parish director” is used in this study.

*** The proportion of dioceses using a team of priests for parish leadership is probably overstated. Subsequent pastor/parish director responses from several parishes identified by dioceses as having this form of leadership indicate that they actually are linked, have a non-resident pastor, and/or have a parish director.

There are several types of changes that are more likely to have been made by dioceses located in the Northeast than by those located in other regions of the country. As shown in the graph below, these changes include linking or clustering parishes, merging parishes, and replacing a resident with a non-resident pastor.

2.2: Parish Reorganization by Geographical Region

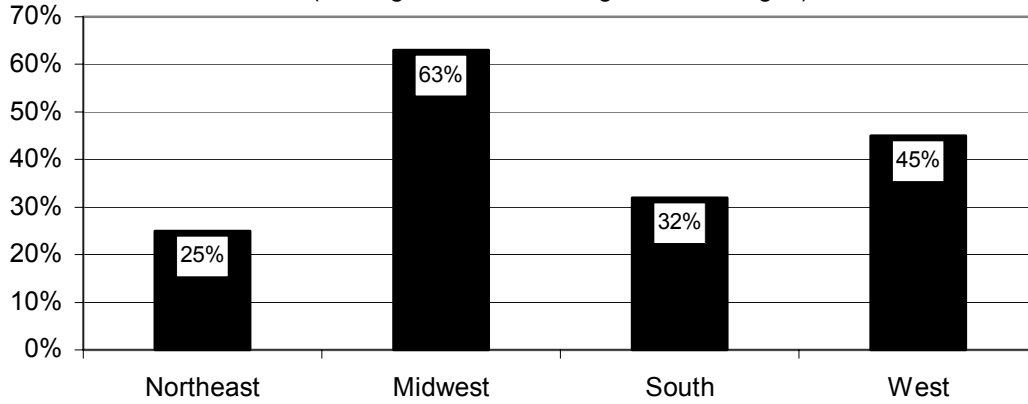
Percentage of dioceses making each type of parish change



In contrast, dioceses located in the Midwest were more likely to replace a resident pastor with someone other than a priest.

2.3: Change to Pastoral Administrator by Geographical Region

(Among Dioceses Having Made Changes)



Among the dioceses that linked or clustered parishes the most common arrangement is that the parishes share a pastor.

In nearly nine-tenths of dioceses where parishes have been linked or clustered, this linking or clustering includes parishes that share a pastor. In nearly half of these dioceses, linked or clustered parishes share a ministerial staff. Over a third of these dioceses report that such parishes share an administrative support staff.

2.4: Types of Parish Linkages or Clusters

(Dioceses Reporting Each Type Among Those Linking or Clustering Parishes)

Parishes share a pastor or team of priests	87%
Parishes share a ministerial staff	47%
Parishes share an administrative support staff	36%
Other arrangements (volunteered by respondents)	20%

Note: 55 dioceses report linked or clustered parishes.

One-fifth of dioceses with linked or clustered parishes volunteered that other arrangements had been instituted. Two dioceses noted that all their parishes are linked or clustered. Three wrote that a variety of arrangements exist. Other comments include the following explanations about linked or clustered arrangements:

- Several dioceses report that linked or clustered parishes share a staff or staff members.
Clusters will lead to sharing pastors and staffs when the need arises.
In transition toward sharing pastors and ministerial staff.
Parishes now share support staff.
- Some parishes share a common coordinating body or work together in planning or goals.
In each instance, the parish retains its own pastor, but in addition to their individual parish councils, they function with a “cluster” council, which meets monthly and coordinates combined activities.
Have set common goals and set up a Board of Pastoral Ministry.
Clustered for the sake of collaborative planning.

- Finally, linked or clustered parishes in a few dioceses share programs.
Cooperate in planning or some programming or scheduling.
Share programs and ministries.

Scope of Reorganization

Nearly half of dioceses that made or formally planned parish changes report that the scope of their reorganization was the whole diocese.

2.5: Scope of Reorganization	
(Among All Dioceses Having Made or Planned Changes)	
Whole diocese	51%
Regions, such as deaneries or vicariates	13%
Groups of parishes	22%
Individual parishes only	30%

Note: Totals over 100% since the scope sometimes covered more than one level.

Individual parishes were the scope of the reorganization in about one in three dioceses; groups of parishes in about one in five dioceses, and regions such as deaneries or vicariates in about one in eight dioceses. Just under half of the dioceses reporting the scope of their reorganization said these efforts involved the entire diocese in the reorganization, and these dioceses were more likely to have a planning office.

Reorganization efforts in the Northeast and Midwest are more likely than those in the South or West to have involved the whole diocese. Reorganization efforts in the West are most likely to have involved individual parishes only.

2.6: Scope of Reorganization by Geographic Region				
Percentage of dioceses doing reorganization at specified level				
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Whole Diocese	68%	62%	33%	16%
Individual Parishes Only	16%	16%	40%	59%

Comparison of Dioceses Responding to the 1995 and Current Studies

While three in four dioceses participating in the 1995 study said they involved the entire diocese in the reorganization process, six years later just over half of the dioceses participating in the current study report involving the entire diocese in the reorganization.

2.7: Scope of Reorganization Among Dioceses Participating in Both Studies		
	Current Study	1995 Study
Whole diocese	55%	74%
Regions, such as deaneries or vicariates	15%	13%
Groups/clusters of parishes	24%	26%
Individual parishes	24%	17%

Notes: 33 dioceses participating in the 1995 study responded to this question. Percentages add to more than 100 because in some dioceses, the scope of involvement covered more than one of these levels.

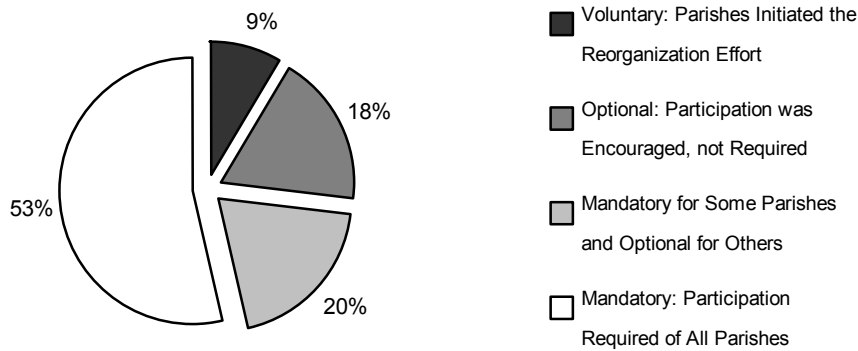
The preceding table compares the scope of reorganization efforts prior to 1995 with those of efforts taking place since that time. The first column shows the current responses of dioceses that participated in both the present study and the 1995 study. The second column shows analogous responses from the earlier CPPCD study (*Diocesan Efforts at Parish Reorganization*, CPPCD, 1995).

The whole diocese was more likely to have been the scope of reorganization prior to 1995 than since that time. This fact suggests that the scope of reorganization might be becoming less extensive over time among dioceses involved in more than one reorganization process. There are no other significant differences in the scope of reorganization.

Voluntary Nature of Reorganization

Participation of parishes in reorganization was mandatory in more than half of dioceses where reorganization has been planned or implemented.

2.8: Nature of Parish Participation in Reorganization



Participation in reorganization was “voluntary” (initiated by parishes themselves) or “optional” (encouraged but not required by the diocese) in about a quarter of dioceses. In one-fifth of dioceses, participation was mandatory for some parishes and optional or voluntary for others. Participation of parishes in reorganization was mandatory in two-thirds (67 percent) of dioceses in which the scope of reorganization was the entire diocese. In comparison, participation was mandatory in just 44 percent of dioceses in which the scope was limited to individual parishes only.

When participation was voluntary or optional, the questionnaire was much less likely to have been completed by someone in a diocesan planning office.

Factors Leading to Reorganization

A declining or aging presbyterate is the most frequently mentioned factor leading dioceses to consider parish reorganization. Population shifts, and the associated increases or declines in attendance, are a second important factor.

From a list of nine possible factors leading dioceses to consider reorganization, respondents were asked to rank the top three factors, in order. The table below shows the percentage of respondents that ranked each factor in each of these ways. For example, 55 percent of respondents ranked a declining or aging presbyterate as the most

important factor. Fourteen percent ranked it as the second most important factor, and 13 percent ranked it the third most important. Adding these three percentages, it can be determined that 82 percent of respondents ranked a declining or aging presbyterate as one of the three most important factors in leading their diocese to consider parish reorganization.

2.9: Most Important Factors Leading to Reorganization			
(Among 87 Dioceses Reporting or Planning Changes)			
	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important
Declining or aging presbyterate.	55%	14%	13%
Declining or increasing attendance in some parishes	19%	21%	15%
Shift in Catholic population within the diocese (e.g., urban to suburban)	11%	27%	15%
Overall decline or increase of Catholic population in the Diocese	9%	9%	7%
Inability of parishes to support themselves financially	1%	8%	13%
Increase in new, non-English-speaking immigrant groups	0%	2%	7%
Problems with church building(s) (e.g., in disrepair, too large, too small)	0%	2%	13%
Assimilation of immigrant groups, making some language or nationality-based parishes unnecessary	0%	2%	2%
Inability to find trained lay staff or ministers	0%	4%	0%
Stewardship (Volunteered)	0%	2%	0%
All other factors (Volunteered)	5%	4%	0%

Note: Some respondents did not rank a second or a third factor.

Dioceses were also asked to rate the influence of each factor from “not at all” to “very much.” The table below summarizes these responses in the first two columns. The first column provides the percentage of respondents who rated the factor as being either “somewhat” or “very much” influential. The second column shows the percentage who rated each as “very much” influential only, and the third offers a comparison with the 1995 study.

2.10: Importance of Various Factors Leading Dioceses to Consider Reorganization			
(Among Dioceses Having Made or Planned Changes in Both Studies)			
	----- Current -----		1995
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only	“Significant Driving Force”
Declining or aging presbyterate	88%	64%	89%
Declining or increasing attendance in some parishes	71%	40%	N/A
Shift in Catholic population within the diocese (e.g., urban to suburban)	58%	38%	59%
Overall decline or increase of Catholic population in the diocese	42%	22%	30%
Inability of parishes to support themselves financially	35%	11%	41%
Increase in new, non-English-speaking immigrant groups	29%	8%	13%
Problems with church building(s) (e.g., in disrepair, too large, too small)	28%	10%	N/A
Assimilation of immigrant groups, making some language or nationality-based parishes unnecessary	14%	3%	26%
Inability to find trained lay staff or ministers	13%	2%	N/A

Comparison of Dioceses Responding to the 1995 and Current Studies

It is interesting to examine the extent to which each of these factors was also selected as a “significant driving force” for reorganization in the 1995 CPPCD study. The third column of the table presents the comparable statistics for those factors that were listed on the previous survey.

In both studies, a declining or aging presbyterate was the dominant factor in leading to reorganization.

The relative ratings of the other factors can be summarized as follows:

- Close to nine-tenths of respondents report that a declining or aging presbyterate was at least “somewhat” a factor in leading the dioceses to consider reorganization. This might be described as a “supply” factor, i.e. the supply of priests available to lead parishes.
- The next three most important factors are all related to “demand” factors, the number of Catholics in an area who need to be served by the dioceses. These three factors are declining or increasing Mass attendance in some parishes, a shift in Catholic population within the diocese and a decline or increase in Catholic population in the diocese.
- Fewer dioceses, a quarter to a third, report that problems with material resources, such as inability of parishes to support themselves or problems with church buildings, were important factors in leading to consideration of reorganization. The least important factors are assimilation of immigrant groups and inability to find trained lay ministers.
- In the latest survey, assimilation of previous immigrant groups is half as likely to be an important factor leading dioceses to consider reorganization as it was in the 1995 study. On the other hand, an increase in new immigrant groups twice as likely to be an important factor as in the previous study.

In addition to the nine factors listed in the questionnaire as potentially leading to reorganization, space was provided for respondents to write in additional factors. Nineteen respondents did so. Some of their volunteered responses repeat those ideas already contained in the nine listed factors. Below is a complete transcription of all unique factors volunteered, grouped in three distinct, although overlapping, groups.

- Several dioceses mentioned some aspect of stewardship. Among these comments are:
 - 1) *Quality of faith life.* 2) *Pastoral Care.*
 - 1) *Collaboration with the diocese.* 2) *Good stewardship.*
 - Stewardship.*
- Others mentioned the need for renewal or increasing vitality in parishes.
 - 1) *Deepen unity of people.* 2) *Enhance vitality.*
 - Renewed emphasis on parish mission.*
 - Growth and development.*
 - Need for parish/pastoral planning and renewal.*
 - Parish vitality – programs, ministry, service.*
 - Vitality of parishes.*
- A final group mentioned the desire to give lay people the opportunity to serve.
 - All are called to serve by reason of baptism.*
 - Baptismal call of all.*
 - Laity prepared for ministry.*
 - Visioning of future needs of trained staff in parishes.*

Goals or Criteria of Reorganization

Dioceses are most likely to cite having each parish celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday as a goal or criterion guiding its reorganization efforts.

2.11: Importance of Various Goals or Criteria for the Reorganization Effort		
(Among Dioceses Having Made or Planned Changes)		
	"Somewhat" or "Very Much"	"Very Much" Only
Each parish would celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday.	80%	59%
Priests would not be over-worked/over-extended.	80%	39%
No Catholic would have to travel an unreasonable distance to attend Mass.	72%	30%
No parish with a viable number of parishioners would close.	67%	36%
Each parish would have a "full service" or "complete" ministerial program.	61%	33%
No parish would close.	54%	33%
No financially viable parish would close.	43%	26%
Each parish would have a resident pastor.	21%	9%

The needs of both priests and parishioners stand out as important goals or criteria of reorganization efforts. Four in five dioceses say that having Mass in each parish every Sunday and not overworking or over-extending priests were each at least "somewhat" important considerations. Slightly fewer, but still a third or more, say that Catholics not having to travel unreasonable distances to Mass and keeping parishes with viable numbers of parishioners open were important goals. Fewer than half of dioceses report that the financial viability of parishes or maintaining a resident pastor in each parish were important goals or criteria of reorganization.

Twenty-one respondents volunteered other goals or criteria behind their reorganization effort. These responses can be grouped into four broad categories of criteria, as follows, with examples from the written comments in italics.

- Preserving Catholic culture and Catholic community
All Catholics in [the] diocese [would] be served.
Parish is at the core of life in rural communities.
1) Catholic presence in declining rural areas [would be] preserved. 2) Follow school/trade attendance patterns.
- Parish vitality
1) Deepen unity. 2) Enhance vitality.
Each parish is more capable to carry out its mission.
No parish meet[ing] the criteria for [vitality and viability] would close.
1) No pastorally viable parish would close. 2) Each parish would participate in determining its future
- Clergy distribution
Arriving at a fair or equitable clergy distribution.
1) Ideal: no priest [saying] more than 3 Masses a weekend. 2) Weekend service not to be scheduled.

1) [Each parish would have a] non-resident pastor, if no resident pastor. 2) If non-resident pastor, then parish has a parish life coordinator.

1) Ratio [of] priests/parishioners. 2) Catholic make-up of the county.
Resident pastor in each county.

- Lay leadership

Development of lay leadership.

Ministries shared where feasible.

1) Sunday celebration in absence of priest if needed. 2) Training for lay ministers.

Most Important Goal

In the same way that they were asked to rank the most important factors that prompted them to consider reorganization, dioceses were asked to rank the top three goals or criteria for their reorganization efforts.

Having a Eucharistic celebration in each parish every Sunday is cited as the most important goal more frequently than any other goal. In general, however, the most important goals reported by the dioceses are fairly diverse.

2.12: Most Important Goal or Criterion of Reorganization
(Among Dioceses Having Made or Planned Changes)

	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important
Each parish would celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday.	28%	21%	7%
Priests would not be over-worked/over-extended.	11%	17%	19%
No Catholic would have to travel an unreasonable distance to attend Mass.	5%	11%	20%
No parish with a viable number of parishioners would close.	11%	11%	11%
Each parish would have a "full service" or "complete" ministerial program.	13%	15%	7%
No parish would close.	17%	10%	5%
No financially viable parish would close.	2%	5%	5%
Each parish would have a resident pastor.	0%	2%	7%
Effective distribution of priests (Volunteered)	2%	1%	0%
Parish vitality/pastoral viability (Volunteered)	1%	1%	2%
Maintain Catholic presence in rural areas (Volunteered)	1%	0%	1%
All other factors (Volunteered)	8%	5%	7%

Note: Last two columns do not add to 100% because some of the 84 respondents did not rank a second or third factor.

Several other goals were mentioned by a third or more as being among the three most important: keeping priests from being overworked, preventing Catholics from having to travel unreasonable distances to Mass, keeping open parishes with viable numbers of parishioners open, having a "full-service" ministerial program in each parish, and closing no parishes.

Diocesan planners are much more likely to list a mission-oriented criterion such as complete ministry or parish vitality as most important or second most important goal.

Consultation During the Process

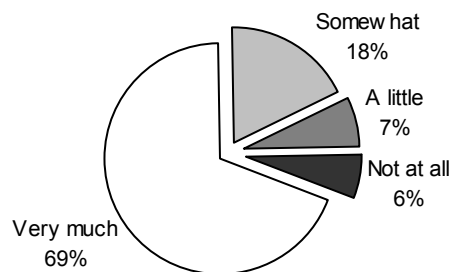
Pastors have been involved in nearly all dioceses where reorganization has taken place since January 1995.

2.13: Groups and Individuals Involved in Reorganization (Involvement Reported by Dioceses Having Made or Planned Changes)	
Pastors	99%
Parish pastoral councils	91%
Parish staff members	86%
Other parishioners or parish groups	76%
Parish clusters or deanery group(s)	72%
Diocesan pastoral council	39%
Outside community groups	9%

- Parish pastoral councils have been involved in reorganization in about nine-tenths of dioceses.
- Other parishioners or parish groups have been involved in three-quarters of dioceses.
- Diocesan pastoral councils have been involved in about two-fifths of dioceses and outside community groups in only about one-tenth of dioceses.

Seven in ten respondents report that in their diocese parishes have been consulted “very much” in the reorganization process.

2.14: Amount of Diocesan Consultation with Parishes in the Reorganization Process



Diocesan planners are much more likely than chancellors and assistant chancellors to report that parishes to have been consulted “very much” (77% to 60%).

Parishes are more likely to have been consulted “very much” when the scope of reorganization is the entire diocese. When the scope is limited to individual parishes, only four in ten dioceses report consulting “very much” with the parishes, compared with 86 percent indicating that they consulted “very much” when the scope was diocesan-wide.

Chapter 3

Pastors' and Parish Directors' Experience

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the diocesan questionnaire was also used to develop a database of parishes and parish leaders who had experienced reorganization between January 1995 and October 2000. Each diocese was asked to provide the name of the pastor (or other pastoral leader) at the time of the change, along with his current location and phone for parishes that had been involved in various types of reorganization (such as clustering, merging, or establishing new parishes) or had staffing pattern changes as a result of parish reorganization (such as a resident pastor replaced with a non-resident pastor or the appointment of a parish director).

These diocesan reports provided a database of parishes that have been involved in reorganization and current addresses of pastors who were in charge at the time of reorganization. This database contained 1,021 parishes in 89 dioceses and one eparchy that had undergone some type of change since January 1995. The next phase of the research was a survey of pastors and parish directors at those parishes.

A second questionnaire was prepared, then reviewed and approved by the CPPCD project advisory committee. This questionnaire asked parish leaders about their experiences with parish reorganization, the attendant staffing changes, and any suggestions or comments they might have for other parishes and dioceses involved in reorganization. In March 2001, this questionnaire was sent to all pastors and parish directors of parishes whose names and addresses had been provided by diocesan planners in the first survey. A total of 855 questionnaires were mailed, representing a substantial proportion of the parishes in the database. A copy of the questionnaire sent to parish leaders appears in Appendix C.

For each parish, questionnaires were mailed to up to two individuals: (1) the current pastor or parish director and (2) the pastor or parish director who was at the parish when reorganization occurred. In cases where the individual leading the parish at the time of change was still there at the time of the survey, only one questionnaire was mailed. The purpose of surveying both types of parish leaders was to understand parish dynamics both at the time of change and at the present. In this way, it is possible to understand the challenges faced by leaders of parishes that undergo change and identify the types of staffing patterns that work best. One challenge of this design was locating former pastors and parish directors of the parishes. In some cases, diocesan planners reported that they did not know the current addresses of priests who are now retired. And when addresses of former pastors were provided, they often turned out to be incorrect. Additionally, some former pastors declined to fill out the survey, returning it only with the comment that they know too little about its current situation.

Two hundred and seventy-three completed questionnaires were received by May 2001. Thus, the response rate for the survey is approximately 32 percent. Given the difficulties associated with the design of the survey, this was considered to be a satisfactory rate for a mailed questionnaire, providing a sufficient database for analysis and interpretation.

Based on the information provided by diocesan planners, 58 percent of the responses are from pastors or parish directors who are currently at the parish. The remaining 42 percent are responses from pastors who were at the parish at the time of the change but are no longer there. Eleven parishes are represented twice among the 273 responses; these are parishes in which questionnaires were returned both by the current pastor or parish director and by the one who was at the parish at the time of reorganization. Additionally, several individuals filled out and returned more than one questionnaire each. Most of these individuals currently lead parishes that have been linked or merged and received one questionnaire for each of those parishes. A total of 227 separate individuals returned questionnaires; 44 individuals filled out more than one questionnaire.

Type of Parish Change

Based on information previously provided by diocesan planners, it is possible to match pastors and parish directors with the type of changes their parishes have undergone. The following table summarizes the number of cases represented in the questionnaires that pastors and parish directors returned, according to the types of changes reported by the planners.

3.1: Types of Changes Reported by Pastors and Parish Directors	
Type of Change	Number of Cases Totals
Merged or Suppressed	81
Merged with Another Parish	59
Closed	15
Became a Mission/Chapel/Oratory	7
Erected	19
Created (no Special Circumstances)	10
Erected in suburb/closed in center city	1
Created from a Mission	2
Previously Merged Parishes Split Again	4
Parish Added a Mission	2
Linked to Another Parish or Shares a Pastor	136
Resident Replaced with Non-Resident Pastor	34
Clustered	37
Partnered	6
Twinned	8
Linked/Clustered Under One Pastor	48
Parishes Collaborate in Planning	3
Assigned to a Parish Director	35
Other (change from Shared Pastor to Separate Pastors)	2
Total	273

As this table shows, types of parish changes have been grouped under four major categories:

1. Merged or Suppressed
2. Erected
3. Linked to Another Parish (or Parishes) or Shares a Pastor
4. Assigned to a Parish Director

In the body of this chapter, responses to questions in the survey are compared among respondents of three of these categories: leaders of parishes that have been merged or suppressed, leaders of parishes that have been linked to another parish or share a pastor, and leaders of parishes that have been assigned to a parish director. There are too few cases of leaders whose parishes have been newly erected for separate generalization.

Characteristics of Respondents

This section briefly summarizes demographic characteristics of the pastors and parish directors who responded to the survey: their age and whether they are ordained, unordained religious, or unwowed laity. It also summarizes respondents' involvement in the parish: the time they were appointed as leaders of the parish, the number of years they have spent at the parish, and the current hours per week that they work there. Finally, the section summarizes two characteristics of the parishes: geographical region, and number of households.

Ordained, Religious, or Lay

About one in seven respondents is someone other than a priest. Not surprisingly, respondents who are not priests are concentrated in parishes that have parish directors. For example, 2 percent of respondents whose parishes have been merged or suppressed is someone other than a priest. In comparison, about two-thirds of respondents for parishes that have parish directors are not priests.

3.2: Status of Respondents	
Priest	87%
Deacon	2%
Religious Sister	6%
Lay Woman	4%
Lay Man	1%

Age and Time of Appointment at the Parish

Almost two thirds of the respondents are over 50. The median age of respondents is 55. Slightly more than half of them were already pastors or parish directors of their respective parishes before reorganization. About one-third were appointed at the time of reorganization. The remainder were appointed after reorganization.

The table below combines information about when respondents were appointed to the parish and whether they are still there. Most respondents who were at the parish before reorganization are no longer there (in some cases because the parish was suppressed as part of a merger). However, a majority of respondents who were appointed at the time of reorganization or after reorganization are still at the parish.

3.3: Time of Appointment and Current Position	
Appointed Before Reorganization	56%
Still at Parish	25%
No Longer at Parish	31%
Appointed at Time of Reorganization	32%
Still at Parish	24%
No Longer at Parish	8%
Appointed After Reorganization	12%
Still at Parish	10%
No Longer at Parish	2%

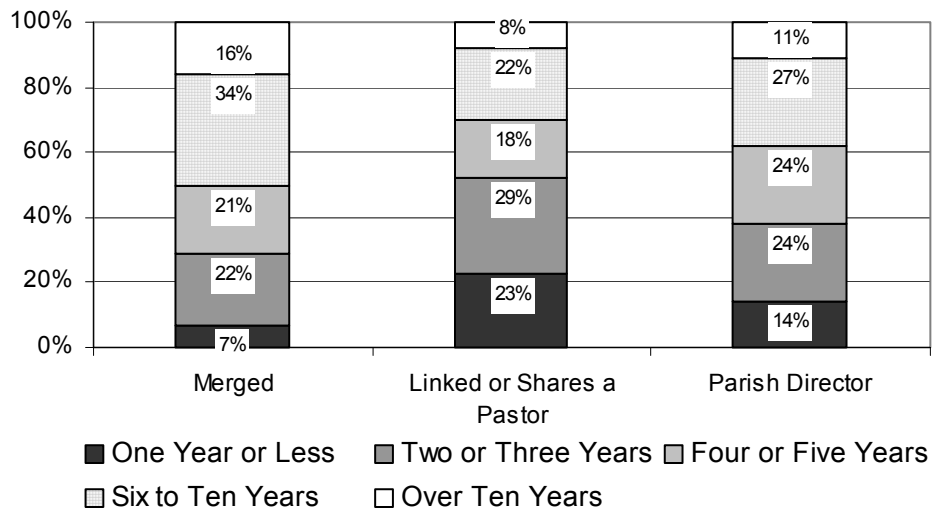
Years Employed at the Parish

The median number of years respondents have been employed at the parish is four.

- About one in six respondents (16%) have been at the parish for a year or less.
- More than a quarter (27%) have been at the parish for two or three years.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) have been at the parish for four or five years.
- About four in ten (38%) have been at the parish for six years or more.

The bar graph below compares three types of respondents on the number of years they have been at the parish: respondents whose parishes have been merged, those whose parishes have been linked or share a pastor, and those who have been appointed as parish directors. As the graph shows, pastors and parish directors of parishes that have been merged tend to have spent more years at the parish than respondents whose parishes underwent other types of change. For example, 50 percent of respondents whose parishes merged have been at the parish for six years or more. This compares to 30 percent of those whose parishes share a pastor and 38 percent of those whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director.

3.4: Years at the Parish by Type of Parish Change



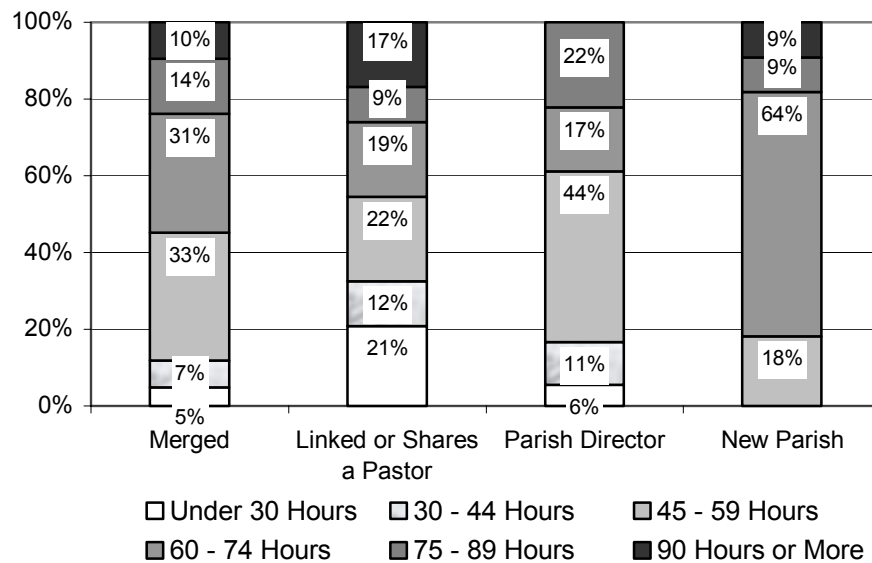
Hours Per Week Working in the Parish

Respondents who are still assigned to the parish typically work about nine hours a day and six days a week at the parish. Hours per week at the parish has been estimated by multiplying hours per day by days per week. Those who reported working 24 hours per day were eliminated from this analysis; 126 hours per week (7 days at 18 hours a day) was considered the practical maximum.

- More than half of all respondents work between 45 and 74 hours per week: 28 percent work 45 to 59 hours per week and 26 percent work 60 to 74 hours per week.
- Nearly one fourth work at the parish 75 or more hours per week. This includes 11 percent who work 75 to 89 hours per week and 12 percent who work 90 or more hours per week.
- The remaining respondents report working less than 45 hours per week at the parish, including 9 percent working 30 to 44 hours and 14 percent working less than 30 hours per week at the parish.

As shown in the figure on the following page, respondents starting a new parish all report working at least 45 hours a week. Those whose parishes have been combined in a merger are the next most likely to spend at least 45 hours per week working in the parish. Those whose parishes have been linked to another parish are most likely to work less than 30 hours per week, but they are also more likely than any other group to work 90 hours or more per week. Almost all parish directors work more than 30 hours per week and none work 90 hours or more weekly.

3.5: Years at the Parish by Type of Parish Change



Other Assignments

Among respondents still assigned to the parish, half are responsible for at least one other parish, and 30 percent are also involved in non-parish ministry. Only one-third do not have any other assignment. The total adds to more than 100 percent because some have more than one type of additional assignment.

Other parish(es)	48%
Non-parish ministry	30%
Mission(s)	6%
None	33%

Not surprisingly, most respondents whose parishes are linked or share a pastor say that they are responsible for another parish. Half of respondents whose parishes were merged are involved in non-parish ministry.

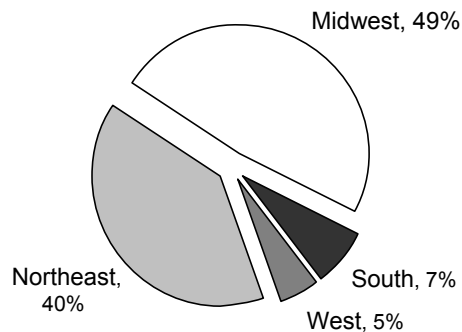
	Merged	Linked or Shares a Pastor	Parish Director
Other Parish(es)	25%	73%	23%
Non-Parish Ministry	50%	34%	19%

Characteristics of Parishes

Geographical Region

Parishes are grouped into four geographical regions based on major U.S. Census categories. The parishes of nearly nine-tenths of respondents are in the Northeast or Midwest. Overall, responses by region are comparable to the geographic distribution for the mailing list.

3.8: Respondents by Geographical Region



Number of Households in the Parish

While many individual parishes did change in size, the overall distribution of parishes by size remains about the same before and after reorganization.

**3.9: Number of Households
Before Reorganization and Now**

	Before Reorganization	Now
Under 150 Households	20%	18%
150 - 399 Households	28%	29%
400 - 799 Households	26%	24%
800 + Households	26%	29%

By Type of Parish Change

The median parish size reported among respondents in merged parishes was 850 households, while the median among parishes that are linked or share a priest was 375 households, and it was 350 households among those that are assigned to a parish director.

Change in Number of Households (Before Reorganization to the Present)

About two fifths of parishes increased in size from before reorganization to the present. This includes 15 percent that experienced modest growth (+1% to +10%), 21 percent that had substantial growth (+11% to +99%), and 4 percent that at least doubled in size. Another two fifths experienced no change in size. Lastly, one fifth of

parishes experienced a loss of households: 10 percent had a modest loss (-1% to -10%) and 11 percent had a larger loss.

By Type of Parish Change

- About half of parishes that have been linked to another parish or share a pastor have not experienced change in number of households. In contrast, only about one in five parishes that has experienced a merger has not changed in size. About three in ten that have been assigned to a parish director have not changed in size.
- More than 40 percent of merged parishes report a decrease in size, compared to only one in seven parishes that have been linked or share a pastor or have been assigned to a parish director.
- Parishes that have been assigned to a parish director are most likely to have experienced an increase in number of households.

3.10: Change in Number of Households by Type of Parish Change			
	Merged	Linked or Shares a Pastor	Parish Director
Decreased 11 to 99%	27%	5%	3%
Decreased 1 to 10%	14%	8%	11%
No Change	21%	49%	31%
Increased 1 to 10%	10%	14%	29%
Increased 11 to 99%	20%	21%	26%
Increased 100% or More	8%	3%	0%

Changes in the Parish Accompanying Reorganization

Most respondents who were at the parish both before and after reorganization report that their time dedicated to administrative responsibilities increased with reorganization. Half also reported that the willingness of parishioners to volunteer also increased. The fact that those reporting increases exceeded those reporting decreases by 40 percentage points in both of these categories is indicative of an increase in the complexity of parishes and of pastors' duties.

- About six in ten respondents who were at the parish both before and after reorganization report that the time they spent on administrative responsibilities increased. About one in five reports that time on administrative responsibilities decreased.
- Half of respondents report that the willingness of their parishioners to volunteer increased with reorganization. Only one in ten reports that parishioners became less willing to volunteer.
- About three in ten respondents report that the time they spent on direct pastoral care decreased. Slightly more report that it increased.
- About three in ten respondents say that their effectiveness increased and that diocesan support for their work increased.

3.11: Changes Associated With Parish Reorganization

	Decreased	Stayed the Same	Increased
Your time spent on administrative responsibilities	19%	22%	59%
Willingness of parishioners to volunteer	10%	40%	50%
Expectations of parishioners toward your ministry	11%	50%	39%
Effectiveness of other paid parish staff	7%	57%	36%
Your time spent on direct pastoral care	31%	33%	36%
Your effectiveness	23%	46%	31%
Diocesan support for your work	16%	55%	29%

By Type of Parish Change

Respondents whose parishes are linked or share a pastor were six times as likely to report an increase in time spent on administration, as to report a decrease. By comparison, among those whose parishes have been involved in a merger, increases were nearly twice as likely as decreases. (It is not possible to analyze parish director situations.)

3.12: Changes Associated with Parish Reorganization, by Type of Parish Change

	Decreased	Stayed the Same	Increased
<i>Time Spent on Administration</i>			
Merged	27%	28%	45%
Linked or Shares a Pastor	12%	18%	70%
<i>Expectations of Parishioners</i>			
Merged	4%	67%	29%
Linked or Shares a Pastor	20%	35%	45%
<i>Effectiveness of Parish Staff</i>			
Merged	8%	47%	45%
Linked or Shares a Pastor	7%	65%	28%
<i>Time Spent on Direct Pastoral Care</i>			
Merged	28%	47%	25%
Linked or Shares a Pastor	29%	24%	47%

The greatest change in expectations of parishioners tends to be reported by respondents whose parishes share a pastor with other parishes. These pastors are relatively likely to report some change in expectations (either an increase or a decrease), while those whose parishes were involved in a merger are more likely to report no change in expectations.

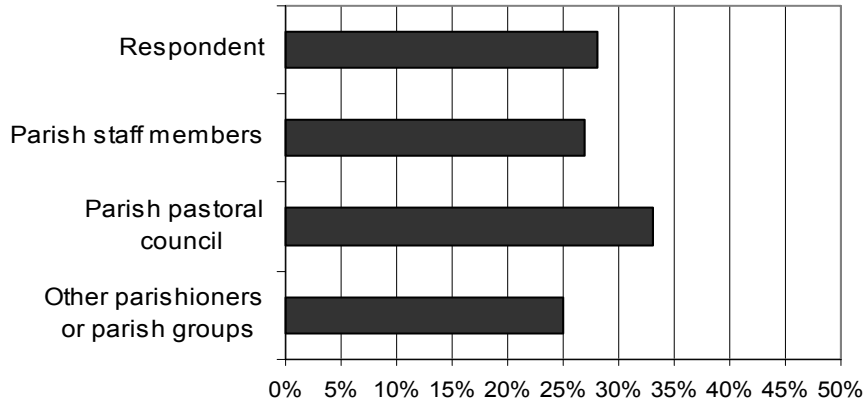
Respondents whose parishes have been involved in a merger are more likely than those whose parishes are linked or share a pastor to perceive the effectiveness of “other paid parish staff” as having increased.

Respondents whose parishes have been linked are more likely than those whose parishes have been involved in a merger to report an increase in the time they spend on direct pastoral care.

Training for Parish Leaders and Members

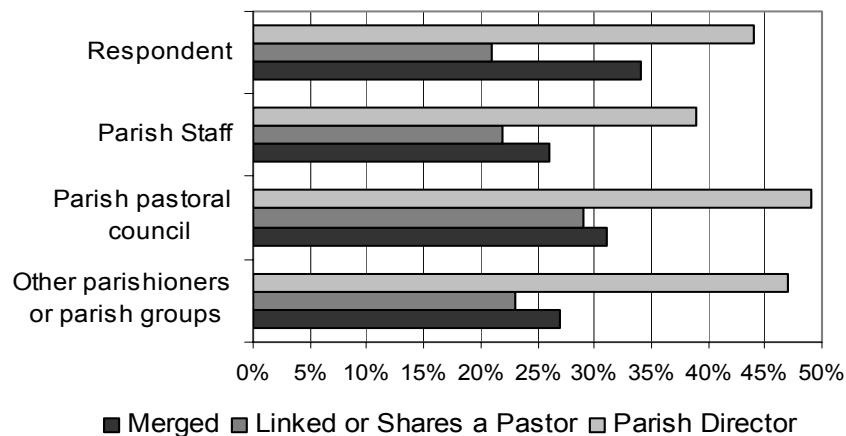
One-third of respondents report that members of the parish pastoral council received special training for the reorganization. A quarter report that parishioners or parish groups received such training.

3.13: Special Training Received



Between 25 and 30 percent of respondents report that they themselves and parish staff members received special training for dealing with the reorganization. Training for reorganization has been most common in parishes that were assigned to a parish director.

3.14: Special Training Received, by Type of Change



Potential Helpfulness of Training

Over 80 percent of respondents say that training would be of at least “some” help for each of several types of leaders and parish members.

Respondents were asked how helpful it would be for each of several types of people to receive training for dealing with reorganization. Four response categories ranged from “not at all” helpful to “very much” helpful. The table above summarizes the responses in two columns. The first column lists the percentage of respondents who said

either that training would be of “some” or “very much” help. The second column lists only the percentage of respondents who said that training would be of “very much” help.

3.15: Assessment of How Helpful Special Training Would Be For Dealing with Parish Reorganization		
	Some or Very Much	Very Much Only
Respondent	85%	55%
Parish staff members	87%	55%
Parish pastoral council	89%	57%
Other parishioners or parish groups	83%	49%
Diocesan leaders	89%	58%

Differences in perceptions of how helpful training would be for each of the various groups tend to be small. About 50 to 60 percent of respondents say that training would be of “very much” help for each of the five people or groups listed.

Respondents whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director are least likely to perceive training as potentially of “very much” help to diocesan leaders (31%). By comparison, 70 percent of those whose parishes have been involved in a merger, and 59 percent of those whose parishes are linked or share a pastor, say that training would be of “very much” help to diocesan leaders.

Input of Parishioners and Diocesan Leaders

While more than half of respondents reported that everyone had “some” or “very much” input in the reorganization, they perceived a large gap between input by diocesan leaders and input by participants at the parish level.

3.16: Input Regarding the Reorganization		
	Some or Very Much	Very Much Only
Diocesan leaders	80%	61%
Yourself	65%	43%
Parish pastoral council	61%	35%
Parish staff members	55%	28%
Other parishioners or parish groups	51%	18%

- More than 40 percent of respondents report that they themselves had “very much” input in the reorganization. Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents who were at the parish before reorganization more often reported “very much” input than those who were appointed at the time of reorganization (58 percent compared with 28 percent).
- Slightly more than one-third of respondents report that parish pastoral councils had “very much” input, and slightly more than one-fourth report that parish staff members had “very much” input.

By Type of Parish Change

Respondents whose parishes were merged are more likely than other respondents to say that each type of person or group had at least “some” input in reorganization.

3.17: Input, by Type of Parish Change At Least “Some” Input Reported			
	Merged	Linked or Share	Parish Director
Yourself	79%	58%	57%
Parish pastoral council	73%	53%	56%
Parish staff members	68%	49%	48%
Other parishioners or parish groups	63%	44%	46%

By Scope of Planning Effort

Linking parish and diocesan responses reveals that respondents from dioceses where the scope of the planning effort was diocesan-wide are more likely than other respondents to say that they themselves, their councils, and their staffs had “some” or “very much” input in the reorganization process.

3.18: Input, by Scope of the Planning Effort “Some” or “Very Much” Input Reported		
	Diocesan Scope	Smaller Scope
Yourself	69%	47%
Parish pastoral council	64%	47%
Parish staff members	57%	41%

Staffing

Sharing of Parish Staff Members

Given the large number of respondents from parishes that are linked or share a pastor, it is not surprising that over 60 percent of them said the parish shares a pastor with another parish. Parishes that share a pastor are much more likely to share other staff, as well.

3.19: Staff Shared With One or More Other Parishes, by Pastor Status			
	ALL	Pastor Shared	Pastor Not Shared
Religious education staff (e.g. DRE/CRE)	33%	47%	14%
Deacon(s)	22%	33%	7%
General pastoral minister(s)	22%	35%	3%
Liturgical ministry staff	17%	27%	3%
Social ministry staff (social justice, outreach)	17%	23%	8%
Parochial vicar(s)/associate pastor(s)	13%	22%	3%
Other ministerial staff	30%	40%	15%

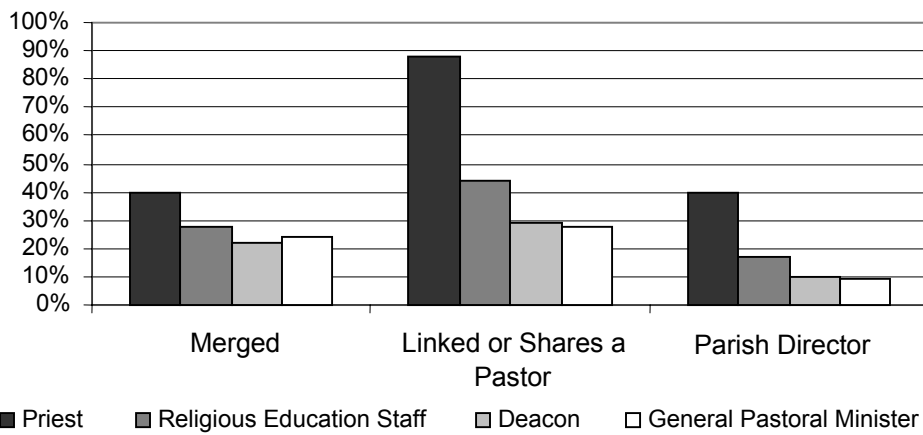
One-third of respondents reported that the parish shares religious education staff, and more than one-fifth reported that the parish shares staff who are deacons and general pastoral ministers. One-sixth reported sharing liturgical ministers and social ministry staff, while just one in eight reported sharing an associate pastor. Other types of ministerial staff, such as business manager, youth minister, Hispanic minister, and bookkeeper, are shared by 30 percent of parishes. In all cases, most of this sharing occurs in parishes that also share a pastor.

By Type of Parish Change

Four in ten respondents whose parishes have been involved in a merger or who were appointed as parish directors report that a priest is shared.

- Respondents whose parishes have been linked are most likely to report that the parish shares a religious education staff.
- Respondents whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director are least likely to report sharing a religious education staff, a deacon, or general pastoral ministers.

3.20: Shared Staff by Type of Parish Change



Sufficiency of Parish Staffing

When respondents were asked whether the parish staff was sufficient, more than half reported that parish staffing was sufficient before reorganization and also sufficient afterwards.

3.21: Staff Sufficiency Before and After Reorganization

		After Reorganization	
		Insufficient	Sufficient
Before Reorganization	Sufficient	13%	57%
	Insufficient	19%	11%

- About one in five respondents reports that staffing was insufficient both before and after reorganization.

- About one in ten reports that staffing was insufficient before reorganization but was sufficient after. And about one in eight reports that staffing was sufficient before reorganization but insufficient after.

By Type of Parish Change

Though overall differences by type of parish change are relatively small, respondents whose parishes have been merged are more likely than others to describe staffing as sufficient before reorganization but insufficient afterward. Respondents in parishes that are linked or share a pastor are more likely than others to describe staffing as insufficient, both before and after reorganization. Respondents in parishes that have been assigned to a parish director are least likely to describe staffing in the parish as sufficient, before and after reorganization.

By Staff Changes

To understand how respondents tend to assess staff sufficiency in terms of actual staff change, a three-point scale (declined; no change; improved) on this subject was compared with similar scales created for changes in priest staff and changes in non-priest staff. Assessment of staff sufficiency is not associated with changes in the level of priest staffing, but it is associated with changes in non-priest staffing. When non-priest staffing was increased, respondents were more likely to report an improvement in staff sufficiency, and when non-priest staffing was reduced, they were more likely to report a decrease in staff sufficiency.

Number of Staff Members Before and After Reorganization

More parishes reported more different kinds of staff after reorganization. Fewer parishes had priests assigned to them full-time after reorganization than before, and more parishes had priests with part-time assignments after reorganization than before. “Full-time” priests are replaced with many different kinds of staff.

- The largest changes were in priest staffing, where the share of parishes with at least one priest assigned full-time dropped from 85 percent before reorganization to 67 percent after reorganization, and the share of parishes with at least one priest assigned part-time increased from just 29 percent before reorganization to 44 percent afterwards.
- The proportions of deacons, general pastoral ministers, and liturgical and social ministry staff increased considerably. Even religious education and volunteer staff showed small increases.

3.22: Parish Staff Changes		
Percentage reporting at least one of each type on staff		
	Before Reorganization	After Reorganization
Priests with full-time assignments	85%	67%
Priests with part-time assignments	29%	44%
Deacons	34%	42%
General pastoral ministers	39%	47%
Religious education staff	80%	84%
Liturgical ministry staff	48%	56%
Social ministry staff	20%	27%
Volunteer staff	51%	54%

Note: percentages are reported for each item only for respondents who reported both the before and after numbers for that item.

The following table summarizes responses to the same set of questions in a slightly different way. For each type of staff member, it shows the percentage of parishes that fit each of four categories.

3.23: Change in Staff Members, Before to After Reorganization				
Percentage reporting each type of situation				
	Parish Had None Before, None After	Parish Had At Least One Before, No Change	Parish Had An Increase	Parish Had A Decrease
Priests with full-time assignments	12%	32%	7%	49%
Priests with part-time assignments	49%	19%	24%	9%
Deacons	53%	25%	16%	6%
General pastoral ministers	49%	22%	22%	7%
Religious education staff	14%	59%	16%	11%
Liturgical ministry staff	43%	35%	16%	6%
Social ministry staff	72%	12%	12%	4%
Volunteer staff	42%	29%	23%	6%

- Approximately half of the parishes experienced a decrease in priests assigned full-time, while fewer than one in ten experienced an increase.
- About one in four parishes experienced an increase in priests assigned part-time, while only about one in ten experienced a decrease.
- Fewer than one in four parishes experienced an increase in each of the remaining types of staff members, and relatively few experienced an increase.

By Type of Parish Change

Parishes resulting from mergers were most likely to have had no change in their priest staffing, but they were also much more likely to have experienced a decrease in other staff. The following table shows how these two types of staffing changes match up with one another, by type of parish change.

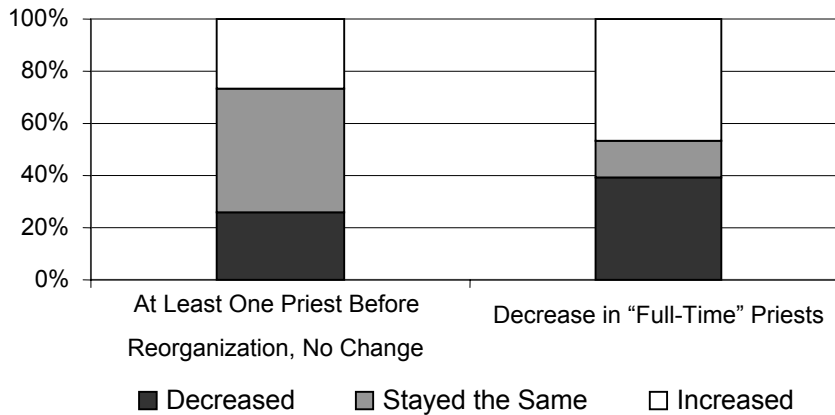
3.24: Staffing Changes by Type of Parish Change				
		Merged	Linked or Share	Parish Director
Decrease in priests				
Other Staff	Increase	5%	25%	39%
	Same	10%	25%	11%
	Decrease	21%	11%	11%
Same number of priests				
Other Staff	Increase	21%	15%	16%
	Same	19%	17%	8%
	Decrease	9%	1%	8%
Increase in priests				
Other Staff	Increase	10%	5%	5%
	Same	3%	2%	3%
	Decrease	2%	1%	0%

In merged parishes, staffing changes tend to reinforce each other. Among merged parishes, staffing was decreased in both areas 21 percent of the time, twice as often as this occurred in the other two parish categories, and staffing was increased in both areas for 10 percent of merged parishes, compared with 5 percent in the other two parish groups. On the other hand, in the other two parish categories, the pattern of change is one of substituting other staff for the loss of priests. An increase in other staff occurred with a decrease in priest staff most frequently in parishes with a parish director (39%) and least often in merged parishes (5%).

Time Spent on Direct Pastoral Care by Change in Priests Assigned Full-Time

Earlier, this report showed that about one-third of respondents who were at the parish both before and after reorganization said their time spent on direct pastoral care increased while nearly as many said that it decreased. The graph below breaks down responses on time spent in direct pastoral care by change in number of priests assigned full-time at the parish.

3.25: Change of Time Spent in Direct Pastoral Care by Change in Number of Priests Assigned Full-Time



Respondents whose parishes had at least one priest assigned full-time before reorganization and had the same number afterward are more likely than those whose parishes experienced a decrease in priests assigned full-time to say their time spent in direct pastoral care did not change. Those whose parish lost a “full-time” priest are more likely to say that time in pastoral care changed (either increased or decreased).

There are too few respondents whose parishes experienced an increase in number of priests assigned full-time or whose parishes had no “full-time” priests before and after reorganization for separate analysis.

Type of Additional Staff that Would be Most Helpful

In a short open-ended question, respondents were asked what type of additional staff person would be most helpful for the parish at the present time. A total of 171 respondents wrote in at least one type of staff person. A summary of their responses is found in the following table, listing the top ten position types.

3.26: Top Ten List of Most Helpful Additional Staff

Type of Position	
1-General pastoral ministers (includes deacons, religious)	34%
2-Administrators and assistants (includes secretarial, maintenance)	17%
3-Business managers (includes accountants, fundraisers)	12%
4-Liturgical ministers	12%
5-Religious educators	11%
6-Youth ministers	8%
7-Priests	7%
8-Peacemakers (social/justice minister)	6%
9-Caregivers (minister to sick and elderly; nurse)	6%
10-Communicators (bilingual minister; evangelizer)	2%

Numbers add to more than 100% because some respondents listed more than one. Other skills mentioned by respondents were facilitation, negotiation, family life, and volunteer coordination.

- General pastoral ministers, including deacons and religious, are the most frequently mentioned type of staff person that would be helpful. More than one-third of all respondents who answered this question would like a general pastoral minister.
- Administrators and assistants, including secretarial and maintenance staff, are the second most frequently mentioned type of staff person, viewed as helpful by 17 percent of those answering the question.
- The next three types of staff person that respondents believe would be most helpful are business managers, liturgical ministers, and religious educators.

By Type of Parish Change

- Respondents whose parishes have been linked or share a pastor are most likely to identify a general pastoral minister or a business manager as potentially the most helpful type of staff member.

Difficulties and Results

Perceptions About Difficulties

Respondents are most likely to identify “coordination and balance of time between parishes,” “finding enough lay volunteers,” and “unhappiness of parishioners with changes brought by reorganization” as the greatest difficulties accompanying or following reorganization.

- Excluding those who indicated that it does not apply to their situation, more than half of respondents said that coordination and balance of time between parishes has been at least “somewhat” difficult since reorganization.
- Slightly less than half of respondents say that finding enough lay volunteers and unhappiness of parishioners have been at least “somewhat” of a problem.

- Slightly fewer, about two-fifths say that interaction of parishioners from former parishes has been at least “somewhat” of a problem. (Note that over a third of respondents said it does not apply, however).
- A third or fewer say that support from the diocese and interaction of staff members from former parishes have been at least “somewhat” of a difficulty.

3.27: Extent to Which Issues Have Been Difficult Since the Reorganization		
	Somewhat or Very Much	Very Much Only
Coordination and balance of time between parishes	52%	19%
Finding enough lay volunteers	49%	12%
Unhappiness of parishioners with changes brought by reorganization	47%	14%
Interaction of parishioners from former parishes	41%	6%
Support from arch/diocese	33%	15%
Interaction of staff members from former parishes	27%	7%

Note: Calculation of percentages excludes those who said the statement does not apply to the reorganization of their parish.

By Type of Parish Change

Overall, respondents whose parishes have been linked or share a pastor appear to have significantly more difficulty than average. Parish directors and pastors in new parishes report less difficulty.

The extent to which various difficulties exist depends on the type of parish change. The following table presents an index score for each item in order to facilitate comparison between various types of change. Respondents whose parishes have been involved in a merger are less likely than those whose parishes have been linked or share a pastor to identify coordination of time and interaction of staff members from former parishes as difficulties. (This issue is reported as applying to very few parishes that have had a parish director appointed.)

3.28: Extent of Difficulties by Type of Change					
	OVERALL SCORE	Linked/Share Pastor	Merged/Closed	New Parish	Parish Administrator
Coordination of time between parishes	50	58	<u>38</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>42</u>
Unhappiness of parishioners with changes	47	48	55	41	<u>35</u>
Finding enough lay volunteers	46	48	48	31	<u>39</u>
Interaction of parishioners	40	38	47	33	<u>26</u>
Support from the arch/diocese	36	37	37	29	34
Interaction of staff members	27	33	<u>19</u>	20	21

Significantly more difficulty = **Large Bold**; Significantly less difficulty = Underlined Italics
 Index Scale for Scores: 0 = none; 100 = very much

Respondents whose parishes have been involved in a merger are most likely to report that interaction of parishioners and unhappiness of parishioners with changes brought about by reorganization as difficulties in their situations. Those who have been appointed as parish directors are least likely to report unhappiness of parishioners as being a difficulty.

Perceptions About Meeting Needs

When respondents were asked whether parish needs were being met before and after reorganization, over sixty percent reported that parish needs were met both before and after reorganization.

		After Reorganization	
		Not Met	Met
Before Reorganization	Met	9%	62%
	Not Met	11%	18%

- Nearly one in five report that parish needs were being met after reorganization that had not been met before.
- Nearly one in ten report that while parish needs were being met before reorganization, they were not met after reorganization.
- Just over 10 percent report that parish needs are still not being met, even after reorganization.

By Type of Parish Change

Respondents whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director are most likely to say that parish needs were not met before reorganization but are met now. On the other hand, respondents whose parishes have been merged are most likely to report that parish needs that were being met before reorganization are not being met now.

	Merge	Link/Share	Par. Admin.
Not Met Before, Met After	10%	15%	30%
Met Before and After	60%	62%	65%
Not Met Before or After	13%	14%	3%
Met Before, Not Met After	17%	9%	3%

Perceptions About Other Results

Nearly nine-tenths of respondents agree at least “somewhat” that the reorganization was carefully planned.

- Three-fourths or slightly more agree at least “somewhat” that the pastor was helpful in dealing with grief, that parish finances are currently healthy, and that ministry in general has been enhanced.
- Two-thirds of respondents or slightly more agree at least “somewhat” that positive elements of the parishes have been retained and that the parish has a greater sense of common purpose since reorganization.
- About three-fifths of respondents agree at least somewhat that reorganization was accompanied by “appropriate parish ceremonies and events,” with about one-third “strongly” agreeing.

- Fewer than half of respondents agree even “somewhat” that there was little opposition to the reorganization.

3.31: Extent to Which Positive Results Were Achieved

Results	Somewhat or Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree Only
The reorganization was carefully planned	88%	35%
The pastor was helpful in dealing with parishioners’ grief	79%	32%
The parish financial situation is healthy	78%	43%
Ministry in general has been enhanced	75%	43%
Positive elements of the parish(es) have been retained since the reorganization	70%	59%
The parish has a greater sense of common purpose since reorganization	68%	28%
The reorganization was accompanied by appropriate parish ceremonies and events	61%	33%

By Type of Parish Change

Respondents whose parishes have been involved in a merger are most likely to agree that “the reorganization was carefully planned.” Those whose parishes are linked or share a pastor are least likely to agree “somewhat” or “strongly.”

Respondents whose parishes were involved in a merger are also most likely to agree that “the pastor was helpful in dealing with parishioners’ grief.”

Respondents whose parishes were merged are most likely to “strongly” agree that “the reorganization was accompanied by appropriate parish ceremonies and events.” Respondents whose parishes are linked or share a pastor are least likely to agree.

Respondents whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director are most likely to agree at least “somewhat” that “the parish has a greater sense of common purpose since reorganization.” They are also most likely to agree “strongly” that “positive elements of the parish(es) have been retained.”

Respondents whose parishes have been assigned to a parish director are most likely to agree “strongly” that “ministry in general has been enhanced” by the reorganization. They are also most likely to agree “strongly” that “the parish financial situation is healthy.”

By Diocesan Process Factors

Parish results are connected to aspects of the diocesan process in a number of areas. Where diocesan respondents said the diocesan pastoral council was involved in the reorganization effort, 44 percent of parish respondents strongly agreed that the reorganization was carefully planned, compared with only 27 percent in dioceses where the council was not involved. More parish respondents strongly agreed that there was careful planning when the scope of the process was diocesan wide than when it was more limited (39% to 18%).

The involvement of the diocesan pastoral council was also important in another area. Where the diocesan pastoral council was involved in the reorganization effort, 73 percent of parish respondents believed their parishes have a greater sense of purpose after reorganization, compared with 58 percent in dioceses where the council was not involved.

The most important factor leading many dioceses to consider reorganization was the declining or aging presbyterate. But in dioceses where this was only “somewhat” or “a little” important, 78 percent of parish respondents believed their parishes have a greater sense of purpose after reorganization, compared with 65 percent in dioceses where this factor was very important. Similarly, 83 percent believed parish ministry has been enhanced when this factor was “somewhat” or “a little” important, which drops to 73 percent among parish respondents from dioceses where the issue of declining numbers of and aging priests was a very important factor.

Diocesan goals also make a difference. In dioceses that had “no parish would close” as a goal or criterion, parish respondents were *less* likely to see the reorganization as carefully planned. But in dioceses where this was limited to “no financially viable parish would close” or “no parish with a viable number of parishioners would close,” the outcome is reversed, and parish respondents were slightly *more* likely to see the reorganization as carefully planned.

3.32: Effect of Selected Diocesan Goals on Perceptions of Planning (Respondents strongly agree that reorganization was carefully planned)		
Importance:	Somewhat or very much	Little or not at all
"No parish would close"	19%	44%
"No financially viable parish would close"	41%	31%
"No parish with a viable number of parishioners would close"	37%	31%

Effectiveness and Parish Outcomes

Four of the seven results discussed above are parish outcomes, perhaps the most important basis for assessing parish reorganization. When these items are compared with respondents’ self-perceived effectiveness, a strong association emerges. In fact, the first three items here are among those most strongly associated with effectiveness. These relationships indicate that, at least to some degree, pastors and parish directors base judgments of their own effectiveness on positive parish outcomes.

The table below uses an index to compare respondents who reported an increase in effectiveness with those who reported a decrease. The scale ranges from plus-100 for strong agreement with the statement to minus-100 for strong disagreement with it.

3.33: Parish Outcome Index, by Increase or Decrease in Effectiveness		
Outcome Item	Reporting Increased Effectiveness	Reporting Decreased Effectiveness
Ministry in general has been enhanced.	78	-4
Parish has a greater sense of common purpose.	51	-3
Positive elements of parishes have been retained.	89	58
Parish financial situation is healthy.	61	31

Respondents who reported decreased effectiveness actually showed a slight overall disagreement with the two most important items in this table, while those who believe their effectiveness has increased were likely to agree with both statements, especially that ministry in general has been enhanced. The other two items received positive scores from both respondent groups, but the index values were much higher if effectiveness was seen to have increased. In all four cases, the large difference indicates that pastors give a great deal of weight to parish outcomes in assessing their effectiveness.

Effectiveness of Diocesan Efforts

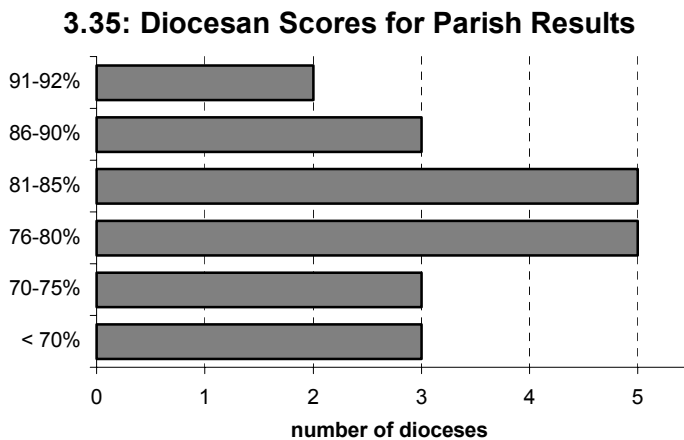
In CPPCD’s 1995 study of parish reorganization efforts, several dioceses were highlighted through case studies. While this approach can be very informative, the selected dioceses were not necessarily employing the best practices or achieving the best results.

In order to identify dioceses that may merit further study for the purpose of developing case studies based on best practices, all surveys were grouped by diocese. Then average responses were calculated for those dioceses with five or more completed surveys. Next, eight measures of effectiveness were chosen from among the survey items for developing an overall score for assessing each diocese’s reorganization efforts.

The eight measures include one related to the planning process, four related to parish outcomes, and three related to the pastor.

3.34: Measures of Effectiveness of Diocesan Efforts	
Planning Process	The reorganization was carefully planned.
	Parish needs are being met after the reorganization.
	There is an increase in parish needs being met.
Parish Outcomes	Parish ministry has been enhanced.
	The parish has a greater sense of purpose.
	More time is spent on direct pastoral care.
Outcomes for the Pastor	Less time is spent on administrative duties.
	There is an increase in personal effectiveness.

If the parish respondents somewhat agreed that their diocese’s effort was carefully planned, and their overall assessment was that it resulted in no net change in the pastor and parish outcome measures, the diocese would receive a score of 68%. It is important to note that even such a rating could be a positive result in situations of staff reductions or parish restructuring.



There are several important observations to be made about the distribution of diocesan scores. First, no diocese received a perfect score (100%); in fact, the highest score was 92%, so there is room for improvement even in the best dioceses. Second, of the 21 dioceses evaluated, 85 percent had scores of 70% or higher, meaning that they achieved some overall degree of positive outcomes. Third, since only those dioceses with at least five parish responses were considered in this analysis, other dioceses with fewer responses may also have highly positive

outcomes. And finally, five dioceses achieved scores that are substantially above average and representative of highly positive outcomes of parish reorganization efforts, indicating that they are likely to be engaging in approaches that qualify as best practices.

The score for each of these top five dioceses is based on at least eight surveys, lending greater reliability to their ratings. The five dioceses in which pastors have given very positive assessments of their dioceses' planning efforts (along with their respective scores) are:

- Archdiocese of Dubuque 92%
- Diocese of Syracuse 91%
- Diocese of Harrisburg 89%
- Archdiocese of Philadelphia 88%
- Diocese of Rochester 86%

What are some “best practices” that characterize these five dioceses and archdioceses? Four key elements that they have in common are:

- Planning is mandatory for all parishes throughout the diocese.
- The process makes use of middle-level structures (deaneries or vicariates; clusters).
- The process is highly consultative: at a minimum, it includes pastors, parish pastoral councils, and middle-level structures).
- The most important goal is that parishes maintain or achieve a full ministry program: four of the top five dioceses named this as a central principle.

Other important goals or criteria named by a majority of these five dioceses are: each parish would celebrate Eucharist every Sunday; priests would not be overextended; and Mass is accessible (no one would travel an unreasonable distance).

Other dioceses may also be utilizing these or other best practices, even though their scores are slightly lower. Scores can be affected by a number of factors, including: the design of the process; implementation of the plans; attitudes and abilities of parish leaders (especially survey respondents); and conditions faced by parishes in the diocese. Dioceses with lower scores are more likely to have problems in several of these areas.

Comments on Role Changes

The first of three open-ended questions on the questionnaire sent to parish leaders asked them how their role had changed as a result of the reorganization.

Leadership is seen by many respondents as a very important part of their work in these parishes. Parish directors are, understandably, the most likely to identify this as a dimension of their role change. In general, respondents observed that pastoring in a time of transition “demanded strong leadership and peace-making skills.” It also means helping people work through their loss, hurt, and fear, playing, as one pastor put it, “the important role of pastor-healer, pastor-reconciler, pastor-unifier.”

Many of their responses addressed issues raised in earlier questions related to workload and the division of their time between pastoral and administrative matters. Others addressed a variety of staffing issues. Comments on these topics tended to vary by the type of change experienced by the respondent and by their “newness” in the role.

Pastors of multiple parishes or in clustered parishes had similar types of responses. They generally reported spending less time with people and more time on administrative affairs and, for some, on travel between parishes.

Their comments about staffing noted the difficulty of having more work but no additional help. In some cases, the expressed reason was that they couldn't afford to hire people for the professional and support positions they felt were needed. Other staff-related comments spoke of needing to involve lay people more in the work of the parish and of the challenges this presents, because these people require training, supervision, and support. One pastor noted that pastors themselves sometimes need new training and skills to function effectively in these situations.

Mergers generated a mix of responses related to the level and type of work. Some indicated that they spent more time on administrative affairs, while others reported having more time for pastoral ministry. Where the merger followed a period of pastoring more than one predecessor parish, the change meant less duplication of effort.

In terms of staffing, pastors of merged parishes reported devoting more time to staff development, including finding ways to support and include staff. One pastor who had pastored both predecessor parishes noted the benefit of having one staff instead of two. Another pastor said that merging with another parish resulted in extra work, but also in extra staff.

Parish directors generally have added the responsibilities of administration to their previous duties as pastoral ministers. This usually means that priests assigned as sacramental ministers in these situations focus on sacramental and pastoral ministry and experience a decreased administrative load. For parish directors, either their total workload increases or their pastoral ministry decreases.

The principal staffing issue, when this arrangement is initially adopted, is the need for priests and parish directors to work together to foster parish acceptance.

Persons who are new to the role of parish leader, whether pastor or parish director, sometimes seem to be surprised by the amount of administrative work involved.

Through the use of in-depth interviews, the next chapter will explore in greater detail a number of the issues raised in this chapter by parish respondents.

Chapter 4

Voices of the Pastors and Parish Directors

To gain additional insights about the changes, practices, challenges, and training that pastors and other parish pastoral ministers have experienced in conjunction with parish restructuring, researchers conducted follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of the parish respondents. This chapter is a qualitative analysis of these interviews. It summarizes the descriptions and evaluations of the experiences of reorganization given by the pastoral leaders.

Interview Methodology

Identification of Interview Topics

The first step in creating an interview guide was to develop a list of possible subjects for the telephone interviews. This list, which came primarily from project design notes, was extensive.

On the subject of the pastor's role, potential questions covered areas such as changes in their duties and use of time, as well as their relationship with various groups within the parish (staff, council, parishioners) and beyond the parish (at the deanery or vicariate level). Other areas of interest relating to the pastor included living arrangements, qualifications, and training.

A second major subject was parish staffing. In this category, areas of interest included new titles, roles, and responsibilities, use of time, and effectiveness. Finding new staff, and the quality and kinds of preparation they require, and staff management issues were some other possible subjects. Finally, there was interest in exploring differences between volunteer and paid staff or between full-time and part-time staff.

Development of the Interview Guide

Given the numerous areas of interest, the next step was to narrow the list of topics by limiting the scope of the interview. Several researchers reviewed the list of possible interview topics and determined that it was more than twice as long as what would be manageable in a relatively short telephone interview. The researchers identified those questions that seemed most important and most directly connected to the data collected in the survey of pastors and other parish leaders.

A pre-test of the preliminary guide was conducted with two pastors, one who had experienced a parish merger, and one who had been given a second parish. After the pre-test, the project director made several small changes and additions to the guide, and detailed instructions were inserted. The final interview guide is shown in Appendix D.

Selection of Interviewees

The interview portion of this project involves the use of qualitative evaluation methods. In such situations, a purposeful sampling strategy is usually preferable to the random sampling approach generally used in quantitative survey research. Specifically, two purposeful sampling approaches were employed: the selection of extreme or critical cases, and the selection of cases to achieve maximum variation.

The most important criterion in the selection of pastors and other parish leaders to be interviewed was their potential to provide additional insights and clarification of important issues. To accomplish this, the researchers reviewed the surveys of all respondents, paying particular attention to their responses to the open-ended questions in which they had an opportunity to more fully express themselves. In many cases, these remarks also provided some indication about their general assessment of the restructuring experience. This criterion involved application of the extreme or critical case approach, in which researchers select those cases from which they can learn the most.

Other criteria were also used in the selection process in order to obtain a balanced picture of the national experience. In particular, a certain number of interviewees were selected from each change category, while also trying to achieve a regional distribution that reflected the parish respondent mix. In other words, an effort was made to achieve maximum variation in both geography and type of change experience.

Conducting and Reporting the Interviews

In addition to the project director, four other experienced researchers served as interviewers. The project director discussed the guide with the other researchers, and they reviewed two sample interview summaries prior to conducting and reporting their interviews.

Interviews ranged in length from 15 to 50 minutes. Interviewers took detailed notes during the interviews and/or taped them. Interview summaries were written up immediately afterwards to ensure accuracy and completeness. A total of 25 interviews were conducted. In the interview summaries, the names of the interviewees and the parishes have been changed.

Between January and July, 2002, telephone contact was made with a sample of 25 current pastors and parish directors. Pastoral leaders who were interviewed were selected from those who responded to the questionnaire based on the type of outcome experienced, the region of the country represented, and the type of parish reorganization experienced.

Respondents' comments on the parish survey were characterized as primarily positive, negative or neutral based on the content and tone of the survey responses to the following open-ended questions:

- What is the most important way your role in this parish has changed since the reorganization?
- What advice would you give to other parishes facing the type of reorganization your parish experienced?
- What advice would you give bishops facing similar reorganization issues in their dioceses?

Of the 25 interviews completed, 11 were characterized as primarily positive, eight primarily negative and six primarily neutral.

Participating Dioceses and Eparchies

As noted earlier, Appendix A contains a list of all 192 United States dioceses and eparchies. Those dioceses that responded to the 1995 and 2001 surveys, and those with parishes that were surveyed in 2001 are identified. The dioceses represented in the in-depth interviews conducted in 2002 and described in this chapter are also identified.

The following table compares the geographical distribution of the pastoral leaders surveyed in 2000 and those interviewed in the follow-up study in 2002. As the table shows, those participating in the survey were disproportionately concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest Census regions. The interviews are more evenly distributed but are still concentrated in the Midwest.

4.1: Parish Responses and Interviews, by Region				
Region	Parish Responses	Percent	Interviews	Percent
Northeast	106	39%	5	20%
Midwest	135	49%	12	48%
South	18	7%	4	16%
West	14	5%	4	16%

This is consistent with what was reported in chapter three of this study. Dioceses in the Midwest are more likely than those in other regions to have made changes to parishes since January 1995.

Eighty-three percent of responding dioceses in the Midwest report having made changes since January 1995. This compares to 71 percent in the West, 76 percent in the Northeast, and 58 percent in the South.

4.2: Parish Responses and Interviews, by Type of Parish Change (Reported by Parish Survey Respondents and in In-depth Interviews)		
	Surveys	Interviews
Changes in Parish Structures:		
“Linked” or “Clustered” Parishes	37%	32%
Merged Parishes	22%	24%
Erected New Parishes	7%	24%
Closed or Suppressed Parishes (not in a Merger)	5%	0%
Closed Parishes but Maintained Physically as Chapels or Missions	3%	0%
Changes in Pastoral Leadership:		
Replaced a Resident Pastor with a Parish Director	12%	20%
Replaced a Resident Pastor with Non-Resident Pastor	12%	0%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Types of Parish Changes

The survey of diocesan leaders found that linking or clustering parishes is the most common type of change to parishes among dioceses that have engaged in parish reorganization. Not surprisingly, parish leaders also reported on linking or clustering of parishes most frequently. Interviewers could not interview leadership in closed parishes nor were any interviews completed with non-resident pastors.

4.3: Distribution of Interviews, by Type of Change and Region						
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Total	%
Linked or clustered	2	3	2	1	8	32%
Merged	1	3	1	1	6	24%
Erected New Parish	1	4		1	6	24%
Parish Director	1	2	1	1	5	20%
	Grand Total				25	

The sample that was interviewed has a disproportionately high number of parish leaders from the Midwest who are reporting on the founding or erecting of new parishes. In two cases these founded parishes were actually the result of effecting a reversal of a recent previous action to merge two parishes.

Pastoral Leaders' Perceptions of Changes

The responses in the interviews were overwhelmingly affected by the type of change that the parish had experienced. For this reason, four groups of interview responses are reported: mergers, linkages or clusters of parishes, transition to parish director or coordinator and the formation or erection of a new parish.

In reporting on each of these four types of change, the material that is italicized is taken directly from the words of the pastors and other parish leaders, as quoted or paraphrased in the interview summaries. Regardless of the type of change, the interviews dealt with four major areas:

1. The effect of the change on the position of the person being interviewed,
2. The effect of the change on the other members of the parish staff,
3. Desirable training to support staff in these transitions, and
4. The learning for (arch)dioceses involved in these types of restructuring.

Mergers (6 cases)

“The role of the priest is changing rapidly. We need to learn how to get out there and really serve. Put administration in the hands of competent lay people.”

By their nature mergers require the consolidation of more than one parish into fewer parishes. Structurally it involves the suppression or closure of at least one parish as a canonical parish although, in some instances, the former parish church remains as a resource to the successor parish. In almost every case, it also involves considerable change in the spiritual life of the parish communities involved. In this study, six in depth interviews were conducted. Three of these were with parishes in the Midwest. One interview was conducted with parishes in each of the South, Northeast and West regions. The survey comments of four respondents could be characterized as neither positive nor negative. Two of the respondents had primarily negative survey comments.

Mergers: Impact on the Pastor

In all the interviews involving merged parishes, the respondent was the pastor of the recently merged parish. The impact on about half of these pastors has been considerable. Frequently the administrative responsibilities are lessened. This is particularly true when the pastor had been pastoring more than one parish prior to the merger. But the pastoral needs of the people are usually greater than they had been prior to the merger.

Before the merger the two churches did more things together. The liturgical styles were very different between the two churches. At the final liturgy, they began the liturgy at one church and finished at the merged church. Teaching roles have not changed much. Pastorally, lots of time and effort went into helping people grieve and become more inclusive. Administratively, before the merger it was very complicated being the head of two churches; there were other staff complications also at that time. They held onto the best of both styles of the two different churches. They kept in mind the ongoing merging of the gifts of the two communities - it's never done and over with. It continues every day. (Midwest pastor)

By its nature, the task of merging parishes puts the pastor in a role of having to mediate the traditions and history of two parishes or choose what needs to be preserved from the past as the new parish community moves into the future.

Each parish had a pastoral council before the merger. After the merger the councils came together as an advisory group to answer the question: "what should a new pastoral council for the new merged parish look like?" The recommendation was to elect 12 people from among the parishioners of the merged parish. That is, there was no "quota system" that a certain percentage must be from the old Holy Name or the former Redeemer. It helps in this case that both parishes were approximately equal in size.

The merger of the parishes presented a great challenge to Fr. John's leadership. His role required him to make difficult decisions, angering some people in order to bring health to the new parish. Before the merger, he said, each parish's attitude was "we are in favor of the merger as long as they come over here and do things our way." He realized he had to go against some traditions of the two parishes in order to bring them together. Sometimes he felt like the grim reaper. It was not rare for people to say to him, "You have killed the spirit of our parish." (West pastor)

One of the more difficult situations reported is when the people of the merged parishes perceive that one parish has become the "winner" and another, the "loser" as a result of the change.

The demands on the pastor can also be intensified as a result of continuing needs or by subsequent actions taken by the diocese, as exemplified by the following situation encountered by one pastor who oversaw the merger of two parishes and then was given an additional parish to pastor.

One cannot overestimate the anger of the people, especially St. Andrew, toward the merger. The previous two pastors left the parish when it became apparent that the diocese was going to merge the parishes. The people of St. Andrew were very angry, feeling that St. Lucy "took over." The anger increased three years after the merger when the official canonical corporation of St. Andrew was dissolved legally, with all proceeds going to the corporation of St. Lucy. In spite of the "we're all in this together talk" many St. Andrew people said that what happened was just what they feared - St. Andrew was closed and all their possessions given to St. Lucy.

One year after the merger Father Phil, the first native minority priest in the county in 150 years, was appointed to this parish for his first pastorate. Handling the touchy circumstances at St. Lucy would have been difficult enough, he reported. The diocese complicated the situation, however, by linking St. Lucy to St. Gregory, a parish of 1,000 households. The parishes are about seven miles apart.

Linkage means that each parish retains its own structures and groups. Father Phil noted he has "two of everything" to attend, from pastoral council meetings to penance services. He said he has not taken a vacation in the three years that he has been a pastor, and has had a total of seven days off. The pastors of other linked parishes in the diocese have an associate to help but the diocese has said that it does not have a qualified associate for Fr. Phil. The only concrete action that he has been able to take to move towards greater efficiency is to move St. Lucy's parish office to St. Gregory's facilities. Note that there are still two parish offices, each with its own secretary; now they are across the hall from each other instead of being seven miles apart. (South pastor)

Not all pastors reported an increased burden in their work as a result of the merger. The absence of a substantial increase in the workload seems to characterize those cases where the merger was worked out at the initiation of the pastor. a) However, in some of these instances, it appears that there may be a reluctance to allow the bishop to fulfill his proper role as principal planner of the diocese, to the consequent detriment of the "communio" that is essential to the nature of the local church. b) However, in these instances, it is not at all clear that the role of the

bishop as principal planner of the diocese, and the “communio” present in the Church and essential to her nature, are always made visible.

The driving force for the merger did not come from the diocese. In fact Fr. Ken and his pastoral associate met with the bishop and asked him to stay out of this planning. There was no official diocesan mandate for a merger; the parishes themselves drove it.Fr. Ken’s role has changed minimally since the merger. There are some additional liturgical demands. (Northeast pastor)

Even where diocesan direction initiated the process, the local leadership and the particular circumstances of the parishes involved had a considerable impact on the effect on the workload of the pastor.

Three days after assuming the pastorate at St. Teresa, Father Sam was given one year to effect a merger of the parishes. He worked with Nativity’s pastor, who was nearing retirement. The merger was worked out between the two parishes without much involvement of the diocese.

The merger was not particularly difficult and was helped by the following factors:

- 1) the ethnic and socio-economic composition of each parish was very similar to the other;*
- 2) each parish recognized that it needed to make some changes;*
- 3) the parishes were about five miles apart, not considered far in the exurban setting; and*
- 4) the pastoral councils were active in merger discussions.*

New facilities were erected for the new merged parish. Both priests continued to serve the parish until the retirement of the former pastor of Nativity. Now Fr. Sam is the only priest serving the parish...His role has changed only slightly, with the additional responsibility of providing pastoral care to two nursing homes. He has no additional administrative responsibilities. (Midwest pastor)

Mergers: Impact on the Parish Staff

Most of the respondents agree that staff roles change after the merger. The parish tends to be larger and some responsibilities increase. There is a need to identify more volunteers to cover the needs. Some positions are added. In one southern parish, \$5,000 a month was being spent from savings to meet operational expenses before the merger. In this same parish, “*Since the merger, financial contributions have doubled and Mass attendance has tripled. The increased funds are being used to repair parish facilities that were allowed to run down.*”

One pastor summed up the effect on the staff this way,

The biggest new thing was continuing the process of merging in everything we did. Effecting one bereavement group instead of two churches. Merging the gifts, discovering combined ministry in a larger place.... Weakness: keeping fresh the sense that they've merged and are not the same as the old original parish. Extremely important staff-related issue: get staff more spiritually centered in their prayer and their own grief; get them to see that it's not just a “task to be done,” the merging continues every day. (Midwest pastor)

Mergers: Training Requirements

Most of the pastors could not identify specific training that would have been helpful to them. One responded, “*How do you train people for something like the complexity of a parish merger?*” Some were clearly suspicious that any training would help and suggested that the most important thing is to select a pastor who has the proper traits and attitudes. “*Lots of pastoral experience. Never send a new priest for this type of assignment.*”

Among the traits and attitudes that the pastors identified were “*the ability to talk to people and facilitate communication. This requires a thick skin in order to put up with parishioners’ anger and grief and not take their*

negative comments personally.” Other attributes named by the pastors included personal faith and holiness, maturity, love for the Church. One pastor said that the diocese could have prepared him better by warning him about the difficulty of the situation. Other desirable training they identified included the development of community building skills, and sharing “our own faith stories.”

Mergers: Learning for the (Arch)Dioceses

Most of the pastors felt that the local church (the diocese) has not tried to learn from these experiences.

Fr. John fears that the Church is not learning from these situations. He reported that there was a lack of diocesan support. In fact, he noted, no one from the diocese had ever formally spoken to him about the merger or evaluated it with him. This interviewer was the first person to “pick my brain” about the merger. (West pastor)

In my diocese, the diocese seems to be more open to listening to people in parishes now. Any learning from this experience has been mainly individual. There isn’t much gathering of experiences nationally. In a concerted way we need to learn from one another. Take parish reorganization seriously. Stop perpetuating the ‘maintain mode.’ Survival is not the question. The question is: What are we called to? We must listen to the Spirit for divine direction. (Midwest pastor)

The chief learning seems to be that the church gets into trouble when the people are not consulted sufficiently. (Northeast pastor)

A review of the process used to merge parishes recognized that the people were not involved. It is necessary to make sure that meetings are held with the parish, that parishioners are involved in the process. Merger did not make sense except around buildings. The process never got to the heart of the communities. (Midwest pastor)

Several of the pastors felt that it is better to merge than to link (twin or cluster) especially if there is only one priest and each parish expects to provide many services. One diocese is actively pursuing opportunities to “un-link” (reversal of a twin or cluster arrangement) parishes after years of linkages. Two of these cases will be discussed in the section on founding or erecting new parishes.

Linkages (6 cases)

“These have been the hardest two years of my life.”

Linkages include a variety of situations, including clustering, twinning, and shared pastor arrangements. Their common characteristic is the sharing of resources by two or more parishes. This could include programs, physical plant, parish staff or the pastor. In five of the six cases reported here, the linkage involved sharing a pastor. Technically, the structure of the parish does not change in these situations but the impact on the shared resource, especially if it is a human resource, can be considerable. The report includes interviews with five pastors and one business manager, two each from the Midwest, South and Northeast regions. Two of the respondents had primarily positive survey comments, three had primarily negative survey comments and one could not be characterized as either positive or negative.¹

¹ In addition to the six situations described here, two other interviews were conducted with pastors whose parishes were clustered with neighboring parishes. In these cases, diocesan clustering for planning purposes is not perceived to have changed the pastor’s workload or responsibilities. Where some changes were recommended, they have not yet been implemented in the interviewees’ parishes.

Linkages: Impact on the Pastor

All pastors who were interviewed were given the responsibility to pastor more than one parish, and they all reported much more work and more complex work.

Father Stan left a situation where there was more than one priest. He moved to an area where he was by himself. He cannot do a lot of ministry directly. A good portion of the work he has to delegate to volunteers. He hired a business manager to take care of the financial aspects of ministry at the five parishes. He resides in a central location among the five parishes. In addition to being the finest structure, it is symbolic. The parish office is located at St. Patrick parish, the largest parish (250 families). (Midwest pastor)

Father Tim's job was to pastor both parishes. "We had separate parish councils, etc." Weekend Mass schedule was reduced from five to four; both parishes had a 9:00, so he kept the one at St. Bernard. The goal of the bishop was for the small parish to take advantage of gifts that larger parish had to offer. St. Bernard resisted (probably due to cultural differences). Books at St. Bernard were in horrible shape, but parish opposed using the Sacred Heart bookkeeper. St. Bernard wanted their own full Triduum. St. Bernard choir would sometimes sing at Sacred Heart. It was the youth groups that did the best job of working together. (South pastor)

Father Dan was named pastor two years ago, at the time the shared pastorate was announced. He had been a pastor in a more conventional arrangement before this assignment. He reports being overwhelmed by the demands placed on him. This is due mostly to the duplication of effort. There are "two of everything" - two councils, two schools, two staffs, two nursing homes and two sets of expectations. Another reason for stress is the lack of financial resources. (Northeast pastor)

One of the pastors cited a considerable change in role.

He now does more liturgies and more preaching. "I do more priest work than pastor work." On a given weekend, he presides at four Masses, each in a different parish. I go to an awful amount of PPC meetings.

He attends more parish meetings. He attends five PPC meetings per month, each lasting about one and a half hours.

He is sacramental minister at a veteran's home about 50 miles away. He enjoys this assignment quite a bit. "Those old guys have a lot of reason to complain, but they don't. Folks in the parish have little reason to complain, but they do. They (the veterans) are more appreciative of me and of life in general. They say thank you more and they laugh more. I can't explain why, but they do. And they have a sense of perspective. Some were POWs in WWII and they put problems in perspective. When I tell them of a problem, they say 'that's not so bad.'"

He has fewer financial responsibilities.

He does less in the way of home visitations. "I don't get to a lot of the homebound. Many live 25 miles away. Parishioners are doing that, picking up the slack. The folks still prefer a pastor visit,

His role as an educator has decreased. He did a lot of presenting and teaching at the university. In his new role as pastor, he does some teaching in the confirmation program. However, he does not get a good response when he offers adult education programs. He finds this disappointing because he enjoys teaching adults quite a bit. (Midwest pastor)

Linkages: Impact on the Parish Staff

The six cases of linkages were unanimous regarding a significant impact on staff but evenly divided about the way that impact should be absorbed. In addition to the case of the linked parishes that doubled the number of hours for Mary's position, three other cases involved parishes increasing staff in a significant way. In one case, in a cluster of five parishes there was no business manager in any of the parishes. A new business manager was hired to cover all five parishes. He is an ex-businessman with an MBA. The pastor and business manager have little contact on a day-to-day basis and essentially operate independently in their respective areas of direct responsibility. The pastoral planning office suggested he hire a pastoral associate; he hired a business manager instead and offered the following reasoning.

If I hire a pastoral associate, that person does the ministry and my role becomes administrative; if I hire a business manager, my role can be pastoral." The arrangement has other advantages for the people of the area: they experience higher quality ministry. He lamented how difficult it would be to find a highly qualified pastoral associate to serve these five rural parishes. (Midwest pastor)

In another case, the pastor responsible for two parishes hired a business manager to serve both. In a third instance, the pastor hired a religious sister as a parish life coordinator for one of the parishes, along with a parishioner with a master's degree in theology to serve as the DRE.

In three other cases of parish linkages, there were no new staff. The existing staff and parishioners had to take on new responsibilities and to develop new ways to carry out the work of the parishes with varying degrees of success.

In the process, groups of people were part of different committees who met with their counterparts from other parishes in order to develop recommendations to have ministerially complete parishes. We were forced to do it from the top. There was no implementation of the recommendations. (Northeast pastor)

The parishes loosely collaborate. They are finally now talking about doing religious education together. It takes time to get parishes to work together. (South pastor)

The staff was never trained for the shared pastorate, though they did take part in the diocesan planning process. As a result of the change the staff has to do more and take on additional responsibilities. Father Dan considers them competent and effective. (Northeast pastor)

Mary, a parish business manager from the Midwest, describes her role change mostly in terms of more meetings and decision-making power.

Prior to the linkage, she rarely attended meetings. Now she is the resource person for the Parish Finance Council and attends their meetings. She is also involved with buildings and grounds, and attends Parish Pastoral Council meetings on occasions (when they have joint meetings with Finance Council). She has also assumed responsibility for a myriad of personnel / human resources-related activities: hiring and supervising support staff (maintenance, janitorial), handling payroll, insurance forms, etc.

She describes her position as "business manager/secretarial" because she still performs traditional secretarial roles like typing the parish bulletin and answering phones. Her time is split between the two parishes. She was only working part-time prior to the linkage—paid hourly for 20 to 28 hours. Now she is in a salaried position and working more than 40 hours per week.

Linkages: Training Requirements

“A pastor first needs to create a vision for the parishes and then he must identify the resources to bring the vision into reality. Thus both the abstract visioning and the creating of organization structure are important. ... a pastor in this type of parish situation has to deal with great amounts of ambiguity, and must be sensitive to people’s feelings.... Trust must be developed.”

These interviews produced an extensive list of skills, attitudes and traits that are required of pastoral leaders in these situations. Many of these are dependent on the personality of the pastoral leader. These include:

Vision.

Task management: Flexibility – life happens. Organization – this is the key trait necessary for the huge task of pastoring two parishes, two schools and two nursing homes.

Perspective: Optimism and energy. Have a positive, open attitude. See the change as a gift, a blessing, not a burden – this is so important. A sense of humor. A belief that it all doesn’t rest on you.

People-oriented: You need an “attitude for others.” Collaboration – the collaborative spirit is very necessary. People skills – ability to react to different people types and agendas. Have a willingness to listen to the people.

Self-confidence: Attitudes – you are the shepherd. Be willing to make hard decisions. A thick skin – Some people are very angry at the change; you must remember that when they express that anger, they are angry at the situation, not you. Must be loyal to the Church.

But personality can be helped by the particular experiences of the leaders who find themselves leading linked parishes and training. When asked to identify the training that might be helpful three broad areas were identified:

1. Support groups of pastoral leaders in similar situations to share information,
2. Enhanced seminary training that includes education to train priest to be pastors not just to be priests and,
3. Lay ministry training programs that certify people for ministry.

Specific training topics that were identified by the interviewees included: accounting, finance, organization, computers, leadership skill, human resource issues (motivating, coordinating and managing volunteers) conflict management, delegation.

Linkages: Learning for the (Arch)Dioceses

“The learning is anecdotal rather than systematic. It is not integrated into how we operate the local church.”

When asked to identify how the Church is learning from these situations, the respondents were not clear that the Church was learning. In some areas religious, deacons or lay people have major responsibilities in the parishes. Some priests are happy to lighten their non-sacramental load by hiring pastoral associates for each of the parishes. Where learning seems to be taking place in a more formal way, it appears to be happening in dialog among those who are dealing with the work of administering multiple parishes on a day to day basis.

Not much has changed because of our process. In the cities, parishes were already sharing what we share today. People are used to attending neighboring churches. (Northeast pastor)

We have several parishes in our diocese where our business managers are women. The diocese is supportive in terms of answering questions, and they organize a business managers group. They bring in speakers and allow dialogue with others in similar positions (i.e., other business managers). (Midwest pastor)

The local diocese is learning much since they have several situations where there is a shared pastorate. (South pastor)

New Parishes (6 cases)

“Our diocese is undergoing tremendous changes over the next few years. There are twice as many parishes as there are priests. Major changes will need to be made. There needs to be a whole new way of being a parish community with new parish structures.”

When this study was proposed the researchers recognized that a parish that was divided because it had grown too large represented the same kind of change and loss for the long time parishioners as two parishes that were merged. In both instances, these kinds of structural changes have an effect on at least two parishes. In the case of establishing a parish, this involves the new parish as a totally new community and the recently diminished parishes from which the parishioners of the new parish migrate.

Although this was the case for several of the parishes in this group of interviews, it was not the only scenario. The researchers were surprised to learn of parishes that were previously merged that had been “un-merged.” In the process of “un-merging,” a formerly independent parish that was merged with another was re-established as an independent parish with its own pastor. Another case involved two “linked” parishes that were previously pastored by one priest that received an additional new pastor because their growth led to them moving from a sort of mission status to a more established situation. Since this not technically a new parish, the researchers were challenged whether to include it in this section or to include it as the reverse of a “linkage” in the previous section. It was determined that this case had more in common with the other “new” parish experiences so it is included here.

Because of the complexity of these three arrangements (establishing a new parish, re-establishing a previously existing parish as separate, and providing clergy to enable parishes to become unlinked), they are treated separately when possible under each of the major headings.

Six in-depth interviews were conducted with pastoral leaders who were involved in these various “new” parish situations. Four of these were with parishes in the Midwest. One interview was conducted with parishes in each of the Northeast and West regions. The survey comments of all of the respondents were positive.

New Parishes: Impact on the Pastor

Establishing a New Parish The three interviews conducted with pastors of newly created parishes revealed three very different experiences with many similarities. All reflect a sense of hope and optimism that is not always present in the transcripts of interviews of pastoral leaders in other circumstances.

Being pastor of this brand new church has been easier because the parishioners have chosen to belong here. They are enthusiastic, active, involved, and positive. He has fewer liturgies than normal here, because they are just starting, but more liturgies will be needed as they grow. There is more work involved in planning and physically setting up liturgies because they don't have a facility for this. They have liturgy in the school gym. They cooperate with neighboring parishes for RCIA,

sacramental preparation and catechesis. It is a very young parish age-wise so there is not a huge need for visiting of the sick or for a lot of counseling at present. (Midwest Pastor)

One uniquely challenging aspect of the assignment is that the parish started with 1,400 families, which has imposed certain limitations in terms of finding an adequate space for liturgy (700 chairs pressed tightly together in a gym). Another important characteristic is that the parish is almost all professional families, and virtually no elderly; this profile is a key part of their identity.

A crucial aspect of his role has involved bringing together people from several different former parishes to create a new community. This requires great pastoral sensitivity to people who are going through change. You have to call people together, but respect the loss they feel. It requires that the pastor be a welcoming presence to everyone. Because there are no old customs and no “old boy” network, people who were on the edges in those old parishes have gotten involved, along with those who have always been active. There is a lot of community building that takes place. It is important to define a pattern that is going to be new and inclusive. It is up to the pastor to create this sense of inclusion. (Northeast pastor)

“The biggest difference is that you are forging a tradition, you are creating a new tradition, whereas in most assignments, you are inheriting a tradition. As a result, there is far less resistance from people. This is a wonderful opportunity, and I told the people we are going to see if a Vatican II church can really work. We don’t have a parish council, as such, but four councils (liturgy, ministry, finance, and planning) that gather together in plenary session once or twice a year to make major decisions.” In terms of roles, in the liturgy area, he basically shows up and presides; he hired a music/liturgy coordinator and there is a group to do planning. He is involved in RCIA and sacramental preparation, but there are parish teams that oversee this work, and he’s just a member of the team who teaches, but isn’t really involved in the planning. He has a business manager to run the place, but he is also somewhat of a hands-on parish director, especially with all of the design and construction because he has an interest in this area. (Midwest pastor)

Providing New Clergy This contrasts considerably with the responses from a pastor in the West who was pastor of two parishes and then another pastor was assigned to one of them so he became pastor of just one of the two parishes. In his growing resort parish, he finds that he needs to provide more coordinating time to more volunteers but he also has more time for sacramental activities. There is also a significant increase in the costs to the parish community.

Each parish was paying half of the pastor’s stipend and living arrangements. The cost to each parish effectively doubled. Before, one secretary worked for two parishes. “Now I have only one part-time paid secretary. People want to be involved but lay leadership is not popular. Few younger people are able to be involved in Church work.” Volunteer roles are not always clear. The pastor has to do a thorough orientation. “But what we have is what we need. This is a retirement community. Much experience and education come in with the people who in some cases have been working in their churches all of their lives. No particular education or experience is needed. We have no laity who have gone through the lay ministry program in the diocese and no deacon. We need to continue to involve the relatively younger 50 to 60 year olds.” (Western pastor)

Re-establishing a Previously Merged Parish as Separate In the two situations where parishes that were previously merged that had been “un-merged” the pastors that were interviewed had other different experiences. In both instances the pastors had been pastor of two merged parishes and discovered that the merger of the two parishes did not work. In one instance the cultural differences including language were difficult to merge into one community.

The Hispanic congregation from Redeemer did not merge well with the small African American congregation in the large Church. The investigation resulted in a recommendation to reopen Redeemer. The start up in Redeemer required major building renovation, building a parish center, re-attracting people who had left, forming a new community, developing ministries. (Midwest pastor)

In another instance, the complexity of the organization was simplified by separating two parishes that had previously been merged.

“We had created one parish with two worship sites. I was the pastor of this parish. But each site had its own staff. There was no place for both groups to come together as one parish community. The communities tended to become more different over time. In 1995, we divided this one parish with two sites into two separate canonical entities. Structurally this is much more manageable. It is necessary to keep the structures simple. It is hard to maintain complex structures over the long time. We actually have one less priest. We had three priests, the overall pastor and one priest assigned to each site. Now we have two pastors. We kept one school on three campuses supported by both parishes. Sacramental responsibilities have been divided. The rest of staff were already divided by the two site locations.” (Midwest pastor)

New Parishes: Impact on the Parish Staff

Re-establishing a Previously Merged Parish as Separate Members of the parish staff were important in assessing the need for change and ensuring its successful implementation.

“There was some strong disagreement about separating into two parishes. Staff wanted two parishes. We held town halls and written church surveys that provided a voice to the people (more supported the change than were opposed).” (Midwest pastor)

After the separation of the previously merged parishes, the parishes continue to work together for certain kinds of things. A religious order of sisters in residence in one of the parishes provides a great deal of help even though they are not assigned to this ministry. Staffing is working in part because of the generosity of the sisters. The parishes still cooperate in the purchase of supplies.

In another pair of separated parishes the stability of long-standing staff, averaging 17 years of experience with the parishes, was identified as very important for the experience of the parishioners as they went through the transitions.

Establishing a New Parish The experience of the staff of the newly formed parishes is quite different, as indicated by these comments.

All staff, but especially those in top positions, find their responsibilities are changing as new needs arise. They have to be willing to learn to do new things. They have to have flexibility. As a part of building this new parish, one important requirement is that all staff members have to be able to work with and develop volunteers.

One example of the challenges for the staff is religious education. For the first year, all 700 children did religious education in their old parishes. This year, the parish is providing formation for all of these children without any parish facilities. So the parish program uses 65 individual homes and includes more than 120 teachers, a real challenge. (Northeast Parish)

The pastor has a small staff that should grow in the future. One of his practices with them is to have an annual three-day staff retreat, which is very effective at solidifying them as a team. The three

things he looks for in staff people are: some academic training (he wants degreed people, some experience, and good people skills. The other staff issue is his realization that later they will need to add at least a pastoral associate and a deacon. (Midwest Parish)

New Parishes: Training Requirements

Establishing a New Parish The respondents who were establishing new parishes all identified traits and some skills that they felt were important.

Facilitation and leadership skills are very important. This position requires someone who is organized, able to participate in numerous meetings, listen to the insights and experiences of others, coordinate people, and juggle a multitude of issues.

An attitude of flexibility is essential. A key trait would be a sense of direction that persists even though much has not yet taken shape, a long-term vision, a mission-driven outlook. The temperament of the pastor is very critical. This position requires someone with enthusiasm, who can be a spark and a catalyst, who may even be a bit charismatic. (Northeast pastor)

Organizer, in many ways a self-starter, element of openness and friendliness, welcoming, inviting. Must have a sense of spirituality and trust in God. (Midwest pastor).

First, clear knowledge of a goal, a vision of church. Second, ability to communicate with people (this applies to both liturgical and administrative styles). Third, capability of being an instrument of grace, since that grace filling-station is what most people want most of the time. It is also important to have self awareness, so that you know what you have and what you have to get somewhere else by tapping the expertise of others; be able to rely on others and trust them. (Midwest pastor)

Many of these traits did not lend themselves to specific recommendations for training. In one instance the respondent identified choosing the right person for the role of pastor to be more important than training. Other recommendations for training included:

Get in-service training in organizing people and in attracting them.

Learn how to lead meetings (which is more than just following the steps in a book).

Become familiar with the institutional (diocesan) responsibilities.

Be a member of a functioning support group before starting the job.

Take a workshop for new pastors (even if you're not a new pastor); NFPC (National Federation of Priests Councils) also has some good workshops.

Be able to deal with the building issues

Programs in business management, organization, how to evaluate and deal with employees. Need more experience in how to run a parish.

Put years 2, 3 and 4 of philosophy aside to provide training for administration.

Re-establishing a Previously Merged Parish as Separate Those respondents who were involved in establishing separate parishes from previously merged parishes added the following:

Training is critical. Can't just throw people into these situations and hope they can do it.

They need skills and abilities in managing planned change, leadership, pastoral sensitivity.

Opportunity to hear from people who have done these transitions.

Opportunity to talk with people currently going through these processes at the same time. Conflict management; listening skills; collaborative vision development;

Network effectively for support (e.g., spiritual director, friends, Hispanic ministry group).

New Parishes: Learning for the (Arch)Dioceses

“I am firmly convinced that the pastor has unbelievable influence, and he can make or break the parish. There is almost no limit to what he can do.”

None of the respondents were able to identify a formal way that dioceses are learning from their experiences. In addition to informal conversations, some said that they were sure to be called on to be a resource at the time of a new parish start up. One suggested that it would be good for diocesan offices to be in touch with the pastors during the process to conduct interviews such as the one reported on here.

Parish Directors (5 cases)

“When I came to this town, I was the first pastoral director here. How things changed was that the people had to get used to having a lay person leading the church on a day to day basis and having a priest come in just for sacraments. The biggest change for the parish was for me, a lay woman, to come to minister to them in a hospital or at a funeral home because they always had Father who came before that. And not only a lay person but a woman who is a lay person.”

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with pastoral leaders who have been appointed to share in the pastoral care of parishes that previously had a pastor in residence. Two of these were with parishes in the Midwest. One interview was conducted with parishes in each of the Northeast, South and West regions.

Two men and three women were interviewed. This included two deacons and a religious sister. Together they held four titles. Two were parish administrators. There was one pastoral coordinator, a pastoral director and a parish director. At the time of the interview, the two deacons had been in their positions between five and seven years, while the others had all been appointed since 1998.

Both deacons and the religious sister reported primarily positive survey comments, the survey comments of one of the women were primarily negative and those of the other woman were neither positive nor negative.

Parish Director: Impact on the Respondent

The impact on these respondents is as variable as their titles. The experiences of the deacons in this study were reported to be somewhat different than the experiences of the others in this group. A deacon from the West reported that liturgically, his role has not changed much.

He does make the announcements at the two or three Masses in which he is a liturgical minister over the weekends. He does not preach every weekend. He has more involvement with liturgy and overseeing the liturgical process. He is still doing some teaching in CCD and leads school/parent nights. He did more counseling before as director of RCIA. Now he oversees counseling in collaboration with the priests and school principal. But there is a lot more administration. He is

responsible for the staff and maintenance of the building. The parish is starting to look at expansion and how to plan a building program.

Another deacon, who has been in his position as parish director in the Northeast for seven years, reports that he is a principal agent in liturgy planning. He did almost half of the preaching before he became a deacon, now he does most of the preaching. He is in charge of marriage preparation.

The parish has a pastoral associate for hospital visits and most counseling. Many lay people in the parish are empowered to serve in some of these areas. He's glad that they hired a part-time building manager to relieve him of that job. He used to handle all financial matters, but now they have a bookkeeper to handle that; he still signs the checks. He says he is good at delegating things to others, staff and lay people.

Sister Joyce, named parish director for a Midwest parish in 1999, reports a somewhat different experience. Formerly, she had a very small part and no decision-making responsibility. She had leadership in her area only.

"It's a whole different ball game when you're in charge. It was quite a transition, and initially I found it kind of scary to make those decisions. I don't have any staff so I have to oversee every aspect of the parish. I feel pulled in so many different directions. The work is not too difficult but there are too many areas. Part of the frustration is that I can't give more attention to some areas that deserve it." She does everything: the pastoral, secretarial, janitorial, etc., because the people in the parish have their own jobs or are too old to help out. "As a result, I don't have the time and energy to reach out to the many inactive Catholics in the area as I would like." She followed two sick pastors, so it was like starting from nothing, laying the groundwork with the parishioners and getting them to see their gifts.

She puts a lot of energy into the parish celebrating liturgy well. She mentioned that this Lent they are having singing practice on Tuesday evenings, an activity they never had before. At liturgy, she handles the prayers of the faithful and the announcements, and leads the singing when the organist isn't there. They have a regular sacramental minister from a local abbey. She leads communion services twice a week and penance services; at these times she does reflections on the readings.

Ms. Reid is the parish director for two parishes. At one parish, she works a lot at coordinating the work of others. There is a part-time music minister (so she no longer has to lead singing) and someone on-site for taking care of the property. She works with a cluster committee on liturgy planning and a building and grounds committee on a parish renovation project. In the area of liturgy, when the service is something other than Mass, she will preside and offer reflections on the readings. In the teaching area, she directs religious education and runs discussion groups.

At the other parish, she works with volunteer musicians on planning; there is a volunteer who coordinates religious education. She coordinates RCIA and has to do more renovation supervision here. She also is currently doing the building care and the bookkeeping, temporarily. She experiences an expectation on the part of parishioners for her to take care of things because she lives here. This parish has a higher number of retired people, who are gone during winter months.

Parish Director: Impact on the Parish Staff

The parishes headed by deacons have both increased staff.

In the parish in the Northeast, they have dramatically expanded the staff. All staff meet regularly to plan and to address pastoral issues. All are required to go on a yearly retreat week and know that they are required to stay in close touch with their spirituality in order to be able to serve effectively.

In the parish in the West, there is a religious education team now. Previously they had a full-time lay pastoral associate in charge of religious education and youth ministry until he had to cut back to part-time.

Other respondents indicated a lack of staff.

“I only have a half-time secretary now, but I fought to keep a full-time secretary when I came. After one year, she was cut to half-time. They said that a pastoral director’s salary is more than that of a priest. But when I studied the situation, I came up with only a \$500 difference. It was more their perception that I was being paid much more.” (South parish)

At the parish where she does not live, there is a part-time music minister and a part-time, on-site caretaker. The other parish has had part-time bookkeepers, but turnover has been a problem, as people find jobs where they can earn more. Coming from a larger parish, the lack of staff has sometimes been hard to adjust to. “The difficulty is not having anyone to bounce things off of; sometimes this can be done with committees, sometimes it’s just you. I am still learning: What things do I just decide about and what things do I consult on?” (Midwest parish)

Parish Director: Training Requirements

“An ability to honor what has been going on while leading people beyond what they know. This requires a real skill in presenting things in a way that whets their appetite.”

When asked to identify the skills, abilities and traits that were helpful in their assignment, the parish directors provided answers that were very similar to the pastors in merged parishes. They included:

Attitudes: a sense of humor; patience; being accepting of all types of people and patient.

Task management abilities: flexibility; conflict management skills, ability to deal with controversy; you have to be sensitive to the situation, but not take things personally; being able to manage yourself, manage prayer and spirituality, manage health; ability to multi-task helps a lot.

People abilities: to be hospitable; the ability to wait, to accept people where they are; being able to empower and affirm others in ministry; being less autocratic, listening to and accepting others in leadership.

Various other skills: communications skills; administrative skills; pastoral ministry skills; teaching/preaching skills.

The training identified by these respondents as essential was substantial and included pastoral training; some management skills, working with people; working with those who are ill or dying and their families; some catechetical training; training or orientation on diocesan requirements and policies; skills to become an effective leader and how to develop leadership in others, how to unify community around a common vision. One respondent stated that they would absolutely need to be able to preach in the parish or this would undermine effective leadership.

She went to the diocese’s new pastor meetings after being appointed, but this was mostly acquainting people with the diocesan offices. She would have liked more discussion of pastor problems and issues. They have quarterly parish director meetings in the diocese, but the others are in very different settings, so there is a lack of common issues; the deanery meetings with pastors are more helpful. ((Midwest parish)

“I have a Master of Divinity degree. If I didn’t have that degree my confidence would be so shaken many times.” (South parish)

Parish Director: Learning for the (Arch)Dioceses

All of the respondents felt that either actively or passively the Church was learning, but several thought that more learning and applications of the learning was needed.

The local diocese took a proactive role in developing this model. Eight years ago they implemented this plan, not waiting until the last minute. And they did not choose failing parishes to do this with. They used parishes of substance. There are frequent dialogues of parish directors, priests, and priest personnel office staff of the diocese. There are no guidelines for parish reorganization. A big obstacle is that there is no clear cut access to liturgical life and support system for parish directors and lay leaders. (Northeast parish)

They are looking at their recent experiences with change as they consider future changes. They haven’t been as encouraging about parish directors as they could be. They haven’t been as supportive as they could; in some ways they don’t acknowledge that you’re there, doing the job and carrying all the responsibility. The four parish directors in the diocese get together on their own every two or three months; at their request, they have met annually with the bishop for the last two years to discuss their work. (Midwest parish)

There has been good coverage in the diocesan paper. People are very aware of these situations. One parish director was just temporarily appointed parish director of a neighboring parish. (Midwest parish)

In the diocese there are ten pastoral coordinators. He (the respondent, who is a deacon) is the only male with this role. The others are sisters and lay women. There are priestly meetings held which the sisters and lay women are not invited to, but this is changing very recently. (West parish)

“Since my appointment there have been several more pastoral directors appointed. I was one of three at first, but now there are more than a dozen. As far as what the diocese has learned, I think they learned that a lay person who has the same kind of education as a priest is knowledgeable and competent in pastoral work.” (South parish)

The perspectives offered by these pastors and parish directors are a valuable counterpoint to the quantitative data presented in the previous chapter. In the next chapter, many of the themes touched on by the interviewees will be explored through further analysis of the data and open-ended responses from the parish and diocesan surveys.

Chapter 5

Implications of the Research for Parish and Diocesan Leadership

This chapter focuses on the implications of the survey data for those in parish and diocesan leadership positions. The first section addresses two crucial issues: factors contributing to the effectiveness of pastoral leaders and the pastoral leader's workload. The second section offers advice to parishes on four aspects of pastoral leadership: planning, communication, leading during times of change, and the spiritual dimension. The third section offers advice to bishops on five themes that emerged from comments about their leadership. The final section presents advice for dioceses, drawn from the comments of diocesan leaders.

Insights from Data Analysis

Effectiveness of Parish Leaders

The topic of effectiveness has been briefly treated in Chapter 3. There are some special insights about this topic, however, that have implications for the effectiveness of pastors and other pastoral leaders.

- 1. Special Training.** Providing special training (to pastors, staff, councils, and others) for dealing with parish reorganization is important. Among those who reported a decrease in effectiveness after reorganization, only 8 percent of these people received special training, compared with 43 percent of those who reported an increase in effectiveness.
- 2. Consultation with Ordained or Lay Parish Leader.** Respondents who were consulted in the reorganization process were also significantly more effective afterwards. On average, those who reported decreased effectiveness had between "a little" and "some" input. By comparison, two-thirds of the respondents with increased effectiveness had "very much" input.
- 3. Effective Handling of Transitions.** Positive transition work, characterized by appropriate ceremonies and by the pastor's helpfulness in dealing with parishioners' grief regarding the change, is the third factor affecting current effectiveness. Respondents with increased effectiveness were, on average, three times as positive about the transition work as those with decreased effectiveness.
- 4. Quality of Parish Staffing.** The quality of parish staffing, as measured by three distinct survey questions, is highly associated with respondent effectiveness. Having a more effective staff, having sufficient staff, and having one or more general pastoral ministers were characteristic of most respondents whose effectiveness increased, but not of those with decreased effectiveness (75% compared with 27%).
- 5. Parishioner and Diocesan Support.** Perceived support from parishioners and from the diocese were both related to increased effectiveness. On questions about willingness of parishioners to volunteer and diocesan support for the respondent's work, positive responses were twice as common and negative ones were half as likely among those with increased effectiveness compared to those with decreased effectiveness.
- 6. Time Management.** Effectiveness is also associated with the duties and use of time by respondents. Four items were important. Those whose effectiveness increased were about half as likely to report that the parish shares a

pastor (40% to 78%), and about half as likely to report little or no difficulty in coordinating time between parishes (30% to 59%). Among those who reported an *increase* in their effectiveness, 54 percent spent more time on administrative duties. On the other hand, among those who reported a *decrease* in effectiveness, 83 percent spent more time on administrative duties. Most importantly, time spent in direct pastoral care remained the same or increased twice as often for those whose effectiveness increased, compared to those for whom effectiveness decreased (87% to 44%).

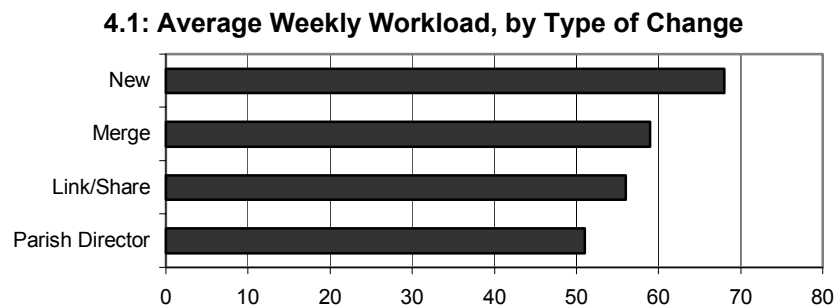
Statistical analysis was used to determine which of the above six topics are strongly related to effectiveness. Three topics were shown to be good predictors of perceived effectiveness in parish reorganization. In decreasing order of importance, they are: first, quality of parish staffing; second, time management; and third, special training.

Note that the first two topics are related to the present situation, that is, the post-reorganization period. This is important because it indicates that, regardless of any past shortcomings, opportunities still exist for improving effectiveness. Even the third topic, special training, is a matter that parishes and dioceses can undertake after reorganization. Diocesan leaders who anticipate the need for preparing priests, parish staff, and parishioners for parish reorganizations need to consider these three areas.

- How might the diocese work to better prepare a pool of highly-qualified parish staff to assist pastors in their work?
- How might the work be structured and the selection process enhanced to create a match between the pastoral leaders' gifts and the work to be done?
- How might special training, specifically intended to support the leader's role in parish restructuring, be made available to parish leaders?

Pastoral Leader's Workload

On average, respondents worked 10.2 hours per day, and 5.5 days per week. The median hours worked were 9 hours per day and 6 days per week. Using either computation, respondents worked approximately 55 hours per week. The average varied by the type of parish change. The highest number of hours worked was reported by pastors of newly erected parishes, followed by respondents of merged parishes, then by those in linked or shared pastor situations. The lowest average was in parishes where the leadership was someone other than a pastor. The following figure shows this relationship.



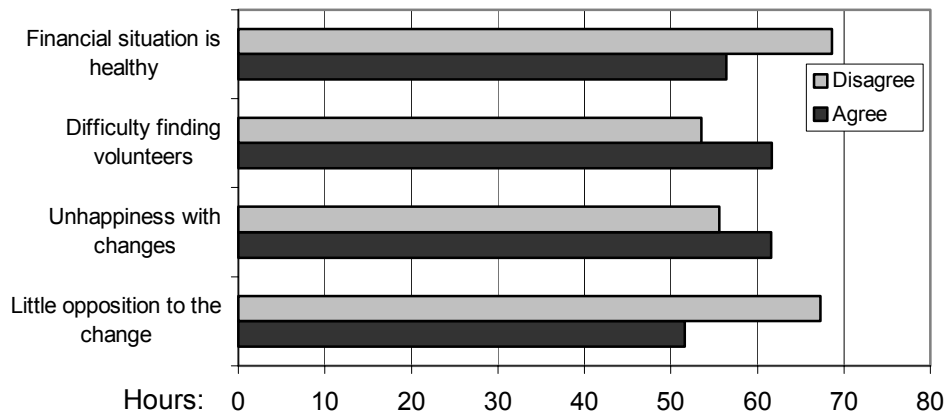
This relationship between workload and type of change is important in light of the fact that parish directors were the most likely to assess parish outcomes positively (with enhanced ministry, financial health, and a greater sense of purpose).

Important relationships also exist between workload and other variables. Respondents who perceive the parish's financial situation as healthy work an average of 12.2 fewer hours. But respondents reported working more hours if parishioners:

- were reluctant to volunteer (8.2 additional hours);
- were negative about the changes that occurred (6.0 additional hours); or
- showed opposition to the reorganization (15.7 additional hours).

The following figure shows the average number of hours worked each week by respondents, depending on whether they agree or disagree that it applies to their parish. Note that working more hours does not guarantee positive outcomes; in fact, it often portends a less favorable outcome. This may be due to respondents spending more time in trying to cope with unfavorable parish reorganization situations.

4.2: Effect of Various Parish Characteristics on Workload



These data raise an interesting question: What kind of work tends to consume the extra time spent by pastors and parish directors? The strongest relationship was between hours worked and increased time spent on administrative duties. Among respondents who reported a change in the amount of time spent on administration (from before to after the reorganization), those for whom it increased worked an average of 64 hours, while those for whom it decreased worked an average of 47 hours. Among respondents who reported a change in the amount of time spent on pastoral care, those for whom it increased worked an average of 60 hours, while those for whom it decreased worked an average of 65 hours.

What are the reasons for increased time spent on pastoral care and on administrative duties? The following table presents the factors that exhibit the strongest relationships.

4.3: Changes in Time Spent on Pastoral Care and Administration

An increase in this factor is associated with these changes in the pastor's time for ...	
	Pastoral Care	Admin. Duties
Ease of finding parish volunteers	Slight Increase	Moderate Decrease
Expectations of parishioners	Moderate Increase	Great Increase
Difficulty balancing time between parishes	Slight Decrease	Great Increase
Personally received special training	Slight Increase	Slight Decrease
Parishioners received special training	Slight Increase	Slight Decrease
Staff sufficiency	Moderate Increase	Moderate Decrease
Personal input into reorganization	Slight Increase	Moderate Decrease

Note that the only factor that leads to an increase in time spent in both categories is the respondents' perceptions of parishioner expectations. This factor, and other factors from this table, will be discussed in the next section.

Advice to Parishes

Respondents were asked if they had any advice to give to other parishes about restructuring. Eight-four percent (230 out of 274) offered some kind of written comment. Most comments referred to the need for some manifestation of pastoral leadership at the parish level. This section will examine various aspects of leadership that were mentioned.

Planning

Planning is one characteristic of good leadership. If there is a parish reorganization that is widely perceived as successful, it is likely that good planning preceded the reorganization. Planning does not guarantee success, of course, but the lack of good planning certainly correlates highly with perceived failure.

Thirty-eight comments directly addressed the need for good planning. This was the second-highest number of comments on any individual theme. Most of these comments simply insisted upon the need for good planning. One respondent simply wrote: "Plan, plan, and plan." Others provided a little more detail.

Take adequate time to plan the reorganization with the people.

Have an organizational plan developed with someone who has experience in mergers, have extra transitional staff and extra money.

You need to carefully plan and listen to the concerns, and needs of your people, maximum input from parishioners is vital to a merged parish situation like ours.

Put in time and energy in preliminary preparation. We had two years strategic planning and another two years of individual committee work with town hall meetings — keeping parishioners informed.

Other respondents specified in some detail the link between the planning process and future parish vitality. A respondent from one northeastern diocese expressed optimism about the planning taking place in his parish and the regional cluster.

For the first time, cluster planning includes participation from all parishes in the cluster. With [the diocesan planning director's] encouragement, we have been preparing plans for sharing resources, coordinating Mass schedules, and joint liturgies. Today, we share adult educational opportunities, evangelization activities, and lay minister training.

We all see this growing interdependence as good and inevitable. No one is happy about "reconfiguration" but [our] cluster no longer fears it. We have dedicated ourselves to keeping all parishes open and thriving. We accept that just surviving is no measure of success. We must also respond to the calls for "A New Evangelization."

After cluster-provided training, the laity has begun to preside at prayer services and even funerals. We have committed to the Renew 2000 process. Every parish in the cluster recently joined the local interfaith association for the first time. We are expecting an explosion in lay vocations. We see that, in the end, great good might come from reconfiguration.

Communication

Another aspect of leadership is communication. Good leaders demonstrate how communication is bi-directional as they carefully listen to the expressed needs of the people before articulating a plan of action. Fifty-seven comments directly addressed the need for good communication. This was the highest number of comments on an individual theme.

Most respondents simply described the need for good communication, with suggestions such as: “Participate in a process with a lot of communication” and “Communicate. Listen. Soothe. Work to foster a consensus.” Other respondents, reflecting upon their experiences, focused in some detail upon the content of communication.

First have the council and trustees see the need or “signs of the times.” Have them talk to people and have meetings. It doesn’t hurt for the priest to tell of the pressures he is facing, that he just can’t do all this as separate parishes.

Respect the past. Praise the people who started the parish, etc. Enjoy their life, get out among the people, celebrate them. Listen to the people – they know what they need. Direct carefully.

Several respondents pointed out the need to communicate a vision of the future. The implication is that the laity needs to be prepared to face a Church tomorrow that is apt to be different than the Church of yesterday. Note that even though there may be a “didactic moment” when an expert informs people about a likely future, there is also opportunity for the people to process the information and communicate back to the experts.

Really listen to each other and face the fact that the Church of the 21st century is vastly different from the pre-Vatican era. Besides praying for vocations, actively recruit candidates for the ministry. More parishes will close unless the declining trend reverses.

Beforehand: Prepare the laity for a new way of being Church -- long before the re-organization happens. Try to teach the laity how it is an opportunity for them to become a more vibrant parish when they assume more ownership and responsibility for what they pay for. The laity must be prepared, educated, and handled with care, personally. Have some town-hall-type meetings two to three years beforehand.

The following table presents, in the words of a number of respondents (some of whom are quoted above), a framework for the parish leader’s effective use of communication in the planning process.

4.4: Comments About Communication in the Planning Process

Communication . . .	leads to . . .	Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the big picture (vision) • Let people talk • Explain reasons / provide information • Really listen to each other • Communicate well 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower lay people • Include them in decision-making • Help them realize/develop a sense of ownership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold frequent “town hall” meetings . . . • Employ multi-layered dialogue 	and . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> insist on attendance with as many groups and individuals as possible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have focus groups and/or small groups in homes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work, pray & play together

Leading during Times of Change

Twenty-nine comments mention at least one aspect of leading during times of change. While a few comments offered broad recommendations, most comments provided focused advice for other parishes undergoing reorganization. Among the broad recommendations were the following.

- *Get better support from bishop/diocesan leaders.*
- *Work with diocesan leadership.*

Most broad comments were about developing lay leadership.

Working together enhances the vitality of the parishes. Utilize lay leadership.

Prepare more lay leadership and growth in sense of mission of parish so people don't feel abandoned just because there is no longer a resident pastor.

Don't be afraid of it. Welcome the challenge to expand the notion of church leadership. Be open and honest in expressing your concerns, but be willing to grow. Celebrate the change.

Key leaders of the parish ought to be required to go through a period of training; it would help tremendously.

Focused advice about leading during times of change often centered upon coordinating ministries between two parishes or carefully watching the details of parish reorganization. One representative who was involved in a merger of two parishes advocated “hiring someone to be on top of all the details and to keep the process moving. This will allow the priest to tend to the painful things people are experiencing.”

A pastor who had a mission added to his parish seconded this recommendation.

The parishioners need someone to take the initiative and to lead and to coordinate parish ministry. This would be the way to go if you can afford it. I could not afford one full-time. Right now I have a former SSJ Sister living there and doing some of the coordination of catechetical and other pastoral activities, especially with the young people and children. I am very fortunate to have her.

Whether or not a person is hired for the coordination role, there is little doubt among the respondents that this function needs attention. A pastor involved in linking two parishes noted the level of complexity in such coordination of resources, Mass schedules, etc. Another pastor emphasized the importance of good coordination. “‘Twinned parishes’ require more time for travel and coordination of ministries and financial administration than a single parish, but it is not a doubling, but maybe a one-and-a-quarter times as much time and effort as a single parish of comparable size.”

Some respondents wrote of the need for greater directing or coordinating from a higher organizational level.

People need to be involved and consulted. They need clear reasons and models presented. The diocese must help with clear directives and timelines. The diocese should provide consultants to help the process. When the decisions are made, just do it!

Have a detailed, coordinated plan, all pastors must support reorganization from their heart. Have an on-going plan to assimilate new members into the parish.

Another respondent, from a merged parish, seemed to argue against tight coordination, especially by the diocese. “If at all possible, the decision to merge should come from the parish, rather than imposed by the diocese. With

the right leadership and given enough time, people will ‘own’ the decision to merge and it can go more smoothly.” This advice is echoed by a respondent from a parish without a resident pastor, who counseled the importance of respecting the accomplishments of people who have worked in the parish, as well as the need to mingle with and listen to the people of the parish.

Respondents often seem to be offering contradictory advice on the level of direction or coordination they desire. Some said the best course to follow is a tightly defined and controlled process. Keywords of this action would be “clarity,” “timeline,” and “objectives.” Other respondents indicated that a better course is to take more time and allow the local laity to assume ownership of the issue. Keywords for the second group would be “process,” “communication,” and “ownership.”

This seeming contradictory advice provides the researchers with a dilemma. Each respondent is reflecting the truth as he or she understands it. Differences in advice may exist due to differences in particular characteristics of the diocese or local situation, ecclesiology, previous experiences with parish reorganization, corporate personalities of the involved parishes, personalities of the current or former pastors, or various other reasons. It may be impossible to determine one set of detailed guidelines that will apply in all cases.

Spiritual Dimension

Pray, pray, pray! Our parishes began this process with a 24-hour prayer vigil and ended with a week-long prayer vigil. We continue to hold prayer vigils every year on the anniversary of our consolidation.

It requires a strong, faith-filled, very Christ-centered person who is willing to empower lay people to involve as many as possible to build one community of faith that is a sharing of traditions and faith perspectives. ... See the BIG picture and communicate that to the people.

The survey questionnaire made few direct references to the spiritual dimension of parish reorganization. Of the more than 80 survey items, four were somewhat related to the spiritual dimension. They are:

- “Your time spent on direct pastoral care” (changes in this attribute);
- “The pastor was helpful in dealing with parishioners’ grief;”
- “The reorganization was accompanied by appropriate parish ceremonies and events;” and
- Outcomes related to ministry and common purpose.

Beyond these four items, many respondents used the open-ended questions (about how one’s role has changed or advice to other parishes and bishops) as an occasion to stress the spiritual dimension of parish reorganization. These recommendations came out particularly in advice for others.

Approximately 20 percent of those respondents who offered advice to other parishes and bishops addressed the spiritual dimension of the task. At the top of their collective agenda was the importance and centrality of prayer.

As others proceed with the process of reorganization, those who have gone through it advise parishes to “keep it always consciously centered on prayer,” maintaining a “prayerful context.” Specific moments of prayer include prayer vigils at the beginning and end of the planning process, shared liturgies, public prayers, prayer within all groups involved, prayer for ministry vocations, ritualization of milestones, and celebration of anniversaries. Prayer is crucial as a part of keeping the focus on God, which was expressed in a number of ways:

- *Make Christ present.*
- *Trust the Holy Spirit.*
- *Need a lot of prayer to keep our eyes on Jesus.*

Respondents had many things to say about the spiritual dimension of both the parish and its principal leader. As mentioned in the quote at the beginning of this section, it is very important that the pastoral leader be “a strong, faith-filled, very Christ-centered person.” Without the grace and strength that these qualities bring, this individual will not be able to effectively guide the parish through the process of change.

In this work of parish reorganization, the pastor or parish director is responsible for “providing leadership in terms of vision and mission” in order to bring about, at the parish level, the “renewal that must happen if the church is to be faithful to its mission.” This means that he or she must:

- *Create a vision,*
- *Formulate a clear vision,*
- *Broaden the vision of those who do not seem to be able to let go of the past, and*
- *Give them hope.*

The last point seems to be an essential quality for leaders in this difficult work.

The task here is one of “creating a community of prayer,” and helping the other members of the parish to join together in “a vital, alive, Christ-centered family.” For this to occur, the pastoral leader needs to:

- *[Help] our parish community realize their importance through their baptism.*
- *[Grow] in [their] sense of mission of parish.*
- *Grow in awareness of [their] “ownership” of the church.*

To do this, all parishioners must “allow their gifts to shine forth to the community” and be willing to “work together for the good of the people of God.” The pastor is responsible for exercising his leadership in a manner that insures this focus on the spiritual is not lost.

Advice to Bishops

Respondents were asked if they had advice to offer bishops of other dioceses that might be considering restructuring. Eight-one percent (222 out of 274) offered some kind of written comment. Most advice offered to bishops concerns their personal role and responsibility **to teach, govern, and sanctify**. Other comments addressed the broader diocesan role.

Like the advice for parishes and their leaders, advice for bishops can be divided into what they should do and who they should be.

Teaching: Training and the Use of Lay People

All need training in group process skills and exercise of different leadership styles so that true collaboration for building/sustaining can occur.

Make training available for the key leadership of the parish. It will help tremendously. Training will help the leaders deal with their own emotions, not to mention the emotions of the parishioners.

Many recommendations conveyed the need for and importance of training. Bishops need to provide training for participation in the planning process, for dealing with the transition period, and for implementing and living out the new configuration. Those in need of training include pastors, their staffs, other parish leaders, and the people in the pews.

Twenty-six comments referred specifically to training, education, or preparation. This indicates that this issue is viewed by many as an essential task. The presence of these recommendations in the category of advice for

bishops demonstrates that these respondents see training/education/preparation as a responsibility of the bishops and that at least some of these activities should be carried out and funded at the diocesan level.

As noted above, training includes elements such as group process skills that are needed during the planning process and tools for dealing with the practical and emotional aspects of transition. One pastor who has gone through the experience made particular note of the need to continue this work for a longer period of time, saying, “Do education and training more during and after the reorganization.”

Related to training are the calls for the use of lay people in appropriate parish leadership roles. (And if this applies to lay people, it certainly also applies to deacons.) A number of priests noted that parishes need to make fuller use of the talents of the numerous lay people who could serve in a variety of roles, from business managers and other support staff to many varieties of pastoral ministers. One wrote that “Bishops need to assign lay people to positions of leadership,” while others encouraged bishops to be open to appointing them as parish directors.

It is important to choose, train, support, and empower these people. This includes finding appropriate opportunities for preaching. On this point, respondents offered the following advice:

- *Pastoral administrators must have permission to preach ... in order to have a primary avenue open to them for the spiritual formation of the people they serve.*
- *Teach more lay people the art and skill of homiletics.*
- *Start widespread training on lay presiding and “Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest.”*

Governing: The Work of Planning

Have a strategic plan that invites clergy, parish staffs, and congregations to participate in the process of change.

Approach it with honesty and have a strong focus as well as a goal that is able to be communicated to those in administration within the parishes concerned.

Work with as many parishioners and staff as you can to come to a consensus that people can live with. Once you have done the above, proceed with knowledge that some people will not be reconciled to whatever is decided.

Another type of leadership advice for bishops concerns **doing the work** that is a necessary part of the planning process. Three particular aspects of leadership were frequently mentioned as characterizing this work: 1) clear direction about the planning process (criteria, parameters, etc.); 2) a consultative style during the process; and 3) decisiveness in making choices at the appropriate time. Each of these aspects was mentioned by more than 20 respondents.

The work of planning often begins with a pre-planning phase that develops a broad vision which is articulated through criteria, parameters, and conceptual models. In general, respondents stressed two points: define the why and how of the process; and declare the need for participation.

One respondent stressed the need for “greater clarity about the goal of reorganization” and “more forceful exposition of pastoral realities (clergy shortage, finances, etc.)” Another noted that the process needs to be “flexible, realizing the differences in each situation.” Additional specific content was proposed as well, such as: “Have a process for parishes to go through that includes grief processing, explanation of what the changes mean. Let the people know why this is happening, what they can and can't expect.”

Others echoed these themes. Undertaking this work ahead of time reduces confusion and unrealistic expectations because people have received clear direction at the outset.

The second aspect of the work of planning is its **consultative nature**. Once the planning process begins, and people and parishes have had a chance to absorb the diocesan directions, bishops can create a productive consultative process through three steps: 1) broaden the conversation as much as possible so that all segments of the Church are involved; 2) listen to the expression of their emotions and ideas; and 3) insist that their work leads to a recommendation or set of recommendations.

The broader and more consultative the planning is, the better it is received. Those who have experienced parish reorganization seem to be unanimous on this point. When respondents write about “broad consultation and involvement,” they mean:

- *Make sure the laity are involved.*
- *Let the people have as much voice as possible in the planning.*
- *Get as many people as possible involved.*
- *Work with as many parishioners and staff as you can.*

With regard to who is to be involved, particular mention was made of diocesan pastoral and priest councils; regional gatherings of clergy, of staff, and of parish councils; and parishioners in general.

Of course, this advice presumes the value of listening to what all of these people have to say. Those who have had good experiences spoke of the value of “talking in interactive venues, giving various constituencies the opportunity to vent and propose.” This means recognizing that an effective process provides for the various stages of transition, from asking questions to expressing their feelings to presenting their ideas. It also requires care in the planning and conduct of meetings; as one pastor put it, “Hold listening sessions with those in similar situations. Provide opportunities to network in a facilitated situation.”

Ultimately, the consultative process is most productive when it produces substantive guidance for decision-makers. This explains why a number of experienced parish leaders advised bishops to press participants in planning efforts to come up with specific recommendations.

Two of the more direct comments along this line were:

- *Tell [people] the “why” of the merging or closing. Have them respond to the reasons.*
- *Be up front about the need. Give people time and models to make a decision. Then act decisively. If the people cannot reach an appropriate decision, be clear that their choice NOT to act is their choice.*

The challenge here, as one pastor noted is to “give people input, but also ... force them to face reality.”

Having carried out this consultation, the final step in the work of planning is for the bishop to be decisive in making whatever choices are necessary. Oftentimes the process produces a consensus that has broad support, but sometimes no clear-cut best option emerges. What insights do respondents have to offer on this matter?

Being decisive in an area such as parish reorganization may be difficult for bishops because it is unfamiliar territory. On this point, one pastor said, “The bishop must be the one to make the decision.” So, as another noted, the bishop needs to “learn how to make tough and sensible decisions.” Several respondents observed that these decisions are sometimes more “apparent to the pastors and parishioners” than they are to the bishop because they are more immediately affected by the situation.

Some pieces of advice on this theme were simple aphorisms, such as “do what needs to be done” or “bite the bullet,” but they do appear to come from experiences where bishops have not always acted decisively. The

respondents indicate they are aware that bishops are subjected to a wide range of pressures. Several mentioned by respondents were: “small groups that gripe;” “old and outdated respect for ethnicity;” and the bishop’s image in the local church or in Rome. Respondents want bishops to “have the courage to make hard decisions,” “be faithful” to them, and “not give in” to those pressures.

More importantly, bishops must recognize that some choices involve balancing competing values or needs, at the parish level, at the diocesan level, or between what is best for the parish and what is best for the larger church. Consequently, some respondents offer advice with differing perspectives:

- *Provide for the needs of the folks as best you can and go forward*
- *If a decision was not right, investigate thoroughly and try to make it right rather than fight to make a wrong decision work.*

Sanctifying: Demonstrating Support and Respect

The bishop himself has to visit and talk to the parish people personally and inform them of possible scenarios -- because he will be the one to decide the move. He has to be very much a part of his people at a time like this. And he cannot afford to appear not to be a part of them.

Check on the progress occasionally; call the pastor to support him in difficult times. Visit the parish after a set time to see how things are going and to help keep things on track. Insist the staff take extra time off and consider paying for substitutes.

Continue to be supportive of those parishes that are going through reorganization. Visit with them and offer your prayers and the “kind, understanding and compassionate” services of your chancery staff.

One very extensive topic in advice to bishops is the importance of demonstrating support and respect for both pastors and parishioners. (Nearly one third of all respondents commented on this issue in some way.) These qualities are important because they are connected to the bishop’s leadership; they are a part of how he establishes trust and credibility.

Providing support was a theme in 44 comments. This was expressed most often through use of the word “support” and frequently with words like “visit” and “presence.”

Most respondents identified some person or persons in leadership as the desired recipient of the bishop’s support. While there were many references to pastors, other staff and parish leaders were sometimes singled out. Respondents noted that support needs to be expressed both publicly and personally. “Support publicly the priest involved,” and “Let new leader know in a direct and personal way of your support” are both representative comments.

The following quotes from four different pastors offer some additional insight in this area.

- *Bishops need to find effective ways of supporting their priests who are stressed.*
- *Contact them on a regular basis and be sure that your vicar in the area visits to offer help and encouragement.*
- *Support the leaders that are trying to bring these processes about; there is nothing worse than feeling you are out there alone.*
- *It is essential for bishops to retain close and supportive contact with his pastors that are in such a situation and to listen to them.*

For other parish leaders, this is equally important.

- *Support and empower lay ministers.*

-
- *There are many religious and lay persons who are educated and creative enough to be spiritual and administrative persons in smaller parishes within a given radius. Trust them, support them, and allow the parishioners know you do.*

On the question of how a bishop should show his support, nearly half of the comments refer to the importance of personal visits to the parishes and his presence with the people.

- *Listen, communicate with people informally as well and join with them in mourning their loss before they move on.*
- *Be present with the people no matter how small the parishes.*
- *Meet with the parishioners in the merging process to hear their concerns and to lend support to the process.*
- *Be with the re-organization, i.e., be present to the people. Support your pastoral team. Share your pain and concern with people. ...Go to the parishes and listen to people. If they feel they have been heard, they will be more open to decisions made.*

The bishop's presence and support is vital throughout the process. One respondent recommended that a bishop should "be personally present to the people at key moments in the process." The following comments (with emphasis added) suggest that there are many appropriate times.

- *Visit the parishes involved in the reorganization (**before and after**).*
- ***After** these mergers he should come for a Mass. It might be good for him to come even to **the last meeting when a decision is made** about do we merge or not.*
- *Bishops could come **on a weekend for Masses or during week at a meeting** and give background info on how decision was arrived at and help parish deal with their loss and grief.*
- *The bishop should personally visit the parish a few times **prior to merger**.*
- *Make frequent visits. Celebrate all parish events and worship for the **last week or two**.*
- ***The Sunday (weekend) before the formal change** celebrate Eucharist with the people, affirming the people.*
- *Please have more contact with the parishioners so that they don't feel abandoned, especially **at the beginning of the change**.*

Support and presence include listening and communication, as well as providing preparation and training. Respondents perceive all as necessary parts of support.

Respecting the people and the parish was identified in 32 comments. This is expressed in many ways. It means much more than respecting the history and accomplishments of a parish, although those are aspects of it. Respect for the strengths of the people, their faith and ideas and gifts, is really the heart of this theme. This means treating the people as true partners in the work of reorganization. One pastor put it eloquently.

I think we underestimate the capacity of an informed laity to understand and cope with crises. Our experience supports the belief that as soon as parishioners have all the data, they will be on our side. They will accept almost any burden. But, if we try to shield them from disturbing information or deliberately keep them uninformed, they will turn against us. They will blame us. The burdens will be only ours.

Numerous respondents advocated that a bishop should allow the people to have as much of a voice as possible, within established parameters, in determining their future. One pastor suggested that "people seem to understand their needs better than a central office," while several others noted that this helps a parish to take ownership of the decision. Giving people a role in decisions affecting them is both respectful and appropriate.

Several pastors suggested the importance of dealing honestly with people, emphasizing that a bishop should not “play games with the people.” The process and parameters themselves can help to express respect for people and their parishes.

A bishop can also demonstrate his respect for the parishioners by working with them. Some comments mentioned that a bishop’s communication with his people should be characterized by the greatest possible disclosure and dialogue. Several people also suggested that a bishop needs to exercise trust. “Trust the Spirit. Trust your priests and people.” Trusting the people can include not only trusting them with a role in the decision, but also being willing to “share your pain and concern with people.”

As evidenced by the quotes at the beginning of this section, support can also be expressed through financial support for certain parish staff needs and by making diocesan staff available for particular needs. The following section gives more detailed consideration to this diocesan role.

Diocesan Role

Have competent and experienced diocesan leadership resource / lead the execution of [the diocesan] plan.

The advice to bishops contains suggestions about the role of the diocese and of his diocesan offices. Twenty-three comments were offered.

A diocesan-wide scope was explicitly advocated in some comments, but most of the time it was less overt. Numerous respondents referred to their own experiences with successful diocesan-wide efforts. Still, in several cases, the whole substance of the advice was reduced to “just do it,” as the following comments illustrate.

- *Implement a diocesan pastoral planning process.*
- *Our problems are similar all over the U.S. The bishops should not delay any further with organization of parishes.*

Diocesan staff support is the most common theme within this topic. Advice from parishes covers three major dimensions of this staff support: 1) availability; 2) competence; and 3) attitude.

Availability refers to the level of staffing, with suggestions such as having someone devoted to pastoral planning on a full-time basis. Other respondents advise that diocesan staff need to “participate directly” and be “actively involved.” Some of these suggestions refer not only to the staff engaged in the planning task, but to the larger context in which this activity occurs. As one pastor put it, “Make sure all of the staff on the diocesan level are working toward the same goals.”

References to competence indicate the importance of having qualified people providing support for diocesan planning efforts. Sometimes this may mean hiring or appointing persons with the appropriate expertise for certain parts of the work.

- *Diocesan staff personnel [must be] better informed and prepared to discuss with parishes the changes that are likely to occur.*
- *Establish a process that is flexible [and] have capable people guiding the process at the diocesan level.*
- *Have a specialist who is “outside” the diocesan structure work with the parishes affected.*
- *The diocese may need to have a special board to deal with parishes that do not want to work together.*

Finally, the attitude of his diocesan staff members is something that a bishop should pay attention to. He should “ensure that the chancery staff does not take a stance of ‘being above’ all of this.” They should demonstrate

compassion and understanding for people at the parish level. The diocesan staff should listen to parishioners who may “understand their needs better than a central office,” and make sure they ask pastors, who may have valuable insights because they are “older and more experienced,” for their suggestions. Much of this is embodied in the following comment from one respondent.

About three years ago, [someone] was appointed director of the reorganization process. His full effort has been invested in continuing talking about the problem. However, he began talking in interactive venues, giving various constituencies the opportunity to vent and propose. He has made the rounds of the Priest Senate, regional gatherings of priests, regional gatherings of deacons, Diocesan Pastoral Council meetings, and regional gatherings of ordained and lay staff. We call these regional gatherings “clusters.” He currently is meeting with regional gatherings of parish councils, again cluster by cluster.

Different Types of Change

Respondents offered conflicting advice about the types of decisions that bishops should make. While some encouraged more closings and consolidations, others called for avoiding these approaches. More importantly, many of the comments referred to a variety of principles and values that lie behind these recommendations. The advice offered through the survey demonstrates that no single strategy is appropriate for all parish reorganization efforts and processes.

Reasons for Closing or Merging Those respondents who offered advice in support of merging or closing parishes (as opposed to sharing or linking parishes) often acknowledged that this was a difficult decision. Yet they identified a number of reasons for or benefits from this approach. One pastor noted that, as a result of a comprehensive planning and reorganization effort, “We now have alive, vibrant parishes in this diocese.” Another pastor echoed this principle, encouraging bishops to look at each parish and “determine if it is viable as a faith community.” Others suggested that some parishes are too small to be viable, ministerially or financially, and that keeping them open may simply serve to maintain places for Sunday Mass that are no longer authentic parishes. Another respondent said that “It is important to serve people where they are at,” and this may sometimes require closing parishes in certain places in order to have the resources to serve people in growing areas.

Some respondents who pastor more than one parish complained that multiplying their duties and dividing their attention among several communities keeps them from really becoming part of any community. Two related pragmatic explanations offered in support of mergers or closings were that “older priests do not have enough energy for several parishes,” and there is no longer a need for maintaining separate old ethnic parishes.

Some pastors identified other practical reasons for closing or merging parishes, such as the elimination of multiple sets of meetings, councils, records, etc. Several respondents added that even these changes may not go far enough; one advised, “Restructuring is necessary, but along with it there must be a rethinking of the pastor’s role in these restructured churches.” This can mean everything from ensuring that there is sufficient additional staffing to the elimination of multiple worship sites that can keep parishioners from really becoming a single community.

Reasons for Sharing or Linking Fewer respondents offered advice in support of parishes that are linked or share a pastor,¹ but they also identified some important values underlying their recommendations. One of the most eloquent was the pastor of a merged parish:

¹ Among those who specifically addressed this topic, six pastors involved in mergers and closings supported that approach, while three preferred linking parishes to keep them open. Two respondents involved in linked or clustered parishes supported that approach, while thirteen preferred merging or closing parishes.

We talk about the beauty of small Christian communities and then because of a priesthood shortage we eliminate small communities by merging them into ever larger mega churches. Is this really what we want?

A few respondents – one of whom spent a number of years working overseas as a pastor of 30 parishes – noted that parish is about much more than a pastor. One deacon who administers two parishes advised, “Don’t close a parish merely because you have no priest to send there.” Another parish director noted that this also requires working with the parishioners in order to make it work: “Small communities need help with what it means to be Church; staffing limitations leave people with the idea it is Sunday Mass, getting Sacraments, and having socials.”

On the other hand, priests and people need to know what the realities are. A pastor of a merged parish suggested that “a parish director and supplying priest would keep parishes viable until regular clergy can be assigned,” but this begs two crucial questions: 1) Is the parish really viable?; and 2) Does the diocese foresee having more priests in the near future?

Finally, one pastor proposed the linking of parishes or sharing of a pastor as a valuable interim arrangement, saying, “Twinning is preferable to closing one and merging at least in the early years. Twinning may facilitate eventual merging.”

Advice for Dioceses Based on the Diocesan Experience

As noted in Chapter 2, respondents to the first questionnaire, which was sent to all dioceses and eparchies, were persons such as chancellors and planners, who were familiar with the diocese’s planning efforts. On this questionnaire, there was one open-ended question, which asked: “What advice would you give another diocese exploring parish reorganization?” Sixty-four of the 89 respondents from dioceses with experience in parish reorganization wrote comments in response to this question. In their advice, seven themes were identified.

Set Goals

The focus should be on the parish vitality. This is the goal. Reorganization may be necessary to reach the goal but reorganization is not the goal.

Focus on where you are going not where you have been. Identify the number and location of parishes necessary to accomplish the mission of the Church now and in the future, given the realities of the diocese. (Geography, parishioners, priests, etc.)

Create a compelling vision that inspires hope and participation and greater vibrancy/vitality.

A diocese’s efforts to plan and implement parish changes should, as Stephen Covey puts it, “Begin with the end in mind.” It is important to clearly distinguish between goals and strategies, between mission and structure. Respondents encourage other dioceses to develop a list of “elements of a viable parish” so that pastoral care, not priest availability becomes the basis for making decisions. One diocese noted that it can be helpful to consider why each parish was established in the first place. Another recommended that the diocesan pastoral council and the presbyteral council can be very helpful in initiating an examination of these issues.

Provide Leadership

*Strong, unequivocal leadership voice from Bishop. Intense training and use of parish councils. ...
Develop strong facilitators for planning sessions.*

Invite all members of the diocese to be involved in the planning. Have a lead agent who is responsible for leading the process. Involve the parish leadership to take an active role in the process.

Support for parish leaders and parishioners as they undergo the transition.

Effective implementation requires continuing (not just initial) diocesan support.

Efforts at clustering should arise from parishes and deaneries. But discussion of the possibility should be encouraged by the ordinary on a wide scale.

Make prayer a central part of the process.

Effective reorganization requires the bishop's leadership. It then must extend to active leadership at the parish level. One of the most important things a bishop can do is to provide support and training for others involved in leading the planning and implementation of parish change. The diocese also needs to have well-trained staff or consultants who can provide support, direction and facilitation. Finally, an essential aspect of leadership is to first and always keep prayer at the center of the work.

Prepare

Develop an inclusive process which involves formation/education on understanding who we are as church.

Precede reorganization efforts with massive information/education campaign.

Prepare the clergy through very thorough formative process before beginning re-organization.

Develop a process that provides an educational component for the parishioners.

Adequate preparation, both in terms of designing the process and laying the groundwork with the people, is the first step in the planning process. This step, sometimes described as "planning to plan," includes the work of gathering information, consulting on the design of the process, establishing procedures and criteria, and setting a timeline. Preparation also includes the all-important task of preparing and beginning to provide whatever formation and training will be required by those who will be engaged in the process.

Educate

Educate the parishioners to the hard data and ecclesiology that support the need for reconfigurations.

On-going catechesis in all parishes on changing demographics of priests and need for lay leadership and ministry.

Introduce theology of church that sustains cross-parish and cluster planning for mission purpose.

Initiate a diocesan-wide education on the declining number of clergy and future staffing models.

People need to be educated regarding the reasons for the changes.

As noted above, the preparation phase includes the development of programs for educating people at the parish level. The next step is to carry out this educational effort, which ought to include a number of elements, ranging from demographic data to theology and ecclesiology.

There is a wide range of information that can be shared with parishioners to help them understand the need for and possibilities for reorganization: data about priests and parish life and facilities; the theology

of mission; the role of lay leadership and ministry; and the parameters and possibilities that are part of a post-Vatican II ecclesiology. Besides informing parishioners, the educational effort properly includes the full implementation of programs to train parish leaders. In addition, continual communication is stressed as a part of both this theme and the following one.

Collaborate and Consult

Consultation is critical.

Develop a process ... of consultation that includes all levels of parish life. Open meetings that allow people to share concerns, fears, etc. Share all facts, findings, finances, etc. so they have the total picture. It must be an open and inclusive process.

Broad-based consultation and participation from the beginning. There is wisdom in each community.

Do grass roots visits and discussion. Come up through pastoral councils to deanery to diocesan pastoral councils to presbyteral council to Bishop.

Meet with the parishioners. Listen to their story.

Involve clergy and laity in the process and consult all parishioners throughout the process.

More than two thirds of the respondents offering advice to other dioceses included this topic in their comments. Many comments mention the need for the reorganization process to include broad-based consultation, and respondents recommend an open process with participation by everyone affected by the contemplated changes.

The word most commonly used in advice about parish reorganization is “involve.” This work should include parishioners and the presbyterate as active and full participants. Working through the full complement of consultative bodies, the involvement of all groups in the decision-making process is urged in order to ensure that all stakeholders are listened to. Whatever the structure of the diocesan process, it ought to be characterized by open communication and true dialogue in which the wisdom of all is received and discerned.

Move at a Deliberate Pace

Create a time line that allows all of the players ... to participate in the process.

When change of parish status is anticipated, involve pastor and parish council in discussion for at least a year.

Be patient. The process takes time.

Change and its acceptance occurs much more slowly than anticipated.

Develop a plan that will unfold over the long term, ie. ten years or more.

The pace of parish reorganization work must allow sufficient time for meaningful participation prior to making the final decisions and for the process of transition when changes are implemented. It is important to allow time for parishioners and pastors to study information if they are to provide good input as part of the process. It will also take time to adequately review their work in a consultative process. Finally, successful change-making requires a period of transition, beginning with preparation, through implementation, to internalization.

Suggestions include developing a plan to be executed over the course of several years and re-evaluating the plan periodically.

Prepare for Emotional Difficulty

Prepare for pain.

Be prepared to deal with heartache, anger, loss. Pray.

Be prepared for a “grieving process.”

Allow parishioners the time to mourn the changes, especially if it involves closing a parish.

Be ready to make hard decisions.

No change is painless. Every transition requires letting go of something that is cherished, and this involves pain. If dioceses are prepared for this reality, they can more effectively assist and support parish leaders in dealing with the process of working through the pain with parishioners. A few respondents observe that pain is also part of the hard decisions that bishops have to make. For both bishops and parishioners, prayer is an important part of dealing with these difficulties.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Insights from an Integration of Research Findings

This research has produced a number of important insights. Some of them are broad, while others relate to particular types of parish reorganization. Collectively, they make it clear that dioceses need to be constantly attentive to all of the change that is occurring and how they can best respond to it.

1. *Change is widespread.* All over the U.S., dioceses are making changes to parish structures and leadership staffing. These changes are happening because of and in response to a combination of a) changes both in staffing conditions within the Church and in the environment in which it functions, and b) the Church's pastoral values. The principal conditions and environmental factors are a range of ongoing demographic changes in parishes (especially areas experiencing growth or decline of Catholic population and the influx and/or assimilation of ethnic groups) and the aging and declining size of the American presbyterate. The dominant pastoral values underlying diocesan initiatives are, first, providing the opportunity for all parishioners to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist every week; second, not overworking priests; and third, a desire that all parishes manifest a complete range of pastoral ministry so that the Gospel is effectively proclaimed and the spiritual needs of all parishioners are met.

2. *Approaches to change vary.* The characteristics of diocesan change efforts are diverse. Only half of all dioceses planning or making changes are engaged in diocesan-wide processes, but these dioceses account for the great majority of affected parishes. In other dioceses, efforts are limited to one or several parishes, parish clusters, and/or regions (deaneries or vicariates). In a majority of dioceses, parish participation is mandatory, and in many other cases, it is mandatory for some parishes and optional for others. Parish mergers and the linking of parishes or sharing of pastors are the most common types of change.

3. *The way in which diocesan leaders respond to change makes a difference.* The common characteristics of those dioceses that have been most effective (measured by outcomes for parishes and pastors) in carrying out planning and reorganization activities are:

- a. Planning is mandatory for all parishes throughout the diocese;
- b. The process makes use of middle-level structures (deaneries, clusters);
- c. The process is highly consultative (including pastors, parish pastoral councils, and middle-level structures); and
- d. In terms of goals, the most important goal is that parishes maintain or achieve a full ministry program (Four of the top five dioceses named this as a central principle.)

Other key goals or criteria named by a majority of these dioceses are: Mass is accessible (no one would travel an unreasonable distance), priests would not be overextended, and each parish would celebrate Eucharist every Sunday.

4. *Adequate consultation and training are key to well-planned changes and positive parish outcomes.* All too often, the consultation and training appear to be insufficient or non-existent. According to parish respondents, 42 percent of pastors and 34 percent of councils had very much input in the process, but these figures would have been 87 percent if they were consistent with the diocesan responses. This discrepancy indicates that what dioceses consider to be very much input is not viewed as substantively by pastors and parish directors. Similarly,

while 86 percent of parish respondents believe that special training would be very or somewhat helpful, only 28 percent actually received it. Thus, in many cases, dioceses are not providing for something that is seen by parish leaders as an essential component for successful reorganization.

Consultation and training are viewed as essential elements of a good planning process, and they produce more positive parish outcomes. One aspect of careful planning is the effective handling of transitions both through appropriate ceremonies and rituals and through leaders' ability to help parishioners in dealing with the emotional aspects of change. Effective planning also results in a reduction in parishioner opposition. Consultation and training also contribute to a lessening of other difficulties, which also helps to improve parish outcomes.

5. *Parish staffing changes result from all types of structure modifications.* Staff roles change when parish structures or leadership arrangements change. There is a wide range of staffing arrangements to accommodate this.

- Many parishes add paid staff, but many others do not, for financial or other reasons.
- Some try to obtain more volunteers but have difficulty attracting or retaining them.
- Parishes share staff with other parishes and cooperate in many routine activities.

Parish sizes and staff responsibilities both tend to increase as a result of parish reorganization. The numbers of staff and complexity of the work appears to be putting pressure on the individual staff people and on the organizational life of the parish, with:

- more interpersonal interactions required,
- more group/team meetings,
- more professional expectations, and
- an awareness of the need for staff to remain in touch with their spirituality in order to serve effectively.

Whether this is more difficult to do in the new structure or whether the respondents are more aware of the need is not clear from the survey.

For the most part, parish reorganization results in fewer priests assigned to the parish full-time, but greater numbers of priests, deacons, general pastoral ministers, and liturgical ministry staff whose duties in any given parish are only a part-time assignment. The number of religious education staff, social ministry staff and volunteer staff do not seem to change very much.

Depending on the type of structure change, the pastors and parish directors report having less time to provide for the pastoral needs of the parishioners and feeling pressured by the administrative requirements of more complex organizational arrangements. Not surprisingly, pastoral assistants or general pastoral ministers, along with business managers, are the most frequently mentioned types of additional staff persons that are desired. In the future, the numbers and types of parish staff might be expected to grow and the kinds of preparation for people to assume these roles will be varied.

6. *Parish outcomes vary according to the different types of change.* Within a diocese, each individual parish experience can be evaluated in order to identify insights that can inform future pastoral practice. In this study, however, these experiences have been aggregated at the national level. This permits an assessment of different types of change and comparisons among them. What can be learned from each? Why are the two less common types the most positively assessed, while the workload in merged parishes and shared pastor situations is more often viewed as stressful and unsatisfying?

- a. *Sharing a pastor imposes a great burden on priests, but it sometimes results in good pastoral ministry.*** An arrangement of linked parishes that share a pastor is one of the two most common types of parish reorganization. Many pastors found this to be a very unsatisfactory arrangement because of the

burdens in places on themselves and their efforts to provide pastoral ministry. These situations are often treated simply as pastor changes rather than parish changes. As a result, the larger issues of the size, qualifications, and interaction of the parish staff are often not addressed. Sometimes this is because of underlying financial conditions, which then continue to hamper parish vitality. Overwhelmingly, pastors in these situations face increased administrative demands, and they report great difficulty with coordination of their time between parishes. In many cases, parishioners' unmet expectations and unwillingness to volunteer also contribute to the challenge. In some circumstances—with proper planning, leadership, and parishioner formation—these arrangements have proved to be effective in producing pastoral ministry and parish vitality, and in some others, the sharing of a pastor has helped to lay a foundation for a successful parish merger.

- b. **Merging initially imposes a great burden on parishioners, but it can produce more alive, vibrant parishes.** A merger of two or more parishes is the other most common type of change. Merger also seems to be the most complex type of parish change, more so than closing or appointing a parish director or starting a new parish. For parishioners, this is a very painful process. Sometimes this pain is exacerbated by the way in which the merger decision is made. The more parishioners are able to own the merger decision, the easier it is for them to accept it. When it comes time to implement the merger, the grief and unhappiness of parishioners requires considerable attention. This means having pastoral leaders at both the parish and diocesan levels who are effectively trained in and committed to exercising compassion, as well as other skills that can facilitate transition at the individual and parish levels.
- c. **Establishing a new parish is generally a very demanding but positive experience.** New parishes are the least commonly reported type of change, yet this type of change offers valuable insights. Pastors report less unhappiness among parishioners, even though they experience many of the same losses as those of parishioners in merged parishes and shared pastor situations. The greater hope and optimism in new parishes may be partly the result of looking ahead to the work of building a new community. The leadership of the pastor is recognized as particularly important in this type of change. The same pastoral talents and approach would seem to be called for in both establishing a new parish and in effecting a parish merger.
- d. **Parish directors face unique challenges, but the outcomes in these parishes tend to be quite positive.** Because these arrangements are unusual and relatively new, parish directors often lack the supportive diocesan networks and systems that pastors have as they work to develop new ways of providing pastoral leadership at the parish level. Parish directors report fewer difficulties with parishioners' unhappiness than respondents in other change categories, but gaining the acceptance and support of parishioners for their leadership is a common challenge for them. Many of them come into situations where people identify the parish with the work of the pastor. In these places, one key to their success appears to be that the parish director is able to persuade parishioners that the thriving of their parish depends on the commitment and participation of the people. This development of a greater sense of parishioner ownership and responsibility could help to produce more positive outcomes in linked and merged parish situations as well.

7. *The impact of these parish changes on parishioners is significant, but not well understood.* This study has depended on the perceptions of pastors and parish directors to identify the impact of structure changes on the parishioners as well. Many of these respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties as a result of either the unhappiness of the parishioners with changes brought about by reorganization or the interaction of parishioners from former parishes. It is unclear whether this unhappiness is the normal discomfort with change or something more. This research has shown that meaningful participation, special training for parish leaders, and effective leadership at the parish and diocesan levels all help to reduce negative impacts.

8. Good pastoral leadership is essential. Many respondents point to good pastoral leadership as the *sine qua non* of effective parish reorganization. Without denying the importance of pastoral leadership demonstrated by other parish staff, the pastor is the key. He must be an effective listener, able to communicate well and manifests good relational skills. According to pastors and parish directors who have experienced these transitions, the following personal attributes are among those that a pastor (or parish director) will find most useful.

- a. **Self-confidence and trust.** A pastor for a parish undergoing reorganization needs to be able to sit at a table with the laity (figuratively and literally) and listen to their concerns – some of which may be expressed very negatively – without being defensive. Only a person with a high degree of self-confidence and trust will be able to do this. A pastor will also need these qualities to enable the laity to take appropriate leadership in the reorganization process and the new parish arrangement, while recognizing the proper canonical role that belongs to him.
- b. **Passion for consultation.** A pastor in a reorganization process needs to demonstrate a passion for consulting with parishioners, believing the People of God are best served by extensive dialogue. He should never wonder “What is the minimum number of people I need to consult?” Instead he should ask “How can I widen the circle of consultation and involve more people?”
- c. **Tolerance for ambiguity.** Most reorganization processes will not end with unanimity or perhaps even with a strong consensus about the direction taken. There will always be some uncertainty whether the course of action taken was the best choice. There will always be people of good will who oppose the process and speak against it. In addition, even the best process or choice will be imperfect and have inherent weaknesses. Yet, in spite of these dynamics, decisions must be made. A good pastor is willing to accept the ambiguity that accompanies any venture in parish reorganization.

These leadership characteristics are also applicable to the bishop and to senior diocesan and parish staff who play key roles in this work.

Recommendations for Action and Research

The environmental characteristics (demographic changes, parishioner expectations, and availability of clergy and other staff) that brought about the types of parish changes examined in this study are expected to continue, so it is vital that diocesan and parish leaders learn how to strengthen the processes to bring about parish structural changes and improve the parish structures and staffing arrangements that effectively carry out the mission of the church.

1. Consultation and training are essential. In almost every aspect of this research, the strongest finding is that consultation and training are viewed as essential for effective parish planning and reorganization efforts. The only exception is that training and formation was a topic that was less frequently mentioned by diocesan respondents in the initial survey. Yet, when preliminary results were presented to a large group of diocesan planners representing a broad spectrum of U.S. dioceses, their consensus was that training belonged right alongside consultation as the two top issues that dioceses need to address in planning and implementing change. (See Appendix E.)

- a. **Consultation** Described alternately as participation or involvement, consultation is the first leg on which this work must stand. The planning and implementation of changes in parish life should be undertaken with as much involvement of and consultation with parishioners as possible. This is essential for two particularly notable reasons. First, the research presented here clearly indicates that broad participation

enhances both the planning process and the post-implementation parish outcomes. Second, good ecclesiology, as expressed in documents from *Lumen Gentium* to *Novo Millennio*, calls for it.

Several fields of research can help to explain why broad participation produces the aforementioned benefits. Work in urban and regional planning has shown that people who are involved in the planning process are changed by their participation. As they work with the information and the issues, they develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the consequences of various alternatives. Work in the field of organizational change and development is also supportive of broad consultation, in which the insights of many members of the organization are called forth and considered. Given these explanations, along with the higher quality of parish outcomes where parish participation is widespread, it is not surprising that the consensus of survey respondents is to do as much consultation as possible.

- b. **Training** Second, and equally important, the advice from virtually everyone is that dioceses should provide as much training as possible for those who are in positions of leadership. Clergy and non-clergy parish staff need to be supported with more training in leadership, human resource management, interpersonal communication, and group process skills in order to remain effective in an increasingly complex work environment. At the parish level, this means the pastor or parish director, pastoral council members, and the parish staff, whether paid or volunteer. With training, these people can more effectively lead and support others in the parish at all stages of the process: planning, transition, and the building up of parish life in the context of the new arrangement.

2. Dioceses should give more attention to parish staffing issues. The results of this study make it clear that persons called upon to lead these types of changes should possess personal faith and holiness, maturity, much pastoral experience, a positive attitude, self-confidence, and love for the Church. Beyond these criteria, the findings related to parish staffing issues in this study suggest two areas in which diocesan action is recommended.

- a. Diocesan leaders need to ensure that educational programs are available for lay persons who will be called upon by diocesan and parish leaders to serve in parish ministry staff positions. This extends beyond the just-mentioned training of existing staff to the formation of those who may be willing and needed to serve in parish ministry in the future.
- b. Diocesan policies regarding job descriptions and candidate specifications for parish ministry positions can be even more valuable in times of parish change. They are particularly important when dealing with shared staff and part-time arrangements.

3. Dioceses should take the time to conduct careful evaluation of their planning and reorganization efforts. Most dioceses do not evaluate their work. This lack of evaluation may come from a view of planning as a one-time activity, but the growing number of dioceses that are undertaking a second, or third, or fourth round of planning indicates that such a perspective is short-sighted, and that evaluation is an increasingly important activity. One point emphasized in many interviews with pastors was that dioceses have not yet sought to learn from these parish changes in any systematic or systemic fashion.

Several examples illustrate the need for undertaking this work. First, some dioceses described their planning processes very similarly, yet the pastors saw those processes very differently. Without some sort of evaluation it is not possible to know the reasons for such different assessments of comparable processes. Second, without evaluation, when the practices of one diocese are adopted by others, it is unclear whether they are effective or not. Third, the reversal of a merger and some of the difficulties described by pastors caring for merged or multiple parishes highlight the importance of paying attention to the differences between communities.

Evaluation can be a demanding activity. As evidenced by a number of comments reported on here, some of the opinions and practices of respondents may be of concern to people in positions of ecclesial leadership. They need

to listen and look for the kernel of truth that may be contained therein. It is important for leaders at both the parish and diocesan levels to undertake the task of reflection and evaluation—to clearly understand what is occurring and why, so that future leaders (clergy or lay) can be better prepared to lead change efforts.

4. While good leadership cannot be fully defined or predicted, there is much pastoral leaders can do to foster it. Good pastoral leadership is very important in any parish reorganization effort. This point was raised through the written surveys and the oral interviews. Everyone is not naturally gifted with strong leadership abilities but there are interventions that can raise these abilities. On an individual level, a pastoral leader can take three steps to nurture personal leadership.

- a. **Develop a vision.** Many authors writing about leadership development emphasize the importance of a guiding vision. A good pastoral leader needs to have a positive vision of a preferred future for the parish. This vision should be developed through some form of grassroots input, for unless the local people take ownership of the vision it will not have the power to move them. It is also important that the leader keep repeating the vision, the dream for the future. Ideally the vision will be expressed in ways that appeal to and captivate the imagination and spiritual longing of the people.
- b. **Learn how to think strategically.** A good leader must be able to articulate what is truly essential for the success of the parish reorganization and what is secondary. Good strategic thinking is also capable of blending values and goals so that they produce a healthy balance rather than a destructive conflict.
- c. **Use the parish pastoral council.** The pastor is not expected to do everything or have all the answers. A good council can be a tremendous resource in assisting the pastor in developing a vision, planning strategically and then integrating it all through ministries and programs. Seen in this way, a good council can help a person grow in pastoral leadership.

5. Dioceses should also be active in developing pastoral leadership. Diocesan leaders who anticipate the need for preparing priests, parish staff, and parishioners for parish reorganizations need to consider these three areas.

- How might the diocese work to better prepare a pool of highly qualified parish staff to assist pastors in their work?
 - How might the work be structured and the selection process enhanced to create a match between the pastoral leaders' gifts and the work to be done?
 - How might special training, specifically intended to support the leader's role in parish restructuring, be made available to parish leaders?
- a. **Preparing parish staff.** As noted above, it would be very beneficial for the diocese to initiate a training program that prepares a pool of highly qualified parish staff that can assist pastors before and after parish reorganization. Most dioceses already have a ministry formation program, or equivalent. This program can be modified to take into account the new roles and functions that are needed after reorganization.
 - b. **Matching pastors and parishes.** This recommendation may be difficult to implement when many dioceses lack sufficient numbers of priests. Still, it is important to consider a pastor's personality, energy level, ability to work with people, leadership style, and spirituality style when matching him to a parish. Where the match is problematic, the diocese needs to clearly delineate the pastor's functions and provide other means of support for the parish, such as a qualified pastoral associate. The same care that is used in selecting the first pastor of a new parish should be exercised in choosing leaders for other major transitions.
 - c. **Providing special training.** Just as it is important to provide special training for potential staff people, it is even more important to provide special training for pastors that will be serving in a parish undergoing restructuring. This point was mentioned by numerous respondents and has been treated throughout this

report. Dioceses may wish to share with each other the content of their training for restructuring, so that a common wisdom may arise about the best preparation.

Leadership is a very important training topic. It is uncertain to what extent various leadership attributes, and pastoral leadership itself, are learned or whether they arise from maturity. A diocesan-sponsored training program to prepare pastors for parish reorganization would do well, however, to at least address how to exercise good pastoral leadership. Given that ability levels vary from person to person, leadership coaching may be advisable, especially for those who struggle with providing effective leadership.

6. *Future research that can help improve parish outcomes merits serious attention.* Much has been learned about parish reorganization as a result of this study, but this is not the whole story. There is considerable room for more investigation in several areas that can help pastoral leaders build stronger parishes in times of transition.

This national study has produced a considerable amount of data. The surveys and interviews are a valuable resource that has only been partially tapped. Further work can still be done by church researchers to understand the relationship between various aspects of parish reorganization and parish outcomes. What factors contribute to planning and pastoral effectiveness? How? It is possible that additional consideration of these questions could lead to the construction of a theoretical framework for understanding past experience and providing guidance for future practice and research.

Research into the experience and perspectives of other groups—pastoral council members, parish staff, and parishioners—is likely to yield additional insights that could improve how parishes and dioceses improve their pastoral ministry. Additional research can provide a greater understanding of the effects that parish changes have on parish staff and council members. By actually surveying these groups, researchers can gain valuable information about positive and negative aspects of the transitions and new arrangements they have experienced. There should also be further study to identify factors that can improve the effectiveness of councils and staffs.

There is a need to go beyond the impressions of parish leaders by surveying the “people in the pews” who have experienced a change in their parish structure to determine their experience with the resulting parish community. What distinguishes those who embrace change (quickly or eventually, after some period of grieving) from those who reject it? Do parishioners and their leaders have the same perceptions about parish outcomes: meeting needs, enhancing ministry, etc.? By studying the experiences of the parishioners, researchers and pastoral leaders might be able to identify the best procedures for implementing these changes and the most important considerations in staffing the future parish and developing and supporting the community.

Conclusion

The researchers on this project spent dozens of hours conducting the in-depth interviews of pastors and parish directors that were part of this study. They spent hundreds more analyzing the experiences and advice obtained through the interviews and the parish-level survey. It was impossible to participate in this effort without coming away from it with a deep appreciation for these men and women. Their dedication to and love for their parishioners and the larger Church were powerfully evident in their descriptions of their work.

As these pastoral leaders face the challenge of leading parish communities through the transitions occasioned by ongoing changes in Church and society, there is much that they can learn from the experiences of others who are similarly situated. And there is much that diocesan leaders must do to offer direction and support for these efforts. Working together, these pastoral and diocesan leaders can discover and embrace these new directions and challenges with wisdom and strength.

Appendices

Appendix A:
Participation in Surveys, by Diocese

Diocesan Responses to Various Survey Components

	1995 plans	2001 plans	2001 changes	parish surveys	inter-views
Region I					
Boston		Y	Y	Y	Y
Bridgeport					
Burlington		Y	Y	Y	
Fall River					
Hartford					
Manchester					
Norwich		Y	N		
Portland (ME)	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Providence	Y	Y	Y		
Springfield (MA)	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Worcester		N			
Region II					
Albany	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Brooklyn		Y	N		
Buffalo	Y	Y	Y	Y	
New York					
Ogdensburg		Y	Y	Y	
Rochester		Y	Y	Y	Y
Rockville Centre					
Syracuse		Y	Y	Y	
Region III					
Allentown					
Altoona-Johnstown		Y	N		
Camden		Y	Y		
Erie	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Greensburg		Y	Y	Y	
Harrisburg	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Metuchen					
Newark	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Paterson		N			
Philadelphia	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pittsburgh	Y	Y	Y		
Scranton	Y				
Trenton					
Regions IV & XIV					
Arlington					
Atlanta					
Baltimore	Y	N			
Charleston		Y	Y		
Charlotte		Y	Y		
Miami		N			
Orlando					
Palm Beach		Y	Y		
Pensacola-Tallahassee		Y	Y		
Raleigh		Y			
Richmond					
Savannah					
St. Augustine					
St. Petersburg		Y	Y		
Venice					
Washington					
Wheeling-Charleston		Y			
Wilmington					
St. Thomas (Virgin Islands)		N			
Region V					
Alexandria		N			
Baton Rouge		Y	Y	Y	Y
Biloxi		N			
Birmingham					
Covington		Y	Y	Y	
Houma-Thibodaux		Y	Y	Y	Y
Jackson		N			
Knoxville		Y	Y	Y	Y
Lafayette (Louisiana)		Y	N		
Lake Charles					
Lexington		Y	Y	Y	Y
Louisville		Y			
Memphis		N			
Mobile		Y	Y		
Nashville		N			
New Orleans		Y	Y	Y	Y
Owensboro		Y	N		
Shreveport		N			

Diocesan Responses to Various Survey Components

	1995 plans	2001 plans	2001 changes	parish surveys	inter-views
Region VI					
Cincinnati	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cleveland		Y	Y	Y	Y
Columbus		Y	Y	Y	Y
Detroit		Y	Y	Y	Y
Gaylord		N			
Grand Rapids		N			
Kalamazoo	Y				
Lansing		Y	N		
Marquette	Y				
Saginaw	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Steubenville		Y	Y		
Toledo		Y	Y	Y	Y
Youngstown	Y	Y	N		
Region VII					
Belleville		Y	Y	Y	Y
Chicago	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Evansville		Y	Y	Y	Y
Fort Wayne-South Bend		Y	Y	Y	Y
Gary		Y	Y	Y	Y
Green Bay	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indianapolis	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Joliet		Y	Y		
La Crosse	Y				
Lafayette (IN)		Y	N		
Madison		Y	Y	Y	Y
Milwaukee	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Peoria					
Rockford		Y	N		
Springfield (IL)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Superior	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Region VIII					
Bismarck	Y	Y	Y		
Crookston					
Duluth					
Fargo	Y				
New Ulm	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Rapid City		Y	Y		
Sioux Falls					
Region IX					
Davenport					
Des Moines	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dodge City		Y	Y		
Dubuque	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Grand Island					
Jefferson City	Y				
Kansas City (KS)		Y	Y		
Kansas City-St. Joseph	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lincoln					
Omaha	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Salina		Y	Y	Y	Y
Sioux City	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Springfield-Cape Girardeau		Y	N		
St. Louis	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wichita		Y	Y	Y	Y
Region X					
Amarillo		N			
Austin		Y	Y	Y	Y
Beaumont		N			
Brownsville					
Corpus Christi					
Dallas		N			
El Paso					
Fort Worth		Y	Y	Y	Y
Galveston-Houston		Y	Y	Y	Y
Laredo					
Little Rock					
Lubbock					
Oklahoma City		Y	Y	Y	Y
San Angelo		Y	Y	Y	Y
San Antonio					
Tulsa					
Tyler		Y	Y	Y	Y
Victoria		Y	Y	Y	Y

Diocesan Responses to Various Survey Components

	1995 plans	2001 plans	2001 changes	parish surveys	inter-views
Region XI					
Fresno					
Honolulu		Y	Y	Y	Y
Las Vegas		Y	Y	Y	Y
Los Angeles	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Monterey		N			
Oakland		Y	Y	Y	Y
Orange		Y	Y	Y	Y
Reno		Y	Y	Y	Y
Sacramento		Y	Y	Y	Y
San Bernardino		Y	Y	Y	Y
San Diego		Y	Y	Y	Y
San Francisco	Y				
San Jose		Y	Y	Y	Y
Santa Rosa		N			
Stockton		Y	Y	Y	Y
Region XII					
Anchorage		N			
Baker					
Boise		Y	Y	Y	Y
Fairbanks		N			
Great Falls-Billings					
Helena		N			
Juneau					
Portland (OR)		Y	Y	Y	Y
Seattle		Y	Y	Y	Y
Spokane		Y	Y	Y	Y
Yakima		N			
Region XIII					
Cheyenne		N			
Colorado Springs		Y	Y	Y	Y
Denver		Y	Y	Y	Y
Gallup		Y	Y	Y	Y
Las Cruces					
Phoenix		Y	Y	Y	Y
Pueblo		Y	Y	Y	Y
Salt Lake City		N			
Santa Fe		Y	Y	Y	Y
Tucson		Y	Y	Y	Y

	2001 plans	2001 changes
Eastern Churches		
St. Maron of Brooklyn - Maronite Rite	N	N
Our Lady of Lebanon - Maronite Rite		
Newton - Melkite Rite	N	N
St. George's in Canton - Romanian Rite		
Metropolitan Archdiocese of Pittsburgh - Byzantine Rite		
St. Josaphat in Parma - Ukrainian Rite	N	N
Passaic - Byzantine Rite		
Van Nuys - Byzantine Rite	Y	Y
Metropolitan Archdiocese of Philadelphia - Ukrainian Rite	N	N
Parma - Byzantine Rite		
St. Nicholas - Ukrainian Rite		
Stamford - Ukrainian Rite	N	N
Our Lady of Deliverance of Newark - Syrian Rite		
Exarchy for Armenian Catholics		
St. Thomas the Apostle - Chaldean		

Appendix B:
Diocesan Questionnaire with Response Frequencies

Appendix B: Diocesan Questionnaire with Response Frequencies

Parish Change Survey *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development*

This questionnaire assesses parish changes that have occurred between January 1, 1995 and October 1, 2000. It will help bishops and dioceses understand how changes have affected parishes. Thank you for your participation!

ARCH/DIOCESE: _____

NAME: _____

PHONE: _____

TITLE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

A. Since 1995, has the arch/diocese made or formally planned changes in the number or organization of parishes (e.g., establishing, merging, suppressing, or “linking”/“clustering” parishes)?

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 70% | 1. Parish changes have been made. Please go to SECTION 1 on this page. |
| 8% | 2. There has been formal planning, but no changes have been made. Please skip to SECTION 2 on page 3. |
| 22% | 3. There have been no changes or plans to change parishes. Please stop here and return the questionnaire to CARA. Thank you! |

SECTION 1: CHANGES SINCE 1995

Please indicate the number of parishes affected by each of the following types of changes: (Write “0” if none.)

- _____ 1. Number of (original) parishes involved in mergers.
_____ 1a. Number of the preceding figure that were closed or suppressed.
- _____ 2. Number of other parishes closed or suppressed (not as part of a merger process).
_____ 2a. Number of the preceding figure that retained a physical presence as a mission or chapel.
- _____ 3. Number of new parishes established or erected.
- _____ 4. Number of parishes where a resident pastor was replaced with a non-resident pastor *as part of a parish reorganization effort*.
- _____ 5. Number of parishes where a resident pastor was replaced with a team of priests (*in solidum*, c.517.1) *as part of a parish reorganization effort*.
- _____ 6. Number of parishes formerly with a resident pastor that were entrusted to someone other than a priest (c.517.2) *as part of a parish reorganization effort*.
- _____ 7. Number of parishes “linked” or “clustered.”
If any “linked” or “clustered,” what is the nature of the relationship between/among them?

NR Yes No

0 87 13 8. Parishes share a pastor or team of priests.

0 47 53 9. Parishes share a ministerial staff.

0 36 64 10. Parishes share an administrative support staff.

0 20 80 11. Other: _____

Parishes and Pastors with an Experience of Change in Structure or Staffing Patterns

In the spaces on the back of this page, please provide the requested information for all parishes that have been involved in reorganization (e.g., erection, suppression, merging or clustering) or have had staffing pattern changes as a result of parish reorganization (e.g., resident pastor replaced with non-resident pastor or team of priests). The total parishes listed should correspond to the numbers in items 1 through 7 above. The sheet can be photocopied if additional spaces are needed. This is a very important part of the questionnaire. It will allow us to survey pastors who have experienced parish change first-hand. Thank you!

Arch/diocese: _____

Parish Name, Location, Address, and Phone Number	Type of Change and Year	Name of Pastor (Administrator) at Time of the Change	Pastor's Current Location, Address, and Phone Number (if different from previous)
<i>(Example)</i> St. Joseph, Garden City – no longer exists St. Thomas, 840 Peekin Dr. Garden City, ST 49048 (709) 555-7074	<i>(Example)</i> Closed in merger with St. Thomas, 1996 <i>(Example)</i> Merged with St. Joseph (Garden City), 1996	<i>(Example)</i> Fr. Patrick O'Leary <i>(Example)</i> Msgr. James Mueller	<i>(Example)</i> St. Lucy's, 1244 River Valley Rd Mountain Town, ST 49049 (709) 555-1622 <i>(Example)</i> Our Lady of Peace, 55 Ocean Bv. Bayside Village, ST 49154 (709) 555-9943

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

This sheet can be photocopied if additional spaces are needed. Please go to SECTION 2 on the next page.

Appendix C:
Pastor/Administrator Questionnaire with Response Frequencies

Appendix C: Pastor/Administrator Questionnaire with Response Frequencies

Survey of Priests and Pastoral Administrators Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development

The percentage for each valid response is beside/below its respective number. The percentage of non-responses (NR), separately calculated out of 100 percent, follows.

The arch/diocese provided the following information about this parish reorganization. Please provide answers to this questionnaire based on your experiences at the parish named here:

Please respond about your assignment to the parish identified in the box above.

Yes No NR

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|----|---|
| 55 | 45 | 5 | 1. Were you pastor or pastoral administrator at this parish (or one of the parishes involved in this reorganization) prior to reorganization? |
| 58 | 42 | 11 | 2. Were you appointed pastor or pastoral administrator at the parish(es) at the time of the reorganization? |
| 30 | 70 | 19 | 3. Were you appointed pastor or pastoral administrator at the parish(es) after the reorganization? |
| Median | 380 | | 4. About how many Catholic households were in the parish(es) immediately before the reorganization? |
| | NR=10 | | |
| Median | 400 | | 5. About how many Catholic households are in the parish(es) now? |
| | NR=16 | | |

Please use these responses for items 6-12.

1 = Decreased 2 = Stayed the Same 3 = Increased

If you were at the parish both before and after the reorganization how did these change with reorganization?

- | | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | NR | |
| 31 | 33 | 36 | 43 | 6. Your time spent on direct pastoral care. |
| 19 | 22 | 59 | 43 | 7. Your time spent on administrative responsibilities. |
| 23 | 46 | 31 | 44 | 8. Your effectiveness. |
| 7 | 57 | 36 | 49 | 9. Effectiveness of other paid parish staff. |
| 11 | 50 | 39 | 44 | 10. Expectations of parishioners toward your ministry. |
| 10 | 40 | 50 | 44 | 11. Willingness of parishioners to volunteer. |
| 16 | 55 | 29 | 44 | 12. Diocesan support for your work. |

Did any of the following receive any special training for dealing with the reorganization? (Write in "N/A" if you don't know or are not sure.)

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--|
| Yes | No | NR | |
| 28 | 72 | 13 | 13. Yourself. |
| 27 | 73 | 16 | 14. Parish staff members. |
| 33 | 67 | 13 | 15. Parish pastoral council. |
| 25 | 75 | 15 | 16. Other parishioners or parish groups. |

Please use these responses for items 17-26.

1 = None or Not at All 3 = Some
2 = A Little 4 = Very Much

How helpful would it be for the following to receive special training for dealing with parish reorganizations?

- | | | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | NR | |
| 3 | 12 | 30 | 55 | 7 | 17. Yourself. |
| 5 | 8 | 32 | 55 | 13 | 18. Parish staff members. |
| 3 | 8 | 32 | 57 | 8 | 19. Parish pastoral council. |
| 4 | 13 | 34 | 49 | 8 | 20. Other parishioners or parish groups. |
| 4 | 7 | 31 | 58 | 10 | 21. Diocesan leaders. |

How much input did each of the following have in the reorganization that happened to the parish(es)?

- | | | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | NR | |
| 22 | 13 | 22 | 43 | 10 | 22. Yourself. |
| 24 | 21 | 27 | 28 | 16 | 23. Parish staff members. |
| 20 | 19 | 26 | 35 | 13 | 24. Parish pastoral council. |
| 26 | 23 | 33 | 18 | 10 | 25. Other parishioners or parish groups. |
| 6 | 14 | 19 | 61 | 10 | 26. Diocesan leaders. |

Does the parish share any of the following staff members with another parish?

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|---|
| Yes | No | NR | |
| 61 | 39 | 8 | 27. Pastor. |
| 13 | 87 | 20 | 28. Parochial vicar(s)/associate pastor(s). |
| 22 | 78 | 18 | 29. Deacon(s). |
| 22 | 78 | 17 | 30. General pastoral minister(s). |
| 33 | 67 | 12 | 31. Religious education staff (e.g. DRE/CRE). |
| 17 | 83 | 13 | 32. Liturgical ministry staff. |
| 17 | 83 | 13 | 33. Social ministry staff (social justice, outreach). |
| 30 | 70 | 31 | 34. Other ministerial staff: _____ |

Please evaluate these statements about parish staffing.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|--|
| Before reorganization: | | After reorganization: | |
| Yes | No | NR | |
| 72 | 28 | 12 | 35. Parish staff (is/was) sufficient. |
| 72 | 28 | 13 | 37. Parish needs (are/were) being met. |
| 36 | 68 | 32 | 38. 80 20 13 |

How many of each position does/did the parish(es) have on staff? (Include yourself where applicable. If none, write "0").

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Before reorganization: | | After reorganization: | |
| Median | NR | Median | NR |
| 1 | 6 | 40 | 1 |
| 0 | 7 | 42 | 0 |
| 0 | 7 | 44 | 0 |
| 0 | 10 | 46 | 0 |
| 1 | 10 | 48 | 1 |
| 0 | 9 | 50 | 1 |
| 0 | 11 | 52 | 0 |
| 1 | 14 | 54 | 1 |

55. What type of additional staff person would be most helpful for the parish at this time?

Please use these responses for items 56-61.
1 = Not at All **3 = Somewhat**
2 = A Little **4 = Very Much**
NA =Does not apply to this reorganization

How difficult have these been since the reorganization?

- 1 2 3 4 NA NR**
 22 25 34 11 8 10 **56.** Finding enough lay volunteers.
 39 24 16 14 7 12 **57.** Support from the arch/diocese.
 18 31 31 13 7 12 **58.** Unhappiness of parishioners with changes brought by reorganization.
 19 25 26 5 25 13 **59.** Interaction of parishioners from former parishes.
 33 14 13 4 36 14 **60.** Interaction of staff members from former parishes.
 16 20 25 14 25 14 **61.** Coordination and balance of time between parishes.

Please use these responses for items 62-69.
1 = Strongly Disagree **3 = Somewhat Agree**
2 = Somewhat Disagree **4 = Strongly Agree**

Please respond to these statements:

- 1 2 3 4 NR**
 14 18 33 35 7 **62.** The reorganization was carefully planned.
 24 32 30 14 6 **63.** There was little opposition to the reorganization.
 14 7 47 32 14 **64.** The pastor was helpful in dealing with parishioners' grief.
 21 18 28 33 12 **65.** The reorganization was accompanied by appropriate parish ceremonies and events.
 2 6 33 59 11 **66.** Positive elements of the parish(es) have been retained since the reorganization.
 8 17 32 43 9 **67.** Ministry in general has been enhanced.
 8 14 35 43 10 **68.** The parish financial situation is healthy.
 8 24 40 28 12 **69.** The parish has a greater sense of common purpose since reorganization.

Please provide the following demographic information:

70. Are you a
 87% Priest 6% Religious sister or brother.
 2% Deacon 6% Lay ecclesial minister. **NR 0%**

71. Are you: 89% Male. 11% Female. **NR 5%**

Median NR

- 55 3 **72.** Your age.
 4 9 **73.** Total number of years employed at this parish.
 9 24 **74.** How many hours per day do you work at this parish?
 6 22 **75.** How many days a week do you work at the parish?

In addition to this parish, what other assignments do you have? (Check all that apply).

- 44% **76.** Parish(es).
 7% **77.** Mission(s).
 30% **78.** Non-parish ministry: _____
 25% **79.** I have no other assignments.

80. What is the most important way your role in this parish has changed since reorganization?

81. What advice would you give to other parishes facing the type of reorganization your parish experienced?

82. What advice would you give to bishops facing similar reorganization issues in their dioceses?

May we contact you for clarifications about your responses?

Name: _____
 Title: _____
 Phone: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

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Appendix D:
Pastor/Administrator Interview Guide

Appendix D: Pastor/Administrator Interview Guide

Hello. Is interviewee available? [If not:] Can you suggest a time later today or tomorrow when s/he might be able to take my call?

[Explanation:] My name is _____. I am calling from _____ as part of a national parish research project. I am following up on the pastor's/administrator's earlier survey responses.

[To Pastor/Administrator:] Last spring, you responded to a survey conducted as part of a national study of parish experiences with structural and/or staffing reorganization. As a final phase of this research, we are now conducting telephone interviews with a sample of those parish leaders. I would like to ask just a few questions about issue and challenges you have faced.

This should take about 15 or 20 minutes of your time. Could we do this now, or would you like to schedule a time for me to call you back? [If it is to be taped: May I record this interview to ensure that I write out your responses accurately? The tape will not be retained and your identity will be disclosed.]

Let's begin by confirming the nature of the parish change and your role in it. My information indicates that you were:

Pastor	Of _____ Parish	Prior to	A Merger
Administrator	And _____ Parish/Mission	At the time of	A Parish Closing
	And _____ Parish/Mission	After	A Parish Founding
			A Parish Clustering
			A Shared Pastor Arrangement

Is this correct? (MAKE CORRECTIONS AS NEEDED)

1. Is/Was this your first assignment of this type? [for example, pastoring through a transition or pastoring more than one parish] (INCLUDE ANY DESCRIPTION GIVEN ABOUT PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE)

Thank you. Now, as we go through the rest of these questions, I'd welcome any examples or stories that illustrate your answers, okay?

2. How has/was your role changed as a result of this type of assignment?

[PROBE: For each of your roles...]

Identify things you did previously that you no longer do.

Identify tasks that are new or that you do differently.

What was different about pastoring in the midst of transition?]

[ROLES: liturgical – liturgy planning, presiding, preaching;

teaching – RCIA, sacramental prep, catechesis;

other pastoral – counseling, visiting, leadership;

administrative – temporal affairs, organizational matters]

(general...)

Let me ask a couple of questions regarding the parish staff.

3. How have staff roles and responsibilities changed?

[PROBE: What did they do that they no longer do?

What do they do now that is new? Are there new positions or titles?

What is required or expected of you as manager of the staff?]

4. In general, how effective are the staff in their work?

[PROBE: What are they doing well, and where is there significant room for improvement?

What academic preparation and experience do they require?

When looking for new parish staff, where do they come from?]

5. If there is any other extremely important staff-related issue that you haven't yet mentioned, what would that be?

5a. How were the staff AND the parish pastoral council helpful, or unhelpful, in the transition process?

Coming back to your own position now,

6. What are the skills, attitudes, and traits that lead to success?

Skills (types or areas of expertise)

Attitudes

Traits

7. Based on your parish experience, what training would be desirable for someone expected to undertake this type of assignment?

8. In your diocese, how is the Church learning from situations and experiences like yours?

[PROBE: How is it being integrated into how we operate as a local church?]

9. Is there anything else you would like to say on any aspect of parish reorganization?

Thank you so much for your time and all of your thoughts.

Appendix E:
Important Issues for Dioceses in Planning and Implementing Change

Appendix E: Important Issues for Dioceses in Planning and Implementing Change

In 2002, the project director of this national study presented some preliminary findings from the survey of pastors and parish administrators at the annual convention of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development. Nearly 100 members were in attendance, many of whom had completed their diocese's questionnaires in the first part of the study.

After listening to this presentation, conference participants discussed the question: **“What are the three or four most important issues that dioceses need to address in planning and implementing change?”** Afterwards, wrote their individual reflections on this question. Two issues were consensus choices: training and participation.

Training Nearly every response made some mention of the importance of training, formation, or education. Most of the time, this was stated as a general need, with no single group being identified. Often, training of lay people for ministry and leadership was named. In such cases, this was frequently accompanied by references to recruiting and empowering these people. Many respondents specifically mentioned the training of pastors, staff, and council members, and several also referred to the importance of educating diocesan staff about these issues.

In terms of what kinds of training would be most helpful, topics that were mentioned included training for planning and for implementing changes, leadership, new responsibilities, formation for lay ministry, and education about the mission of the Church. Depending on the topic, this training should be offered before, during, and after the planning process.

Participation Participation is described with a variety of terms, but the consistent elements are 1) the inclusion of parish leaders and members 2) in the decision-making process. References to the involvement of all, the inclusion of the laity, and a consultative process are commonplace.

Other Issues Several other issues also received repeated reference. Communication, an attitude of openness or willingness to embrace change, collaboration and coordination, prayerfulness, and leadership all had widespread mention. Finally, diocesan planners identified the bishop as having a vital role. Important qualities include his vision, leadership, ongoing support, presence and participation, courage, and positive attitude.