



PARISH GROWTH
PARTNERS



RECONCILING

THE PASTORAL ROLE WITH THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE

A PASTOR'S PATH TO COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

In a recent address to the priests serving in his diocese, Bishop Gregory Aymond of Austin, Texas said, "My brothers, we are not CEOs."¹ He reminded his audience that their principal duties as priests were to be preachers and teachers of the word, presiders of the sacraments, and shepherds who provide pastoral care.

Yet he recognized that pastors are also called upon to manage personnel, raise and spend money, and attend to countless administrative tasks. How to resolve this conflict? Bishop Aymond advises, in part, "If we are to be good stewards of the gifts given to us as priests, the key is to call other people to do the things that they can do so that we can do the things that we have been specifically ordained to do."² In order to focus on those principal duties, it is essential that pastors know that they have both the permission, and the obligation, to seek internal and external resources to effectively manage the business aspects of running a parish.

Focusing On Your Pastoral Duties

How can pastors effectively manage the day-to-day administrative responsibilities for their parishes while remaining true to their calling? Likewise, how can pastors remain grounded in their love of God, preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus, and encourage authentic stewardship among their parishioners while completing necessary church business?

Bishop Aymond advises pastors to avoid becoming distracted from their pastoral calling in favor of managing the parish: "We all know it is easy to get caught up in some of these managerial things, because they are more manageable. It is easier to see the results, and we feel more successful when it is finished. All of that is understandable. However, it is never to be the core of our ministry. We must call others to assist us, and we oversee their work."³

Therefore, effective stewardship by pastors is directly related to their willingness and ability to recognize their own skills and talents, and to identify areas where they require assistance from others. To fulfill responsible parish stewardship, this assistance can come from pastoral staff, parishioners, and outside professionals.

There are many opportunities to learn how to be a more effective administrator; to better understand basic accounting principles, to balance a budget, or more creatively use technology for parish communications. However, not all pastors find enjoyment in the day-to-day administration of their parishes, and others may lack skills in these areas. These pastors experience a conflict between their "administrator" role and their "pastoral" role.

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In these cases, pastors can become so distracted by their administrative duties that they can become less attentive to their special gifts of compassion and healing, and less involved in those direct pastoral activities that foster the relationship building that Bishop Aymond references as being central to their priestly duties.

The continuing challenge for pastors is to discover how to lead with vision, create a faith-filled community, and effectively build relationships within their ministries while also determining how best to pay the bills.

As Bishop Aymond reminds us, it's a matter of balance and priorities. "Particularly in the parish, the shepherding priest is also the administrator and the overseer. The parish must run smoothly, and finances, buildings, insurance, civil and church laws, and ministerial complications are important and have to be attended. However, these administrative things should not take us away from God, the word, the sacraments and being the one who gives pastoral care to those in need. They should not be the purpose of our lives, and they should not take up most of our time."⁴ Achieving this balance relates directly to the call and challenge of Christian stewardship: managing our time and talent.

Understanding Stewardship

The heart of stewardship is the belief that everything we have is from God, on loan to us, "to cultivate and care for the common good."⁵ St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds us how purposeful God is with gifts of the Spirit: "to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."⁶

Stewardship is "the very real expression of our discipleship and personal commitment to share God's gifts and blessings to us with others as we live the Gospel in the uniqueness of our times and life circumstances."⁷ "It is a natural Spirit-led response and a necessary ingredient for the successful implementation of God's plan for redemption."⁸

Stewardship involves sharing those special gifts God has given to each person: time, talent and treasure. While there is a tendency to focus on the first two, treasure is equally important. Church projects and ministries will always need funding. In addition, offertory revenues can serve as a natural outgrowth of the inner workings of the Spirit. When people give of themselves to others, including giving monetarily, they are responding to God's call to share what has been given to them.

The comprehensive definition of Christian stewardship approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in November 1992 (revised and updated in 2002) challenges all of us to be accountable with our personal gifts from God:

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"Who is a Christian steward? One who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with all, and returns them with increase to the Lord."⁹

A Pastor's Path To Collaborative Stewardship

There are many situations that compete for a pastor's attention. Whatever the demands of the parish, a pastor's first response is to be "preacher and teacher of the word... because people have to be fed by the word before they approach the Eucharistic table."¹⁰ This call from God to teach, preach, serve others, and facilitate parish-wide stewardship has implications for a pastor's time and talent for self-management.

Balancing many responsibilities makes for a difficult daily journey. How is it done? Where does one start? Once again, Bishop Aymond offers some helpful guidelines. First, "we must continue to be men of prayer."¹¹ Second, "we accomplish priesthood in consultation and collaboration."¹² He reminds us that Jesus didn't accomplish His ministry alone. He gathered together 12 apostles and many more disciples. Bishop Aymond also cautions that, "we can do better ministry if we do not surround ourselves with 'yes' people...and how do we do that today? With good pastoral councils and finance councils...those people with their gifts are our collaborators and the ones with whom we consult."¹³

Pastors may be best able to initiate stewardship among parishioners when they start with an understanding of their own inner spiritual resources, and how to best use their own gifts of time and talent. This "self-stewardship" might begin with an inventory of their own skills and talents. Such self-awareness can guide pastors to seek other resources to help complement them in areas where they do not have a strong, natural inclination.

Pastors Must Lead, But Also Seek Outside Help

Pastors deal directly with the entire parish community and are constantly on the frontline of daily challenges that require much time and effort. They are the leaders of our local churches and they affect our entire church community and its future. Pastors are an important resource and a critical part of God's plan for our redemption. They are humans first, called by God to be priests, and assigned as pastors. That assignment involves responsibility for all church matters including the administration and financial management of their parish.

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However, many pastors probably feel overwhelmed as they strive to do all parts of their job well. Bishop Aymond recognizes this feeling, and counsels, “If we are going to be effective priests, you and I must care for ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. We can’t do it all...”¹⁴

Indeed, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops clearly urges pastors not to try to “do it all,” but rather to seek outside assistance. Their pastoral letter on stewardship states, “Professional staff and/or consultants should be employed where appropriate and where diocesan or parish resources permit.

As in all aspects of church life, the collaborative leadership and active involvement of many people is essential to the success of parish and diocesan stewardship efforts.”¹⁵ They add, “...Parishes and dioceses are urged to seek the assistance of qualified communications professionals...to develop communications plans that will make the best possible use of available resources.”¹⁶

Effective stewardship by pastors is directly related to their ability to identify specific areas where they may require assistance from others. Through preaching, teaching, presiding over the sacraments, and shepherding, pastors are critical to creating the “meaningful spiritual home”¹⁷ sought by the Catholic faithful.

In summary, the demands placed upon the time and talent of the contemporary Catholic pastor can appear overwhelming. In an attempt to reconcile the conflict between pastoral and administrative priorities, pastors should first focus on their responsibilities as a priest: preach and teach the word, preside over the sacraments, and provide pastoral care and guidance.

With regard to creating and promoting an effective stewardship program within their parish, they should focus on consistently preaching the message of stewardship.

However, when it comes to communicating and administering stewardship ministries and programs, pastors should rely upon parish staff, parishioners, and qualified outside professionals to create, design, implement and measure the effectiveness of these programs.

This white paper was prepared for Parish Growth Partners by Edward A. Colozzi , Ed.D., president of Career Development and Counseling Services. Over the past 30 years Ed has counseled numerous religious and secular professionals to help them improve focus, leverage strengths, and realize their full potential.

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