

Leadership Development Experiences  
of Exemplary Roman Catholic Parish Priests:  
An Exploratory Study

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## **Dedication**

In remembrance of my beloved husband,  
Ruben Valeros Ong, LL.B.  
who inspired this work from beginning to end

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of several individuals. The esteemed faculty who taught me at the George Washington University Executive Leadership Program deserves special thanks. I am indebted particularly to my chair, Dr. Ellen F. Goldman. She guided the development of this work, and pushed until it was completed. Her wisdom and perspective as a scholar-researcher were a constant light in my quest for understanding. I am grateful to the two members of my committee, Dr. Lionel Howard and Dr. Dewey Wallace, Jr., for their guidance; and to my external reviewers, Rev. Dr. E. Stanley Ott and Rev. Dr. Donald Paul Sullins, for their insight and support. It was an honor working with such accomplished scholars.

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## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

### Leadership Development Experiences of Exemplary Roman Catholic Parish Priests: An Exploratory Study

This qualitative, phenomenological study addressed the research question: How do exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests perceive and describe their leadership development experience? The study explored experiences considered important in developing leadership, including how they occurred, the meaning provided, the definition of exemplary leadership in the parish setting, and support for leadership development. The research used the leadership, leadership development, and experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) literature. The results inform practice related to leadership development and priestly formation.

Ten exemplary pastors assigned to an archdiocese in a U.S. metropolitan area were selected from recommendations of referral sources (Sternberg, 1994). Each pastor reconstructed his leadership development experiences during a series of in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006). Reduction and thematic analysis (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006) led to the identification of seven defining experiences of leadership development and their important characteristics.

The study offers the following conclusions with respect to the pastors' leadership development: (1) exemplary leadership in a parish setting encompasses spiritual, organizational, and community leadership roles, with the spiritual dimension the underlying force driving leadership action; (2) the experience of leadership development shows some of the significant types of experiences reported in the general leadership literature as essential to leadership development; (3) leadership development is a highly

individual process of varied experiences, with particular characteristics and different levels of interaction, and spiritual beliefs and positive values are integral contributors; (4) specific learning approaches are employed in the experience of leadership development; and (5) the meaning that evolved from the leadership development experiences was a gradual transformation in understanding and approaching leadership. Further research across parishes and religious orders would enhance the study's transferability.

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# **CHAPTER 1:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

This study sought to understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests (also referred to as pastors) and to identify what experiences contributed to their ability to lead their organizations and communities. Leadership development is defined as the expansion of a person's capacity to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes that enable members to work together in productive and meaningful ways (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998). In this study parish refers to the community of Catholic believers located within the geographical boundary defined by the diocese.

Demographic and societal changes, the declining number of priests, and a trend toward multiple-parish pastors have influenced the leadership needs of many parishes. (Cieslak, 2003; Duch, 1990; Sweetser & Forster, 1993; Zech, 2003). Among the demographic changes are a 75% growth in the Catholic population over the past 40 years, with approximately 77.7 million Catholics in the United States today but an 11% decrease in the number of diocesan priests over the past decade (Gray, Gautier, & Cidade, 2011). Of the 26,660 diocesan priests in 2012 (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2012), many are now retired or will likely retire in the next decade. Moreover, fewer men are being ordained than what is needed to replace the aging clergy population. Despite the increasing Catholic population, church leaders have downsized the number of parishes from 19,000 in 2000 to 17,800 by 2010; nearly 3,390 parishes are without resident pastors. On the other hand, the average number of registered households

in U.S. parishes has grown to 1,168, with 40% of the increase from 2005 to 2010 represented by Hispanic/Latino Catholics. Gray et al. (2011) predicted that U.S. parishes are likely to continue to get bigger as the number of Catholics is forecasted to grow in the future.

There is scant research on the leadership development practices and experiences of Roman Catholic pastors, and an organized body of literature is not available to guide priests in leading their parishes or to inform them as to what leadership development practices will make them good leaders. This study contributes to the literature by offering an understanding of what experiences contribute to development of leadership and the meaning provided by these experiences; offers important insights for priestly formation and leadership education; and contributes to our understanding of leadership development in the religious context.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Shifting demographics and the declining number of priests available to serve American parishes are major problems for the Catholic Church. For several years now, and increasing in frequency, diocesan priests have been asked to serve multiple parishes (Schuth, 2006), and priests are being appointed pastors as early as 2 to 4 years after ordination (Zech, 2003). “The continuing and worsening shortage of priests has led to understaffed parishes and also a growing number of parishes are without a priest altogether” (Carroll, 1992, p. 295). Davidson and Fournier (2006) noted that the average size of a parish has increased, with larger parishes experiencing more growth than smaller ones, and 15% of small parishes have no resident priests.



These dramatic changes in the various dimensions of Catholic parish life have resulted in the pastors assuming “an expanding and more complex leadership role in the temporal as well as spiritual life of the parish” (Zech, 2003, p. 1). In a 2008 National Ministry Summit attended by over 1,200 lay ministers, religious and clergy, Catholic ministry leaders recognized the need to look for new leadership approaches to the Catholic parish ministry in the contemporary world (Osborne, 2008).

Historically, the parish has been a stable community of people located within a particular church or diocese headed by a parish priest or pastor (Code of Canon Law, 1983). It is described as “a place where people find God, where they join together in meaningful worship” (Castelli & Gremillion, 1987, p. 3); the “heart of everyday spirituality” (Enzler, 2001). The parish life experience of community building is highly valued “in an American society disaggregated by individualism, work patterns, and communications media” (Gremillion & Leege, 1987, p. 9). Zech (2006) noted that a great parish must do more than nurture the spirituality of its parishioners. It must be a welcoming place that people want to be part of, and it must be well managed.

The evolving reality in the Church demands that pastors not only be spiritual leaders, but also become builders of the community and effective administrative leaders (Duch, 1990; Zech, 2003). The leadership responsibilities of priests serving as pastors in parishes are identified as spiritual, organizational, and community leadership (Duch, 1990; Zech, 2003). Spiritual leadership is at the heart of the priest’s role and involves the pastor’s core work as spiritual leaders of community worship and ritual activities and of caring for the spiritual life and growth of parishioners (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006). Organizational leadership is the ability to work with people toward a common goal and to

communicate a vision for the parish community (Carroll, 2006; Duch, 1990).

Community leadership is the ability to involve community members in building the parish and in addressing its social problems (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006).

Diocesan priests who work in parishes generally feel that they are more knowledgeable and skilled and that they have more responsibilities and commitment to people compared to other professionals (National Opinion Research Center, 1972).

Szafran (1976) opined that this could be due to priests having developed “a type of professional schizophrenia”:

They have isolated their organizational roles . . . through which they exercise influence on general policies and programs from their individual roles in which they celebrate worship services . . . and in general minister to the needs of their congregation. (p. 348)

Szafran further noted: “This interpretation proposes that priests operate in two spheres—the one oriented toward the organization, the other toward the client” (p. 348).

Imse (1969) examined this dilemma of clergy who attempt to harmonize their spiritual and organizational leadership roles—for example, the Pope as head of the Catholic Church, and similarly the priests. These roles are different but not always easily or clearly separated. The spiritual and organizational roles complement one another; decisions affecting the spiritual role of the office will probably affect or have repercussions on the organizational role, and decisions cannot be made with reference to only one role, because choices and actions are always influenced by both. Those ideals are still in play in contemporary times (Hoge & Wenger, 2003). Parish priests are therefore expected to lead in an integrated way, combining spiritual, community, and organizational leadership roles.

Carroll (2006) noted that excellent pastoral ministry must be understood both normatively (the view of Jesus' model of servant leadership) and contextually in response to opportunities and challenges in the parish setting and from the broader social and cultural environment. Duch (1990) opined that "for a parish to make a positive difference, parish leaders should look realistically at the organizational aspect and leadership aspects of their parish" (p. vii).

Parishes as presently constituted will continue to be the backbone of Catholic religious life, and social institutions as complex as present-day parishes require professional leadership (Hoge, 1987). Cozzens (2000) noted that "leadership is at the heart of parish ministry" (p. 33). There is a need for church leaders to lead creatively and to become "knowledgeable and informed executives . . . leaders with the ability to enhance Christian living within the community of the Church" (Duch, 1990, p. 17). Rosetti (2001) called on priests to be comfortable with change and to "be leaders of change and not its victims."

The pastor's training has offered very little to prepare him for leadership in a modern Catholic parish (Sweetser & Holden, 1992; Zech, 2003). Zech (2003) opined that pastors need training in leadership, which they feel is important but for which they are relatively unprepared. Murphy (1995) observed that newly ordained priests may lack the necessary preparation for leading a parish. Schuth (1989) noted the lack of leadership development and other leadership preparation for priests assigned to lead the parishes. The courses for teaching organizational and community leadership skills have yet to be developed in seminaries (Schuth, 1989). Research on priestly ministry in multiple parishes reveals the absence of "the kind of investment one would expect in the

professional development and support priests need in order to thrive in their assignments” (Schuth, 2006). Father Eugene Hemrick (personal communication, February 2, 2011), director of the National Institute for the Renewal of the Priesthood, observed that “for years, priests have been trained in theology primarily; leadership was learned on the job. There is/was a mentality that knowing how to operate a parish sort of came with ordination.” According to Cieslak (2003), “Due to maturity, experience, and personality, some priests make better leaders than others. Yet all priests can be helped to grow in leadership” (p. 120).

There is limited research from which to draw specific conclusions about the leadership situation in Catholic parishes. There are scattered pieces of evidence, but they are of uneven quality. Schuth (1999b) suggested:

Studies are needed to determine the patterns and styles of ministry engendered by the divergent models (of priestly formation) and their relative success in producing “good priests.” . . . All proposals should be tested for their pastoral realism and should bring the church to engage the realities of contemporary culture. (pp. 6-7)

Schuth further noted that “common to all models of priestly formation is the intention to promote authentic discipleship, healthy community life and leadership potential” (p. 7).

For such a critical issue as preparing priests to assume leadership roles in response to the changing times, there is no organized body of literature available to guide priests or to inform them as to what leadership development practices will make them good leaders. While many factors influence the success of a parish, pastoral leadership is a critical area requiring investigation.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary priests assigned in Roman Catholic parishes. The study explored experiences considered important in developing leadership and sought to examine the meaning provided by these experiences.

## **Research Question**

This study was guided by one research question: How do exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests perceive and describe their leadership development experience? There were two subquestions: What experiences contributed to their ability to lead their parishes? What is the meaning provided by these experiences in the practice of their leadership roles?

For the purposes of this study, *exemplary* was defined as superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). The operational definition of *experiences* includes any activities, events, practices, knowledge, skills, observations, feelings, or reactions of the participant ('Experience,' 2008).

## **Statement of Potential Significance**

Leadership development among Catholic priests is a topic that has not been thoroughly researched despite the magnitude of challenges faced by the Church that demand more effective and creative leadership at the parish level (Carroll, 2006; Duch, 1990; Hoge, 1987; Hoge, Carroll, & Scheets, 1988; Schuth, 1999a; Sweetser & Forster, 1993). This research was designed to begin to fill the gap in our theoretical understanding of leadership development in the church parish setting.

The findings add to the leadership literature by identifying leadership development experiences relevant to parish priests. In so doing, the findings extend the leadership literature to a new context—parishes.

The findings also provide practical direction for priests and others involved in their development by identifying specific experiences required in order to build organizational and community leadership abilities. In addition, the findings provide insights into the unique nature of the pastoral journey, the distinctive leadership roles of parish priests, and the challenges these pastors face.

Finally, investigating the leadership development experiences of parish priests may potentially be critical to promoting their personal growth and leadership capability to positively impact the Catholic Church. Thus, this study contributes to theory, research, and the improvement of practice.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research (Figure 1) was derived from a review of literature on adult learning, leadership, experiential learning, and leadership development. The two major constructs are adult learning and leadership; subconstructs

are experiential learning and leadership development. Leadership development is represented as the result of learning from experience.

Scholars report that learning, as well as the ability to learn, enhances and develops leadership skills, and in a reciprocal relationship, leadership both seeks and produces learning (Argyris, 1977, 1991; Brown & Posner, 2001; Jaques, 1989; Kotter, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Studies have shown that a relationship exists between learning and self-reported effectiveness along dimensions related to leadership behaviors (Dalton, Swigert, Van Velsor, Bunker, & Wachholz, 1999). Brown and Posner (2001) provided further evidence of this relationship by showing that “more active and versatile learners subsequently consider themselves more frequently involved and engaged in leadership behaviors” (p. 274). Vaill (1996) argued that learning is a foundational element of effective leadership, and that in an unstable organizational environment, leaders have to learn in order to survive. In organizations where innovation is a key performance driver, learning is critical to continued survival (Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Senge, 1990).

The interconnectedness between leadership and learning has been studied by organizational behavior scholars. Jaques (1989) observed that leaders must have the “learning how to learn” skill and the opportunity and capacity to learn. Argyris (1991) opined that leaders must learn how to learn; questioning one’s own views and someone else’s reasoning provides a valuable opportunity for learning. Senge (1990) suggested that leaders need to be responsible for learning by building learning organizations, where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning.

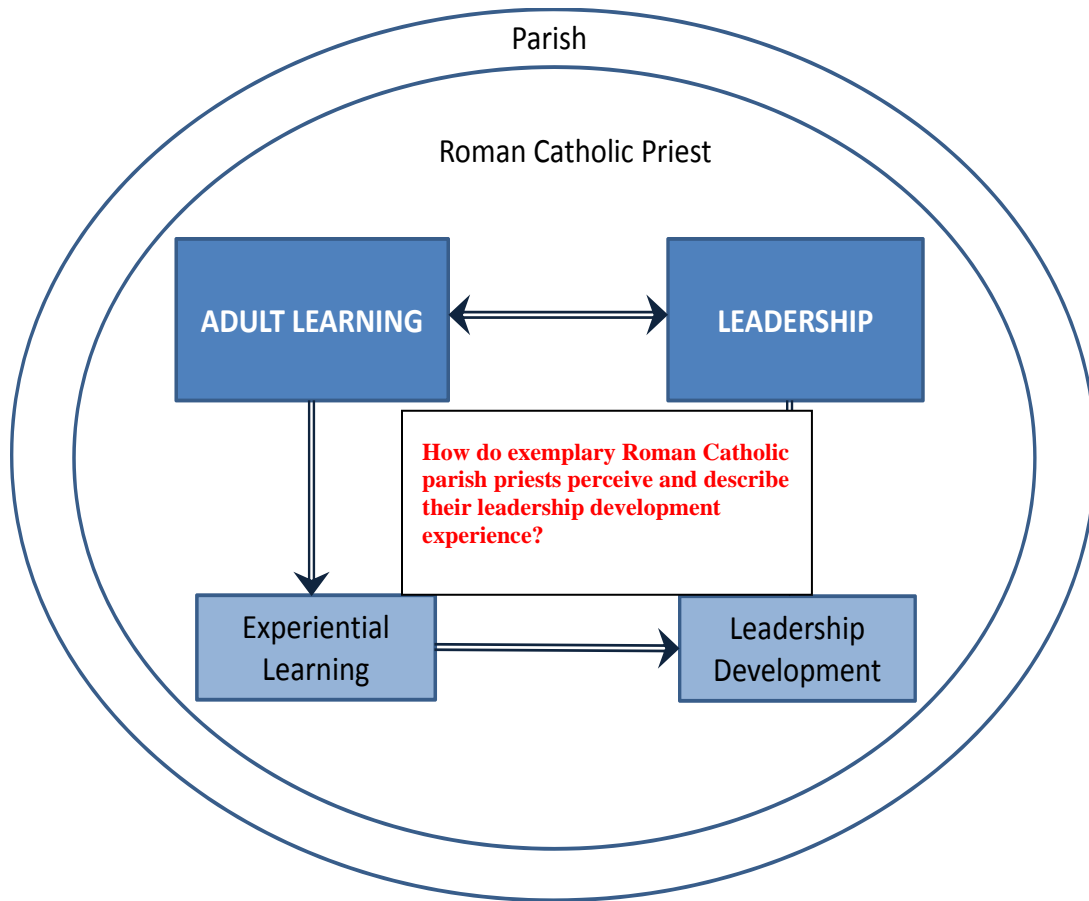


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Kotter (2005) asserted that “the most notable trait of great leaders is their quest for learning. . . . Often they are driven by goals or ideals that are bigger than what any individual can accomplish, and that gap pushes them to keep learning” (p. 6). For managers and leaders, learning is essential to job performance and a successful career (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Marsick, 1987). Self-management skills that include curiosity and love of learning are among the critical skills for leading organizations in the 21st century; likewise in contemporary organizations, there is a need to learn and develop effective leadership skills (Marquardt, Leonard, Freedman, & Hill, 2009). Excellent leadership, according to Marques (2007), is “closely linked to



enthusiasm for being educated, not only in formal educational environments, but on a continuing basis” (p. 924); “a leader is a lifelong learner” (p. 928).

The leadership literature provides the theoretical concepts that can guide the implementation of logical leadership development efforts in organizations (Cox, Pearce, & Sims, 2003). These include a cadre of developmental job assignments, skills training, feedback mechanisms, and developmental relationships. Brown and Posner (2001) described “creating a culture of leadership and learning as the ultimate act of leadership development” (p. 280) and commented that “the interest in connecting learning . . . and actually providing leadership is relevant to the growing interest in the development of leaders” (p. 275).

The adult learning literature addresses the importance of experience to adult learners, key components of the learning process, and perspectives on learning applicable to leadership development. The link between adult learning and experience has been highlighted over the past two decades by scholars, for example, McCall (2010) and others (Arvey, Zhang, Krueger, & Avolio, 2007; Arvey, Rotundo, Johnson, Zhang, & McGue, 2006) who show that the majority of leadership skills are learned from experience in the workplace. In particular, research shows that about 75% of activities that individuals report as crucial to their careers are on-the-job learning experiences (Dalton et al., 1999). Kouzes and Posner (2007) conducted a study on managers’ use of learning tactics when faced with a new or unfamiliar experience. The results indicated that experience is approached “with a willingness to learn, an appreciation for the importance of learning, and a recognition that learning necessarily involves making some mistakes” (p. 204). “Effective leaders . . . see all experiences as learning experiences” (Kouzes & Posner,

(2007, p. 341). Van Velsor and McCauley (2004) commented that “developmental experiences can enhance a person’s ability to learn, and individuals with high ability to learn seek out and may benefit more from a variety of developmental experiences” (pp. 4-5).

Understanding how the learner’s experience affects the learning process is the focus of adult learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Specifically, constructivist approaches to learning are concerned about how leaders make meaning of their experiences. The most comprehensive of these approaches, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT), with its unique perspective on learning and development, may provide a means of understanding the learning process involved in leadership development.

Kolb (1984) defined *experiential learning* as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it” (p. 41), requiring four different kinds of abilities: (a) an openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences; (b) observational and reflective skills; (c) analytical abilities; and (d) decision-making and problem-solving skills. After the final phase, another set of concrete experiences follows, and it triggers the experiential learning cycle to start again. The ultimate goal of this experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) is to obtain “a fully integrated personality” (Malinen, 2000, p. 89).

Leadership development is represented in the conceptual framework as the result of learning from experience. According to Brown and Posner (2001), “Leadership development is a learning process. Learning from experience can be used to assess,

strengthen, and create leadership development programs that develop effective leaders” (p. 279).

### **Summary of the Methodology**

The setting for this study was an archdiocese in a U.S. metropolitan area, and the participants consisted of exemplary priests assigned to lead Roman Catholic parishes in the archdiocese. The researcher is familiar with this setting, as she has worked with and is currently employed by a diocesan social service organization.

The research utilized qualitative methodology, as the research questions were exploratory in nature (Creswell, 1998, 2007). There is simply not enough known about the subject to design an appropriate quantitative study that would serve the study’s purpose. More specifically, the phenomenological approach was best suited to answer the research questions because of the focus on the *meaning of experiences* as perceived by the research participants.

A purposive criterion selection method was employed to select 10 exemplary parish priests for participation. The sample was selected through a referral process from key leaders within the archdiocese that had direct experience with all their parish priests. All referral sources were given the same criteria for suggesting exemplary priests and verified their knowledge of and experience in working with the particular priests they nominated.

The Seidman (2006) in-depth, three-interview technique was utilized to identify the experiences that contributed to leadership development. The three interviews allowed the interviewer and participant to understand the experiences and place them in context.

The first interview consisted of a focused life history, the second focused on details of the experiences, and the third involved reflection on the meaning of the experiences.

Thirty interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Following Moustakas' (1994) procedural approach to phenomenological data analysis, the transcripts were read multiple times followed by horizontalizing, or identifying the most significant and interesting statements relevant to the research questions, and then coding or labeling them with a descriptive word or phrase. After a comprehensive review of codes in the fourth reading, individual profiles were created. Codes were then grouped and consolidated into categories, resulting in the identification of seven defining experiences. The composite data were analyzed for each of the identified phenomena of leadership development resulting in (a) individual textural descriptions, (b) individual structural descriptions, and (c) the overall essence of the experience. The overall findings were distilled into key concepts based on the resounding themes, and the defining experiences were analyzed individually and as a group. Data analysis of exemplary leadership definitions used Colaizzi's modification of Moustakas' (1994) analytic reduction procedures of significant statements, formulated meanings, core themes, and a description of the essence of the experience as a whole. Further details on the research methodology are presented in chapter 3.

### **Delimitations**

This study was bounded by the following considerations:

- There are 140 parishes located within the boundaries of the selected archdiocese.
- The focus was on those pastors considered exemplary by criteria provided to referral sources.

- Exemplary organizational and community leadership was the focus of the study, more than spiritual leadership, although the interrelationship is noted.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study include the generalizability of results to other priests as well as other professionals. The qualitative goal of understanding the leadership development experiences and their meaning for parish priests considered exemplary inherently limits generalization. The focus on those considered exemplary also limits the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. Likewise, the lack of clearly defined work role and the need to perform diverse tasks and duties resulting to clergy role diffusion or ambiguity may limit the applicability of the findings. This limitation is mitigated by the thick descriptive quotes provided so that individual readers can judge for themselves the transferability of the findings. Another limitation is that the sample was drawn from referral sources; the extent to which the selected referral sources were available to assist may have affected the composition of the study sample. The last limitation is that the referral sources were suggested by only one person, that is, the key informant. However, this person has extensive experience and knowledge of the workings of the archdiocese and has a broad understanding of leadership in the Catholic parish setting.

### **Assumptions**

The study assumed that spiritual, organizational, and community leadership roles of pastors can be integrated, learned, and improved. In addition, the study assumed that exemplary pastoral leadership can be identified by leaders within the archdiocese who

have direct knowledge and observational experience with pastors serving their parish organizations and communities. Finally, this study assumed that parish priests identified as exemplary can be guided to share the experiences that were important to their development as leaders and to identify the meaning of those experiences.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Adult learning.* The process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

*Archdiocese.* An ecclesiastical province presided over by an archbishop, who may have metropolitan authority over any other bishops and their dioceses within his area. An archdiocese is more significant than a diocese ('Archdiocese,' n.d.).

*Cardinal.* A senior ecclesiastical official, usually an ordained bishop, of the Catholic Church who leads a diocese or archdiocese or run a department of the Roman Curia. A cardinal is a member of the College of Cardinals, which as a body elects a new pope. ('Cardinal,' n.d.).

*Catholic seminary.* An institution that primarily educates men for priesthood and sometimes also educates lay people who want to work in ministry. A seminary may be conducted at one of three levels: high school, college, or graduate. At the graduate level, a seminary can also be referred to as a theologate; this level comprises the final 4 to 6 years of study and formation before ordination (<http://www.catholic.org>).

*Church.* Three inseparable meanings: the people whom God gathers in the whole world; the particular or local church diocese; and the liturgical assembly ('Church,' n.d.).

*Diocese.* A determined geographic area; a “particular church,” a community of the faithful, whose district is under the supervision of a bishop. A diocese is divided into parishes (‘Diocese,’ n.d.).

*Diocesan priests.* Ordained to work in a particular diocese or archdiocese, and generally work in parishes, schools, or other Catholic institutions as assigned by the bishop of their diocese (‘Diocesan priests,’ n.d.).

*Exemplary Roman Catholic priests.* Ordained Catholic ministers who demonstrate superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders include achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993).

*Experiential learning.* The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984).

*Leadership.* An influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (Rost, 1993, p. 102).

*Leadership development.* The expansion of a person’s capacity to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes enabling members to work together in productive and meaningful ways (McCauley et al., 1998).

*Ministry.* Any service on behalf of the common good, whether of the Church or of the wider society (Drilling, 1991).

*Parish.* A definite community of the faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of a diocesan bishop (Code of Canon Law, 1983). In this study, parish refers to the community of Catholic believers located within the geographical boundary defined by the diocese.

*Pastor.* An ordained priest designated to head a parish (Code of Canon Law, 1983). A Christian minister or priest having spiritual charge over a congregation or other group. In this study, “pastor” is also referred to as “parish priest.”

*Pastoral leadership.* The spiritual, organizational, and community leadership by an ordained priest heading a parish that is grounded in Christ’s teachings (Duch, 1990; Zech, 2003).

*Religious priests.* Members of religious orders or institutes who receive duty assignments from their superiors in their respective religious orders or institutes (‘Religious priests,’ n.d.).

*Roman Catholic priest.* Someone who is ordained to minister within the Catholic Church. The main duties of the priest are preaching, celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments, and exercising a role of leadership within the Church (‘Roman Catholic priest,’ n.d.).



## **Summary**

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the experiences of leadership development in the context of Roman Catholic parish priests. The research contributes to the body of knowledge of leadership development by offering an understanding of what experiences contribute to the development of parish leadership and the meaning provided by those experiences. Two problems were addressed by this study: (a) the scant research on the leadership development practices and experiences of priests; and (b) the absence of an organized body of literature that offers insights for leadership education and priestly formation that could be used to guide priests on how to develop as pastoral leaders. The next chapter examines the literature informing the study.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter offers a review of the relevant literature in the key constructs of leadership and adult learning. The first section of this review describes the approach to identifying relevant theoretical and empirical research in the field. The second section discusses the concept and the many varied definitions and theories of leadership; this section also describes leadership models in the church setting. The third section reviews the relevant literature related to leadership development in both secular and church organizations. The fourth section presents literature from adult learning and experiential learning theory. The final section summarizes the findings of the literature review and discusses inferences for the research study.

The literature review includes findings from the Protestant denomination. Protestants and Catholics have sufficient similarities. Both religions are rooted in the Christian tradition and share a common heritage. Their goals and missions of service are the same. Certain key pastoral leadership tasks are relatively similar, such as leading congregations in worship, preaching and teaching, providing pastoral care, exercising administrative functions, and playing important broader roles as participants or leaders in community organizations (Carroll, 2006; Hoge, 1987; Hoge et al., 1988). Many similarities exist with regard to structural characteristics, such as partnerships with other organizations and congregations, support of social service groups, and participation in regional and local clergy meetings (Ammerman, 2005). Thus, pastors in both traditions can assist one another as they face the challenge of providing exemplary pastoral leadership—with spiritual leadership the *sine qua non* of their role in the parish ministry.

## **Research Databases and Search Strategies**

Literature for this review was selected from different sources using iterative database and website searches. To identify literature related to leadership and leadership development, a search was completed of the business/organization management literature (ABI/Inform), Dissertations and Theses Online, and psychology (PSYCHINFO) databases. The key search terms used were “leadership,” “leadership development,” and “leadership practices.”

Literature on the leadership and leadership development of clergy was identified through EBSCOhost ATLA Religion, EBSCOhost Business Source Premiere, ERIC, ProQuest ABI/Inform, JSTOR, Dissertations and Theses Online, and Google Scholar. The key words “church,” “clergy,” “priest,” “pastor,” “Roman Catholic priest,” and “parish management” were used. The terms were also combined with “leadership,” “leadership development,” “learning,” “adult learning,” and “experiential learning.” Documents from websites of the Roman Catholic Church and relevant church organizations were reviewed. Additional information was gathered through communication with selected priests, researchers, and scholars involved in the formation and education of Catholic priests.

To identify relevant literature on experiential learning, the ABI/INFORM and ERIC databases were utilized. The keywords “learning” and “adult learning” were combined with “professional development” and “managerial learning.” The ERIC database was used to search the combination of “experiential learning” and “learning experiences” with “management” and “managerial learning.”

In all cases, the focus was on the literature of the 20th century, when significant studies on leadership began. The literature search was initiated in December 2010 and continuously updated as the research proposal was developed until the time of proposal defense in October 2011. The search was repeated to update the literature as the dissertation was nearing completion in November 2012.

### **The Literature on Leadership**

Conceptual perspectives of leadership have evolved and expanded over time from a focus on the leader as a person and on the leader-follower relationships to a nonhierarchical, process-oriented form engendering new visions of leadership. The multitude of perspectives has resulted in many varied definitions of leadership (Table 1).

For the purposes of this study, which examines the leadership development experiences of Catholic pastors in parish organizations in the United States, leadership is defined as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1993, p. 102). This definition describes a leadership where dynamic social and political relationships exist for a mutual development of common purposes that reflect the intended changes, capturing the varied parish leadership roles of clergy and the multiple expectations of their followers in an increasingly secularized American culture.

Protestant and Catholic parishes alike are regularly encountering challenges to their long-held beliefs, and both are responding by acknowledging that there is more of a two-way relationship today between pastors and parishioners, as well as greater diversity and flexibility in their respective roles (Carroll, 2006; Hoge et al., 1988). As leaders and followers they are intending—and experiencing—“real changes,” even as they respect

their “mutual purposes” to meet such challenges in ways that are faithful to Christian teachings and traditions.

What follows is a review of relevant literature addressing the leader as a person, leader-follower relationships, leadership as a process, new perspectives of leadership, and church pastoral leadership. The leadership literature provides the theoretical concepts that can guide the implementation of logical leadership development efforts in organizations (Cox et al., 2003).

Table 1  
*Definitions of Leadership*

<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Bass, 1999	“Transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration” (p. 11).
Bennis & Goldsmith, 1994	Not explicitly defined. Identified several key ingredients of leadership, including a guiding vision; passion (hope and inspiration); integrity (self-knowledge, candor, and maturity) and trust; and curiosity and daring.
Burns, 1978	“Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing . . . various economic, political, and other resources . . . in order to realize goals . . . mutually held by both leaders and followers” (p. 425).
Greenleaf, 1977	“The servant-leader is a servant first. . . . Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or, at least, not be further deprived?” (p. 7).
Kouzes & Posner, 2007	“Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It’s the quality of relationship that matters most when we’re engaged in getting extraordinary things done” (p. 24).
Northouse, 2007	“Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3).
Pearce, 2004	“Shared leadership is a simultaneous, ongoing, mutual influence process within a team that is characterized by ‘serial emergence’ of official as well as unofficial leaders” (p. 48).
Rost, 1993	“Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102).
Tichy & Cohen, 1997	“Leadership is the capacity to get things done through others by changing people’s mindset and energizing them to action” (p. 44).
Yukl, 2006	“Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 8).

## **The Leader as a Person**

The trait, skills, style, and contingency approaches to leadership view the leader as the person exercising influence.

**Trait theories of leadership.** Also known as “great man” theory, the traits approach raises the question of whether the leader’s traits are inherited or acquired (Bryman, 1992; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986). Research suggests that the main traits most important for leadership are intelligence or cognitive ability, followed by self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability; a definitive list has yet to be produced, however, despite a century of study (Northouse, 2007). A review of more than 124 trait studies shows that (a) traits alone are not sufficient to predict effective leadership, and (b) the model fails to account for the context in which the leadership occurs (Stogdill, 1948). Some researchers subsequently pursued other research tracks (Stogdill, 1974), but others (Fiedler, 1974) continued to explore the traits approach.

**Leadership skills approach.** Stogdill’s (1948) research led to Katz’s (1974) seminal work proposing that effective leadership includes three skills—technical, human, and conceptual—and that the importance of each varies, depending on the leader’s level in the management structure. A later skills-based leadership model (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleischman, 2000) focuses on the capabilities that make a leader effective. The skills model provides a structure to help guide leadership education and development programs, but its limitations include weak predictive value and suitability for application in other leadership contexts (Northouse, 2007).

**Leadership style theories.** In this approach, a leader's behaviors or actions are classified into two categories: people focused and task focused (Stogdill, 1948). Assessment methods such as the Managerial or Leadership Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1978, 1985) have gained and maintained considerable popularity, particularly with organizational development consultants (Northouse, 2007). Attempts to measure the effectiveness of different leadership styles yield mostly inconclusive and contradictory outcomes, however (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 2006). This approach is also criticized for its failure to account for contextual influences on organizational leadership (for example, when applied to the behaviors of mid-level leaders, who are expected to translate to subordinates the vision and strategies usually set by top-level leaders) (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001).

**Contingency theory of leadership.** This theory addresses the relationship between leadership style and group performance/leader effectiveness, which is influenced by how favorable a situation is using variables of task structure, leader's position power or authority, and quality of leader-group relationships (Fiedler, 1967). Leader style is measured by using the Least Preferred Coworker Scale, requiring leaders to describe the attributes of the coworker they worked least well with, which reveals their motivations. Results of numerous studies tend to support contingency theory (Strube & Garcia, 1981), providing data about leaders' styles that can be used to assist organizations in identifying leadership profiles (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006). However, the methods used in these studies have been criticized for confusion over the measurement instruments (Bryman, 1992).

The leader as a person approach has important implications for improving leadership effectiveness. Information about the person's leadership traits, skills, and styles is essential for planning leadership development activities.

### **Leader-Follower Relationships**

The review that follows discusses leadership theories involving relations between leaders and followers: situational leadership theory, leader-member exchange theory, path-goal theory, transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory, and spiritual leadership theory.

**Situational leadership.** Four styles of leadership—directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating—are involved in this model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). They relate to the subordinate's level of maturity or capability to carry out a task (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985). Situational leadership assumes both flexibility of style and the cognitive ability of leaders; that is, skills to diagnose a situation and apply the style called for. This approach is used extensively in leadership training and development programs because of its practicality and prescriptive value (Northouse, 2007). Despite its widespread use and positive contributions to research, the ambiguity of the model's conceptual framework has been criticized (Yukl, 2006). Surprisingly, research fails to support the relationships proposed (Blank, Weitzel, & Green, 1990; Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997).

**Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.** This theory examines the characteristics of the leader, the individual member, and—the focal point of the leadership process—their dyadic relationship (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976). Leaders provide direction and guidance through the influence permitted them by



members. Studies show that in the workforce, high-quality LMXs produce higher levels of employee engagement, more efficient task division, and greater commitment to organizational goals accompanied by higher productivity (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Although these are related to positive organizational outcomes, the basic ideas of LMX theory are criticized as not fully developed (Yukl, 2006), and apt to foster a perception of favoritism due to in-groups and out-groups (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

**Path-goal theory.** According to path-goal theory, by defining work goals, clarifying linkages, removing roadblocks, and providing support, a leader can pave the way for increased personal payoffs to subordinates for achieving those goals. Studies suggest that effective leaders adopt different styles or behaviors—directive, supportive, participative, or achievement oriented—in different situations (House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974). The path-goal theory has guided research significantly by identifying potentially relevant situational variables; its reliance on expectancy theory as the primary basis for explaining leader behavior has been criticized, however (Yukl, 2006). Methodological limitations of validation research suggest that the theory has yet to be adequately tested (Yukl, 2006). Moreover, its broad scope and complexity make it difficult to apply in varied and rapidly changing situations, which leaders often face (McCall, 1977).

**Transformational leadership.** First described in Burns' (1978) seminal work in contrast with transactional leadership, transformational leadership refers to a relationship that raises both leaders and followers to “higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 20); transactional leadership refers to an exchange between leader and follower for the purpose of gaining a reward. Bass (1985) expanded these ideas, identifying through

empirical research four components essential to transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence (“charisma”), (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Transformational leaders achieve performance beyond expected levels in their subordinates or followers, leading to a positive impact on empowerment, motivation, and morality (Bass, 1985). Substantial empirical evidence supports the many strengths of transformational leadership theories (Bass, 1990; Bass & Seltzer, 1990), which provide new insights into the process of how certain leaders inspire followers toward greater performance. Some weaknesses of the theories include problems in methodology, lack of clarity on how followers respond to leaders’ visions, and failure to explain the nature of effective strategic leadership in organizations (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006).

**Servant leadership.** According to the seminal work on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), the servant leader seeks to lead from a foundation of altruistic love and to cultivate the formation of servant leadership in followers. Servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). Serving the needs and improving the conditions of followers is accomplished through nurturing, empathy, empowerment, creativity, and foresight that inspire followers to become future servant leaders themselves (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf’s work laid the foundation for emerging theories on the concept.

Several works on servant leadership identify themes that help operationalize the construct. Spears (1995) listed 10 critical characteristics of the servant leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship,

commitment to the growth of people, and community building. Laub (1999) considered the following essential behaviors (among others) characteristics of servant leaders: valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership. Russell and Stone (2002) stressed the importance of vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008) proposed a holistic approach that integrates “follower-oriented, service, spiritual, and moral dimensions of leadership” (p. 405). Although still relatively new, the servant leadership concept is linked in some studies to organizational and team effectiveness (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Irving & Longbotham, 2006; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002); leader and organizational trust (Joseph & Winston, 2005); and job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009; Hebert, 2004).

**Spiritual leadership.** Fry (2003) defined spiritual leadership as “the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (p. 711). Creation of a vision that allows members to experience meaning in their lives is integral to this concept, as is building organizational cultures that are characterized by altruistic love—the practice of genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others (Fry, 2003). In organizations, “this means creating a humanistic system . . . based on hopeful striving through faith in a vision with a culture grounded in the values of altruistic love” (p. 717), which makes both leader and follower more organizationally committed and productive. Spirituality is linked to organizational effectiveness and to learning organizations (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003). As a theory, spiritual leadership is still in its infancy (Dent et al., 2005) and is criticized for lack of a clear

definition as to what constitutes spirituality and how it is connected to leadership (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009).

The theories involving leader-follower relations have made significant contributions to our understanding of the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers. In particular, the transformational leadership, servant leadership, and spiritual leadership theories highlight how certain leaders are able to inspire followers to achieve outstanding performance.

### **Leadership as a Process**

A perspective that views leadership as a process of enhancing the capability of both leaders and followers to perform collective work effectively is described below.

**Shared leadership.** The shared leadership approach is defined as “a simultaneous, ongoing, mutual influence process within a team that is characterized by ‘serial emergence’ of official as well as unofficial leaders” aimed at maximizing team potential (Pearce, 2004, p. 48). It emphasizes “peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). It acknowledges the interdependent nature of leadership and a focus on collective achievement, shared responsibility, and the importance of teamwork (Conger, 1989; Pearce & Sims, 2000), a process through which members experience full empowerment and an increased sense of autonomy (Cox et al., 2003). Shared leadership is a relatively new concept, and initial attempts to develop models (Gronn, 2002, for example) appear to be promising (Pearce & Sims, 2000); however, more theory development is necessary to integrate the varied literature.

**Distributed leadership.** Frequently used as a synonym for shared leadership and collaborative leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007), leadership as a distributed practice specifies “an integrative model for thinking about the relations between the work of leaders, and their social, material, and symbolic situation” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, p. 38); the understanding of a “situation” is stretched to include organizational routines and tools of interaction with people. In distributed leadership, leadership is extended to the work of several leaders and may be either collaborated distribution, collective distribution, or coordinated distribution (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Gronn (2002), building on Spillane’s work by adding the concept of concertive action, defined distributed leadership as “the aggregated leadership of an organization dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members” (p. 429). The concept is still in its infancy, and current studies mostly focus on theory development and hypothesis generation (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Spillane, 2006); the limited empirical research in school and business settings shows promising advantages (Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2005; Timperley, 2005).

**Authentic leadership.** Authentic leadership is defined as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p. 424). This definition allows authentic leadership to be operationalized on four core constructs: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Avolio, Walumbwa, et al., 2009). The construct’s internalized moral perspective aligns with the servant leadership philosophy

(Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Initial evidence for construct validity shows a significant correlation between authentic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with supervisor and performance (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Research is needed to provide evidence for construct validity and to build on empirical knowledge.

The perspective of leadership as a process expands the scope of theory and research with the exploration of these processes and adds the dimension of time to the study of leadership. However, more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of this perspective in teams and organizations.

### **New Perspectives of Leadership**

Broader inquiries into leadership theories and research have led to the development of complexity leadership and other emerging leadership theories.

**Complexity leadership.** In complexity leadership theory, the leader is viewed as more of an indirect catalyst, collaborator, or facilitator (Schneider & Somers, 2006); leadership is recognized not only in terms of position and authority, but also as an emergent and interactive system of dynamic and unpredictable agents in complex feedback networks (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). This is a new way to think about leadership in an era of globalization and technological advancement, in which organizations face unprecedented levels of change, instability, and uncertainty (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). “Leadership can be enacted through *any interaction* in an organization. . . . Leadership is an *emergent* phenomenon within complex systems” (Hazy, Goldstein, & Lichtenstein, 2007, p. 2).

Complexity leadership theory recognizes three distinct leadership functions: administrative (roles that maintain and support the bureaucratic apparatus); enabling (roles that minimize the constraints of an organizational bureaucracy to enhance follower potential); and adaptive (roles that promote generative and emergent change) (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). A growing body of research focuses on leadership in complex systems, but this field clearly needs substantive research to validate a new theory of leadership.

**Other emerging theories.** Theorists are now calling for a more integrative focus for leadership theory building (Avolio, 2007). One proposal is the connectionist-based model of leadership prototype generation (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001), which argues that one's perceptions of leadership can be a function of the larger cultural, social, task, and interpersonal environments in which those mental representations are formed. Another is in the field of strategic leadership, with a search for empirical evidence of the strategic influence of charismatic leadership (Waldman, Javidan, & Varella, 2004).

Complexity leadership theory and other emerging leadership theories are promising perspectives with important themes. These are, however, largely theoretical in nature. A consensus framework has not yet emerged.

### **Church Pastoral Leadership**

The preceding literature review examined general leadership theories as applied to secular organizations. The progression of these approaches bears several interpretations: from individual to group (personal traits, skills, and style, versus relationships with others and the environment); from inward-looking to all-embracing (unilateral decisions and actions, versus shared and mutual influences); and from practical to transcendent (tasks and accomplishments, versus ideas and inspirations). This section considers the research

on leadership theories in the context of church organizations. The general information provides a starting point for understanding the evolution of leadership practices in this specific context.

Although leadership has been studied for decades (Bass, 1990), the topic of religious leadership has not been thoroughly examined by 20th-century scholars (McClymond, 2001). A wide variety of books, articles in lay and religious print media, and web postings of relevant church organizations address the topic of parish leadership in the United States, but many of the findings and prescriptions are not based on empirical evidence. The discussion that follows is within the context of Protestant and Roman Catholic pastoral leadership in U.S. congregations and parishes.

**Leadership of Protestant clergy.** Research efforts on ministerial leadership have been hampered by lack of consensus on evaluation parameters and concerns about the validity and reliability of measurement instruments (Nauss, 1972). Moreover, unlike other professions, ministers do not have clear job descriptions on which to base evaluation criteria.

Similar to the secular literature, early empirical research focused on predicting and assessing ministerial effectiveness based on leadership styles, behaviors, and skills. Various measurement tools were used: (a) Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954); (b) Ministerial Effectiveness Inventory (Malony & Majovski, 1986); (c) Ministerial Activity Scale (Johnson, Barge, Lohr, & Wagner, 1975; Nauss, 1989); (d) Least Preferred Coworker Scale (Fiedler, 1967); (e) Leadership Behavior Questionnaire; (f) Managerial Practices Survey (Yukl, Wall, & Lepsinger, 1990); and (g) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, 1985).



A study of 14 United Methodist ministers and 59 lay members used Critical Incident Technique to identify critical leadership behaviors that seem to describe an effective United Methodist minister, but were not tied to the achievement of specific outcomes. A total of 204 critical leadership behaviors were identified specific to ministry roles of being an administrator, organizer, pastor, preacher, priest, teacher, and reactor. The findings provide interesting data that serve as a starting point for more specific research on the leadership behaviors of ministers (Cochran, 1982).

A study involving 5,000 laity and clergy from 47 denominations utilized the Ministerial Effectiveness Inventory, a psychological assessment tool to predict personality functioning (Schuller, Strommen, & Brekke, 1980). It described 11 factors that contribute to ministerial effectiveness: (a) having an open, affirming style; (b) caring for persons under stress; (c) evidencing congregational leadership; (d) being a theologian in life and thought; (e) undertaking ministry from a personal commitment of faith; (f) developing fellowship and worship; (g) having denominational awareness; (h) not having disqualifying personal and behavioral characteristics; (i) evidencing ministry to community and world; (j) being priestly and sacramental in ministry; and (k) manifesting a lack of privatistic, legalistic style.

The Ministerial Activity Scale and Leadership Behavior Questionnaire were used in a study of 421 pastors and congregations in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to identify effectiveness in 10 ministerial leadership functions (Nauss, 1994). Findings showed that the skills of goal orientation, persuasiveness, and relations orientation were predictive of effectiveness in most functions. The situational variable of congregation size was added in a subsequent study (Nauss, 1995) to identify patterns of leadership

skills, as measured by the Ministerial Activity Scale, for 10 functions in five size groups. The results revealed significantly different styles among the pastors. Effectiveness in clergy leadership was described in this sample as an intentional orientation, sometimes combined with a participative style.

Transformational leadership is the focus of much research in secular organizations, but very few empirical studies have tested its validity among Christian pastors. Two studies conducted in Germany explored the effects of transactional and transformational leadership behaviors on follower and congregational outcomes (Rowold, 2008). The results indicated that transformational leadership positively correlated with (a) followers' satisfaction with their pastor; (b) extra effort, effectiveness, and job satisfaction; and (c) congregational satisfaction with the worship service (assessed through a separate five-item questionnaire).

A modified instrument including the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was used in a study of 102 African-American Baptist pastors to examine the relationship between the pastors' leadership style and the church's involvement in community sociopolitical issues (Langley & Kahnweiler, 2003). The results indicated that churches with transformational leaders were more likely to be involved in some type of sociopolitical activity. Only the self-report form of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was employed; follower evaluations of leadership style were not assessed.

Several dissertations employed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to study transformational leadership among Protestant pastors. In these studies, transformational leadership was linked to the perception of effectiveness and to follower satisfaction

(Onnen, 1987); to an advanced meaning-making system (Kennard, 2002); and to an antecedent of follower trust (Barfoot, 2007).

Likewise, several dissertations (Bivins, 2005; Dillman, 2003; Ming, 2005; Scuderi, 2010; Wallace, 2005) examined the concept of servant leadership in church organizations, which has gained popular acceptance because it closely parallels Christian teachings and theological bases of ministerial formation. All of these cases showed that servant leadership achieved positive links with many desirable outcomes, including leader effectiveness, trust in the leader, personal job satisfaction for the leader, empowerment of and partnership with followers, and church growth.

**Leadership of Roman Catholic clergy.** While the roles of both Protestant and Catholic clergy have undergone a major redefinition since the 1960s, resulting in “a greater sense of mutuality in ministry between pastors and lay people” (Carroll, 2006, p. 13), for Catholics, the change ushered in by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1962 was monumental (Murphy, 1995). At that time, “the Catholic Church was grappling with the changes . . . which involved not just liturgy and language but also a fundamental change in the way clergy and laity interact” (Gautier, Perl, & Fichter, 2012, p. ix).

A 1970 landmark study on priestly life commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) showed that the role of the priest moved away from an older cultic model that put him on a pedestal to a “servant-leader model” that required mutual collaboration with laity (Greeley, 1972). This emphasis on mutual sharing of responsibility between priest and laity is strongly felt in parish life, according

to the first large-scale investigations of organized parish life in the United States (Leege & Gremillion, 1987):

If a major purpose of Vatican II was to reinstate the sense that all Christians—lay, priests and religious—are responsible for the corporate life of the Church in the local parish, Vatican II is succeeding in the United States. The American Church is participatory not only in religious ritual but especially in shared responsibility for ministry. (p. 9)

A follow up research that replicated Greeley's (1972) landmark study on priestly life reported an emerging shift toward the cultic model by younger priests (Hoge & Wenger, 2003). This apparent shift in orientation among priests seemed to have persisted as shown in another study conducted in 2009 (Gautier et al., 2012). However, the authors observed that

“Priests, on the whole, are supportive of collaboration and see it as an asset to their priestly ministry, not as a liability. Although more recently ordained priests exhibit somewhat lower levels of acceptance for lay ministry, this may be more a function of their relative inexperience in pastoral ministry than a fundamental shift in attitude toward lay ministry itself” (p. 90).

***Role of leaders.*** Regardless of the emphasis on shared ministry, the pastor still leads in setting the tone and direction of the parish (Sweetser & Holden, 1992) and is expected to develop skills and attributes that invite open communication, shared decision making, and effective action (Cieslak, 2003; Murphy, 1995; Sweetser & Forster, 1993; Sweetser & Holden, 1992) leading to real change (Sweetser & Forster, 1993). “Effective decision-making is either more centralized—in the pastor—or decentralized to the level of those laypersons and staff especially interested in a particular type of ministry or program” (Leege & Gremillion, 1987, p. 10). Priest leaders are expected to be “synergistic persons who animate their followers with an energizing spirit and a guiding vision to share power to produce lasting results” (Duch, 1990, p. 33); nevertheless, they

are also responsible to a bishop's higher authority, and this connection broadens their leadership function into one that is "intrinsically accountable, collegial, and collaborative" (Winters, 1997, p. 78). The bishops call the pastors "the point of unity between worship of the parish and its activities, between the spiritual aspects of the parish and the organizational, between the specific character of the parish and the mission of the larger Church" (NCCB, 1980, p. 2). According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) (1977), the servant life of Christ is the underlying foundation for leadership forms within the Church. Priests are to follow the pattern of genuine self-giving, generosity of spirit, self-sacrificing love, and service exemplified by Christ as the Good Shepherd. The goal of leadership is not only to provide service for the parish community but to enable the community to minister to one another in Christian love and commitment. Church documents concerned with priestly life and formation emphasize a priest's servant work, along with his ability to work with all the faithful (Cozzens, 2000; Winters, 1997; Pilarczyk, 1986).

A groundbreaking research initiative undertaken decades after Vatican II yielded notable results. The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life is probably the most comprehensive effort to understand Catholic parishes in the United States 25 years after the reforms (Castelli & Gremillion, 1987). By using a broad descriptive sample of parishes—1,099 surveyed nationwide and 36 selected for in-depth research—the report offered varied lenses through which scholars may examine the leadership of pastors and lay people in different types of parishes. Some of its findings are particularly relevant to pastoral leadership:

- In 9 out of every 10 parishes, the pastor remains the dominant figure.

- In parishes with the highest sense of community, the pastors are enablers, both pastors and parishioners are accessible and caring, and more lay consultation and sharing in governance is allowed.
- In parishes with less sense of community, the pastors handle decisions alone. Only in very small parishes (typically in towns or rural settings with few Catholics) do the pastors still try to be “all things to all people” (p. 12).

Cieslak (2003) reported on two studies that demonstrate the effects of the leadership roles of pastors. The first study was a survey of 106 parishes of the Rockford diocese between 1980 and 1993 on the effect of the pastor on a parish’s financial viability. The results indicated that parish income dramatically changed after the appointment of a new pastor. The highest change in parish income was recorded within a year after a new pastor was appointed. These trends were observed for all parishes in the diocese and for numerous subgroups of parishes. “The increase in contribution variability may indicate a parish referendum on the new pastor” (p. 124).

Another study confirmed the difference that pastoral leadership makes within a parish. A survey of 105 parishes involving more than 55,000 parishioners of Rockford Catholic diocese was conducted in February 2007 to create the Indicators of Parish Vitality, which were developed to provide “a vision of a modern Catholic parish that is attentive to both the needs of its parishioners and the needs of the greater society” (Cieslak, 2003, p. 125). Four indicators were identified: worship, community, service, and education/formation. Leadership, one of several indicators within the section of community, was assessed by parishioners based on seven parameters:

- Parish leadership identifies and encourages the talents and interests of those in the community.
- Parish leadership seeks a wide diversity of people for involvement in activities and ministries.
- Parish leadership is able to identify the changing needs of the parishioners.
- The parish has sufficient qualified personnel as staff and for program leadership.
- The parish has an active pastoral council that meets regularly and advises the pastor.
- The parish has an active finance council that meets regularly and advises the pastor.
- The parish provides and encourages training and ongoing faith formation for all staff, as well as pastoral and finance council members.

The results revealed that leadership was the highest single predictor of overall parish vitality. Parishes where the people rated the pastor high in leadership were perceived as desirable and vibrant parishes. Cieslak (2003) commented:

There is no better predictor of parish vitality than the leadership index. . . . The primary mechanism through which leadership is statistically linked with vitality is through encouragement of a diversity of people to become involved in parish ministries. (pp. 128-129)

In contrast, Klimoski's (1999) research indicated that parishioners' expectations for their priests vary depending on the culture of the parish, the age of parishioners, and the extent of parishioners' involvement in parish life. Thus, he claimed that it "would be presumptuous to make sweeping generalizations about what a parish wants in a priest" (p. 37).

*Competencies of leaders.* Another major research effort on the future of Catholic religious orders in the United States was conducted using several studies over a 3-year period (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). One study of Catholic religious orders identified the principal competencies (skills and personal characteristics) required for superior leadership, following behavioral event interviews with the orders' leaders (using small samples of 23 "especially outstanding" leaders selected by a panel of experts and 12 "typical" leaders) (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993; Nygren, Ukeritis, McClelland, & Hickman, 1994). Superior leadership performance was defined as "success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and ability to ground practices in organizational values" (Nygren et al., 1994, p. 377).

The findings of this study revealed that both typical and outstanding leaders displayed basic skills and traits (threshold competencies): (a) information seeking, (b) administrative skills, (c) orientation toward efficiency, (d) conceptual and analytical thinking, (e) mission orientation, (f) self-confidence, and (g) concern for moderation (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993; Nygren et al., 1994). Outstanding leaders, however, differed from typical leaders in their greater display of (a) achievement motivation, (b) long-term initiative or strategy, (c) ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, and (d) use of power through consensus building. Two additional competencies of outstanding leaders were considered unique to religious organizations: (a) better persuasive ability at getting members to support group goals, and (b) deeper grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993; Nygren et al., 1994). These results presented a framework for understanding the characteristics that define excellence in the leadership of Catholic religious orders.



In a study of Catholic priests, three contemporary theories of leadership were proposed—servant, transformational, and spiritual leadership—all of which parallel the Catholic Church’s leadership expectations for pastors and its theological bases of priestly formation (Karpinski, 2002). The emphasis of the transformational leadership model on collaboration, empowerment, and collegiality likewise aligns with the theological concept of priestly ministry, which emphasizes the same attributes: “One of the chief characteristics of service within the Church is the transformation of hearts and minds to God” (p. 112).

A study of 93 pastors from Catholic and other Christian denominations used three tools—the self- and observer-rated Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985), and the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1998)—to measure clergy leadership style, personality, and spirituality and to assess which of these variables predicted pastoral leader effectiveness (Carter, 2009). According to the results, the transformational leadership style showed significant correlations with pastoral leader effectiveness as measured by parishioners’ expectations in terms of personal character, behavior, and theological orientation, but only one dimension of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire’s transformational leadership scale, individual consideration, was a significant predictor. Other findings suggested that personality (high conscientiousness) and spirituality were related to, but also did not predict, pastoral leader effectiveness.

Sofield and Kuhn (1995) wrote that the two dominant characteristics of true leaders involved in the Christian ministry are (a) intense integrity accompanied by the courage necessary to pursue integrity regardless of its personal consequences, and (b)

generativity motivated by concern for others. Cieslak (2003) highlighted the importance of developing a vision as a necessary first step to helping pastors grow in leadership. Friend (2002) stressed that “there is no more powerful engine driving a ministry or organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile and achievable vision of the future, widely shared” (p. 1). Cozzens (2002) identified seven skills of highly effective Catholic pastors: (a) an ability to connect, (b) a capacity for solitude, (c) a sense of boundaries, (d) leadership, (e) an ability to collaborate, (f) an ability to be a doctor of souls, and (g) an ability to be a bearer of the Word.

## **Summary**

This review has outlined the major shifts in leadership theory, from early thinking that leadership is innate and trait based to recent models concluding that leadership can be learned and developed. Research continues to advance and expound upon these approaches to leadership, even as newer and more specialized models are proposed to build on existing findings (Avolio et al., 2009); however, the literature reveals a lack of agreement among theorists.

The most obvious intersections between secular and religious approaches to leadership are manifested in several areas: the relationship-oriented theories of transformational leadership, servant leadership, and spiritual leadership and the process-oriented theory of authentic leadership. Yet studies of personal leadership traits, skills, and styles can be helpful as applied to pastoral leaders, in terms of understanding their characteristics and development. The other general theories about relationships between leaders and followers described above (e.g., situational, LMX, path-goal) likewise can provide valuable insights in the church context; however, the motivations, incentives, and

goals outlined in those models do not easily translate from secular to religious settings, where they have far different implications. As for other approaches to leadership as a process, parishioners and laity can practice shared and distributed leadership as members of a congregation or “team” of like-minded participants. Finally, new theories come uncannily close to describing the challenges of pastoral leadership when they describe changes and uncertainties in a complex adaptive system, certainly one way of looking at a religious organization in transition.

Studies of church pastoral leadership differ from those in the secular literature mainly in terms of their diffuse parameters and inexact metrics (Nauss, 1972). The research subjects—pastors, ministers, priests, members of religious orders, laity, and others—are assumed to operate within hierarchies that delineate their duties and responsibilities (Cochran, 1982; Langley & Kahnweiler, 2003; Nauss, 1994; Winters, 1997) and theological structures that describe and prescribe their beliefs and practices (Carroll, 2006; Hoge et al., 1988; Hoge, 1987; NCCB, 1977). But in practical terms and everyday realities, the leadership roles of church pastors and ministers are not so clear and predetermined (Carroll, 2006; Hoge, 1987). Pastors “on the job” are paradoxically free to exercise “leadership” in any number of ways, either top-down or shared (Carroll, 2006; Castelli & Gremillion, 1987), and their parishioners are free to provide feedback about their leaders’ “effectiveness” using any number of evaluation parameters (Cieslak, 2003; Nauss, 1972).

Nevertheless, a comparison of leadership theories described in the general literature with those discussed in Catholic Church literature, as shown in Table 2, reveals major areas of congruence. The main categories of leadership models (person,

relationship, process, and new) provide a combination of concepts and variables that may influence and contribute to effective leadership performance by Catholic pastors.

The leadership models as described guide the approach to developing leaders.

There is an implicit assumption that individuals have the potential to develop as leaders.

The following section reviews the literature on leadership development and identifies how it is practiced in both secular and church organizations.

Table 2  
*Selected Leadership Theories and Parish Leadership*

<b>Focus of theory</b>	<b>General leadership literature</b>	<b>Discussed in Catholic Church literature</b>
Leader as person	Traits Intelligence Self-confidence Determination Integrity Sociability Skills Technical Human Conceptual Styles People-focused Task-focused	Traits and skills identified empirically: information-seeking; administrative, conceptual, analytical skills; efficiency orientation; mission orientation; self-confidence; concern for moderation; achievement motivation; long-term initiative; focus on group goals; consensus building; deep grounding in spirituality/humanitarian values, ability to get support for group goals (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). Integrity mentioned as practice (Sofield & Kuhn, 1995).
Leader-follower relationship	Situational Directing Coaching Supporting Delegating	Not mentioned
	Leader-member exchange High-quality exchanges Trust and respect	High quality exchanges, trust and respect mentioned as practice (Cozzens, 2002; Sofield & Kuhn, 1995).
	Path-Goal Directive Supportive Participative Achievement-oriented	Achievement motivation empirically identified (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993).
	Transformational Idealized influence Inspirational motivation Intellectual stimulation Individualized consideration	Transformational leadership proven empirically (Carter, 2009); mentioned as theory (Karpinski, 2002).

<b>Focus of theory</b>	<b>General leadership literature</b>	<b>Discussed in Catholic Church literature</b>
	Servant leadership Nurturing Empathy Empowerment Creativity Foresight	Servant leadership mentioned as theory (Karpinski, 2002; NCCB, 1977) and practice (Cozzens, 2000; Pilarczyk, 1986; NCCB, 1977; Winters, 1997).
	Spiritual leadership Self-motivation Vision Altruistic love	Spiritual leadership proven empirically (Carter, 2009; Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993); mentioned as theory (Karpinski, 2002; NCCB, 1977, 1980) and practice (Cozzens, 2002; NCCB, 1977, 1980).
Leadership as process	Shared leadership Shared responsibility Teamwork Full empowerment Sense of autonomy	Shared leadership proven empirically (Castelli & Gremillion, 1987); mentioned as practice (Carroll, 1992, 2006; Cozzens, 2002; Duch, 1990; Murphy, 1995; NCCB, 1980; Pilarczyk, 1986; Sweetser, 2007; Sweetser & Holden, 1992; Szafran, 1976; Winters, 1997).
	Distributed leadership Spontaneous collaboration Intuitive working relations Institutionalized practices	Spontaneous collaboration aligns with shared leadership philosophy (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).
	Authentic leadership Self-awareness Internalized moral perspective Balanced processing Relational transparency	Internalized moral perspective aligns with servant leadership philosophy (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
New perspectives	Complexity	Not mentioned
	Connectionist	Not mentioned
	Strategic leadership	Long-term initiative or strategy empirically identified (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993); vision mentioned as practice (Cieslak, 2003; Duch, 1990, Friend, 2002).

### **The Literature on Leadership Development**

The issue of whether leaders are born or made is a subject of continuing interest among scholars (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Regardless of one's perspective, attempts to develop leadership can improve leadership performance (Avolio, Walumbwa et al., 2009; Burke & Day, 1986; Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Bass, 1990). This view has again been confirmed in a meta-analysis of leadership impact research that showed a 66%

probability of achieving a positive outcome (e.g., behavioral and cognitive change) with leadership interventions (Avolio, Reichard et al., 2009).

Day (2000) made a key distinction between *leader development* and *leadership development*. Leader development is directed toward the individual member and expanding his/her capacity to lead through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead. Leadership development focuses on expanding the collective capacity of the organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (McCauley et al., 1998). The main emphasis is to build and use interpersonal competence (Day, 2000), identified as social awareness (empathy, service orientation, and developing others) and social skills (collaboration and cooperation, building bonds, and conflict management) (McCauley, 2000). Both individual leader and collective leadership development are important organizational concerns. Most of the literature, however, uses the term leadership development to refer to both, as is done here.

There is no validated general framework and theory for leadership development (Avolio, 2007). For this reason, Avolio proposed considering development that combines aspects of leader, follower, and context to explain the development of leaders.

Another perspective advanced by Quatro, Waldman, and Galvin (2007) considered four interrelated skill domains: (a) analytical (developing leaders to understand and manage discrete complexity); (b) conceptual (developing leaders to understand and manage interrelated complexity and foster creativity); (c) emotional (developing leaders who are adjusted to emotional issues); and (d) spiritual (developing enlightened leaders who value spirituality). This holistic model integrating a spiritual domain has relevant application to religious clergy, especially parish priests who serve as

leaders of their faith communities.

### **Importance of Experience**

A review of research conducted over the past few decades highlighted that experiences are the primary source of learning leadership for managers in organizations (McCall, 2010). Van Velsor, McCauley, and Moxley (1998) proposed three elements that combine to characterize an effective leadership development experience: (a) assessment, (b) challenge, and (c) support. Assessment provides relevant information, mostly from feedback identifying an individual's current leadership strengths, level of leadership effectiveness, and development needs. Challenge means forcing people out of their comfort zones by exposing them to new and testing experiences, allowing new capacities to develop. Support provides the individual with the motivation to learn and grow. Leadership development is most effective when all three elements are present.

Learning from experience is also affected by the amount of challenge, the variety of tasks, and the quality of feedback (Mumford et al., 2000). Challenging experiences stimulate development by providing managers with the opportunity to learn and by acting as a motivator for learning (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). More learning occurs when individuals receive accurate feedback about their behavior (Yukl, 2006). In addition, Avolio and Hannah (2008) pointed to the importance of "trigger" events or "high impact experiences" in a leader's personal development, that, "if properly interpreted and processed . . . are expected to stimulate further leader development, as well as produce perhaps a new way of approaching a particular leadership issue, opportunity, challenge, or problem" (p. 335). Many essential leadership skills are gained

and refined through certain experiences, not by formal training (Douglas, 2003; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; McCall et al., 1988; Yost & Plunkett, 2005).

Allen and Hartman (2008) proposed a comprehensive list of sources of learning to create a program within the framework of Conger's (1992) four primary approaches to leadership development: (a) personal growth, (b) conceptual understanding, (c) skill building, and (d) feedback. The authors suggested providing some conceptual understanding of leadership before moving to skill building and then proceeding to other learning sources based on the individual's motivation and career stage. The authors also suggested that to ensure a positive effect on learning, "organizations should take a long-term approach to leadership development and create a supportive environment" (p. 18).

### **Types of Leadership Development Experiences**

Van Velsor et al. (1998) pointed to experiences deemed essential to leadership development: (a) developmental job assignments, (b) multirater feedback, (c) skills-based training, (d) feedback-intensive programs, (e) developmental relationships, and (f) hardships.

**Developmental job assignments.** Developmental assignments are special assignments used to enhance managerial skills (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). Examples of those that can be carried out concurrently with one's regular job are the following: (a) managing a new project or start-up operation; (b) serving as the department representative on a cross-functional team; (c) chairing a special task force to plan a major change or deal with a serious operational problem; (d) developing and conducting a training program for an organizational unit; and (e) assuming responsibility for some administrative activities previously handled by one's superior.



The effectiveness of developmental assignments may be increased in several ways (McCauley, Eastman, & Ohlott, 1995). The challenges and learning opportunities provided by each type of assignment should be matched to the manager's needs and aspirations. Managers should become more aware of the importance of assignments and share responsibility for planning them. After an assignment is completed, positive and negative outcomes should be tracked, and this information should be used in career counseling and succession planning. The manager should reflect on the assignment and identify lessons learned. Such retrospective analysis, which can be facilitated by the boss, a mentor, or a training and development professional, is likely to enhance learning from experience (McCauley et al., 1995; Ohlott, 1998).

Nonetheless, research on the effectiveness of developmental assignments is limited. Some longitudinal studies have provided evidence that diverse, challenging assignments early in one's career facilitate advancement; other studies have suggested that different skills are learned from different types of challenges and hardships (Lindsey, Homes, & McCall, 1987; McCall et al., 1988; McCauley et al., 1994, 1995; Valerio, 1990). These results, however, are based on the managers' after-the-fact assessments of their own development, not on systematic comparisons among assignments using before-and-after measures. It remains to be discovered what types of assignments are effective for what types of skills and what types of people.

**Multirater feedback.** Also known as 360-degree feedback, multirater feedback aims to assess the strengths and developmental needs of individual managers. The feedback process involves a systematic rating of a person by subordinates, peers, superiors, and customers (internal and/or external). The information collected from these

individuals is returned to the leader for review, development action planning, and implementation (Chappelow, 1998; Vicere & Fulmer, 1997). Indications of possible developmental needs include large discrepancies between ratings by others and manager self-ratings, as well as ratings of managers way below normal (Yukl, 2006).

The results of several studies examining whether multisource feedback leads to positive change in leader behavior have been mixed (Atwater, Roush, & Fischtal, 1995; Bernardin, Hagan, & Kane, 1995; Hazucha, Hezlett, & Schneider, 1993; Reilly, Smither, & Vasilopoulos, 1996; Seifert, Yukl, & McDonald, 2003). A meta-analysis of feedback studies found that feedback, on average, resulted in modest improvement and that performance actually decreased in one-third of the cases (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Research on 360-degree feedback and transformational leadership showed that the more harmonious the relationship between the manager's self-perceptions and those of his or her staff, the more likely that manager was perceived by the staff as transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Yammarino, 1991; McEvoy & Beaty, 1989). According to Alimo-Metcalf (1998), 360-degree feedback, if "sensitively and skillfully handled . . . could represent a major organizational transformation towards greater empowerment of staff" (p. 43).

While the research suggests that behavioral feedback can be helpful in some situations (Facteau, Facteau, Schoel, Russell, & Poteet, 1998; Hazucha et al., 1993; Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997), there is insufficient evidence to support the commonly held notion that it is a potent method of leadership development or that it can reliably improve leadership skills (Waldman, Atwater, & Antonioni, 1998). More research is needed to determine what form of feedback is most useful, the conditions

under which feedback is likely to cause positive change, the types of skills or behaviors likely to be improved, and the types of managers likely to benefit.

**Skills-based training.** McDonald-Mann (1998) described skills-based training as “a developmental experience in which individuals gain knowledge and practice behaviors necessary to hone present skills or develop new ones” (p. 107). A variety of techniques have been used successfully, depending on the competencies to be taught (Bass, 1990; Burke & Day, 1986; Latham, 1988). The commonly used techniques are lectures, case studies, role-plays, behavioral role-modeling, and simulation following the leadership development model of assessment, challenge, and support (McDonald-Mann, 1998).

Some training programs apply particular leadership theories. Examples of theory-based programs include Theory Match (a self-study program based on the contingency concept (Fiedler & Chemers, 1982); normative decision making (Vroom & Jago, 1988); the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire for transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990); the situational leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1984); and Miner’s (1986) managerial motivation. While theory-based programs sometimes have been shown to improve managerial effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Latham, 1988), most studies have failed to establish whether such improvement resulted from actual application of the theory or merely from managers’ overall increase in interpersonal and administrative skills (Yukl, 2006).

**Feedback-intensive programs.** In most feedback-intensive programs, managers are assigned to work in different functional units of an organization for various periods of time, for purposes of development, not promotion (Yukl, 2006). These job-rotation assignments are similar for each participating manager and not based on individual skills

or deficiencies. One study found that participants in a job rotation program gained higher mutual respect for other functions, greater appreciation for collaboration, and a stronger belief in the value of viewing problems from different perspectives (London, 1989). The feasibility of such programs may be limited, however, by current organizational trends such as downsizing (Hall & Foulkes, 1991). Whether the benefits of feedback-intensive programs such as job rotation can be achieved with less costly types of special assignments has not been determined. Overall, only a few studies have evaluated this developmental activity despite its widespread use (Yukl, 2006).

**Developmental relationships.** Coaching and mentoring help managers interpret and understand what they are experiencing (McCall, 2010; McCall et al., 1988). Ideal mentoring and coaching characteristics were found to be listening and communication skills, patience, knowledge of the organization and industry, and the ability to read and understand others; in addition, the keys to a good mentoring or coaching relationship included trust, an open communication system, and common goals, standards, and expectations (Allen & Poteet, 1999).

**Mentoring.** In a mentoring relationship, a more experienced manager helps a less experienced protégé; the mentor is usually at a higher level but not the protégé's immediate supervisor (McCauley & Douglas, 1998). Mentors provide two distinct types of functions for protégés: (a) psychosocial (acceptance, encouragement, coaching, counseling) and (b) career facilitation (sponsorship, protection, challenging assignments, exposure, visibility) (Noe, 1988). Mentors can also help protégés adjust, learn, and reduce stress during difficult job transitions, such as promotions, transfers, foreign assignments, mergers, reorganizations, and downsizings (Kram & Hall, 1989; Zey, 1988).

Protégés have been shown to experience career advancement and success (Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Whitley & Coetsier, 1993). Mentors may experience increased job satisfaction and development of their own leadership skills. In one study, mentoring given as well as received predicted career advancement in a company (Wilbur, 1987). Nevertheless, mentoring is not always successful, especially in formal programs using assigned mentors, where personality conflicts and lack of commitment are likely problems (Noe, 1988).

While the research in general suggests that mentoring can be useful, there has been little attention to the specifics of (a) how a mentor actually facilitates development of leadership competencies in a protégé; (b) the skills, values, and behaviors most likely to be acquired or enhanced in a mentoring relationship; (c) the learning process; and (d) the conditions facilitating development (Yukl, 2006).

***Executive coaching.*** Executive coaching is an increasingly popular type of developmental intervention (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Kilburg, 1996) whereby an external or internal consultant helps a high-level business leader learn relevant skills and handle specific challenges one-on-one. Executive coaching can enhance many behaviors and skills, such as listening, communicating, influencing people, forging relationships, handling conflicts, building teams, initiating change, conducting meetings, and developing subordinates (Yukl, 2006).

Executive coaching has several advantages over formal training courses, among them being convenience, confidentiality, flexibility, and more personal attention, but obvious and significant disadvantages (high expense, shortage of competent coaches) are the main reasons that coaching is used primarily for executives (Yukl, 2006). While

there is evidence of the positive effects of executive coaching on personal and leadership development (Allen & Poteet, 1999), more research is needed (Yukl, 2006).

**Hardships.** Hardships may be the most difficult technique to control from a developmental perspective. The importance of hardships for learning is fairly obvious, as they offer lessons that would be otherwise difficult to obtain. Hardships are different from other developmental methods because they occur unintentionally, occur at any time, and the lessons taught often lead to retrospective learning, or learning on reflection (Moxley & Pulley, 2004; Van Velsor et al., 1998). Examples of hardships include business mistakes or failures, career setbacks, personal trauma, problem employees, and downsizing.

### **Other Leadership Development Activities**

Some formal and self-directed activities have been associated with leadership development.

**Action learning.** Action learning is a leadership development tool that is often used to combine formal training with learning from experience (Dotlich & Noel, 1998). This activity involves a small group of people solving real organizational problems, while focusing on how their learning can benefit individuals, groups, and the larger organization (Marquardt, 2004; Revans, 1982).

Action learning helps build a wide range of leadership skills (cognitive, execution, relationship, and self-management skills) as well as collaborative leadership skills that are essential for building learning organizations, groups, or teams, and for personal development (Marquardt et al., 2009). Individuals or teams work on field projects to solve organizational problems, which are often applied by the organization.

The types of projects are diverse, and they last weeks or months. Participants meet periodically with a skilled facilitator to discuss, analyze, and learn from their experiences; multiple teams may meet periodically in a seminar to share their experiences and learn from each other (Marquardt, 2004; Yukl, 2006).

The quickest and most enduring learning occurs when people are engaged in finding solutions to real problems through action learning (Giber, Carter, & Goldsmith, 2000). However, the effectiveness of action learning for leadership development depends on the project, team, and coaching. The narrower the scope of the project, the less portable the skills acquired (Baldwin & Padgett, 1993). The less challenging the project, the less likely it is to provide much learning. Projects carried out by teams rather than individuals deliver more learning. Where team members have diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and perspectives, action learning works best (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). The results of the few other studies evaluating effectiveness are inconclusive (Marson & Bruff, 1992; McCauley & Hughes-James, 1994), due to their reliance on self-reported benefits rather than objective indicators of behavior change and performance improvement. Research is still needed that is designed to determine the unique benefits and characteristics of action learning projects (Yukl, 2006).

**Outdoor challenge programs.** In outdoor challenge programs, a group of people engage in physical activities in an outdoor setting (Galagan, 1987), typically a sequence of increasingly challenging tasks that require mutual trust and cooperation. An experienced facilitator leads, coaches, encourages, and helps participants link the experience to their organizational life.

These programs have two purposes, personal growth and team building (Conger, 1992). Personal growth emerges from increased awareness of one's feelings and the possibility that feelings can differ from perceptions (e.g., fearfulness despite knowledge of safety). The exercises are designed to boost confidence, self-control, risk-taking, and willingness to give and receive trust. Team building results from strong group identification and cohesiveness during a bonding experience, usually when the members perform a series of exercises requiring mutual trust and cooperation over a period of two or more days. The hope is that the group's increased trust and cohesiveness will transfer back to the workplace (Yukl, 2006). The findings of the few studies (Baldwin, Wagner, & Roland, 1991; Gall, 1987; Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1987) investigating the effectiveness of outdoor challenge programs for leadership development are inconsistent. More research using objective measures is needed.

**Personal growth programs.** Designed to improve self-awareness and overcome inner barriers to the development of leadership competencies, personal growth programs typically include a series of psychological exercises, led by a professional facilitator, in which participants attempt to understand and share their purposes for living and working. The facilitator presents conceptual models of human development, organizational change, and the role of leadership (Yukl, 2006).

Personal growth programs involve strong emotional experiences and have lasting effects on participants, compared with most developmental activities. On the positive side, enhanced interpersonal skills can increase leadership effectiveness. Other lessons learned, however, can reduce leadership effectiveness (Conger, 1993). Encouraging a better balance between work and personal life, for instance, can have a negative effect if



the manager chooses to make less of a commitment to the organization. In addition, one's awareness of unconscious conflicts does not necessarily resolve them, and the experience may do more harm than good. Few studies have examined the consequences of personal growth programs on participants or organizations (Yukl, 2006).

**Self-help activities.** Many self-help techniques are available for enhancing one's leadership skills, including practitioner books, instructional audios or videos, and interactive computer programs (Yukl, 2006), applying the skills-based theories of leadership. They may be intended to replace or supplement training programs or to facilitate learning from experience. As for the effectiveness of self-help techniques, however, there is almost no empirical research (Baldwin & Padgett, 1993), so little is known about their benefits or the extent to which they can substitute for formal instruction. Further study is therefore needed to evaluate how much and under what conditions self-help activities can most effectively develop leadership competencies.

In the meantime, some self-help guidelines may be tentatively recommended: (a) forge a personal vision of your career objectives; (b) seek appropriate mentors; (c) seek challenging assignments; (d) improve self-monitoring; (e) seek relevant feedback; (f) learn from mistakes; (g) learn to view events from multiple perspectives; and (h) be skeptical of easy answers (Yukl, 2006).

The effectiveness of all the aforementioned approaches to leadership development partly depends on conditions within the organization—whether they facilitate or inhibit learning and the application of that learning by managers. Top management that offers support, reward systems that encourage skill development, and an organizational culture that values continuous education are all facilitating conditions (Yukl, 2006).

In sum, given the current reality of a constantly changing context in the competitive environment where organizations operate, there is a need for leadership competencies that can adapt to these critical challenges (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). The authors predicted:

Most organizations will not need the “Lone Ranger” type of leader as much as a leader who can motivate and coordinate a team-based approach . . . and, many if not all aspects of leadership will require a more collaborative approach to leadership. (p. 29)

Thus, as understanding of leadership evolves, there is also a shift in the way leadership development is approached—from more than just developing individual leaders to a greater focus on a relational model and the context in which leadership is developed.

The section that follows looks at the research on leadership development as it is practiced in the church setting.

### **Leadership Development in Church Organizations**

The literature on leadership development in the church setting is sparse. A review of the literature on approaches to leadership development reveals a few empirical studies for pastors of Protestant denominations and none among Catholic parish priests.

**Leadership development of Protestant pastors.** McKenna, Yost, and Boyd (2007) studied leadership development in terms of Protestant religious leaders’ key life experiences. They asked 100 senior pastors in a wide variety of denominations and church sizes to identify major events in their careers that were critical to their development, and to describe the lessons learned from those events. Paralleling past research on business leaders, the developmental experiences cited most frequently by the pastoral leaders were those that took place “in the trenches” (32%), during “times of

significant transition” (27%), and in personal relationships (23%). Experiences that took place “in the trenches” included leading without authority, starting from scratch, organizational turnaround, problem staff/church members/peers, leadership setback, and failures/mistakes. Situations that occurred during “times of significant transition” included being a church staff leader, leading alone, leading with others, leading through others, congregational switch, exposure to a larger scope, renewed call, personal trauma, and shepherding others through personal crises or traumas. In personal relationships, observing great role models and developing other people were the most cited developmental experiences. The findings suggest that clergy leadership development occurs when clergy do their day-to-day work, as well as when they lead at the edge of their comfort zones. These broad experiences, whose significance is often underestimated, are critical for religious leaders’ development, just as they are for secular leaders.

Drake (2003) evaluated the impact of senior pastors’ leadership development training experiences on their effectiveness as church leaders in an American Protestant evangelical denomination (Methodist). The study aimed to determine whether more training translated into a greater positive impact on the organization, as would be expected. Senior pastors in Methodist churches across the country were randomly selected based on the age and size of the church and the length of the pastor’s service. The respondents were asked to describe their leadership development training experiences over the previous 3 years, including self-studies, personal reading, seminars, and higher education courses. Leadership development training experiences were defined as learning activities a leader engaged in for the purpose of education, self-

improvement, or personal growth. This definition aligns with the way skills-based training is described in secular organizations. Church performance growth trends (as measured by attendance and annual income) were compared with the pastors' training experiences. Results showed no significant relationship between the number of seminars taken by a pastor and his or her church's attendance and income; there was a positive relationship with both attendance and income, however, when the pastor took higher education courses. There was also a positive relationship between the church's budget for pastoral development and its attendance and income performance. These mixed results indicate that formal learning experiences probably have some effect on leadership development. The specific implication derived from the literature is that church performance can be measured using the objective criteria of worship attendance and financial giving (Smith, Carson, & Alexander, 1984). However, careful validation of such criteria is needed to determine whether they are directly associated with training effectiveness.

In a two-phase study conducted in the Episcopal Church to identify the pastoral leadership qualities and competencies that contribute to congregational vitality, Gortner and Dreibelbis (2005) first interviewed 66 senior pastors who were nominated by peers and judicatory leaders as having contributed to positive change ("effective" clergy) or negative change ("struggling" clergy) in their congregations. The interview included, among others, questions on various approaches to communication and networking and experiences with mentors and seminary training. The results showed that mentorship was self-reported to have the greatest influence on religious leaders' development of their ministries; secondary influences were postordination training and experience, direct work

with people in need, and on-the-job learning from lay leaders and parishes. Survey questionnaires were then sent to 456 additional senior pastors nationwide in 1,500 congregations ranging in size and vigor. The survey questions were designed based on interview findings and included questions on experience with mentors. Most (about 81%) of respondents reported having mentors who contributed significantly to their personal growth and development. Mentoring after seminary and ordination helped pastors become more self-reliant and independent in their leadership approaches. However, mentors often failed to transmit core leadership skills in such areas as conflict management, networking, and communication; according to the findings, learning focused more on developing skills in abstraction and in religious functions. The unintended consequence of this failure was the perpetuation of an ethos of nonassertiveness in the ordained ministry.

Tunncliff (2005) examined how leadership development in seminary education could be improved. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with 40 senior pastors considered “highly effective” practitioners, defined as having led a congregation as its membership grew to at least 2,000. They were asked about events during (a) high school, (b) college, and (c) the 5 postgraduate years when many attended seminary. The results revealed four major categories of leadership development influences: (a) “parallel leadership experiences” that helped build the subject’s self-confidence, sense of teamwork, and level of personal responsibility; (b) “actual leadership experiences” in which the subject had an important role as a leader influencing a group toward common goals; (c) “influential role models,” which describes individuals who served as good examples, demonstrated great integrity, affirmed the subject’s worth, potential, and

abilities, and provided the subject with opportunities to develop those abilities; and (d) “significant learning experiences,” or those academic or personal events that stood out in shaping the subject’s character and leadership abilities.

Cohall and Cooper (2010) conducted a national survey of 255 American Baptist pastors to quantitatively analyze how they perceived their preparation for a role that involved influencing their congregants as spiritual, social, and political leaders (pastoral leadership). One of the findings indicated that although academic training was important in such preparation, mentoring was an important factor for leadership effectiveness, and greater satisfaction was achieved from mentoring by experienced clergy. The survey results pointed chiefly to two recommendations: (a) paying more attention to leadership preparation for pastors, and (b) providing more opportunities for the mentoring of new pastors by older and more experienced pastors.

Table 3 summarizes studies conducted among Protestant clergy. In sum, the literature on leadership development in the Protestant denomination shows that mentoring and certain types of experiences (e.g., starting from scratch; organizational turnaround; dealing with problem staff, peers, and congregants; leadership setbacks; failures/mistakes) are more important than formal training for producing effective pastors. Difficulties remain in defining the effectiveness of specific leadership development practices. Unlike secular leaders in businesses and organizations, where income and goal-meeting may be objectively measured, religious leaders value additional subjective metrics, including the spiritual and indefinable. When pastoral “effectiveness” was mentioned in the literature, it covered lessons learned, church membership, congregational vitality, increase in church attendance and income, job satisfaction,

longevity in vocation, knowledge expansion, a sense of responsibility, ministerial need, pastoral services, and parish outreach, among many other factors (Drake, 2003). The leadership of pastors was described in terms of their roles as spiritual leaders (preachers, liturgists, and moral concerns), social leaders (social guidance and administrative functions), and political leaders (public spokesmen) of their respective congregations (Cohall & Cooper, 2010).

Table 3  
*Leadership Development Studies of Protestant Pastors*

<b>Subjects/participants</b>	<b>Inquiry/ type of study</b>	<b>Findings</b>
44 Methodist pastors (Drake, 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact experiences</li> <li>• Interview</li> </ul>	The number of leadership seminars taken by a pastor had no significant effect on church attendance and income, but higher education courses did have a significant effect. There was a positive relationship between the church's budget for pastoral development and church attendance and income.
522 Episcopal priests (Gortner & Dreibelbis, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualities and competencies</li> <li>• Survey</li> </ul>	Mentorship had the greatest influence on ministerial development, followed by postordination training and experience, direct work with people in need, and on-the-job learning from lay leaders and parishioners.
40 Protestant pastors (Tunnicliff, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of education</li> <li>• Interview</li> </ul>	Leadership development influences included experiences that built self-confidence and a sense of teamwork, significant leadership roles, and influential role models.
100 Protestant senior pastors (McKenna, Yost, & Boyd, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences that matter</li> <li>• Interview</li> </ul>	Developmental experiences occurred in the trenches, during times of significant transition, or in personal relationships.
255 American Baptist pastors (Cohall & Cooper, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for first role</li> <li>• Survey</li> </ul>	Leadership training in the seminary curriculum was inadequate. Mentoring was an important factor for effective leadership preparation. Mentoring by more experienced clergy provided the greatest satisfaction.

**Leadership development of Catholic priests.** Compared with Protestant congregations, there is a lack of empirical research that explicitly identifies the leadership development experiences of Roman Catholic pastors; experiences are mostly identified in

practice. Most Catholic priests are trained in one of the diocesan seminaries in the United States. Each of these seminaries provides an integrated formation in four central areas: intellectual, spiritual, human, and pastoral (NCCB, 2006). The human formation component deals with interpersonal skills and affective maturity. The pastoral component addresses an array of skills to equip seminarians for future pastoral leadership as priests.

Seminarians have concurrent training in a ministerial or service setting (hospital, school, social service agency) as well as in parishes where they are involved in various ministries such as the pastoral education program (personal communication, Monsignor Jeremiah McCarthy, January 27, 2011). Nonetheless, Schuth (1989) observed that the training of seminarians is inadequate to prepare them for pastoral leadership, as the courses to teach leadership skills have yet to be developed in seminaries.

Parish life is now much influenced and enriched by leader formation programs, which U.S. dioceses have launched since Vatican II to serve their local faith communities (Gremillion & Leege, 1987). For example, Monsignor Robert Panke (personal communication, August 19, 2011) identified the leadership development programs for a newly ordained priest in his archdiocese. For the first 2 years, the new priest is teamed up with a senior priest for mentoring on a monthly basis to help with transition, pastoral formation, taking time off, and being happy and healthy. In addition, there is a six-unit program for all new pastors and priests in their third year of priesthood (thus a full 3-year program of continuing formation for young clergy including the mentoring program). New pastors attend a new pastor workshop developed by the vicar for clergy of the archdiocese. The course, which is designed to give a general overview of a pastor's role



and tasks and to assist in basic skills development, is tailored to meet the needs of the parishes of the archdiocese.

In a major research initiative for the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy—a membership association of dioceses, religious communities, and other organizations committed to promoting and supporting ongoing formation of clergy—the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) conducted a telephone survey of 1,212 Catholic priests (diocesan and religious) in the United States. The subjects were asked about the extent of their participation in ongoing formation and continuing education activities related to priestly life and human development. These activities included theological updating, counseling and pastoral ministry, physical well-being, preaching and presiding, emotional well-being, and management and administration. Results showed that nearly 90% of respondents participated in at least one area of development, with theological updating the most commonly reported. About three-quarters took part in counseling and pastoral ministry, physical well-being, preaching and presiding, and emotional well-being activities. About half were involved in management and administration activities, which did not specify a leadership development component (Perl & Froehle, 2002).

Despite the dearth of academic research in the field of priestly leadership development, several organizations are actively involved in national initiatives to improve the leadership and management competencies of Catholic priests. The report on post-Vatican II parish life in the United States (Gremillion & Leege, 1987) described several leader formation programs that U.S. dioceses have launched since Vatican II. These include the formation of the National Organization for the Continuing Education of

Roman Catholic Clergy, priest sabbaticals as opportunities to pursue continuing education, and diocesan and other leadership programs.

Periodic sabbaticals for priests are encouraged and even paid for by a parish or diocese. Depending on the priest's needs, the sabbatical could range from a few weeks to a year.

Sabbaticals offer priests the opportunity to be renewed through a rest, a change of pace and freedom from the stress of ministry and other concerns. When a priest acquires additional theological understanding, pastoral skills, and personal growth during a sabbatical, there are obvious benefits for the people he serves. (NCCB, 1984)

The Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) is a nearly 20-year-old organization that minister to priests, diocesan leaders, and lay leaders in over 43 U.S. dioceses. Through their banner program, "Good Leaders, Good Shepherds," CLI provides clergy and lay persons with pastoral leadership formation and consulting services of a high standard that build their leadership competence in ministry. The program specifically for priests is a 2-year priestly formation training course that combines the science of leadership with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This program teaches priests "more efficient and effective ways to lead, inspire and motivate their flocks" (CLI, 2012) through a comprehensive curriculum that includes visioning, goal setting, communication skills (listening and giving feedback), team leadership, group problem solving and decision making, envisioning and initiating change, negotiating, and leading in both strategic relationships and organizational contexts. A complementary program, Tending the Talents, was launched to strengthen the overall quality of ministerial relationships and increase the quality of parish life and leadership.

The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project addresses a variety of issues facing U.S. Catholic parish leadership in a rapidly changing social environment. These issues include multicultural and generational diversity, ministry in linked parishes, and various roles and dimensions of lay ecclesial ministry. The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project (2011) is a collaborative undertaking of the National Association for Lay Ministry, the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development, the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, and the National Federation of Priests' Councils.

The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management (NLRCM, n.d.) pulls together experts from the fields of business, finance, academia, philanthropy, and nonprofit organizations to promote excellence and best practices in the management, finances, and human resource development of the Catholic Church in the United States at the parish, diocesan, and national levels. The organization has been referred to as “corporate Catholic America’s response to the financial and management issues plaguing the Church” (Feuerherd, 2006, p. 5). One example of several ongoing initiatives is “Standards for Excellence,” a program promoting excellence and best practices in the management, finances, and human resources development of the Church. The NLRCM currently has 24 dioceses and 15 Catholic nonprofits called “Partners in Excellence.” Also, in partnership with two national church associations, the NLRCM launched “Catholic Leadership 360,” an assessment tool and leadership development program for priests and laity, and the “Catholic Leadership 360°,” a collaborative virtual learning forum that is part of an ongoing leadership formation program, within which priests can engage in an extended conversation, learn from one another, and share best practices.

Other resources for diocesan and pastoral planning have also been initiated (e.g., the “Toolbox for Pastoral Management”; ChurchEpedia.org, an encyclopedia of best practices in church management, finance, human resources, and communications; and the *Church in America* DVD and workbook).

Lastly, the National Institute for the Renewal of the Priesthood (n.d.) supports priests and religious communities by providing opportunities to share information and research (including leadership topics), and by promoting discussion in an online forum. Participants discuss the priesthood, ways priests can better strengthen and support each other in their commitment to the Catholic faith and the faith community, and real-life experiences of priests.

While the leadership development opportunities described above are available to Catholic clergy, they are not mandatory. The success or failure of specific leadership initiatives among priests is ultimately determined by the culture of the Church (Schuth, 2008), which is conditioned by the bishop as head of the diocese. The bishop provides the necessary encouragement, support, and opportunities for priests to engage in leadership development activities.

Several leadership development activities that are common in a secular or corporate context are notably absent from the literature describing Catholic clergy leadership development. Skills-based leadership training, for instance, while widely offered, is neither integrated into formal training programs in seminaries, nor a required course in continuing education programs for priests. Multirater feedback (formal 360-degree feedback), action learning, and outdoor challenge programs are not standard practices for clergy. The academic research also lacks evidence of priests making

consistent and reliable use of developmental job assignments, feedback-intensive programs (job rotations), and developmental relationships (leadership coaching and mentoring).

Some competencies designed for business leaders are being addressed in the course offerings of the CLI and NLRCM, as previously discussed. These initiatives have not widely occurred, however, for three apparent reasons: (a) there is a dearth of academic research on the topic, which Catholic leaders might otherwise use as a basis for justifying, creating, implementing, and measuring the effects of such programs; (b) the few comparable programs already in place are not mandatory for the potential leaders they are supposed to help; and (c) such programs must have the bishop's support, an unpredictable condition.

## **Summary**

The literature on leadership development identifies traditional strategies as well as some alternative approaches applicable to both secular and church organizations. Close scrutiny of the results and conclusions of most of these studies, however, regardless of context, ultimately reveals that nearly all lack concrete, consistent, objective evidence of effectiveness in actually developing leaders, even within their own definitions of leadership. More systematic, in-depth investigation of leadership development, using some kind of standard metric, is still needed. The focuses and components of leadership development identified in the literature demonstrate the importance of both internal and external influences. For example, a leader's ability to learn is as vital as the number and quality of opportunities for learning. Likewise, the leader's commitment to

organizational values is as necessary as the way the organization views its fundamental relationship with employees.

Widespread approaches to leadership development range from formally structured programs to vaguely defined work experiences. Nearly a dozen methods and techniques are labeled “developmental activities,” among them physical and psychological challenges and others based on untried theories. When the potential leader isn’t being molded by others, he or she is encouraged to apply self-help guidelines, such as articulating a personal vision, seeking mentors, and finding ways to expand his or her perspectives. Few studies agree on the ideal combination of activities to develop the ideal leader.

In the context of clergy, both the literature and the interviews reveal an even greater lack of consistently identifiable and applied leadership development practices, if the subject is addressed at all. Further research on the practicability or usefulness of secular leadership development practices in religious organizations holds much potential.

Generally, studies of “effectiveness” of leadership development among Protestant clergy demonstrate that a few key business-world development practices for executives do carry over, namely education, experience, mentoring, and training. As for Catholic clergy, no academic research was found in the literature. The closest equivalent to leadership development activities is the formation of priests in the seminary (earlier identified as inadequate in the area of leadership development) and opportunities for continuing education after seminary. However, several leadership development strategies in use have been identified. A number of Catholic organizations have taken on the responsibility of developing priests into leaders by implementing some innovative

nationwide initiatives to improve clergy leadership skills; however, these initiatives do not have a basis in underlying leadership theory, nor is there inclusion of relevant theories of learning to maximize the leadership development potential.

Mumford et al. (2000) asserted that “leadership is held to be a potential in many individuals—a potential that emerges through experience and the capability to learn and benefit from experience” (p. 21). Leadership development is thus an experience of learning. The following section reviews the literature on the theoretical foundations of adult learning and the experiential learning theory to inform how leadership, as an experience of learning, may develop.

### **The Literature on Adult Learning**

Several adult learning theories exist, but there is no single theory of adult learning. Each one contributes in its own way to advancing our understanding of adult learners (Merriam et al., 2007). Andragogy, defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43), is recognized as the best-known model of adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Knowles (1980) identified six core assumptions or principles: (a) adult learners need to know why they have to learn; (b) the adult learners’ self-concept needs to be recognized, allowing an opportunity for self-directed learning; (c) adult learners have a reservoir of experiences that is a rich source for learning; (d) adults are ready to learn when they experience a need to cope with life situations; (e) adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered; and (f) adult learners are motivated by internal rather than external factors.

Despite being considered the central model of adult learning, Knowles’ principles do not describe how learning actually takes place. Illeris (2005) provided a

comprehensive view of the learning process itself, positioning learning as “the continuous interaction among cognition, emotions, and the social context” (p. 104). This broad and open definition allows personal development, socialization, qualification, and other activities to be considered types of learning, depending on how they are viewed. All learning takes place in the context of society, which sets the conditions for learning possibilities, and for adults, experience fuels the process. To understand how experience catalyzes learning, other theories need to be considered.

### **Experience as the Catalyst of Adult Learning**

The experiences of adults have long been viewed as playing a critical role in adult learning (Dewey, 1934, 1938; Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Lindemann, 1926, 1961; Merriam et al., 2007). For Lindemann (1961), “The resource of the highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience. . . . Experience is the adult learner’s living textbook” (pp. 6-7). How experience impacts learning is described in Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT).

**Experiential learning theory.** Kolb defined “experiential learning” as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it” (p. 41). This definition incorporates four fundamental ideas: (a) emphasis should be on adaptation, rather than content or outcomes; (b) knowledge is a transformation process, a continuous creation, not a static entity to be exchanged; (c) both objective and subjective experience are transformed by learning; and (d) learning and the nature of knowledge are interdependent.



Kolb (1984) summed up his unique perspective on experiential learning and development in the following six propositions.

**1. *Learning is a process, not an outcome.*** The idealist approach of traditional education and the behaviorist theories of learning of Watson, Hull, Skinner, and others view ideas as constant, fixed, immutable content or elements of thought, resulting in a tendency to define learning in terms of measurable outcomes—knowledge accumulated or habits formed in response to stimuli (Kolb, 1984). In ELT, however, ideas are formed and re-formed, “derived from and continuously modified by experience” (p. 26), in an emergent, adaptive process.

**2. *Learning is continuous, grounded in experience.*** Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested in a learner’s experiences; all learning is relearning (Kolb, 1984). While this continuity provides predictability and security, behind it is an element of doubt and uncertainty: What happens when continuity is interrupted by the unexpected? Learning occurs during the interplay of expectation and experience. Relying too much on continuity and certainty may result in dogmatism and rigidity, the inability to learn from new experiences. But if continuity is affected by too many new experiences, one is overwhelmed by skepticism and insecurity and incapable of effective action.

**3. *The learning process requires the resolution of conflicts among modes of adaptation to the world.*** The origins of Kolb’s perspective on learning and development lie in the similarities among models proposed by Lewin (1951), Dewey (1938) and Piaget (1970). These three experiential learning models describe certain conflicts, suggesting that learning results from their resolution: (a) Lewin—concrete experience versus abstract concepts and observation versus action; (b) Dewey—the impulse that gives ideas their

“moving force” versus reason that gives impulse its direction; and (c) Piaget—accommodation of ideas to the external world versus assimilation of experience into existing conceptual structures (Kolb, 1984).

To be effective, according to Kolb (1984), learners need four different kinds of abilities:

- Concrete experience abilities (CE)—to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences
- Reflective observation abilities (RO)—to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives
- Abstract conceptualization abilities (AC)—to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories
- Active experimentation abilities (AE)—to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems.

These four learning abilities occupy continuums within two primary dimensions of the learning process: (a) the concrete experiencing of events at one end, and abstract conceptualization at the other; and (b) active experimentation at one end, and reflective observation at the other. As learning proceeds, one moves from actor to observer and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment (Figure 2).

***4. The learning process is a holistic mode of adaptation to the world.*** Experiential learning is similar to Jung’s (1931, 1960) theory of psychological types in that the process is not the special province of a single function, but involves the integrated functions of the whole person. It is the major form of human adaptation, occurring in all settings and stages of life, and encompassing more limited adaptive concepts such as

creativity, problem solving, decision making, and attitude change. According to Kolb (1984), “When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations” (p. 33).

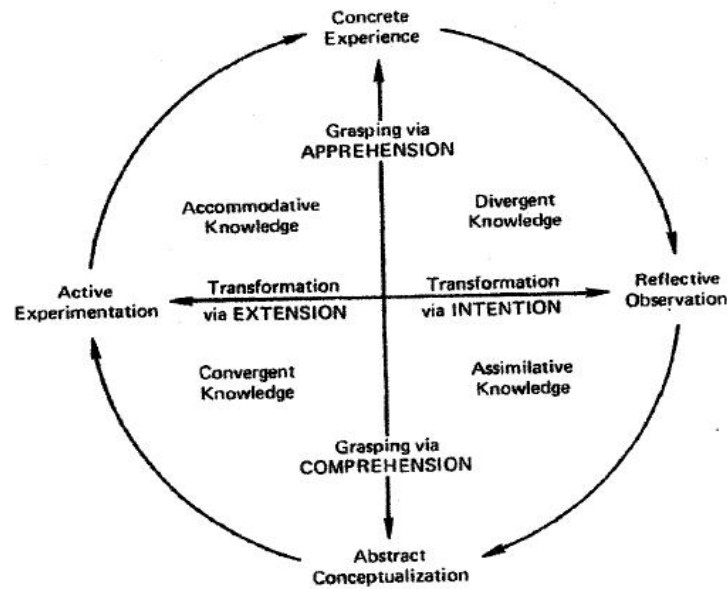


Figure 2. The experiential learning model and underlying structural dimensions. From *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, by D. A. Kolb, 1984, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Copyright 1984 by Prentice-Hall. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

**5. Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment.** The dual meanings of the term *experience*—subjective, personal, and internal (experiencing a feeling), and objective, environmental, and external (experiencing an event)—symbolize the transactional relationship between the person and the environment that occurs during experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). “Transaction” connotes fluidity, interpenetration, and reciprocation; once the two become related, both are changed. Learning results not simply from responding to a fixed environment, but from actively creating situations that meet one’s learning objectives, “a transactional process” (Bradford, 1964, p. 192) that is

active, self-directed, and applicable in group settings as well as in everyday life (Kolb, 1984).

**6. *Learning is the process of creating knowledge.*** The typology of different knowledge systems in ELT offers a way to approach such practical problems as follows: understanding how knowledge results from the transaction between social knowledge (all previous objective human cultural experience) and personal knowledge (an individual's subjective life experiences) in a process called learning; the psychology of the learning process; and epistemology (the origins, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge) (Kolb, 1984).

Extrapolating from Kolb's ELT, leadership development could be similarly viewed as a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Kayes (2002) opined that learning how to access all four learning modes and styles facilitates adults' reflection and critical reflection on experience, helping leaders become adaptable and discerning in responding to organizational problems. Experiential learning allows leaders to engage their own experiences and reflect upon those experiences to further synthesize and analyze information. Such skills are essential for problem-based learning and engaging leadership skills in modern organizations.

Differing philosophical orientations had led to the criticism of Kolb's model. Fenwick (2003) pointed to its lack of attention to the learner's context of experience, which includes "the social relations and political cultural dimensions of the community, . . . the nature of the task, . . . the vocabulary and cultural beliefs through which the individual makes meaning of the whole situation, and the historical, temporal, and spatial location of the situation" (p. 79). Others, Boud and Walker (1991) among them, have

attempted to address the issue of learners' context by improving on Kolb's experiential learning model to acknowledge specific contexts that shape an individual's experience in varied ways, and to consider how individual differences affect the kind of learning developed through reflection on experience. Jarvis (1987) proposed a modified model of the learning process by portraying a person shaped by a social context where there is always potential for a learning experience to occur. He identified that the person's response might be "reflective learning" (contemplation, problem solving, or active experimentation) or "nonreflective learning" (absorbing information, unconsciously internalizing new understandings, or mechanically practicing new skills), or even "nonlearning" (rejecting learning, too preoccupied to learn, or just interacting mechanically). Thus, reflection is reinforced as a key requirement in experiential learning, and therefore reflective practice is important to adults' learning.

**Reflective practice and experience.** Schön (1983, 1987) developed the concept of reflective practice based on how reflection, particularly "critical reflection," plays out in the professional setting. Practitioners learn by identifying problems of interest and then experimenting with solutions. Knowledge is "constructed" through reflection during and after this experimental action (Schön, 1983).

Several distinct elements of reflective practice were noted by York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, and Montie (2001):

- Time, intentionally slowed or stopped to allow consideration of multiple views
- Openness, the only state within which new understandings can occur
- Thought processes that are active, aware, and provide context (such as analysis, synthesis, and metacognition)

- Examination of one’s beliefs (formed from experiences and affecting behavior), goals (general or specific aims, intentions, or desired outcomes), and practices (dispositions, behavior, and skills in specific performance areas)
- Acquisition of deeper insights that lead to action

Wellington and Austin (1996) identified five orientations to reflective practice—immediate, technical, deliberative, dialectic, and transpersonal—that result from being filtered through its practitioners’ beliefs and values. While the orientations affect outcomes, they do not compete with one another, but are simply different ways of engaging in reflective practice. Practitioners should recognize and respect one another’s orientations to better “reflect upon a wider range of questions and develop a wider range of responses” (p. 314). Regardless of an individual’s orientation, two processes in reflective practice build expertise: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998).

***Reflection-on-action.*** This process may be described as analytically thinking through a situation after it has occurred (Schön, 1987). It involves consciously reliving an experience, reevaluating it, deciding if anything could have been done differently, and then trying to do so. The results are new perspectives on experiences, which allow for changes in behavior and commitments to action. In Kolb’s (1984) cyclical model, this is the phase of reflection and observation from a variety of perspectives, paving the way for continued change and growth.

Four steps can guide one’s reflection: remembering an event, asking yourself what occurred; analyzing and interpreting the event, asking why you acted the way you did; making sense of the event, asking what you learned, how you can improve, and how

it might change your future thinking and actions; and considering the implications, asking what you will do the next time a comparable situation occurs, and what conditions would facilitate learning (York-Barr et al., 2001).

***Reflection-in-action.*** This process may be described as reshaping “what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schön, 1987, p. 26), “giv[ing] rise to on-the-spot experiment” (p. 28), thinking on one’s feet, or using one’s wits. It is triggered by a surprise, predicament, or opportunity in which what has always been thought and done no longer works. “We think critically about the thinking that got us [there]; and we may . . . restructure strategies of action, understanding of phenomena, or ways of framing problems” (p. 28). Schön (1983, 1987) suggested that professionals use this process of reflective practice as an integral part of professional development. Studies (e.g., Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998), however, did not find that the amount of experience a person possessed necessarily indicated that person was using reflective practice.

Describing the leadership practice of Protestant and Catholic clergy, Carroll (1992) observed:

In preparing sermons, teaching, counseling, or managing their congregation, [they] reflect-in-action, drawing on their biblical and theological heritage, on their own and others’ experiences, and on ideas and insights from a variety of sources. They also take seriously the perspectives of laity, treating them as reflective practitioners in their own right. And, they regularly reflect on their practice, finding in their experiences new models and resources for addressing future challenges. (p. 299)

Reflection in- and on-action can occur with respect to any type of learning, whether formally or informally experienced.

**Formal versus informal learning experiences.** Formal learning is “typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured” (Marsick & Watkins,

1990, p. 12). Informal learning is unstructured, though planned and intentional. In informal learning, the learner is in control (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Examples are self-directed learning, networking, coaching, and mentoring. Learning may take place in and be deliberately encouraged by an institution, but is not typically classroom-based, and in fact can occur despite an environment hostile to learning.

Marsick and Watkins (2001) further differentiated incidental learning that occurs almost unconsciously. Incidental learning is a by-product of some other activity, including formal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). It is always occurring, with or without the learner's conscious awareness, and therefore "may be taken for granted, tacit, or unconscious" (p. 26). Examples include learning from task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the hidden agenda of an organization's culture, and trial-and-error experimentation.

Informal and incidental learning occur wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity to learn (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). A review of nearly 150 studies (Callahan, 1999) showed that informal and incidental learning were relevant in many contexts, including private and public sectors, all types and levels of educational and professional institutions, families, and communities. Such learning can result from significant unplanned or unexpected events that force people to find solutions to new problems (Carter, 1995; Menard, 1993).

Three conditions enhance informal and incidental learning: (a) critical reflection to bring to the surface tacit knowledge and beliefs; (b) activity by the learner to identify options and gain new skills to implement them; and (c) creativity to expand options (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). By increasing one's awareness of learning opportunities



presented by life experiences, and by gaining insight into one's learning preferences, individuals can enhance their informal and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

In the church context where pastors are continually interacting with parishioners and community members, there is much applicability for informal and incidental learning from experiences.

### **Experiential Learning and Exemplary Leadership Development**

While the important link between adult learning and experience has long been recognized, it was not until the 1980s that a body of research started to highlight the importance of experience-based learning in the field of management and leadership development (Davies & Easterby-Smith, 1984; McCall et al., 1988). These studies stress that job experiences are the primary source of learning for managers. McCall (2010) highlighted key results of research over the past few decades about the role of experience in the leadership development of secular managers:

1. To the extent it is learned, leadership is learned from experience. Research on twins done at the University of Minnesota found that 30% of the variance in the "leadership role occupancy" criterion was explained by heredity, but the vast majority (70%) was due to experience (Arvey et al., 2006, 2007).
2. Certain experiences are more important than others. These experiences include early work experiences, short-term assignments, major line assignments, other people (almost always very good and very bad bosses or superiors), hardships, and some miscellaneous events like training programs (Douglas, 2003; McCall et

- al., 1988; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Yost & Plunkett, 2005; Yost, Plunkett, McKenna, & Homer, 2001; Valerio, 1990).
3. On-the-job experiences are powerful because of the challenges they present (Lindsey et al., 1987; McCauley et al., 1994).
  4. Different types of experiences can teach people different lessons. It is difficult to determine whether or not a specific person will actually learn what the experience offers (Lindsey et al., 1987; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002).
  5. Job experiences and assignments can become more developmental. High-caliber learning experiences can be enhanced through feedback on learning progress and challenges (DeRue & Wellman, 2009) and sometimes by adding coaching.
  6. In spite of obstacles commonly faced throughout individuals' careers, people can obtain many of the experiences they need. It is a matter of knowing who gets what experiences, having the experiences available, and being willing to put developmental moves ahead of other priorities.
  7. Learning is a dynamic process that takes place over time. It can be planned, but a lot of learning takes place incidentally. The adult learning literature provides models and theoretical explanations for the absorption and integration of new ideas and knowledge following childhood and adolescence. ELT, in particular, provides a process for understanding what is required to improve or expand adult learning capabilities, including the importance of reflection and the maximization of all learning experiences, be they formal, informal, or incidental to developing attributes of a good leader.

Learning how to lead is vital to individuals as well as organizations and is the chief skill that organizations want to develop in their employees (Hackett, 1997; McIntyre, 1997). Kouzes and Posner (2007) have shown in empirical studies that leaders who are more involved in learning are also more involved in the practices of exemplary leadership.

Exemplary leadership in business organizations has been described in varied ways. Warren Bennis (1999) equated “exemplary” leadership with “great” leadership, wherein the “new leader” (a) understands and practices the power of appreciation, (b) constantly reminds people of what’s important, (c) generates and sustains trust, and (d) is an intimate ally of the led. Bennis argued that “exemplary leadership is impossible without full inclusion, initiatives, and cooperation of followers” (p. 71).

Some qualitative researchers have considered successful and effective leaders as “exemplars or role models who use their conceptual, interpersonal and theatrical skills to influence others” (Hunt & Laing, 1997, p. 32). Five exemplar leadership variables were identified from the exemplar model of leadership as espoused, with variations (Bennis, 1999; Tichy & Devanna, 1986). These include leaders’ ability to (a) generate a vision of a future state; (b) differentiate themselves from their followers; (c) consolidate people’s thinking around specific values; (d) transmit their vision, their difference, and their values; and (e) expose and concede a flaw.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) identified five practices of exemplary leadership based on analysis of thousands of leadership experiences of business organizations and nonprofits. These practices were (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart.

Hunt and Laing (1997) reported on a 2-year survey of 105 executives and the perceptions of them by over 1,000 of their colleagues. The study benchmarked the features of leadership identified in the exemplar model (vision, difference, values, transmission, flaw) against Schroder's (1989) definition of competencies associated with high-performing managers (cognitive, interpersonal, presentational, motivational). The results showed that those who were ranked most effective on the competency questions were also described as most effective and successful on the exemplar role model.

Studies of nonprofit organizations, religious organizations included, have described exemplary leadership in terms of effective, successful leadership similar to secular organizations, as previously discussed. In an interview of 45 nonprofit chief executive officers, Herman and Heimovics (1989) found that for nonprofit leaders to be successful, they must be proactive, risk takers, creative, and adaptive. In another study, Knauff, Berger, and Gray (1991) showed that effective nonprofit leaders must take risks, convey vision to others, and have a strong self-understanding. The importance of taking a long-term perspective and focusing on strategic planning was noted in the two studies. Carroll (2006) identified some characteristics and marks of excellent Christian ministry, such as resiliency and spiritual discipline; agility and reflective leadership; trust and personal authority; staying connected; and self-directed, career lifelong learning.

In the specific context of Catholic religious organizations, Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) distinguished outstanding leaders from typical leaders based on the competencies of achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade

members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values.

In sum, there is no common definition of the term *exemplary leadership* in either secular or nonprofit/religious literature. Exemplary leadership is commonly used interchangeably with such terms as “great” leadership, “successful” leadership, “effective” leadership, “outstanding” leadership, and “superior” leadership, all descriptive of principal identifiable competencies (skills and personal characteristics) necessary to lead organizations toward a viable future. The competencies associated with these terms are varied, but vision and being self-aware, proactive, inclusive, and adaptive come across as integral components of the competencies described.

For the purpose of this study, I have adapted the definition of exemplary as it has been used to describe leaders in Catholic organizations. Exemplary leadership is defined as *superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values* (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993).

## Literature Review Summary

This chapter has summarized the major findings of relevant literature on leadership and adult learning to inform the understanding of exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests' lived experience in leadership development.

Major areas of congruence exist between the general leadership literature and church literature, providing combinations of concepts and variables that can influence and contribute to effective leadership performance by church leaders. Obvious intersections are revealed in theories of servant, spiritual, transformational, and authentic leadership. Theories and models such as leadership traits, skills, and styles, and leader-follower, processual, and complexity leadership also find applications in the church context.

The leadership roles of pastors, with their diffuse parameters and imprecise metrics, are marked by some ambiguity compared with leadership in secular organizations. While church leaders are assumed to operate within defined functional hierarchies and theological structures with prescribed beliefs and practices, in reality their leadership roles are not so clear and predetermined. Scholarly attempts to define the scope of pastoral leadership do not appear to be as agreed upon as scriptural interpretations.

Leadership development expands the collective capacity of organizational members to effectively engage in leadership roles and processes (McCauley et al., 1998) through the improvement and use of interpersonal competence (Day, 2000). The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders in the context of Catholic religious organizations are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or

strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993).

Different approaches to leadership development applicable to both secular and church organizations range from formally structured programs to vaguely defined work experiences. McCall (2010) considered experience, more than competency models, as the best way to build a foundation for leadership development. Studies have shown that job experiences are the primary source of learning for managers. However, most studies revealed that nearly all leadership development strategies lack concrete, consistent, and objective evidence of effectiveness in actually developing leaders. Few studies agree on the ideal combination of activities to develop the ideal leader.

The literature on leadership development of clergy indicates a lack of consistently identifiable and applied leadership development practices. Among Protestant pastors, work experience and mentoring and, to a lesser extent, formal training are practices that have been identified in some empirical studies. There is, however, meager academic research related to the leadership development practices of Catholic clergy. Leadership is not addressed during seminary formation of Catholic priests, but opportunities are available after ordination through continuing education programs, pastoral leadership trainings, and nationwide initiatives of church and church-linked private organizations. These are, however, not mandatory for priests. The bishops, as heads of dioceses, could play a critical role in the success or failure of leadership development programs and initiatives (Schuth, 2008).

We do know that leadership development is induced via experience (Davies & Easterby-Smith, 1984; McCall, 2010; McCall et al., 1988) and that experiences play a fundamental role in how adults learn (Knowles et al., 1998; Merriam et al., 2007; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Kolb's (1984) ELT provides a starting point for understanding how exemplary priests have learned to lead. The ELT provides six characteristics of experiential learning that could serve as a particularly useful heuristic for assessing leadership development approaches.

Reflection is a vital part of the learning process, not only to the requirements related to leadership development, but also to obtaining value from any experience (Schön, 1983, 1987; Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Reflection may take the form of conversations with the experience while it is occurring (reflection-in-action) or be initiated after the experience has occurred (reflection-on-action) (Schön, 1983). Reflection is essential regardless of whether the learning experience is formal, informal, or incidental (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Both Protestant and Catholic clergy have been described as reflective practitioners (Carroll, 1992).

Thus, there is sufficient opportunity to add to the understanding of experiences that contribute to the leadership development of exemplary parish priests and to understand what the experiences actually contribute and what meaning is provided by these experiences. The next chapter discusses the methods for carrying out this study.



## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary pastors assigned to Roman Catholic parishes. A single research question was addressed: How do exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests perceive and describe their leadership development experience? There were two specific subquestions: What experiences contributed to their ability to lead their parishes? What is the meaning provided by these experiences in the practice of their leadership roles? For the purposes of this study, *experience* was defined as any activity, event, practice, knowledge, skill, observation, feeling, or reaction of the participant ('Experience,' 2008).

This chapter discusses the research procedures for the study, including the rationale for selection of a qualitative inquiry paradigm and phenomenology as the research methodology, the setting of the study, the sampling design and procedures, data collection protocols and procedures, data processing and analysis, means of identifying researcher bias, means of ensuring trustworthiness, and human participants and ethics precautions. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

#### **Inquiry Paradigm and Methodological Approach**

A qualitative inquiry paradigm (Creswell, 1998, 2007) was chosen as the research tradition for this study. Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 249)

The research question for this study met key criteria Creswell (2007) provided for choosing a qualitative approach. The first subquestion, “What experiences contributed to their ability to lead their parishes?” reflected an initial probe into the topic, and based on the literature, the topic needs to be explored (Duch, 1990). Further, since the research was designed to have the participants—in their own setting—describe their lived experiences of leadership development, the qualitative paradigm provided an accurate match to the phenomenon under study. Researchers across many disciplines (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Patton, 1990) opined that qualitative studies are best suited for studying meanings, social events, and life processes from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomenon.

The approach selected for this study was phenomenology, as detailed by Moustakas (1994). In phenomenological study, the researcher is concerned with seeking the underlying meanings of an experience through intuition and reflection, emphasizing both intentionality and inward consciousness based on memory, with the objective of achieving a unified vision of the meaning of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this study’s research on understanding the meaning of the leadership development experiences of parish priests considered exemplary leaders is consistent with the phenomenological emphasis on the search for meaning. The study of leadership development among parish priests is largely unexplored, and further research is needed to ascertain the experiences that priests report to be important in their development as exemplary leaders. The researcher sought to understand the individual and understand the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007) of these exemplary parish priests. Since this understanding began with the participants’ search for answers to the research questions,

the epistemology of this study was constructionist (Warren, 2002): the meaning of the experience was being created.

### **Setting of the Study**

The study setting was an archdiocese in a U.S. metropolitan area. At the time of the study, there were 580,000 Catholics in this urban archdiocese, 98 Catholic schools, and many social service programs. The demographic and social changes and challenges facing the Catholic Church in the United States, as outlined in chapter 1, were very much present in this archdiocese. This archdiocese included 140 parishes, which are representative of national parishes in terms of rural, small-town, suburban, and urban settings; size and ethnic composition; and organizational complexity and dynamism of activities.

### **Sampling Design and Procedures**

The sampling design had two levels. In the first level, a list of exemplary leader parish priests was developed from referral sources from a particular archdiocese that offered the researcher the most likelihood of access due to its location. The second level involved locating the study participants—exemplary priests who serve as pastors of their parish.

A top archdiocesan leader in charge of clergy served as a key informant for the study and suggested six high-ranking archdiocesan leaders, including himself, to serve as referral sources. The referral sources were selected based on the following parameters: (a) being high-ranking leaders and decision makers working on archdiocesan-wide assignments; (b) having a broad knowledge base of the local priests' history and

activities; and (c) being viewed as exemplary leaders themselves by other top archdiocesan officials. The choice of referral sources represented a sampling method known as “social labeling” (Sternberg, 1994), whereby experts were assumed to be knowledgeable about their peers. The process was approximate, since priest leaders working in the administrative archdiocesan office were being used as referral sources rather than priests assigned to parishes.

The referral sources were contacted via email and provided an explanation of the study. They were asked to suggest a maximum of 10 priests within the archdiocese whom they thought met the criteria of an exemplary pastor using the definition provided to them of exemplary leadership. Each referral source was provided suggestions independently of the other and did not know the identity of the other referral sources. Follow-up letters were mailed to the referral sources on the day after the email was released, and a phone call was placed after 1 week. Information shared with the referral sources can be found in Appendix A.

The definition of exemplary leadership provided to the referral sources originated from a major study of religious leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. In this study, Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) defined exemplary leadership as superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values. In addition, the literature on expertise development

suggests that it takes 10 to 15 years as a minimum time frame for expertise to develop (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Rommer, 1993; Skovholt et al., 1997), so this criterion was added to the definition provided to the referral sources.

Out of the six referral sources, two declined to participate; one cited health reasons, and the other did not give an explanation. Four referral sources identified a total of 39 priests instead of 40 because one referral source submitted only 9 names instead of 10. The 39 names were first screened to eliminate individuals who were no longer working as pastors. Three individuals were eliminated, which yielded a pool of 36 possible participants. From the complete list of names suggested, the 10 most frequently referred were chosen. The 10 individuals selected were in charge of parishes located in both city and suburban areas throughout the broad territorial jurisdiction of the archdiocese. Out of the 10 possible participants contacted, two were not available to participate in the study due to health reasons and travel commitments. Because the remaining 26 persons on the list were referred only once, a decision was made in consultation with the committee chair to consider age and geographical diversity in the choice of the two replacements.

Seidman (2006) suggested that two criteria govern the number of participants in a study: (a) “sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experience of those in it” and (b) and saturation of information, or “a point in a study at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported. He or she is no longer learning anything new” (p. 55). Seidman considered the criteria of sufficiency and saturation to be helpful, but subject to practical considerations such as time, money, and

other resources. For that reason, he did not recommend a required number of interviewees. Dukes (1984) suggested studying 3 to 10 subjects. Minimums are generally not given.

After interviewing eight participants, the information being generated was not sufficiently different and the important types of experiences were repeating. Based on discussions with the committee chair regarding the sufficiency and saturation of the findings, it was agreed that 10 participants would be sufficient to allow the researcher to generate substantive meaning of the experiences, if no new information was generated in the 9th and 10th interviews, which was the case.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interview Protocol**

The qualitative in-depth interviews followed the design suggested by Seidman (2006) for phenomenological studies and consisted of three separate interviews with each participant. According to Seidman, the three-interview method allows the interviewer and participant to understand the experience and place it in context. Seidman's structure provides a format for guiding researchers using phenomenology as both a theory and a method. Phenomenological interviewing combines a life history approach with focused in-depth interviewing: "The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (p. 15).

In-depth interviews for this study were structured following Seidman's protocols. Seidman's (2006) three-part interview series consists of a focused life history for the first interview, details of the experience for the second, and finally, reflection on the meaning of the experience for the third interview.

For this study, the first interview focused on the perception of training for the roles and duties involved with leading a parish and definitions of exemplary leadership. The researcher asked about the size of the parish congregation to determine the possible impact on the leadership activities of the priests. The second interview focused on the details of the leadership development experiences. The final interview focused on the meaning of these experiences and the perceptions held as to the importance of different leadership development experiences.

Each interview utilized a protocol that included a few key, open-ended questions (Appendix E). Probes were developed to follow the key questions. Interviews were unstructured and intended to elicit information from the participants, as well as eventually narrow the focus as clarifying questions were asked and themes emerged. The questions were constructed based on examples provided in qualitative inquiry texts (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006) and the leadership literature. They were also guided by research on the topic conducted as part of the requirements of qualitative research coursework preceding the dissertation proposal defense, and by the expertise of the dissertation adviser.

### **Interview Logistics**

Potential study participants were contacted by the researcher in groups of three in order to be able to offer maximum flexibility in interview scheduling. Contact information, such as parish office phone numbers and electronic mailing address, were obtained from the archdiocese directory, which is publicly available at the archdiocese website. The potential participants were screened through use of an introductory letter sent via email (see Appendix B). The same letter was mailed to the participants' parish

address the following day. The mailing of the introductory letter was followed by a telephone discussion to ensure that the criteria relating to years of pastoral experience ( $\geq 10$ ) were met and to stress the requirement for three 90-minute interviews over a 2- to 3-week period.

Once the participant agreed to be interviewed in the course of the telephone discussion, the researcher immediately asked for an appointment for the first interview. An email confirmation of the interview schedule was sent to the participant 1 week before the interview. The email communication included a written copy of the informed consent form (Appendix C), a request for a copy of the participant's resume, and an overview of the main questions in the first interview protocol.

In preparation for the interviews, the researcher performed a web search of the parish and archdiocese websites to gather information about the priests' background and parish history. This enabled the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the participants' individual backgrounds and the general work context. Prior to the interview, the researcher engaged in the epoche process to set aside, as much as possible, any biases, preconceived notions or beliefs, understandings, and facts, so as not to taint her ability to perceive the interviewees' experience as described. The consent form for the interview and recording was reviewed before any questions were posed. Since not all participants were able to present their resume before the first interview (because according to them they never applied for a job), the background information obtained through the Internet search proved helpful. All participants nonetheless submitted their resumes in the course of the interview period.

The researcher traveled out of state to conduct most of the interviews. All



interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participants' parish offices or rectory, the exception being two interviews of one participant, which were conducted in another parish office suggested by the participant for the researcher's convenience. Two participants, in an effort to become more comfortable with the interview process, asked for the researcher's personal and work background at the start of the first interview. This was not found to impact the information the participants shared with the researcher.

Seidman (2006) suggested that the interviews be spaced from 3 days to 1 week apart, allowing participants time for reflection, but not enough time to lose connections. Seidman also noted that there are "no absolutes in the world of interviewing" (p. 22) and advised that changes to the duration and spacing of interviews can be explored to accommodate individual schedules. All 10 participants completed their interviews within a 3-week timeframe. Once set, the interview schedule was adhered to, except for two interviews that had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen demands on the participants' time.

Three days before the second and third interviews, the main interview questions were provided to the participants, as had been done before the first interview. Informal feedback by the participants indicated that the advance information was appreciated because it allowed them to collect their thoughts before the interview. Participants were also invited to journal their experience and record ideas that occurred in between interviews in a notebook provided by the researcher. Only one participant recorded comments in the notebook, and another returned the notebook, not finding any use for it. As a closure to the interview series, the transcript of the final interview was sent via email with a participation thank you note.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist within 1 week of completion of the interview. The transcriptionist signed a letter of confidentiality (Appendix D). Additionally, notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews. The researcher checked the transcripts against the audio recordings and her notes for completeness and accuracy. Transcripts of previous interviews were shared with all the participants in advance of their next interview via electronic mail. Most participants indicated that they did not read the transcripts prior to the second and third interviews due to lack of time, save for two participants who relayed feedback before each of those interviews. The rest of the participants relayed their comments via email 2 to 3 weeks after receiving their final transcripts. Very few, minor corrections were made to the transcripts by either the participants or the researcher.

### **Pilot Test**

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher pilot-tested the interview protocol with two retired parish priests in the archdiocese. The researcher simulated the whole data collection process, including email communications and review of transcripts. The participants were able to answer the interview questions without difficulty, and their responses indicated a satisfactory grasp of the intent of each question and the follow-up questions. The first participant conscientiously read through and commented on the three transcripts, promptly responded to the researcher's emails, and provided feedback on the interview process. This participant also recommended another retired priest for the second pilot test, who was equally supportive but declined to read transcripts or respond to emails.

A variety of probes were used in the course of the pilot test. After the first pilot test, the transcripts were reviewed by the dissertation adviser, who suggested a few additional probes to encourage participants to share their stories. The second pilot test was found satisfactory after review of the transcript. The pilot test did not indicate any problems with the data collection process or the research protocol. Therefore, revisions of the research approach were not necessary.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

The analysis of data included tasks performed to first inductively reduce the data to what was of most significance and interest, and then to describe the essence of the entire experience of leadership development through the creation of individual profiles, and finally to identify thematic connections across all the data (Seidman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

The resulting raw data using Seidman's (2006) in-depth interviewing technique generated a total of 600 double-spaced, typed pages of transcripts. Seidman noted that text can be analyzed in two ways: (a) by developing profiles of individual participants and then grouping them into like categories; and (b) by identifying individual passages and then grouping them into categories and ultimately into themes. Given the large amount of text and the complex nature of the topic, which involved experiences occurring over the participants' lifetime, the researcher utilized both methods of analysis to provide coherence to the participants' overall experience as well as details of common experiences.

Initial analysis by coding of text was the first major procedure, followed by the crafting of individual profiles. This sequence provided greater objectivity by allowing

analysis of the entire text before identifying interesting quotes that may not be relevant to the participants' experiences. The individual profiles were presented in the participants' own words "to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates" (Seidman, 2006, p. 120).

In addition to the interview text, there was another form of data—the researcher's notes taken during and after each individual interview and during the coding process. The notes were used with the first reading of interview data to enhance overall understanding and then after the coding and selection of themes. No omissions were found.

The following procedural steps were undertaken to analyze the data:

1. The first reading of the data was initiated. The text of each interview was read straight through to understand the complete context of the data (Creswell, 2007). The researcher's notes were also reviewed at this time, as they enhanced overall clarity and understanding.

2. Coding of the text followed, which involved horizontalizing and labeling.

Following Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenological data analysis, horizontalizing involved identifying the significant and compelling statements relevant to the topic and question and then labeling (coding) them with a descriptive word or short phrase necessary to understand the individual participant's experience. Significant statements were identified in the second reading of the text and then coded in the third

reading. The definitions of exemplary leadership, defining experiences and the related features, meaning derived, and support for leadership development were coded separately using alpha codes A to J.

3. A comprehensive review of codes was conducted in the fourth reading and some refinements to the labels were made.

4. The first two sets of interviews were code-checked by the adviser, and the third and fourth sets were code-checked by a peer. Coding check by adviser and peer was deemed to be accurate from the labeling standpoint.

5. The codes for each participant were put into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, separating the definitions of exemplary leadership from the defining experiences and the support for leadership development. Codes related to the important features and meanings of the experiences were also listed.

6. The individual profiles were prepared. This involved returning to the transcript of individual participants (for a fifth reading) and working from each code sheet to extract and identify verbatim comments to fit into a one-page (single-spaced) profile. The resulting 10 profiles provided a verbatim description of the essence of participants' definition of exemplary leadership in a parish setting, thoughts on their defining experiences of leadership development, and their most important comments regarding their leadership development experience. The dissertation adviser reviewed and approved the first four profiles.

7. Following procedures identified by Moustakas (1994), a master set of codes was created by constructing Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for the codes of each defining experience (and its important features and meanings), the definitions of exemplary

leadership, support for leadership development, and recommendations for leadership development programs. Codes were grouped into categories reflecting commonality and eliminating redundancy. For the data on defining experiences, all categories and their codes were reviewed and a thematic phrase was developed that described the defining experience. This involved an iterative process of creating or adjusting headings and subheadings of coding categories. A sixth reading of the text followed to ensure that the consolidated coding categories were applicable to the individual experiences. The new codes were then applied to the text pages after consolidating the coding categories. The coding consolidation resulted in identification of seven defining leadership development experiences.

8. The coded data were transferred into a series of Microsoft Word documents organized as follows: definitions of exemplary leadership; descriptions of each of the seven experiences (including their important features and meanings derived); support for leadership development; and recommendations for leadership development programs. This step allowed all of the verbatim comments related to a particular code to be easily located. The researcher originally attempted to use a qualitative data analysis software package (HyperResearch) for sorting and coding data, but found the process tedious and confusing because in the process of working on the data, the researcher had already started to link the experiences, their salient features, their derived meanings, and other relevant data. Accordingly, use of this software was abandoned.

9. Analysis of the relevant composite data in Microsoft Word files was undertaken for each of the identified phenomena of leadership development. Moustakas (1994) identified three types of descriptions to be created for analyzing

phenomenological data: (a) individual textural descriptions identifying what individuals experienced; (b) individual structural description identifying how they experienced the phenomenon; and (c) a composite of both descriptions as the overall essence of the experience. Moustakas further specified the separate integration of all individual textural and individual structural descriptions at the composite level. In this study, the individual textural and structural descriptions were presented as the individual profiles.

10. In analyzing data related to definitions of exemplary leadership, it was found helpful to present all of the participants' significant verbatim statements and to develop formulated meanings for the definitions rather than to describe data based on the identified thematic descriptions. For this purpose, the researcher drew from Colaizzi's (1978) modification of Moustakas' (1994) analytic procedures of significant statements, formulated meanings, core themes, and a description of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. Significant statements were extracted that pertained directly to definitions of exemplary leadership. Meanings were then formulated from the significant statements (Appendix F). The formulations aimed to discover and highlight those meanings hidden in the various contexts and "horizons" of the phenomenon that were present in the original descriptions. The aggregate formulated meanings were organized into themes common to all of the participants' descriptions. The results were then integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Twenty-six significant statements and corresponding formulated meanings for exemplary leadership definitions were identified and categorized into three major themes that characterize the pastors' leadership roles in a parish setting.

11. The overall findings were distilled into key concepts based on the resounding themes that were learned. An exhaustive description of the phenomenon provided an unequivocal statement of its essential or fundamental structure. The experiences identified by the participants as their defining leadership development experiences were reviewed and analyzed individually and as a group. The experiences were grouped inductively into seven categories reflecting the nature of the experience. To identify the structure of experiences, which is part of the research question, the data analysis considered the following: (a) examples of the experiences, (b) features relevant to the experiences, (c) the relative importance of the experiences compared with the others identified by the participants, (d) the occurrence of the experiences over time, (e) the support for the experiences, and (f) the types of meanings derived from the experiences and their relationship to the identified experiences and to other types of meanings. The analysis included recommendations for designing a leadership development program. The participants' age, education, total time worked as a pastor, number of parishes worked in as a pastor, length of time as pastor in the current parish, and size of the current parish were considered across the data to identify any patterns related to these demographics.

12. The chapter on findings was prepared for review by the dissertation committee.

### **Identifying Researcher Bias**

In phenomenological research, identifying one's own beliefs and opinions is a vital part of the process and is referred to as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). The idea is to become aware of one's own suppositions in order to be free of them—which will allow



the researcher to be fully present during the interview, listening with openness. In the course of this study, several approaches were utilized to minimize researcher bias while understanding that it is a goal that is never fully attainable.

1. The researcher wrote her ideas on leadership development experiences in an essay, drawing ideas from Ahern's (1999) article on reflexive bracketing. This essay was reviewed before each interview as a reminder that the task at hand was to bracket her assumptions. These assumptions were shared with a peer from the researcher's workplace, someone with significant experience in clinical social work and behavioral interviewing, before the interview of the first participant. The sharing session served to alert the researcher to a broad range of potential factors that might be encountered in the conduct of the research, and it enhanced the researcher's awareness as to suppositions and beliefs about leadership and leadership development.

2. Because of the unavailability of the peer debriefer initially tapped from the researcher's doctoral program, the researcher's dissertation adviser served as debriefer after the first two interviews were completed. This was conducted as a dialogue about the overall project status, the interview experience, the protocol effectiveness, and general findings. The adviser/debriefer did not find any indication of bias and expressed confidence in the way the research proceeded.

3. The researcher's adviser reviewed the first two sets of the verbatim transcripts to ensure that the questions were being asked appropriately and were generating data appropriate to the research questions. The adviser noted that, indeed, the data generated answered the research questions and, as noted previously, suggested a few additional probes.

4. The researcher reread her summary notes on interviewing technique by Seidman (2006), Odendahl and Shaw (2001), and Sorrell and Redmond (1995) immediately before each interview. This provided a refresher of interview techniques and strategies, such as skills in listening for and interpreting meaning, remaining attentive, providing nonverbal nods, maintaining eye contact, and other skills important for effectively engaging the participant.

5. Throughout the interview process, the researcher maintained a personal journal to document thoughts and ideas that occurred after interviewing each participant. This exercise proved particularly helpful in developing thoughtful probes that brought forth details important to meanings as the researcher moved to the second and third interviews.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research methods establish trustworthiness by considering four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness in a qualitative study addresses issues that parallel the issues of validity and reliability in a quantitative study.

Credibility refers to the authenticity of the findings. In this study, credibility was enhanced by the following procedures, identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- Prolonged engagement: In this study, three lengthy interviews were completed with each participant.
- Triangulation by use of multiple sources of data for analysis and interpretation: This study made use of transcribed data and the researcher's notes.

- Member checks: In this study, interview transcriptions and the profiles were shared with participants, and all considered them an accurate representation of their interviews.
- Peer debriefing to identify bias: The researcher was interviewed at the onset of the first interview and after the first two sets of interviews were completed. In addition, the researcher engaged in a self-reflective process known as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994) to understand her judgments and opinions, so that they could be bracketed during the interview and analysis process.

Transferability refers to the relevance of the research findings for other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba advised that this is best achieved in qualitative study by providing thick description from which others can judge for themselves whether the findings are of value. In this study, thick description was provided from the transcribed interview data in chapter 4 related to definitions of exemplary leadership, identification and meaning of leadership development experiences, and other influences to leadership development.

Dependability as it pertains to the process of inquiry is concerned with its consistency and stability over time and across methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Dependability in this study was improved through the researcher's taking notes during the data collection phase and by listening to audio recordings to check the accuracy of interview transcripts. Dependability was also enhanced by the reading of transcripts and code-checking by the peer and adviser.

Confirmability addresses the internal coherence, the grounding of study findings with the data, the logic of the data inferences, and researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). To address confirmability, the researcher prepared an audit trail documenting the flow of events from referral source nominations to in-depth interviews and data analysis. This audit trail served as a record of all research activities and is handwritten on a notebook and typed as a separate record. The integration process was addressed through regular meetings and communications (via email and telephone) with the adviser during the research and writing process. The committee was kept informed of the researcher's progress via email after successful completion of the interviews and reviewed chapter 4 of the dissertation before it was finalized. Procedures specific to researcher bias have already been described.

### **Human Participants and Ethics Precautions**

The researcher anticipated minimal risk to the participants; participation in this research was of no more risk than that encountered in everyday life. Each participant was assured that his particular parish would not be identified, nor would his superiors have access to the data. Emotional discomfort, anxiety, or other affective risks were not anticipated, due to the focus on the particular subject matter of leadership development experiences, rather than the whole of the experience of being a pastor.

Specific ethical issues such as the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of data, storage of data, disclosure of the research questions and method of analysis, research participant rights, dissemination of data, possible benefits, and researcher contact information were provided to the research participants in a written informed consent form, found in Appendix C. A separate confidentiality agreement was signed by the transcriber of interview sessions (Appendix D).

Research participants were informed about the study's goals and methods through the study information sheet, which was also shared with the referral sources (Appendices A and B). They were invited to participate in a study of their leadership development experience, with the goal of understanding what meaning these experiences have in the practice of their current leadership roles. The interview duration, time frame, and a short biography of the researcher were included. The researcher did not foresee a conflict of interest between her and any of the potential research participants. Although she is employed at a social service organization sponsored by the archdiocese, this would have no bearing on the selection of participants, the interviews, the analysis, or the dissemination of results.

### **Summary**

This chapter has described the phenomenological research tradition and the specific research methods employed in conducting this research study. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences contributing to the leadership development of exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests. The participants were purposely identified by referral sources and included 10 exemplary pastors in an archdiocese in a U.S. metropolitan area. The experience of each participant was disclosed through approximately 4 hours of audio recorded interviews. Several procedures were conducted to address the trustworthiness of the study. The data generated included transcripts of the interviews, interview notes, and the researcher's recorded thoughts during and in between the interviews. Detailed analysis of the data was used to develop the findings, which included the participants' definitions of

leadership, their thoughts on their most important leadership development experiences, the meaning of individual experiences, and perceptions held about the importance of different leadership development experiences.

The next chapter explores the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **FINDINGS**

The research question that guided this study was, How do exemplary Roman Catholic parish priests perceive and describe their leadership development experience? Specific subquestions were: What experiences contributed to their ability to lead their parishes? What is the meaning provided by these experiences in the practice of their leadership roles?

This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative, phenomenological study involving 10 exemplary pastors assigned to an archdiocese in a U.S. metropolitan area. The findings were derived from 30 in-depth interviews conducted over a 2½-month period, followed by 3 months of data coding and analysis. The report of the findings is organized as follows: (a) description of the sample, (b) individual profiles, (c) exemplary leadership in a parish setting, (d) defining experiences of leadership development and their important characteristics, (e) meaning attributed to what was learned from the leadership development experiences, (f) support for leadership development, (g) designing a leadership development program; and (h) a summary of the findings.

#### **Description of the Sample**

A general profile of the study participants is shown in Table 4. The 10 pastors ranged in age from 49 to 69. As a group, these priests had an average of 16 years of experience as a pastor, with a range of 10 to 25 years. (Participants were required to have at least 10 years of experience to be included in the study.) The participants had worked, on average, in three different parishes; the range was two to five parishes. The length of

time in their current parish ranged from 1 to 9 years, with an average of 4.5 years. Three priests had completed 1 year in their current parish, and three had completed 7 years.

Table 4  
*General Profile of Participants*

<b>Participant Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Total time worked as pastor</b>	<b>Number of parishes worked with as pastor</b>	<b>Length of time as pastor in current parish</b>	<b>Size of current parish (number of registered families)</b>
Priest A	62	23 years	5	1 year	2500
Priest B	51	11 years	2	5 years	900
Priest C	64	25 years	5	1 year	1000
Priest D	49	12 years	3	1 year	3800
Priest E	69	25 years	2	7 years	1400 + over 100 unregistered
Priest F	64	14 years	3	7 years	2500 + 1000 unregistered
Priest G	52	17 years	4	7 years	900
Priest H	62	12 years	2	9 years	1800
Priest I	56	13 years	3	3 years	800
Priest J	63	10 years	2	4 years	2100

The size of their current parish was highly variable: from 800 registered families to 3,800. The differences in the participants’ age, degrees completed, work experience, tenure as pastor, number of parishes assigned to, and size of current parish were considered in the analysis of data, and none were found to affect the themes.

To ensure participant confidentiality in reporting the findings, participants were identified as Priest A through Priest J. All the quotations are verbatim from the transcription of the interviews. Ellipses were used when skipping significant amounts of text from paragraphs or pages in the transcripts. Certain idiosyncrasies of oral speech that a participant would not use in writing—for example, repetitious “you knows” or the expression “if you will”—were deleted. The researcher’s words were sometimes inserted



in brackets to transit between passages or to clarify one. Excerpts of significant verbatim comments may be repeated in some parts of the chapter if they supported multiple findings.

### **Individual Profiles**

The individual profiles were crafted and organized to reflect the participants' most significant verbatim comments (Seidman, 2006). The profiles display a representative portion of the interview transcripts that provides the essence of each participant's definition of exemplary leadership, his thoughts about the essence of his defining experiences of leadership development, and his thoughts about the essence of his most important comments regarding his leadership development experience. The participants' background information was prepared by the researcher. The individual profiles that follow provide a coherent representation of a portion of the interview transcripts. Data derived from all the interviews are discussed later in the chapter.

#### **Profile of Priest A**

Priest A started ninth grade in minor seminary and completed his philosophy and liberal arts education in the college seminary before attending a theological college.

#### *Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

One who listens to the people, to their concerns, to their issues, tries to make Christ present. One who is familiar with the Scripture and leads the people to God's presence and God's love for them in their lives. . . . To be able to speak the truth and to speak that truth in love. To make challenging decisions at times, not to go forward with a particular endeavor if I believe it would lead to the detriment of others but to really be supportive.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

The family experience is number one—it's where the individual's personality is shaped. I think it sets the tenor of how one is going to live their life. That doesn't mean to say that behavior can't change, but the personality is pretty well set at that time. And that's due to both biological as well as environmental issues, the whole nature/nurture tension in development.

Dealing with rejection, whether it was as an altar server or not going to the major seminary, would be very significant moments because it also had to deal with the Church, which I believed God was calling me to be a member of as a priest.

[My] work as a priest personnel director because the level of responsibility was quite significant. It was here that I had to deal with a superior who had ultimate say as to where priests would be assigned, as well as with the individual priests. Whether it was an assignment issue, a parish issue, or a personal issue, I had to have integrity as well as confidentiality.

Managing projects, whether it was the stage crew or the parish, raising a lot of money, building a rectory, or repairing a school.

Ongoing education, both personal as well as group work, I put that very much in tune with working with my brother priests in the priest support group. . . . The pastors and priests that I worked with set the role model for what it means to be a priest.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

It's ongoing. It's not complete. I joked about [how] I will need a role model when I get to retirement. How do I live as a retired priest? I think that in that position, the priest can also exercise leadership. Maybe I might become a role model for someone else. So I think to absorb the qualities and characteristics that others have. To continue [to] see myself as developing rather than someone who is complete. I think that's true at every stage. I'm an individual that likes to take in more and more information. There comes a point in time when you have to make a decision. . . . And as you move forward, you may need to take the time to evaluate. I don't think a good leader is a very stubborn person who once they make up their mind, that's it. I think a good leader is willing to evaluate the progress so far and then be able to make some adjustments as need be.

**Profile of Priest B**

Priest B entered the seminary after completing undergraduate studies and working for a short time in a government agency. He completed two master's degrees.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

I think a lot of people want to talk about being a leader but in the end, real leaders have followers—and I don't mean blind followers. I think the other aspect of leadership is a good leader is also developing new leaders. I think one of the most important and lasting works that I can do in terms of leadership is not only to be a leader but also help others step into leadership roles and share the parish life so that when and if I'm called out of here, there are people in place. . . . I don't think leadership is really possible unless the people of God here know that I love them and that I respect them, and that they love me and trust and respect me.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

The thing that's biggest on my radar—maybe because it was such a trauma in my life—was that experience of the nervous breakdown. There's a kind of spiritual awakening that took place. . . . It took away a big chunk of my pride and made me more humble. It prepared me to really be a pastor and a leader who could be more compassionate, understanding, and loving, even while setting a course that we need to go to. I have often thought that that was the worst thing that ever happened to me, and the best thing.

My experience with my pastors, both good experiences as well as challenging ones. I had particularly learned a great deal in terms of the humanity of being a pastor and good leader from X. He manifested to me a very spiritual and reflective leadership. He was truly a man of prayer and deep wisdom and spiritual insight. . . . And I certainly benefited a great deal from XX. . . . There were times when he confronted me about some of my more rigid tendencies coming out of the seminary, and he cautioned me. . . .

I think that certainly my formative years with my family as well as three of those men who mentored me [before I entered the seminary]. Some of those lessons they taught me at the time, I don't know if I was able to understand them all but then as I got older, I could understand. They all modeled kind of a leadership. It involved looking at some of the gifts . . . and letting us begin to use them, and giving us opportunities to show leadership.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

Maybe the most important lesson that I ever learned was love. . . . I have to say that the most important thing that I learned for a priest leader is that once these people [parishioners] know that I do deeply love them, and I tell them that all the time and they know I'm not just saying it, because I do have a deep love for the people of God here—they hear me gladly. I know not all of them are living the teachings and I know there's trouble. But they know that I know that. But the shared love and respect means that we're moving together in one direction. I

don't know how I could really lead people here authentically, as a priest, or as any kind of a leader, unless first they know that I very much love them.

### **Profile of Priest C**

Priest C's seminary formation was interrupted twice: when he left to complete a bachelor's degree in a university and when he took a leave from the seminary before being ordained as a deacon in order to take a job in another state.

#### *Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

A person who believes in what he is doing, who is not about himself but about the people and the task that is his; who wants to love and be loved; who wants to share God's love with the people; who is not afraid to try something different. . . . I think building community is essential . . . by inviting people into it, helping them feel that this is theirs . . . someone who is willing to lead not just by example, but who is comfortable to delegate.

#### *Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

My dad was a graduate of the military academy, so we were always taught responsibility. . . . My focus was always very clear . . . that's how we were raised and so that sense of you do what you're supposed to do and you do the best at what you do . . . watching my father particularly, but watching my family relationships and what works and what doesn't work.

I learned a lot from my first pastor and the first associate I had [role models]. They were excellent men. . . . I was able to learn by observing what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do when I become a pastor. . . . I do think that the demands of the job, which is more on-the-job training—it's really hard to be trained as a pastor.

When I was chosen for vocations which I didn't want to do, and recognizing that's not my strength. My strength is in the parish; that's what God called me to do, it's what makes me happy. . . . I had the courage to go and say, "I don't think this is where I'm supposed to be. Can I get out of this job?"

I have made bad decisions in life. . . . I think it's important that you look at the battles that you fight and make sure that there's a likely prospect of winning that battle, before you put yourself in that situation of losing. Not for my sake, but for the sake of the parish and the people that are there. . . .

Family, the role models that I had, learning different things from different people, help me formulate this is the kind of priest I want to be, and person I want to be.

And then the learning experiences of making mistakes are come-and-go kind of situations. They don't really change the mold, they hone.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

I would say that family, relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church, and then personality. I think the rest of it is the honing part. . . . If you have a person who isn't happy, because of a family background, or isn't comfortable with who they are as a person, and isn't in a good place with God, it doesn't make a difference what you teach them, all of that is going to come out later. . . . It will manifest in their leadership skills.

**Profile of Priest D**

Priest D entered the seminary after finishing high school at the age of 17 and subsequently completed a master's degree.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

Someone who is well grounded, feet flat on the ground; the aspect of humility, not wanting to lord his power or his time or his authority over people. . . . The ability to walk with people along the way. . . . Being able to sense what the needs truly are. . . . The aspect of the spiritual. . . . Realizing that this is not my parish, it's his parish, it's his family and I'm here to serve in role as pastor, but I also want to be open to what he wants done. . . . It's a constant dialogue for me with the Lord on what's necessary.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

My father was a state trooper [who became barrack commander]. . . . By the time we were in college, he was going through the ranks. So, there was a style of leadership that he had, that I think I also followed. It was where you took care of problems, but you did not lord it over people. . . . And my mother . . . was always working for leaders [as administrative secretary]. . . . I saw her own organization and how she worked with those that she served as her bosses. So, I think I had a very good example from them.

My three spiritual fathers . . . they were the examples and models for priestly service that I received. [I learned] most importantly to be practical, to deal with things as they come. Secondly, that the most important thing is the salvation of souls. . . . Thirdly, to keep a sense of humor about things, that no matter how difficult things are or what kind of situations we find ourselves, to be able to have

that ability to laugh and keep moving on. Finally, to not take yourself so seriously. . . . It's not about me, it's about the people.

Being formed in particular by the [difficult] experience of my first assignment as a pastor in Parish X. . . . It was listening to people whether they were calling or coming to the rectory to talk or incorporating into the homily, again healing, forgiveness, all of those different aspects. . . . [I learned] that things are not always pleasant, and in facing those difficulties, many times you find yourself alone. . . . So you learn quickly that as a leader . . . the gifts and the things that you learn along the way, they're basically in your tool belt and you use them to face whatever situation you have.

Moving from Parish X, what I learned there and translating that into what happened at Parish XX, my second assignment as a pastor. Again, that was a great challenge of listening and being diplomatic. I was sent into a difficult situation.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

The most important thing for me is the ability to be able to listen to the people around you. That it really is about serving them. It's not about me or my ego. In order to be a leader, you have to be able to listen to the needs of the people in front of you. . . . There are many times when you have to sit and take a lot of bile . . . and not to react with emotion. . . . And understanding that as a pastor, as a leader, you don't want to crush souls. . . . To be respectful of the people who are in front of me.

**Profile of Priest E**

Priest E entered the seminary after high school and subsequently completed his master's and doctorate degrees.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

A manager always fulfills the mission and maintains the team for the community. . . . He has to do it with high but achievable goals. A *leader* is somebody who is a manager with vision . . . knows what he is trying to accomplish . . . where he wants to go, where he wants to take people. . . . The biggest contact with the people is in the liturgy. Does he conduct the liturgy as a prayer? And I think that preaching has to be real. When a priest comes in to a parish, people want to know: Is he a human being, first of all, a vulnerable human being? Somebody who likes them and cares about them and wants to know their history? . . . Is he sincere in his spirituality? . . . A lot of that comes across in how you celebrate the

liturgy and how you preach. . . . Does he know the gifts he has and . . . doesn't have, or does he think he can do everything, which nobody can actually do?

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

Encounter on the retreat in a [rough] parish. . . . That night was probably the worst of my priesthood because the boys sort of rioted. They did what they often did. . . . It was horrible. . . . I will never forget what he [the adult man in the retreat group] said [to the boys]: "You can't make me stop loving you. No matter what you do, I will care about you. When you need me, I will be there, and you can't change that. I care about you." . . . We had total cooperation after that, from everybody. And for me it was a life-changing event. That's what Jesus was preaching—unconditional love. It didn't make any sense to me until that event. . . . Christian leadership involves unconditional love and courage and a profound trust in God's providence.

I would say that the biggest influence on me is the marriage encounter, being the marriage encounter priest. When I entered the priesthood, I had a very negative self-image. I was a very wounded person. . . . So [with marriage encounter] I became aware of how negative my feelings about myself were. . . . In 3 years of marriage encounters, I really cared about how a person felt about themselves. We have a language by which we discussed how we felt about ourselves and the great talent was to believe the first truth about us in the Bible, that we are made in the image and likeness of God.

My assignment to found a parish and a school from scratch . . . has a profound impact in my life and priesthood. . . . I started the parish from scratch and I started the parochial school from scratch. I spent 20 years doing that . . . two very successful institutions.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

The retreat experience in the inner city opened my spirit to what the Gospel is about. My marriage encounter experience helped me immensely as a human being to have a healed self-image, which I did not acquire except with the support of marriage encounter at the age of 34 . . . [and allowed me] to see the church work very effectively with busy middle-class people. And then my parish assignment which is a combination of all of that: my faith in the Gospel, a good self-image, and working effectively with people of all kinds.

**Profile of Priest F**

Priest F always wanted to be a priest. After seminary formation abroad, he pursued a doctorate degree.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

You walk with the people that you are trying to lead. . . . To feel a real commitment to the people who have been put in some way in your care. . . . To sense that the Lord has put you here to shepherd these people and so . . . you have to develop a sense that I am with you, I am one of you, I am part of you. . . . To be willing to make the decisions that need to be made. . . . To listen a lot and then when the time comes, to move. . . . To have the self-confidence that I am steering them in the right direction . . . to know that you can make mistakes, that you're not infallible. . . . To really commit yourself to these people . . . to be willing to act as a leader and sometimes direct people in a way that they may not, at first, be willing to go.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

My first pastorate. . . . They had money problems, morale problems. . . . We addressed them quickly and then I got to see the fruits of that. It's the most important in terms of the administrative things that a pastor needs to do, and developing organizational skills. . . . It was my first experience with a really crackerjack staff . . . so I learned a lot in terms of . . . how to get along with staff, and how to . . . get them to trust you.

I went there [second parish] just thinking I would bring all that I had done in my first parish, and it would just plop down and continue in the second parish. And it did not. . . . A lot of [staff] in-fighting and bickering, some downright nastiness. . . . And the people . . . seemed rather cool to me, not very inviting. . . . It taught me that you just cannot import your successes from another parish. You really have to look at the situation, see what's different, and try to remedy it.

[In my third parish] I had a super staff. . . . They were much more accommodating . . . a little more open to change. . . . The people are just incredibly good-natured and welcoming. . . . So that really gave me the confidence to go out and meet new people. . . . All of our departments . . . are very strong.

Kind of foundational for all these things . . . would have been my experience with Cardinal X, both as his secretary and then as a member of his staff when I was the head of a department. . . . Cardinal X really taught me how to manage time well. . . . He taught me a lot about delegating, a very important leadership skill.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

[There] is that important dimension of the leader surrounding himself with capable, good people. . . . And also that the people you serve, the parishioners, play a vital role in how a leader is going to develop in terms of . . . establishing trust. In getting to be a part of their lives—I mean certainly by preaching—but by



greeting them, staying after Mass, talking with them, going to their homes when they invite you. These are the ways in which you build up on a more personal level, and you also get a great understanding of the parish.

## **Profile of Priest G**

Priest G attended military high school before entering the seminary and then pursued graduate studies abroad.

### *Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

A leader in the Church has to have the qualities of Christ, and Christ was compassionate. He went out to people . . . extended the Father's love . . . listened . . . tried to understand . . . challenged. But he accepted people where they are and that, I think, have to be the role of a pastor. It can't be about me. . . . It has to be about others. . . . Someone who is willing to . . . lay down his life for others. . . . To be someone who is like-minded to Christ. They teach us in the seminary that the priest is an *alter Christus*, another Christ. So to look at the Gospel, to really get to know Christ, and to become like Christ. . . . There are lots of ways to do that . . . a lot of people out there that will help us to become like Christ, but we have to want that as our goal.

### *Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

[Being appointed] executive director of the Office of Youth Ministry, because it was the first time in my years as a priest that the diocese entrusted me with a leadership position. . . . To have that experience, but then also to realize that I had so much to learn, and to associate myself with people that could teach me was important. . . . And then I also worked with boards. . . . There was a wealth of information in those 5 years, and I had a lot of people to learn from. . . . It really did set me up to be where I am today.

At Parish X where I had to go in and bring about this healing that happened because of the sexual abuse [incident]. . . . What came into play there for me was . . . all the pastoral background that I had been taught and experienced myself, both as an adolescent and a young adult, in my early years as a priest. So I had to really pull forth lessons I had learned from either mentors when I was a kid or young adult, or from previous pastors.

One pastor—a great administrator as well as being a very pastoral person [a priest mentor]. I was only with him for about a year. . . . But to see how he could manage such a large parish and do it so successfully certainly was an aid for me getting to where I am.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

It is imperative . . . for the diocese to have a program in place for training of pastors. It's one thing to be an associate pastor; you can learn on the job, so to speak, if you have a really good pastor above you. But once you become a pastor, you're really placed in the arena of having to make the immediate decisions. . . . Oftentimes, priests walk into situations where they have to think almost off the cuff because they have never had that experience. So to have the opportunity to learn from other pastors in a classroom-type setting, how to make decisions, how to do some of the important work that comes with parish leadership, . . . some of the basics that people really look for in us. We get some of it on the pastoral and spiritual and moral side of things in the seminary, but the financial, the plant management, the human resources, the managing people, those aspects, at least in my day, we didn't have. So for that to be in place, and be a mandatory program for all priests to be a part of in preparation for becoming a pastor, I think is essential.

**Profile of Priest H**

Priest H entered the seminary after finishing a law degree. He completed graduate studies abroad.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

To be faithful to the will of the Father. To pray. To discern the Father's will. To be able to discern that will in the people and in the activities, and to be able, by the grace of God, to say yes.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

First, there is the mercy and the love of God. That has priority in every way, that we can think and speak of authentic leadership. And if we relate leadership to God, then leadership has to reflect the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the perfect model for leadership. There is the Father who communicates all of his love to his Son, through the Holy Spirit, and the three of them form a perfect communion. . . . The reality of seeking God, and experiencing God, being loved by God, and being called to obedience. And then to accept the grace that God gives to us to be obedient. . . . In any model of leadership, it is God who is God. . . . To say that we have God as an example doesn't get close to the reality of how essential God is and the relationship with God is, to leadership. He is the source of every single thing that we want to lead everyone to, and he is the way, and he communicates that to us.

The second is family because they are my first experience of leadership. I knew them, even before I knew or I knew that I knew God.

The third is education because a teacher told me a long time ago . . . that there's one thing you never have to teach a child: You never have to teach a child to learn because every child wants to learn. The whole experience of God and the whole experience of family is an experience of learning, of coming to understand the experiences followed by our understanding. We learn how to make decisions, we learn how to judge the experiences. Those things lead us to insights. So education permeates all of them.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

I'm still learning to be a leader. But I'm not studying to be a leader. I'm studying to be faithful. So I guess that's the most important thing about leadership. I must be faithful because I believe that if I'm faithful and if I'm obedient, God will give me and show me everything that I need to know in order to pastor this parish. I don't have any claim on any specific models or goals or a blueprint. I don't have any of those things, outside of love and obedience and trusting that out of that, God will show the way. . . . So often, we can be very . . . successful in a parish, and then we're moved to another parish and yes, you have experiences, but you cannot just take what you've just been able to do and use it as a template and impose it on the next parish. You have to go there and start all over again. Yes, you have experiences. You have many things to help you to make decisions more quickly. But still, you start all over again. I think that's a very good thing because things are always new in God. . . . Being faithful and obedient to God . . . to what God reveals . . . prayer . . . celebration . . . communion with other people, and work.

**Profile of Priest I**

Priest I worked for the federal government before entering the seminary. He has two master's degrees and a doctoral degree.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

Leadership is, of necessity, collaborative. I don't run this parish by myself. I rely on a lot of other people to contribute to the mission of the parish. . . . Leadership in a parish . . . is trying to recognize the talents of the people around you and inviting them to share those with the parish as a whole. In the way that I work with people, if we agree on a task that they're going to do, I just let them do it. I'm assuming that they're going to do it and do it well. I try to avoid managing what they do. I try to treat them as adults, that they're going to perform their functions correctly. . . . It's recognizing the talents that people have, treating

them as adults, giving them responsibility, and assuming that they're going to respond well to that.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

The grace of ordination would be most important. I couldn't do what I do without it. I believe very strongly that the charism that comes from ordination enables me to preach the Gospel. It enables me to come out of myself in terms of reaching out to people, particularly in situations of grief and mourning. . . . Charism helps with pastoral responsibilities as well. It also helps when I have to say things to people that they may not want to hear, maybe to challenge them about their growth in the faith life and so on. . . . All of those areas of my ministry are affected by grace and sacramental belief.

Fraternal support. There's the support of other priests, but also the support of lay people. . . . As much as the priest has been dragged through the mud the last several years, I think the average parishioner still has a fair amount of respect and confidence in their priest. That can be very humbling at times, but also very helpful, knowing that our work is appreciated.

Dealing with challenges and conflicts. . . . They're learning experiences. . . . I have been in situations where there were things going on in the parish that really were not in conformity with what the Church would want to happen. . . . I found that although it was difficult at the time, facing those problems head on, in the long term it was the right decision. . . . You go through situations like that and you learn what you did well and what you want to do better the next time, in terms of relating to people and conveying what's important, and helping them sometimes to see whether they need to change in order to be faithful to what Christ has called them to do.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

The importance of grace and the charism of the Holy Order would be very important to emphasize. . . . I think what has helped me most has been presenting from grace. The experiences that I've had, both witnessing the leadership of other priests but also what I've encountered myself in trying to be a pastor. . . . Some of my experiences before . . . those have been learning occasions for me and what I've witnessed from other priests that I served with, that has kind of formed my understanding of my own role.

**Profile of Priest J**

Priest J finished a doctoral program and took a job for a number of years before entering the seminary.

*Definition of Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting:*

The two words that come to my mind would have to be servant leadership. And that is more of an art than a science. . . . In business, being a CEO of a corporation, the bottom line is the profitability. . . . In the Church, our purpose is the salvation of souls and trying to make sure that is the fundamental mission of a parish. . . . Also, reaching out to people with the good news. . . . Trying to bring back those who were involved, and also reaching out to new people who may be interested. . . . Those are the fundamental kinds of things in leadership that I have to be modeling. . . . And those underlining things just trying to be the great model for leadership in the Church—the Lord himself. And how he taught by example. He washed his disciples' feet. These are the kinds of things we have to be prepared to do. . . . There's a different model we need to be using if we're going to be effective in ministerial leadership.

*Defining Experiences of Leadership Development:*

The early experience of the funeral because that is actually a very important part of parish work. . . . Often you have people coming in who may not have been to Church in a good long time and they're wondering what kind of reception they are going to get. So a sense of hospitality is very important in leadership. Taking the lead and showing kindness, sympathy to the family, and just working through whatever issues come up with them. I'm learning about this all the time.

Evangelistic opportunities that present along the way. Different parishes—my first parish, I probably had more weddings in that parish in any given year than I had in others. . . . Things are changing, a lot of people just aren't getting married, they're just living together. . . . But then meeting with couples, trying to help them with issues that they might have, and trying to help them get ready, because of the evangelistic potential that this could have.

I did the funerals and weddings because that's what comes to mind for the basic evangelistic principles. . . . There's a lot of routine in the work of a priest. The sacramental work. But again trying to do it well, trying to take care of people, because of the ramifications, even in details.

*Most Important Comments Regarding Leadership Development Experience:*

Leadership in the Church is not like leadership in business in the sense that servant leadership is really key here. We go back to the Gospels, a great passage of Holy Thursday and the feet washing and all the implications with that. . . . That the Lord was doing this and saying this is what you have to do is very different than Donald Trump. . . . That is a very different leadership style. We hope we're not ruthless. We're wise as serpents but gentle as doves. That's what we're supposed to be in trying to do this. There are many applications for

planning. . . . Those are the things I've learned more about as time has gone on because those are things that I have had to be concerned about.

### **Exemplary Leadership in a Parish Setting**

The findings described in this section include the participants' definitions of exemplary leadership, the significant statements and their formulated meanings, the themes generated from the formulated meanings, and the essence of exemplary leadership.

#### **Definitions of Exemplary Leadership**

Twenty-six significant statements relating to definitions of exemplary leadership were extracted verbatim from the participants' interview transcripts. These significant statements and the meanings formulated from the statements are shown in Appendix F.

The formulated meanings of exemplary leadership definitions fell into three general leadership themes—spiritual, organizational, and community (Table 5). Participants in this study defined leadership primarily in terms of the first theme, spiritual, seeing the pastor's role as a form of servanthood, the ability to bring people closer to God and to care for the spiritual life and growth of parishioners. The pastors' personal relationship with God or their spirituality was expressed in the imitation of Christ's attitudes, values, and ways of relating to people. The second and third themes were gleaned from data with respect to organizational activities and community building. Organizational leadership refers to the ability of leaders to work with people toward a common goal and to communicate a vision for the parish community. Community leadership is the ability to involve community members in building the parish and in addressing its social problems.

Table 5  
*Definitions of Exemplary Leadership and Their Associated Formulated Meanings*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Formulated meanings</b>
<p><b>Spiritual leadership:</b> The pastors’ core work as spiritual leader of community worship and ritual activities and of caring for the spiritual life and growth of parishioners (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006). The pastors’ personal relationship with God or spirituality is expressed in the imitation of Christ’s attitudes, values, and ways of relating to people (Duch, 1990; Klimoski, 1999; Schuth, 2006).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A leader has Christ-like qualities—caring about others, hardworking, self-sacrificing.</li> <li>• A pastor leads by the example of Christ, using Christ as the standard of service.</li> <li>• A pastor who makes people feel loved can more easily lead and help them improve their lives.</li> <li>• Leadership is service—leading by example rather than by command.</li> <li>• An exemplary pastor is grounded, humble, and understands the needs of others.</li> <li>• An exemplary pastor is a man of prayer who takes action after a process of discernment.</li> <li>• Leadership is service, a discernment with God through grace.</li> <li>• Leadership is believing in one’s self and others and trying new things.</li> <li>• A leader brings people to God to achieve the Church’s mission.</li> <li>• A leader achieves his goal of fulfilling Christ’s mission (i.e., bringing people closer to the Church).</li> <li>• Leadership is listening to people and their concerns and leading them to God’s love.</li> <li>• Leadership is actively listening to people and their concerns.</li> <li>• Leadership is listening with compassion, dedication, and speaking the truth.</li> <li>• Leadership begins with preaching in big and small settings and requires mutual love, trust, and respect between pastor and the people.</li> <li>• Leadership is energetic preaching that connects to lived experience.</li> <li>• The pastor must be able to be seen as human and, hence, able to connect to people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Organizational leadership:</b> Ability of leaders to work with people toward a common goal and to communicate a vision for the parish community (Carroll, 2006).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership is making decisions that build rather than hurt.</li> <li>• Leadership is collaboration with people to achieve the Church’s mission.</li> <li>• Leadership is not only to lead by oneself, but also to develop new leaders.</li> <li>• A good pastor helps and empowers lay people to take on leadership roles.</li> <li>• A pastor helps lay people to develop and understand the teachings of the Church.</li> <li>• A leader models appropriate delegation and empowerment.</li> <li>• A leader is a manager who also has vision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community leadership:</b> Ability to involve community members in building the parish and in addressing its social problems (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pastor makes people feel essential to and interdependent with the community.</li> <li>• Leadership challenges relationships among people by presenting them with difficult decisions that require changes in the status quo.</li> <li>• Leadership is developing individuals as part of the parish community.</li> </ul>

**Spiritual leadership.** According to the participants' statements, they experienced spiritual leadership as a combination of values and qualities and a set of skills and abilities, modeled on the example of Christ. They mentioned personal qualities or spiritual values that emphasize compassion, humility, concrete love, trust, belief in self and others, and commitment: "Having the qualities of Christ [who was] compassionate, . . . went out to people, . . . extended the Father's love" (Priest G); "Well grounded, feet flat on the ground, [who has] the aspect of humility, not wanting to lord his power or his time or his authority over people" (Priest D); "A real commitment to the people . . . because without that commitment, especially for a priest, it is just a job" (Priest F); "Able to, first of all, have good followers in the disciples who trust him" (Priest B); "Believes in what they're doing, who is not about themselves, but about the people and [about his] task, . . . who is not afraid to try something different" (Priest C).

These statements highlight an exemplary leader's skills and abilities in such areas as listening, discernment, and preaching: "He listens to the people, to their concerns, to their issues, [and] tries to make Christ present; . . . [is] familiar with the Scripture and leads the people to God's presence and God's love for them in their lives (Priest A); "Able to sense what the needs truly are" (Priest D); "Preaching . . . with wisdom for living . . . connect[ing] with real life . . . and preach[ing] with some energy" (Priest E). One participant summed up his concept of leadership as follows:

The great model for leadership in the Church [is] the Lord himself and how he taught by example. . . . These are the kinds of things we have to be prepared to do. We are not supposed to be like princes. There's a different model [other than business] we need to be using if we're going to be effective in ministerial leadership. (Priest J)



The paradoxical idea of leadership as servanthood was echoed by another participant:

I see a leader very much in terms of servant. A servant of God is certainly what Jesus Christ has set for me as an example. A leader is not someone who just makes all decisions and tells people what to do. A leader tries to serve the people [by] guiding them in what they should do. . . . [Jesus] showed by his example that he was there with [them]. (Priest A)

**Organizational leadership.** Participants also described the mixture of qualities, skills, abilities, and values demonstrated by a leader's actions that may be termed organizational leadership. An organizational leader has a vision and knows how to appreciate and involve the talents necessary for building up the organization: "To make challenging decisions at times, not to go forward with a particular endeavor if I believe it would lead to the detriment of others" (Priest A); "A manager with vision [who] knows what he is trying to accomplish [and] knows where he wants to go, where he wants to take people" (Priest E); "[Being] willing to make the decisions that need to be made—in terms of the direction we are going to take in social justice or in faith development" (Priest F); "To help others step into leadership roles and share the parish life, so that when and if I'm called out of here, there are people in place" (Priest B).

Organizational leadership as both a skill and value was expressed by Priest I: "Trying to recognize the talents of the people around you, and inviting them to share those [talents] with the parish as a whole." Priest C elaborated:

An exemplary leader is someone who is willing to lead not just by example, but who is comfortable delegat[ing] and let[ting] go. . . . [To] enable people to rise to their best and to help them do that, whether they are staff or a parishioner. . . . To share the good news that Jesus Christ has been committed to the Catholic Church. . . . A lot of it is helping them . . . understand who we are and why we do what we do. (Priest C)

Thus, while the focus of the organizational leadership was grounded in the mission and values of the Church, it was about providing organizational leadership, whether the concern was teaching, fostering leadership development among parishioners, making decisions, or managing people or activities.

**Community leadership.** The third theme is community leadership, which embodies the skills, values, and abilities required to lead the parish as a community:

A lot of things function on their own, but community is something . . . [an exemplary pastor] build[s] by inviting people into it, helping them feel that [it's] theirs, that they're an essential part of whatever is going on, and [that] if they're not there, the rest of us are affected by their absence. People then want to be a part because it's theirs; they have taken possession of it. (Priest C)

To sense that the Lord has put you here to shepherd these people, . . . you have to develop a sense that, "I am with you, I am one of you, I am part of you." . . . [You] also [have] to be willing to make the decisions that need to be made—in terms of the direction we are going to take, in terms of social justice, or in terms of faith development. (Priest F)

It was also noted that parishioners play a role in influencing and forming their pastors to better serve their communities:

I often say to people, "I'm just so glad you're here. I love you, and I'm so glad to be in this parish, and I thank God for every one of you. You show me and help me to become the man I need to be." I tell them the ways that they help to really change me as a man. That's what communities are supposed to do. We form each other into the man or woman [who] Christ has meant us to be. . . . That's the kind of leadership that I mean. (Priest B)

These statements suggest that the community leadership experience also relates to organizations. The parish is the organization that individuals will identify as an integral part of their lives, which will foster the building of a community.

## **The Essence of Exemplary Leadership**

The essence of exemplary leadership was the integration of faith in God with self-sacrifice and service, using specific skills to serve or facilitate the mission of the Church. Faith in God was a major expression of spirituality that was expressed in works. The self-sacrifice and service of exemplary pastors were based on the spiritual values of the Church, for the purpose of accomplishing the Church's mission to build a parish community. Exemplary leaders were humble; were committed to the Church's mission and to the people; listened to the people's concerns and issues; and served the people following Christ's model of servant leadership. Responsibility for others was foremost in their minds and hearts.

An important component of leadership as experienced by the participants was the ability to involve parish members in leadership roles, by recognizing their talents and delegating to them certain responsibilities. The exemplary pastor's ability to listen, discern, and appreciate their gifts and talents was instrumental in making them participate actively in decision-making and in the implementation of mission activities.

### **Defining Experiences of Leadership Development and Their Important Characteristics**

Seven defining experiences were identified by the participants as contributing to their leadership development: (a) impact of family background; (b) drawing inspiration from role models and mentors; (c) dealing with parish challenges and conflicts; (d) experiencing the grace and mercy of God; (e) ministering through priestly service; (f) managing parish projects; and (g) handling diocesan assignments.

As shown in Table 6, these experiences occurred at multiple levels of interaction: personal, interpersonal (one-to-one), group, organizational, and external. All 10 participants identified at least one experience in the personal, interpersonal, group, and external levels of interaction as significant to their leadership development. All but three participants mentioned an experience associated with the organizational level of interaction. Five or more participants described each of the seven types of experience. Only one participant did not mention the impact of family background.

Table 6  
*Levels of Interaction Involved with Experiences of Leadership Development*

<b>Leadership development experience</b>	<b>Level of interaction</b>
Impact of family background Experiencing the grace and mercy of God	Personal
Drawing inspiration from role models and mentors	Interpersonal: One-to-one
Ministering through priestly service	Interpersonal: One-to-one Group
Dealing with parish challenges and conflicts	Interpersonal: One-to-one Group Organizational
Managing parish projects Handling diocesan assignments	Group Organizational External

The characteristics of the experiences important to the participants' leadership development varied across experiences, but generally included elements of spiritual beliefs and practices, positive values, learning by observation, and learning from mistakes. Table 7 shows a summary of each experience's important characteristics. The following sections discuss each leadership development experience in turn, relating its structural elements and essential characteristics to the textural descriptions.

Table 7

*Important Characteristics of Defining Leadership Development Experiences*

<b>Leadership development experience</b>	<b>Important characteristics</b>
Impact of family background	Family upbringing: positive family values and behaviors—service, selflessness, hard work, sacrificial love Father’s words and examples: responsibility, humility, focus, decision-making, adaptability, collaboration
Drawing inspiration from role models and mentors	Learning by observation Continuity of contact
Dealing with parish challenges and conflicts	Difficult situations/environments Determination required
Experiencing the grace and mercy of God	Faith Personal conversion
Ministering through priestly service	Regularity of duties
Managing parish projects	Managing the work of others Involving other people Learning new skills Learning from mistakes
Handling diocesan assignments	Learning by observation Broadening of responsibilities

**Impact of Family Background**

This category identified specific aspects of family life that participants said contributed to their development as leaders, including the paternal influence on their values.

**Family upbringing.** Family background contributed to participants’ leadership development as a result of their parents’ modeling of positive family values and behaviors. These include a “consistent model of service” (Priest A), selflessness and hard work (Priest H), and sacrificial love:

My parents set up a very good family life. I’m not saying my parents were perfect, but there was just a way in which there was a sacrificial love on behalf of both parents. . . . In seeing that, I was able to give the kind of love that priests need to give to [their] congregation. That was modeled for me by my parents in the care they had for myself and my brother and sisters. (Priest J)

**Father's words and examples.** Six of the 10 participants mentioned the special admonitions of their biological fathers as having contributed to their leadership development. The first teaching was in developing a sense of responsibility: "My father was a very strong-willed individual so I know I learned a lot from him in regards to right and wrong, and taking responsibility at home. . . . He made sure that we took our responsibilities seriously" (Priest G). Another priest, the son of a former barracks commander, learned a style of leadership wherein "you took care of problems, but you did not lord it over people" (Priest D).

The second teaching was in learning how to focus, make decisions, and being adaptable.

My dad was a graduate of the military academy, so we were always taught responsibility. . . . Because my father moved [frequently], I had to adapt to changes, and that was an asset to me. My focus was always very clear—that's how we were raised: You do what you're supposed to do, and you do the best at what you do. It's just part of my life. So if there is a leadership style, it's looking at a situation and saying: What do I do in order to meet the need, or correct the situation, or continue on if it's working already? (Priest C)

The final teaching of fathers was in modeling a collaborative style of leadership:

My father was very well respected, successful as a federal employee. . . . At the time he retired, he was in charge of personnel . . . [for] a fairly sizable organization. He was always very good with acknowledging the skills of other people and working in a collaborative way. . . . I think, if anything, I was influenced in that regard, . . . recognizing the skills that people have to bring to the situation. (Priest I)

The above descriptions illustrate the impact of positive family values. Lack of positive modeling was also significant in participants' lives:

I probably learned more things from my father by way of negative examples. I struggled a lot with my father. . . . I think [he] was a good man; I never doubted he loved me. But . . . [he] had many demons and I struggled to grow up in [his]

home. At some level, I've been able to model something different for myself and find my own self. (Priest B)

**Summary.** Overall, the important characteristics of the participants' leadership development experiences relating to the impact of family background included positive family values and behaviors (service, hard work, selflessness, sacrificial love). The words and examples of fathers contributed to the formation of priestly leadership through the inculcation of a sense of responsibility, humility (not dominating others), focus, decision making, adaptability, and collaboration. The negative family background experiences appeared as positive efforts to compensate for a father's bad examples.

### **Drawing Inspiration from Role Models and Mentors**

The majority of participants were influenced by nonfamilial role models. A few were influenced by someone they considered a mentor. The interviewees' experiences of drawing inspiration from role models and mentors varied. The characteristics of learning from observation and the continuity of these experiences were what they had in common.

**Learning by observation.** Experiences with role models and mentors also involved learning by observation. Of his first pastor and associate, Priest C said: "I was able to learn by observing what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do when I become a pastor." Priest B described his interactions with three mentors:

Some of those lessons they taught me at the time—I don't know if I was able to understand them all, but then as I got older, I could understand. They all modeled [a] kind of . . . leadership. It involved looking at some of [our] gifts . . . and letting us begin to use them, and giving us opportunities to show leadership.

Priest J recalled his experiences of observing his role models:

One of the things I would say was formative for me is looking at other priests whom I've known through my life. Thinking about things that they've done that I

admire and how I wanted to imitate that. Or in other cases, looking at things that they've done where I say, I would never want to do it that way. Sometimes I'll be thinking, when there is a challenging moment, How would Father X, someone who was a pastor when I was a child—how would he handle something like this? I try to think, what did I see him do? And that can in some ways give me some ideas about some things.

Of former pastors who participants considered role models, Priest B learned about “the humanity of being a pastor and a good leader” and being “confronted about some of my more rigid tendencies coming out of the seminary.” Priest D referred to them as “spiritual fathers” who taught him “to be practical and to deal with things as they come.”

My first pastor was a wonderful guy who was pig headed . . . and very authoritarian. It was his way or the highway. . . . I learned to be clear in what I was saying. I learned to be in charge if I was in charge. I learned to adhere to what the Church teaches and to proclaim that publicly, by his example. At the same time, I learned that you don't have to beat people over the head to get them to do what you want them to do. It's better if you can lead them rather than force them. You can do a lot with a sense of humor that you can never do by a force of arms. And you can probably help people more by listening to them than by talking to them. (Priest C)

Priest A learned to be cognizant of important opportunities that should be tapped beyond what is normally demanded in a situation:

He wasn't just concerned about the building of a beautiful church. He was concerned about the outer edges, the marginalized, and the resources that were available at the parish. . . . That is a good lesson in leadership. . . . Do the difficult things, but in all the areas. You don't just confine yourself to the spiritual. (Priest A)

The influences of mentors on Priest G included one who taught him “compassion, . . . really being there and caring for the individual and what's happening in their lives, . . . to be one in their pain and their suffering and their sorrows” and another who was “a great administrator. . . . To see how he could manage such a large parish, and do it successfully, certainly was an aid to getting where I am.”



**Continuity of contact.** The nature of Priest A’s experiences with his role models was “ongoing” and “spread out”:

The rector at the seminary and the high school teacher introduced me to role models outside of the family. Then, the pastors and priests that I worked with set the role model for what it means to be a priest. . . . I think there could very well be someone in the future who will give me an example of how to continue. How to live as a retired priest—I will need a role model for that in many years to come! (Priest A)

There was continuity in both contact and feedback, as Priest G stated:

There’s been three priests . . . in this diocese who I have learned from on how to be a pastor. Two of them I still turn to and seek guidance and help [from]. . . . One has been a priest for almost 40 years. The other one is a priest almost 35 years. They were instrumental in my formation as a young seminarian and as a young priest, and so I know that I can call them because they still do a great job, and they are men of prayer and . . . very insightful.

Those cited by interviewees as mentors generally knew them before as well as during their priesthood: “Certainly, my formative years . . . with three of those men who mentored me before I entered the seminary were defining experiences” (Priest B).

**Summary.** Overall, the important characteristics of the influence of mentors and role models, which contributed to the participants’ leadership development, included learning by observation. The role models’ values of compassion, care, and appreciation of others’ gifts and talents were factors that may indicate leadership abilities. The continuity of influence by role models and mentors was effective for drawing inspiration from them.

### **Dealing with Parish Challenges and Conflicts**

During the 10 to 25 years they worked as pastors, participants experienced challenging situations and activities as well as conflicts. The characteristics that

contributed to their development as leaders were the difficulty of the situations and/or environments and the determination required to deal with them.

**Difficult situations/environments.** Having to address difficult situations assisted in leadership development, according to study participants. Examples of these situations included murders on church property; serious problems with finances or staff; and assignments to challenging parishes (located in a rough neighborhood, in which sexual abuse was alleged).

These priests' difficult parish assignments were defining experiences:

I'm being sent to heal the people after a horrific action, the murder of their pastor. . . . A building . . . needed to be done. . . . We had to continue moving on, even in the midst of the trial, to help the parish heal. . . . Listening to people, whether they were calling or coming to the rectory to talk. . . . Incorporating into the homily . . . healing, forgiveness, all of those different aspects, . . . [I learned] that things are not always pleasant, and in facing those difficulties, many times you find yourself alone. (Priest D)

My first assignment was in the most difficult parish in the archdiocese. . . . There was constant noise of fire engines, police, ambulances. It was chaotic. . . . I had money stolen out of my room. I had my car sabotaged. . . . It wiped me out financially. I had nothing left. And one weekend we had 34 broken windows. When they sent in a new pastor, teenagers left a party and the civil disturbance unit of the metropolitan police had to be called out. They started a riot! (Priest E)

They asked me to be pastor in . . . a rough, rough neighborhood. . . . Most of the guys would have been terrified to go down there and live. . . . That was the kind of ministry I was able to know because I was here in a largely black parish and that was a black parish. It was a great place. I loved being there, but it was difficult. . . . (Priest B)

Priest G, as "the pastor of a parish that was hurting" from allegations that their former pastors had sexually abused a minor, worked to heal the community and learned that "oftentimes in ministry, I'm going to be placed in an assignment where I am not well equipped for the situations I'm going to encounter." The priest's realization of his

inadequate preparation for the challenge was itself an experience for leadership development.

Challenging situations could occur even after an experience of success in a previous similar situation. An experience revealed to one priest that success in a difficult parish did not necessarily translate into success at another. One had to look at a specific situation and respond to its own challenges.

My first pastorate . . . had money problems, morale problems. . . . We addressed them quickly and then I got to see the fruits of that. . . . I went to another parish with financial difficulties . . . thinking I would bring all that I had done in my first parish, and it would just plop down and continue in the second parish. And it did not. (Priest F)

At the second parish, there was staff “in-fighting and bickering, some downright nastiness” and parishioners “seemed rather cool to me, not very inviting”:

It taught me that you just cannot import your successes from another parish. You really have to look at the situation, see what’s different, and try to remedy it. . . . What I learned is that I do have leadership skills, but they can be augmented or diminished by the parishioners themselves—how they relate to you—and by the staff. I mean, I hadn’t changed, so that’s why I said to myself, “It’s not me!” . . . I walked in to fill a vacuum that no one wanted to fill. (Priest F)

Several interviewees recalled dealing with conflicts between pastor and staff: “There was a fair amount of turmoil in the parish between the then-pastor and the principal of the school. . . . They were like oil and water. They just didn’t mix” (Priest I). Another parish was split over an incident that occurred between the previous pastor and the parish school administrator: “It was difficult walking into that, because there was so much animosity” (Priest D).

Difficulty did not necessarily have to be a negative experience. It also came in the form of a challenge, of having to create something one had not done before.

Assigned to found both a parish and a parochial school “from scratch,” Priest E “spent 20 years doing that,” resulting in “two very successful institutions.” This positive experience had “a profound impact in my life and priesthood” (Priest E).

**Determination required.** In dealing with parish challenges and conflicts, the importance of determination was the second characteristic noted of experiences that contributed to one’s development as a leader:

When I got to Parish X, the buildings were in great disrepair. They had some financial difficulty. . . . So the first thing I had to do was begin to chip away at that problem. . . . By the time I left there, we had pretty much renovated every building. . . . little by little. That’s the other big thing I learned, sometimes just making those little changes. (Priest B)

One of the reasons I was sent here is they were \$4 million in debt and no plan to pay for it because they spent a lot of money building a new church. . . . When I let go several staff people, I reaped a harvest of great resentment. . . . I went from a place where I was liked and appreciated because I started the parish . . . to a place where I came in as a stranger, a place that was falling off a cliff and I had to make changes. . . . No matter how much I consulted with the parish council or the finance council, they would not agree that changes were needed. So I had to make the changes anyway, and there are still people who will not talk to me or attend the liturgy if I celebrate it. (Priest E)

I remember praying for [a murder victim]. . . . I learned that passion is essential to be a good leader. And when I say passion, I mean a little anger. I was angry at the condition of the neighborhood. I was angry enough at that murder that when the Lord told me, “You’ve got to do something about this,” I had the energy to do it and stay focused and move forward. (Priest B)

Determination in communicating with other people in a variety of ways also enabled participants to deal with challenges and conflicts: listening (Priest D, Priest J); consulting others for their expertise, gaining insight from their experience, and taking action (Priest G, Priest J); relating to and helping people, conveying what’s important (Priest I, Priest F); getting along well with staff and earning their trust (Priest F).

**Summary.** Dealing with parish challenges and conflicts contributed to the participants' leadership development in the sense that these difficulties—financial woes, low morale of parishioners, immoral or unbecoming behaviors of previous pastors—created opportunities for the growth of their leadership capabilities.

### **Experiencing the Grace and Mercy of God**

Participants' defining experiences of the grace and mercy of God, through faith and personal conversion, contributed to their development as leaders.

**Faith.** The “most defining” experience of leadership development, according to one participant, was

being put into situations where I'm not equipped, and learning how to deal with the situation. . . . Part of that has to be prayer each and every day . . . and asking for God's guidance. When you do, you discover the Holy Spirit is at work, leading you to the right places. (Priest G)

A similar faith experience was described by Priest E:

When I started with the interfaith training to train people to work with the sick, the terminally ill, and the bereaved, it was an amazing experience. . . . Every time we reach a closed door, it opens. Every time we need something, it happens. If we need money, somebody sends it to us. . . . We think we're the board but actually we're following a plan that is mysteriously in someone else's hands. (Priest E)

This study participant related his faith experience to the charism of priesthood, the sacramental power given to ordained priests in the exercise of priestly ministry. As a defining experience,

the grace of ordination would be most important. . . . I couldn't do what I do without it. I believe very strongly that the charism that comes from ordination enables me to preach the Gospel. It enables me to come out of myself [to reach] out to people, particularly in situations of grief and mourning. . . . Charism helps with pastoral responsibilities as well. It also helps when I have to say things to

people that they may not want to hear, maybe to challenge them about their growth in the faith life, and so on. All of those areas of my ministry are affected by grace and sacramental belief. (Priest I)

The faith experience of Priest J involved a family in need of assistance:

We had a very limited amount of money to give to families who needed tuition assistance. This family came in pleading and, intellectually, I knew we had almost no money. But as this father poured out his heart and pleaded for the education of his child, I found myself saying, "I will give this amount of money to you." And I remember thinking, that is the craziest thing I could have said. I haven't got that kind of money! . . . I went into our chapel and I said, "Dear God, I don't know what I have just done. I just promised this man money that I don't have. Forgive my stupidity, but don't punish him. Punish me if you need to for this." I pleaded on behalf of this father who was trying to do the best for his child. . . . About 15 minutes later I got a call from the archdiocese, from the bishop, saying "Father, we've gotten some more tuition assistance for you." . . . It was that much and a little bit more. And I'm thinking, oh dear God, you do take care of us! . . . So I was able to do what I needed to do and get what I needed for this person. (Priest J)

Some study participants directly attributed their leadership skills to their faith in

God:

I was very turned in on myself as a young man, and the Lord wants to turn it out and offer it. The word *ecstasy* means to stand outside of oneself, to be turned out toward God and toward others. And I'm just thrilled of what God has done to me. (Priest B)

The people have taught me incredible lessons in life, about their relationship with the Lord, about doing his work . . . even in incredible circumstances and not being crushed . . . but knowing that it leads to something greater. . . . We are called to be leaders, and many times there are great challenges from all sides. But the important thing is that the Lord gives us the gifts, but most importantly, he gives us the grace which is where humility comes in. On my own, I couldn't have done any of this. But it is by his grace that it's been made possible. And you realize that you truly are his instrument. He puts you at the right place at the right time to do his asking of you. (Priest D)

Priest H, in particular, made reference to the absence of a formal leadership development program, which nonetheless did not hinder leadership from occurring in his parish, but which he ascribed to his faith:

While I do reflect on my leadership or pastoring of a parish, I see the parish as being greatly changed since I've come. But . . . I cannot take credit for the change. And people are always saying to me that I'm wrong. And I suspect that I am. But is that a program? I honestly don't have a program. I'm not that organized. I wish that I were, I know that I can be. But I just give thanks to God for all that I have seen happen, here and in the other parishes that I've been in. . . . I've seen them do things that . . . I could never do. I can encourage them, I can pray for them, but I just can't take credit for any of this and I don't. I just feel gratitude; it's by the mercy of God. (Priest H)

**Personal conversion.** A personal conversion was the way Priest E described experiencing the grace and mercy of God:

By my nature, I'm an analytical person. . . . I was in a summer contemplative group in my former parish. We were studying some very good material put together by a Trappist monk. . . . For . . . maybe 19 years, I really had no warm devotional feelings. I was terrified by preaching because I had nothing to say. And I just felt so empty for so long. . . . Commenting on the Gospel passage where Jesus was in a boat and he fell asleep and a storm came, [St. Therese of Lisieux] said, "If the Lord chooses to sleep in the bow of my boat, only to awaken in eternity, that's fine by me; I prefer to walk by faith." In other words, for her [St. Therese], emptiness was not an enemy. It became a friend. And that's the conversion that changed my life. To see emptiness as a friend . . . now I feel a certain security in preaching out of emptiness. It's a strange and paradoxical experience, that that emptiness somehow creates room for the Spirit to work. And it's a weekly miracle in my life. (Priest E)

**Summary.** Experiencing the grace and mercy of God, through faith and personal conversion experiences, contributed to participants' leadership development. These experiences were demonstrated by the willingness to live in faith, learning to risk, trusting in God's help to perform one's duties, and reaching out to the needy. Grace through ordination was already a form of leadership, in that it certified the ordained priest to lead his "flock."

## **Ministering Through Priestly Service**

This category of defining experiences involved regularly occurring priestly duties and the “evangelistic opportunities” they present (Priest J). Their regularity contributed to the development of leadership. Ministerial services described by the study participants included such rituals as baptisms, weddings, and funerals; caring for the infirm; acts of mercy; solidarity with and comfort of the grieving; and prayer life. The following accounts are some examples of the above.

Rite and ritual services:

Things are changing. A lot of people just aren’t getting married, they’re just living together. . . . Meeting with couples, trying to help them with issues that they might have, and trying to help them get ready [are defining experiences] because of the evangelistic potential. . . . I did the . . . weddings because that’s what comes to mind for the basic evangelistic principles. There’s lot of routine in the work of a priest, the sacramental work. But again trying to do it well, trying to take care of people, because of the ramifications, even in details. (Priest J)

Funerals:

There is an individual [who] has three girls, two boys—and the youngest girl had Down’s syndrome. [He] developed cancer and it went into remission. During that time, his wife developed a cough. He became free of cancer and she developed cancer. . . . We had the funeral for his wife and a few months later, [his] cancer returned. . . . At the funeral for both of them . . . I started to cry. . . . People said to me, “That’s the first time I’ve ever seen a priest cry.” I knew I was doing it. People need to see that priests are human. That human beings . . . suffer . . . so unjustly. Both parents dying. The caregiver dying before the person who’s being cared for. The priest has got to be . . . who he is. (Priest A)

Sometimes life is a desert, when we just have to struggle to survive and we go day by day, sometimes hour by hour. Like when people are grieving, out of work, all kinds of issues. . . . And then—and this is when the vulnerability especially comes in—sometimes we are at sea. . . . You just don’t know exactly what’s going to happen next. And that relates to the experience of a young person dying who shouldn’t die. It’s against all logic. I buried a teenage girl in this parish, . . . so much to live for. (Priest E)



That early experience of the funeral . . . is actually a very important part of parish work and it has become clear to me in a number of ways. Often you have people coming in who may not have been to church in a good long time and they're wondering what kind of reception they are going to get. So a sense of hospitality is very important in leadership. Taking the lead and showing kindness, sympathy to the family, and just working through whatever issues come up with them. I'm learning about this all the time. (Priest J)

Caring for the sick and elderly:

I remember this one man, who I would visit every Saturday when I would go to the nursing home. Just a wonderful man, nobody visiting him. So I would become the highlight of his week and it meant a lot to him. I know I would feel so badly if I didn't get there. He just taught me the importance of recognizing and respecting people whose lives were different from my own and had changed, and who looked as though they didn't have anything to offer anymore, but who still did. Spending time with them, talking with them, sharing their memories, listening to them, was extremely important. (Priest G)

Study participants also considered "reflection on the Scripture" (Priest A) and "spiritual growth and trying to grow my relationship with Christ" (Priest I) to be defining experiences under the umbrella of ministering through priestly service.

**Summary.** Overall, the regular performance of sacramental ministry created important occasions for participants to perfect their skills as a pastor. It posed a constant challenge to one's attitudes, values, relationships, and communication behavior and, hence, contributed to the development of leadership.

### **Managing Parish Projects**

As the leader of their parishes, study participants were involved in making things happen during their parish assignments. They viewed being responsible for managing parish projects as defining experiences that contributed to their leadership development. Project management issues included managing the work of others, involving other people, learning new skills, and learning from mistakes.

**Managing the work of others.** The experience of managing a project involved managing other people and working beside them. This participant was given responsibility over three maintenance men:

I had to oversee [them] and I learned some things there . . . such as how to motivate them but also how to schedule and how to make them accountable. I also learned the very painful truth that sometimes you have to let someone go if they're not up to the job. It's not fair to the people of God to keep employing someone who's not really doing the job. (Priest B)

In managing the work of others, the importance of choosing a good staff was described:

The Catholic Church is a professional organization, so people operate out of their own motivation and their own education and their own professional standards. Consequently, you have to have good staff. And if somebody is not working out, you should not wait to let them go. . . . That is a major part of leadership. . . . Those are some of the unpleasant decisions that you try to make as pleasant as possible. (Priest E)

**Involving other people.** Implementing a building project meant involving other people such as an outside professional and fellow priests:

When . . . we needed to provide housing for the priests, I took a role in saying this is the project. And then to work with the architect in designing the rectory, getting from other priests what they thought was important to have. A priest would say, "I would like my own bathroom in my room rather than a common bath." "We need to have a place where we can gather, a common facility." "We need to have a place where we can go in and pray, and to add a chapel to it." [Taking] into consideration the various needs and then work[ing] with the architect to design what was appropriate. (Priest A)

[For] a major capital campaign . . . there were certain things we had to do every week and . . . we had to ask people for money and make a case. . . . I had never been through an experience like that before and—we had people coming in every week and coaching. In the end, everything fell into place just as they said it would. . . . What it taught me was, sometimes, . . . when you follow through with things, do your homework, do what you're supposed to do, things can work out. (Priest J)

Another participant involved his parishioners in managing a project for a food pantry:

One of the other things that I learned . . . is being open to needs, once people bring them to you. . . . The parishioners saw a great need for a food pantry to be established at the Catholic parish. All the other churches in town had food pantries but not us. And they thought it was a terrible thing because we really need to be doing our part . . . for the needs of the community to be met. So they approached me that fall and I said, “I have no problem. Let’s look at some space.” . . . Well, it was received overwhelmingly with approval and so within a few months it was up and running. And it was phenomenal to watch. (Priest D)

**Learning new skills.** The core issue of how one acquires the training to learn new skills involved in project management was highlighted by several study participants:

“Something I’m doing this year is a fundraising, capital campaign, and I’m doing a building project. [I was] never taught how to ask people for money. Never have built anything on my own” (Priest G). Another summed up the defining experience of managing parish projects as “meeting the demands of the job, which is more [like] on-the-job training. It’s really hard to be trained as a pastor” (Priest C).

**Learning from mistakes.** Some priests’ project management experiences caused them to reassess past decisions: “I look back . . . and think I would handle it differently now. So I think I learned some good things. I also learned by making some mistakes” (Priest B). The same lesson was one of this study participant’s defining experiences:

I have made bad decisions in life. The parish I came from . . . had a need for a parish center, and so for 8 years now they’ve been working at it and just don’t have enough money to do it. . . . It never adversely affected my relationships with the people of the parish, but it did keep us in a hole that we could never get out of, in terms of accomplishing this goal as a parish. . . . It’s important [to] look at the battles . . . you fight, [to] make sure . . . there’s a likely prospect of winning . . . before you put yourself in [a] situation of losing. Not for my sake, but for the sake of the parish and the people. (Priest C)

**Summary.** Overall, the important characteristics of managing parish projects that contributed to the participants' leadership development related to decision making, planning, implementation, learning new skills, and learning from mistakes. Financial challenges and doing things without having learned the appropriate skills were opportunities for testing the mettle of the priest-leader, and hence for growth.

### **Handling Diocesan Assignments**

The defining experience of handling matters at the archdiocesan level contributed to the participants' leadership development, primarily in terms of learning by observation and broadening of responsibilities.

**Learning by observation.** Handling a diocesan assignment involved being exposed to different perspectives and learning by observation:

Looking at how my pastor or the archbishop—who was my boss—would handle situations, and try[ing] to learn . . . what they would do in difficult situations. And learn[ing] [what] I like . . . or I don't like. . . . I would do that same thing or I would change it to be more effective, [or] what I thought was more effective. . . . So [a defining experience] was observation . . . and learning how to do something a different way and a better way. (Priest C)

The one I was most closely associated with was Archbishop X because I lived in the same house, I drove him everywhere, we ate every meal together. He gave me a great insight into how a diocese works. What are the levels of authority, how do you move in a certain way to get something done? That was a tremendous learning experience for me. (Priest F)

**Broadening of responsibilities.** Participants considered appointment to a diocesan leadership position an opportunity for leadership development with the widening of their scope of responsibilities:

There is the diocesan life. The more you're involved in the life of the Church as a pastor, the more the diocese has to be involved. . . . So you're not just in your parish. . . . [I] also have to be on various committees of the archdiocese. And so

it's also giving yourself and your gifts to the Church as a whole, so that your talents can be used and help in other areas of ministry besides your own parochial boundaries. (Priest G)

As a priest in leadership positions, for a number of years I was [the head of] the Priest Council . . . which was an interesting position because you get to interact with the archbishop pretty closely on planning the agenda and on running the meeting. I also worked for some years directly in the tribunal . . . hearing marriage cases. . . . And I was the legal advisor to the archbishop, which meant a lot of research [involving] the teachings of the Church. (Priest F)

Participants viewed their handling of a diocesan assignment as an important responsibility, especially in light of the many people who might be affected by their actions:

In my work as director of priest personnel, I saw my parish community really as the priests of the archdiocese. . . . I would be their advocate. . . . The level of responsibility was quite significant. . . . I had to deal with a superior who had ultimate say [over] where priests would be assigned, as well as with the individual priests. Whether it was an assignment issue, a parish issue, or a personnel issue, I had to have integrity as well as confidentiality. (Priest A)

Not all interviewees welcomed the experience of handling a diocesan assignment, such as this interviewee, who found it “isolating”:

I was vocation director for a short period of time. I hated doing that job; I loved being a priest. . . . I went to the archbishop and said, “You’ve got to get me out of this job, it’s killing me!” And he said yes. . . . I went back to parish work and I love parish work. (Priest C)

**Summary.** Overall, handling diocesan assignments aided participants’ leadership development by providing occasions for learning and by augmenting their skills and sense of belonging to the bigger organizational life of the Church beyond the parish. The experience could be negative, however, when the assignment did not fit the individual’s abilities and inclinations.

## **The Essence of the Defining Experiences of Leadership Development**

Based on the descriptions above, the overall essence of all the defining experiences of leadership development was that they were faith-driven and involved either role models or interactions with others. The experience required strong belief in the power of faith and prayer and modeling of essential Christian values such as genuine self-giving, generosity of spirit, self-sacrificing love, and service, which served as the foundation of the leadership development experience. At the same time, many of the defining experiences required the individual to possess certain skills and acumen in interpersonal relations, management, organization, and administration. The defining experiences were opportunities for learning new skills by observing, doing, and learning from mistakes. The experiences could occur with regularity and continuity or could be unplanned. The defining experiences required a large amount of determination by the individual to deal with challenges, opportunities, and conflicts. The meaning contributed by these experiences is discussed in the next section.

### **Meaning Attributed to What Was Learned from the Leadership Development Experience**

This section describes the meanings of the experiences that the participants identified as defining their leadership development. The meanings are described in terms of what participants learned from their leadership development experiences over time.

Participants noted salient differences in their learning over time. Some struggled with the use of the word “change” to describe this: they were reluctant to claim that what they learned from their leadership development experience had changed them over time. They did not consider “change” descriptive of the gradual process by which they saw

their leadership skills and abilities evolving. One priest placed emphasis on leadership as a practice: “The application[s] of skills, depending on the demand of the situation you walk into—those change” (Priest D). Another saw a growth process: “My understanding of leadership was not so much changed as it was formed and developed, because it wasn’t like I had one going into it. Does that make sense?” (Priest I). A third participant was reluctant to put a label on his trial-and-error, sink-or-swim experience:

Leadership didn’t change but what I became more sensitive to was the fact that I had to include more elements in the decision-making process. . . . So you learn from mistakes and successes, you see what works and what doesn’t work, you hone that out to be more sensitive in order that you avoid hurting people, you avoid too much tumult in the parish. (Priest C)

The majority of participants, however, firmly asserted that their leadership was transformed: “Definitely” (Priest A); “Oh, it’s been transformed” (Priest E); “Absolutely” (Priest F); “Without a doubt” (Priest G); “Oh sure, yes” (Priest H); “Yes” (Priest B and Priest J). Several themes arose repeatedly in their descriptions of transformation: striving to learn and improve, becoming more collaborative, having a better understanding of authority, and acknowledging ambiguity. Each is addressed below.

### **Striving to Learn and Improve**

A dramatic demonstration of the need for a leader to learn and improve emerged from a conversation between a priest and one of his early mentors:

After I finished college, I had a meeting with one of the sisters who had taught me in high school. And I said to her, “Things have changed a lot.” And she said to me, “Well, you either change or die.” And so I’ve known that for the last 40-something years. . . . And I have seen that over and over again in every area of my life. Everything calls us to change because to change is to become a better person than we are. (Priest H)

Leadership, he concluded, required transformation through self-improvement, and, conversely, unless a leader improved and was thus transformed, he was not a true leader:

If we don't change, then somehow we accept ourselves. I don't know how we accept ourselves because as we grow in the knowledge of God . . . it grows you, it changes you, it transforms you, it converts you. And to say that I think leadership is valuable but I'm okay just the way I am, that would be a big lie. . . . You have to change, you have to grow, you have to develop. (Priest H)

Among the things a priest had to learn, in order to experience a transformation as leader, were the specifics of his parish and parishioners: "When you become pastor of a very large parish with a history that you have not been a part of, then you need to take time to learn that history, to learn the inner workings of it before you can move on" (Priest A). On-the-job training, especially of the trial-and-error, sink-or-swim variety, was readily acknowledged as an opportunity for transformative development as a leader: "You learn an awful lot from mistakes and failures. You learn so much from every single experience. . . . Everything gets processed, everything gets filtered" (Priest H). This contrasted with semantic concerns over what to call a similar scenario, expressed by Priest C above.

Formal education proved to be only one kind of learning. Most participants soon understood that they needed to gain experience and seek additional knowledge from others in order to continue to improve as leaders. Some warned against thinking that "you know everything and . . . everybody is going to follow you" (Priest B), even if that attitude was expressed in a positive way:

Any . . . newly ordained priest . . . think[s] that everything rests on your shoulders and you've got all this wisdom and knowledge to share and to give to people. And then all of a sudden—well, you do have a lot of knowledge and wisdom that



you gained in the classroom—but you don't have the experience. And so all of these experiences gave me the opportunity to learn from people who had been in similar situations and who had a background that could assist me. [With] almost every assignment, I have grown in my understanding of how to lead a parish, how to lead an organization, because of the people that have been there. Because the wealth of knowledge and experience in their lives has certainly influenced me and helped me make better decisions. (Priest G)

This recognition connected to the importance of collaboration in priests' leadership development.

### **Becoming More Collaborative**

Priest B recounted his efforts “to stay in dialogue with the people,” a succinct statement of the two-way process for a religious leader to experience transformation. Nearly all of the respondents described their interactions with colleagues, superiors, parish members, role models, mentors, and even the public as both something that had changed a great deal over their careers, for good or ill, and that had transformed them as leaders:

Trying to incorporate as many people as possible, give them the opportunity to be a part of it so it's not me but us. . . . Learning to use my gifts for the good of the whole, and take the things I've learned to do a better job in the future. (Priest C)

Observing the transformations of others could influence one's own transformation: “You see people who had challenges and struggles and who learned, and changed, changed dramatically and drastically because of the love of God” (Priest H).

On a more practical, day-to-day level, relationships with staff could affect a priest's fulfillment of leadership responsibilities and goals:

I . . . need a good staff and I have to really love the people that I'm serving. . . . If you don't have a good staff and you don't feel the people you or aren't particularly friendly to you, you really can't do much. . . . I came to trust my staff, my principal, much more. . . . So now my style of leadership is much more

collaborative because the people that I have hired, I learn from them. They are really top-notch people. When I got started, it was benevolent dictator! Not to that extent, but I found myself taking initiatives, making decisions, because I didn't know. So that definitely changed. . . . Here, it's become much more collaborative. (Priest F)

Assignments require more sensitivity to others. When I was a pastor all by myself, there wasn't all that problem. . . . A decision would be made and we would move on from there. . . . Now . . . I am in a collaborative type of ministry and role. It's not the old model where the priest said it and it was done. He works with a group of very dedicated and competent people, so in a collaborative type of style, that's where I would see my ministry has developed. (Priest A)

Nevertheless, there were limits to collaboration, especially when different internal and external groups competed for a priest's attention and involvement:

I cannot let people walk all over me. . . . I am responsible to the archbishop. It is a trust that he has given me in asking me to be the pastor of this parish. And I have to make sure I don't sell the church down the river. (Priest J)

The collaborative process highlighted for many participants the dual nature of their job as both an authority figure and one who serves others.

### **Having a Better Understanding of Authority**

The findings included several stories of priests coming to terms with their roles as leaders. Recognizing and accepting themselves as such were significant leadership development experiences. The participants described a transformation process of becoming more comfortable with exerting authority while simultaneously yielding to others' authority, both temporal and spiritual.

The following examples illustrate the many kinds of transformations potential leaders grappled with, including transitions from student to professional:

The seminary really trained us to be followers initially, so that we would be mentored. . . . That method of training was more for teaching us how to get along with superiors, less about being the leader yourself. So I don't know that I had

any well-formed ideas about leadership, but I picked those up both from the . . . pastor[s] . . . but also from my own experiences. (Priest I)

From resentment to appreciation:

I did struggle a lot with my earthly father and on account of that, I did have a few authority issues. But I think I was always able to know that it was tactically appropriate to obey my authorities, but it was more of a tactical, rather than a heartfelt love for those in authority. . . . So my view of leadership, now that I'm more a leader, has changed. You know how parents or older folks often say to younger teenagers, "You'll understand when you get older. One day you're going to be in charge." So I have made that transition; . . . my attitude about leadership and authority has had to change. I developed a much greater appreciation of those in authority over me, by being in authority myself. (Priest B)

From wielding power to earning respect:

People in leadership have a sense of power or intimidation. But really effective leadership, I think, comes from if you really win over the people. They know they can trust you, they know that even when you make a decision that may not be popular—like, for example, closing the school—that they'll be with you. They may not agree but they realize that you've done your very best. If I try to intimidate somebody, if I try to exercise fear, they may do it, but I know they won't respect me. . . . Not that I have to be liked necessarily. . . . I have to be willing . . . when I have to make the difficult decisions that are unpopular . . . to exercise it as kindly as I can. (Priest J)

From collective to individual leadership:

When I left the seminary I was . . . an extension of the institution of the Catholic Church. I found in that a lot of security, but my experiences have made me . . . an extension of Jesus Christ as a disciple, that has brought insecurity but great performance to my ministry. (Priest E)

This last example leads to an examination of some of the ambiguities inherent in the transformation process for the participants in this study.

### **Acknowledging Ambiguity**

The popular image of a leader as bold, confident, and superior was not uniformly applicable to the present study. For a priest in a parish setting, leadership could develop

in unexpected ways. While it is uncommon for leaders in business and industry to mention humility, uncertainty, and insecurity when describing their transformational leadership experiences, several participants described their experiences in this manner.

One priest saw himself less as a representative of the collective authority of the Church, as he did when he was younger, and more as an individual under divine authority:

When I left the seminary I was . . . an extension of the institution of the Catholic Church. I found in that a lot of security, but my experiences have made me . . . an extension of Jesus Christ as a disciple, that has brought insecurity but great performance to my ministry because the locus of control has switched from myself to the Holy Spirit. (Priest E)

By relinquishing control to his religious beliefs, he continued to gain greater control over his performance as a leader.

Knowing one can exert authority, but choosing not to, even if one is unsure why, was another transformation in the development of a leader. It is a variation of knowing one's limits. The less certain this priest became about his decision making, the more certain he was that he was going about things the right way:

Humility is really the major change. When I was a young man, I thought I could do anything, and I thought I knew everything. . . . And there was a kind of moving away from that. I was so certain about what we needed to do to make this church go in the right direction and all those things. Now, I'm not as certain. And paradoxically, I think that makes me a better leader because, it's a very short walk from being a leader to being a despot. . . . To accept that there are a lot of things I don't know, I think paradoxically makes me a better leader. (Priest B)

The next study participant experienced transformation in his leadership capabilities by constantly questioning himself and his motives and remaining open to new information:

Should I have said this? Should I have said that? Could I have done this? Could I have done that? Should I have listened more? Everything gets processed, everything gets filtered. And you have to decide also, with the processing and filtering, whether it is pride or humility that's causing you to do that. (Priest H)

He also articulated the ambiguity of leadership inherent in being a priest, inasmuch as the religious nature of his job gave him the authority to lead as well as the responsibility to obey: "Ultimately what changes us is love, isn't it? And the only way to fully experience it is to be obedient to it" (Priest H).

### **The Essence of the Attributed Meaning**

Based on the meanings identified above, the essence of the participants' experience of what was learned from their leadership development may be characterized as transformation of leadership practices. The meaning that evolved from the experiences fell into certain categories of common desires and activities. The meaning that evolved from the experiences encouraged the drive to learn and improve, through both education and experience, with the assistance of others and through self-examination. The meaning that evolved from the experiences allowed for appreciation of the value of a collaborative process that involves many other people, which could affect, for better or worse, their daily tasks and achievement of goals. The meaning that evolved from the experiences encouraged understanding of the authority role as well as obligations to other authorities, acknowledging that some situations are unique to the jobs of religious leaders. The meaning that evolved from the experiences caused the individuals to deal with the ambiguities brought up by certain transformative experiences, whereby being humble, uncertain, and insecure about leadership gave them the awareness to be a better leader. The meanings that evolved from the leadership development

experiences were personal, concrete, and reciprocal. The next section discusses another influence on leadership development: support.

### **Support for Leadership Development**

The previous sections described the efforts of participants towards their individual leadership development. This section describes the environment that helped create the conditions for the leadership development of participants. Based on the experiences seeking, obtaining, or lacking support from the various people they dealt with as pastors, most participants considered support to be vital to leadership development efforts. With respect to support or lack thereof received for their leadership development, the participants' histories fell into six primary categories: seminary education; continuing education; opportunities for reflection and fellowship; access to peer groups; competent staff; and responsive superiors. Each is discussed in turn.

#### **Seminary Education**

A priest's development as a leader can be supported early in his career, starting in the seminary. "Leadership development should start in the seminary" (Priest D). One participant learned important leadership lessons from priests in the college seminary:

[Those] were tumultuous years in the Church and in the world. We talked about all the revolutions that were going on. The Civil Rights movement, the sexual revolution, the changes that were going on in the second Vatican Council. . . . Father X [English teacher] . . . helped us to reflect on some of these changes. . . . I think a leader needs to take time to sit back and to ponder what's happening in the world around him, not just in terms of what's happening in his parish. . . . The rector [of the seminary] . . . showed concern for each of the students as well as . . . for the quality of education that was being offered; that stood out as a leadership role. (Priest A)

Priest B noted that formal courses related to leadership development were not taught in the seminary:

I don't think we really studied leadership or were never really prepared. It was presumed that we would go out of the seminary and be under somebody's tutelage. And when I was in the seminary, 25 years ago, that was the truth. Most of us went out and spent 5 or 10 years at least under somebody, showing us the ropes. Here's the rule, here's how we have to apply it. Or here are some options, rather than just here are the rules. (Priest B)

Some priests expressed reservations as to whether leadership development could be realistically taught in the seminary:

I've been teaching 15 years leadership development. I found that by far my best students were those who have been out on ministry for several years because they have made mistakes, some of which were hurtful, and they understood the importance of leadership development and the skills that I was teaching them. . . . I found from teaching in the seminary that the culture of the religious house in which people live was much more powerful than anything I taught them in class. I learned, rather sadly, that part of the human condition is that unless you are a saint or a poet, the culture you live in will be more powerful than whatever your ideals are. . . . Religious communities and seminaries should be models of effective leadership. In my experience, they are not. They are top down, sometimes secretive places to get through. (Priest E)

I honestly don't know how you can train at the seminary well for the kinds of subtleties of leadership. . . . You have to just get that from experience. In the seminary, you're not living in a parish. You're sort of living in an artificial environment. . . . And you might spend your summertimes in a parish. But it's not like normal life. I hate to put it that way, but you're basically being instructed in lots of rules and topics and the question is how to synthesize all of that. That's not something that can be easily taught. Maybe it could be, but I don't think you can sit there in class and learn it. (Priest B)

### **Continuing Education**

Pastors have an objective responsibility to engage in ongoing development, according to one participant: "What you learn in the seminary . . . is not all that there is. You must be open to ongoing education, understanding nuances, philosophical axioms. Never deny, seldom confirm, always distinguish, Aristotle says" (Priest A).

Some interviewees expressed satisfaction with the educational opportunities that were offered to them on practical topics:

Throughout the year there are days . . . where they offer certain presentations on certain subjects, which are always good. . . . And I'm always enriched. There are always wonderful things that you walk away with. Some of them are very practical, which I always appreciate. (Priest D)

The diocese gave its priests professional development funds "to go take a seminar, whether it's across the country or right here in town" (Priest B).

Most interviewees also expressed dissatisfaction with specific educational offerings, in terms of content, faculty, venue, frequency, availability, and other factors:

They have a half day . . . where they do an instructional thing, and I know everybody is supposed to be there. . . . They're giving us thoughts on whatever they decide. . . . You go there, listen to talks, and you go home. (Priest C)

They will gather people who are becoming pastors. . . . But that tends to be a kind of reintroduction to the diocese. This is the finance department, this is what they do . . . and this is the tribunal and that's what they do. And so it is a great refresher for guys who want to be pastors, probably something they never paid any attention to, budgets and how to do your annual report. . . . But it's a one-day thing and anything that's one day is not really, ultimately, very helpful. (Priest F)

Study participants' attendance at convocations was appreciated, but not necessarily for the continuing educational options presented there:

It's generally like going to a seminar. . . . They're trying to balance getting us together to have a good time with this seminar format. . . . I want the cardinal to do most of the talking. . . . And then he could bring in a couple of effective speakers. (Priest B)

Another set of interrelated criticisms involved priests who could not or would not engage in continuing education, and the diocese that did not make it compulsory:

The diocese offers each priest \$400 a year to do some professional development. . . . Most priests don't use that. "I'm busy, I don't have time for that." And so that \$400 goes unspent. At some level, if a priest wants to be a good leader, at



some point he's going to have to prepare himself for that. . . . But an awful lot of priests don't take that seriously. (Priest B)

[The presentations] don't always jibe very well with my schedule. But I try to participate in as many of them as possible. (Priest D)

It's really hard to work [ongoing education] in . . . [on a] regular basis, especially if you're the only priest in the parish and somebody dies or there's a wake or there's a crisis. . . . It's hard to do those things if you're in a busy parish. I think it's also hard to do those things unless you're really committed to doing that. (Priest C)

Questions remained as to what was considered continuing education for priests, whether priests were required to engage in continuing education, and whether those requirements were enforced. The absence of clear expectations for continuing education among priests within and across parishes indicated a lack of support for continuing education as a form of leadership development. One interviewee thought this reflected poorly on the priesthood as compared with other professions:

No other professional cadre of people get[s] away with never doing professional development. Lawyers, doctors—they're all expected to go to these things. They're expected to publish if they're teachers. We priests, although we're pastors and spiritual men, we're also professionals, and professional development should be a part of our life. (Priest B)

### **Opportunities for Reflection and Fellowship**

The study findings showed that priests were supported in their development as spiritual leaders through retreats, days of recollection, and convocations.

**Retreats.** Opinions of the practice were mostly positive:

That's [a retreat] an important support for a priest, to expect him to have a spiritual life, so the diocese sponsors the retreat or we can find our own. An additional retreat day is an option occasionally, before Lent, before Easter, before Christmas. . . . Sometimes I go to it, sometimes I don't. (Priest E)

Several study participants pointed out that “in canon law . . . we’re supposed to make a retreat” (Priest B); “the Church . . . requires that a priest go on retreat once a year” (Priest E). Like continuing education for priests, however, as discussed above, requirements, if any, with respect to retreats were seldom enforced, and opinions varied as to what they were. One study participant said there needed to be “much more enforcing of the yearly retreat” and more work “on developing our spiritual life. Even our required retreats, that’s not enforced. When they’re given, we’re all fractured in different places and there isn’t really that communal aspect” (Priest B).

**Days of recollection.** “There is a spiritual aspect in terms of days of recollection—seeing where that occurs within yourself, knowing that it occurs within other people, and then progressing from there” (Priest A). Time was made available for priests “to gather for renewal” (Priest B) “throughout the year” (Priest D). Recalling the state of continuing education for priests, such gatherings were “not really well attended, because they’re not mandatory” (Priest B).

**Convocations.** Priests appeared to be divided over the quality of the leadership development support found via fellowship opportunities at biannual and annual convocations. Some positive opinions contained qualification:

A marvelous time. . . . We had different presentations on priestly life. . . . We’re all there together. There are presentations, spiritual and leadership stuff and the administrative stuff. They bring in different priests from different parts of the country and also sometimes even our own speaker on certain things. It’s a great time to relax, but it’s also a great time to pick up some new information.  
(Priest D)

They’re okay but . . . there’s not enough input asked of us before the convocations are formed on what we would like to see. (Priest G)

Wonderful. I don’t undermine that at all. But it is purely social. (Priest C)

## **Access to Peer Groups**

Priest peer groups differed from convocations, retreats, and meetings that offered fellowship, primarily for their lack of “sharing opportunity” (Priest C) and “communal aspect” (Priest B).

A support group could facilitate leadership development by helping some priests avoid becoming too isolated and rigid:

We don't have as many priests, and there are so many priests that are on their own. One of my fears is that . . . we can almost become little fiefdoms, where this is my little kingdom and don't tell me how to do things. So bring us together and help us to learn together, so we can really grow as presbyters and grow in our leadership abilities, so that we can have our parishioners grow into the kingdom [of God]. I think that would be instrumental. (Priest G)

The freedom experienced by priests in peer groups reinforced members' “human formation”:

What pastors themselves do to build in some support is to associate with priests in some kind of formal way in terms of a prayer group or a support group. Some of the support groups study Scripture and they pray. Some of them go out to dinner. It just depends, you know. But that feeling that when you go back to your parish—especially if you don't have an associate—you have a cadre of people out there that you can go to if you have a particular question or problem, or just to remind yourself that you are a priest and a pastor, but you're also a human being and you want to associate and develop some of those personal skills in terms of friendship, in terms of responding to people. (Priest F)

Things like support groups are really good. . . . There have been a couple of ways in which I really feel very supported. Just talking about people and situations. Not specifics about people, but just situations we're dealing with and saying “Any ideas for how I could do this better?” (Priest J)

## **Competent Staff**

Handling administrative duties was not something taught well, if at all, to priests, according to the study participants: “When I was going through seminary . . . how to deal

with a staff situation, we didn't do stuff like that" (Priest I). Interacting with employees and colleagues he could rely on helped a priest become an effective leader in his parish:

Many times, you're trying to keep up with the pastoral . . . and the sacramental side of things, and the administrative stuff just becomes more burdensome. I understand. I know why they need reports, I know why they need paperwork, I know the world in which we live. But at times it becomes a bit of a burden. And there aren't always people on our staff that we can trust to follow through. . . . That's one of the great challenges, the . . . burden that comes with the administrative part. . . . When it comes to support, it's important to have staff who are capable. (Priest D)

Sharing the "burden" included compliance with rules, regulations, and other requirements, in addition to helping with workload:

You do need to have really competent people because there are certain things that a pastor is not supposed to do. You're not supposed to be directly involved with the money counting, with the offertory. . . . You do need support there. Some parishes are very tiny, where the pastor may have to do some of that. But a lot of that kind of work is very time consuming, and having someone who is really helpful with that is really good. There are lots of things that are detailed kind of work, like financial administration. If you have a religious education program of any size, just trying to take care of the records. . . . We have very specific requirements for sacramental ministry, and you really have to be on top of those. (Priest J)

## **Responsive Superiors**

Some participants appreciated the support they received from their superiors:

Cardinal X has been very good about sending us information regarding certain areas. The information he's been giving us since the HHS mandate [Health and Human Services requirement for insurance to cover contraception] and the attack on religion has been wonderful. It's been quick, it's been, for most part, concise, so that we have our talking points. So that I'm most grateful for. That was not always the case in the past. It could be 2 weeks before you would get a response. And with how quickly everything moves these days, it was too late. (Priest D)

There's been real challenges which I felt like there was steady support [from the archdiocese] during the whole process of going through and preparing to close the school. Just talking about it with someone—What should be the next steps? What do we need to do? So it becomes a clear process. That makes life easier, trying to

think, What am I going to do now? Those are the kinds of things I have received. Now the archdiocese of 140 parishes can be very complicated at that level. That kind of leadership, trying to make sure specific things are taken care of before they become crises, that's a thing. If you can keep working on things and try to keep crises at a minimum, then you're doing pretty good. The level of support I have gotten from the archdiocese, I am happy. (Priest J)

Many study participants expressed frustration with their superiors, saying the diocese "could do more" (Priest F):

What is needed is a leadership on the larger level, the diocesan level, that is in touch with what their priests need in situations, and creating opportunities that would equip us with the kinds of tools we really need to continue to be effective leaders in today's Church. (Priest G)

Examples of what the diocese already provided included retreats and convocations: "They pay for it. . . . That's an important support" (Priest E); "\$400 a year to do some professional development" (Priest B); "Support groups for priests who want it" (Priest E); and "Certain presentations on certain subjects, which are always good. And so they do help" (Priest D).

Some priests gave examples where they didn't feel supported by their superiors:

- Assistance with administrative burdens: "They are trying to help us out but in that regard, it's difficult" (Priest D).
- "Enforcing" retreat attendance (Priest B)
- More useful courses: "Some kind of a workshop. . . . Anything that's one day is not really, ultimately, very helpful" (Priest F); "We need guidance and direction to form proper responses for these situations. In the way society moves so quickly now, to have forums or conferences or workshops that could educate us even more so, to the situations of our day, so that we can pastorally respond . . . would be important" (Priest G).

- Forming support groups: “Regionally, the diocese needs to gather the priests and assist us” (Priest B); “Built-in opportunities within the life of the local Church, the archdiocese, the diocese, in which pastors can come together. . . . I don’t think there’s enough of that going on” (Priest G).
- Better designed meetings: “Input asked of us before the convocations” (Priest G); “I want the cardinal to do most of the talking. He is our shepherd. What’s on his heart? What are the things he’s concerned about—because I am supposed to be his representative” (Priest B).

Two priests in particular articulated the need for leadership support from their dioceses on a more personal level. The first study participant pointed out that priests are followers themselves and seek to learn from their leader how to lead their own parishioners:

The cardinal could convene us and make that a priority for him, . . . especially in a large diocese like this. . . . I’ve been through three different cardinals as a priest—they tend to be very swept up in the administrative details, and because of that, they’re not really able to be a true shepherd of their priests. He is the chief shepherd of this flock. The closer I feel to him, the more clear I am about what I need to do with this parish.

What is [the cardinal’s] thinking on how we, in a culture that is increasingly hostile, how should we as priests respond to that? . . . Because we’re encountering an awful lot of real breakdown in the culture, and it can get very discouraging for a priest. (Priest B)

A second study participant would like to see diocesan leaders act toward the priests they lead the way priests already act toward their own parishioners:

Probably the most disheartening in the situations I was describing as defining was that the leadership of the diocese never really reached out to me and asked, “How are you doing and what do you need?” I had to reach out to people and get their help.

A little personal contact . . . wouldn't hurt either. To occasionally get a note from the diocese, or phone call, simply to say, "Hey, how are things going? Is there anything you need some help with?" We try to do that with our parishioners, and I think it would be good for . . . the bishops . . . every now and then to reach out to the priests one-on-one and have a little dialogue with us. . . . I know they're busy but I think that connection—there needs to be a stronger relationship, I believe, between the bishops and the local priests. (Priest G)

These examples showed how leadership development was influenced by the support received by participants based on the kinds of relationships and levels of interaction involved in a parish setting.

### **Summary**

Overall, support of leadership development for participants fell into six categories: seminary education, continuing education, opportunities for reflection and fellowship, access to peer groups, competent staff, and responsive superiors. The success or failure of each kind of support depended on who was to provide it, the way in which it was to be received, the thought and preparation involved, the individual characteristics of the parish and diocese, and numerous other changing factors such as personalities and societal events. The section that follows includes recommendations for designing a leadership development program for new pastors and those in mid-career.

### **Designing a Leadership Development Program**

The findings in this section build on the information gleaned in the prior section by describing the participants' recommendations for designing leadership development programs, both for new pastors and for those in mid-career. Included are suggestions for newly ordained priests assigned as parochial vicars and for those in seminary formation. A priest is appointed as a "parochial vicar" (formerly "associate priest") after ordination,

to assist a pastor in an assigned parish. An ordained priest becomes a pastor when he is designated to head a parish (Code of Canon Law, 1983). There is no common definition as to what constitutes being at “mid-career,” but for purposes of this study, a pastor is considered in the middle of his career when he has served at least 10 years in pastoral ministry.

### **Seminary Education**

Handling all sorts of matters as a priest comes with maturity, but that, too, can be imparted, to some extent, to students:

One of the most important things regarding leadership [is that] before they’re ordained, they have to be mature. Do they need to be 27 years old with a 50-year-old wisdom? No. But they need to be mature enough to be able to walk into . . . different situations. (Priest D)

A leadership development program for seminarians could include teaching of specific skills:

You might have something like . . . how to deal with personal, one-on-one counseling, . . . how to deal with a staff situation . . . or . . . a parish that’s divided over some issue. . . . Having those types of seminars in the seminary probably would be helpful. (Priest I)

Adding courses on leadership development was important enough to overcome objections to “how heavy the academic load is for the seminarians” (Priest D). After all, “seminarians are a captive audience. They have to do what you tell them to do” (Priest I).



## **Postordination Mentoring**

Seminary graduates should be given the time and guidance they need to fully develop their leadership capabilities, according to the study participants, who were critical of today's sped-up assignments: "We don't do so well. . . . They're out of seminary 2 years and they're already being named pastors, and they make all the rookie mistakes" (Priest B). The "mentoring process has really been short-changed, and there's a lot of concern about that. . . . Now, very quickly they're being put into a leadership position" (Priest I).

The necessary time and guidance to develop as a leader should be ensured through "a much more vigorous mentor program, where . . . for the first 4 or 5 years . . . a pastor . . . is expected to be in regular contact with [a] mentor" (Priest B). A newly ordained priest "who's not spending a lot of time as a parochial vicar" misses a beneficial opportunity to "get some observation on what goes on and form some ideas" (Priest I).

The value of mentorship also came up in the context of retreats: "Having a common experience around a gifted retreat master . . . can really lead us to see different things" (Priest B).

## **Program for New Pastors**

The matters to be considered in designing a leadership development program for pastors at the beginning of their careers fell into four basic categories: subject matter for training; teaching methods and approaches; support for pastors; and roles of superiors.

**Subject matter for training.** According to one participant, "Leaders . . . are able to move people in a definite way. Those are skills that need to be learned, and not just in studying leadership itself. Skills where you go and study" (Priest B). Ongoing education

would also subjectively provide support for a beleaguered profession, he continued: “In a culture that is increasingly hostile, how should we as priests respond to that? . . . Because we’re encountering an awful lot of real breakdown in the culture, and it can get very discouraging for a priest” (Priest B), and “with the controversy in our government over religious freedom issues, we need to have . . . good instruction on how to be leaders because people tend, in the present day, to become radicalized” (Priest A).

When asked what new priests should be trained to do as part of a leadership development program, study participants suggested a wide range of topics. They formed three main categories: leadership skills, management skills, and continuing spiritual formation. An additional category addressed special considerations for parishes with schools.

***Leadership skills.*** Study participants recommended that new priests receive training in many specific areas of leadership, as “these are real responsibilities” (Priest D):

Knowing how to work with groups, understanding group process, understanding a variety of decision-making styles and how they are appropriate . . . to the circumstances [or] situation, conflict management, how personality affects spirituality, and leadership style . . . gained through a knowledge of Myers-Briggs theory. (Priest E)

Examples of how people have led in the past [Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr.] . . . How certain models [of leadership] work. . . . What are the best practices in that style of leadership? An individual should be exposed to leadership styles and characteristics and qualities. (Priest A)

Helping new priests discover and develop their own leadership qualities was an important responsibility for teachers and mentors, who should pose “questions . . . to them to determine their style and how that style can work within a church environment

... that is changing” (Priest A). One interviewee encouraged priests to adopt the collaborative leadership style:

Helping priests to see the importance of collaborating with the laity . . . recognizing their gifts and how to call them forth and involve them, to see how that collaborative way of approaching things is going to be a much more positive experience both for the priest and for the people themselves. (Priest I)

Additional subjects for instruction suggested by study participants included goal setting and implementation (Priest G), decision making (Priest D), and developing leadership vision (Priest E).

**Management skills.** Subjects for training in this area included general management, as well as management of finances, human resources, and facilities (Priest A, Priest B, Priest D, Priest F, Priest G, and Priest J).

New priests needed to know that neither their religious nor their secular duties could be “ignored or walked away from” (Priest D):

Yes, you have a responsibility for the celebration of the sacraments, preaching of the Gospel, but we also must understand the importance of leadership . . . in the temporal areas as well. You’re going to be . . . running million-dollar businesses. (Priest D)

Focusing on the former at the exclusion of the latter could create problems:

These are things that you need to know about. . . . If you’re . . . just going to pray and you let someone swindle you because you’re gullible or you’re naïve, you’re not being a good steward of temporal resources of the parish. (Priest J)

One study participant offered a three-step plan to ensure that, “as much as we might not like it,” administrative duties “are presented in a clear fashion to younger priests,” and that those duties are properly carried out: “First and foremost . . . we know

what the policies of the archdiocese are, . . . second that we follow them, and . . . thirdly we clearly know who to go to in those circumstances” (Priest D).

Three management areas, finance, facilities, and human resources, received special mention in study findings. Financial management covers budgeting, fiscal responsibility, fundraising, and much more:

For new pastors, there are some very practical things that they have to know. They have to be familiar with . . . the way in which we report finances to the archdiocese. . . . They have to know because they are responsible for the money of the parish . . . and how to preserve it. (Priest F)

Another one would be a course on human resources. “What the rules are in regards to evaluation of individuals and challenging people to take on their jobs more fully or completely” (Priest G) and “Definitely something on honing in your people skills. . . . How do you manage conflict between you and your parishioners, and what is more frequent, between you and your staff” (Priest F). “How to deal with controversy, the most challenging often being hiring and firing of people, to choose the right person for the particular job at hand” (Priest A). “Understanding the laws of our society today would be extremely important for new pastors, [and] for men prior to becoming pastors” (Priest G), and a course on time-management (Priest F).

It was also suggested that new priests learn about managing building projects:

Have someone from facilities come in and do a presentation on what are the policies of the diocese with regards to building. What do you need to know about the areas in which the archdiocese functions. . . . What are the rules there? If you’re going to be doing a project, what will it entail? (Priest G)

***Continuing spiritual formation.*** The preceding discussions clarified that leadership and management trainings, rather than spiritual formation, were the main focus of the recommendations for a leadership development program for new pastors.

The reason for this focus may be that a spiritual formation program was already in place for most interviewees. Nevertheless, a couple of suggestions regarding spirituality emerged from the findings.

The first involved priests' spiritual needs: "When the majority of pastors are by themselves, it could get to a point where you are so wrapped up in everything . . . you don't take the time out for your own spiritual growth and development" (Priest G). A leadership development program should therefore include "a presentation on the need for pastors to have spiritual directors and confessors" whom they could "see on a regular basis" and "talk with in regards to spiritual issues that are going on in their lives" (Priest G).

The second recommendation addressed a gap in some priests' spiritual education: "An awful lot of priests never really study theology—whether it be moral theology, systematic, Christology, ecclesiology, or any of the disciplines—they do very little work after they leave the seminary" (Priest B). A leadership development program that "bring[s] interesting but also important theological issues to the fore" would help priests deal with "people today" who have "very flawed notions of the Church" (Priest B). The study of theology would enable priests to "draw people back" and "begin to articulate a new vision for the people of God about the Church. That's just an example of how theology can hinge on pastoral practice. So theological development is important" (Priest B).

Additional recommendations from other study participants included (a) training on the intersection of faith and culture (Priest B), (b) a pastoral leadership course as a

prerequisite to becoming a pastor (Priest E), and (c) learning to be humble and to be able to relate to people (Priest A).

*Special considerations for parishes with schools.* The leadership development of priests with respect to parishes with parochial schools recalled the discussion above on premature assignments:

I never believe that young pastors should be sent to places with schools. They should go to a smaller place and begin to understand the basic workings of being a pastor and all the responsibilities that go with it. You prove yourself there, then you can move up. (Priest D)

Once in a school setting, a young pastor was advised to consider the “dynamics” of his interactions with everyone involved: “For the pastor and the principal to work together as a team is extremely important to the health and success of the school. . . . A good relationship with the teachers is extremely important” (Priest G). A leadership development program therefore should include “a presentation on ministry in a school setting . . . and how to make those collaborative relationships work. And how to work with a school board in regards to enhancing the mission of the school” (Priest G).

**Teaching methods and approaches.** Study participants recommended the use of appropriate teaching methods, materials, and technologies to suit different learning styles and subjects:

There needs to be priests who are good leaders who are willing to sit down one on one or in a panel. I think there are videos or video-conferencing that can be done. . . . I think you need to use some of that new technology [such as Skype], which most younger priests are so very familiar with. I think you need to bring in people from outside the Church. Leaders and role models that exist in the business world, in the medical profession. Doctors and nurses and people who deal with people at the deepest levels when they’re facing incredible challenges and decisions. And to have the young priest continue to reflect with them and talk with them about things. So I think it’s a variety because everyone is going to

learn from something differently. Not everyone is the same. To have someone sit down and write, and reflect. Journaling helps people do that as well. (Priest A)

Participants found supportive experiences more likely to occur “in small groups” through forums or workshops:

When you bring us together . . . there should be more workshops. There’s a keynoter in the morning and there’s a keynoter in the afternoon. . . . Put us in small groups and have particular topics addressed to give us knowledge and skills that we could implement. . . . Have forums or conferences or workshops that could educate us . . . to the situations of our day, so that we can pastorally respond. I think that would be important. (Priest G)

Attendance at a retreat “where the theme might be leadership” would be a form of “continuing education in that field,” one priest suggested; through “reflection on the Scripture,” attendees would “see how different people have taken examples from the Scripture or from the lives of people we see as saints . . . to show how they were leaders” (Priest A). As a “sharing opportunity,” it [retreat] “is really the best,” according to Priest C, whose diocese did not have an annual retreat. “It’s generally like going to a seminar. If we’re going to go and spend this quality time together, we might want to have the agenda be a little more meaty” (Priest B)

Convocations provide “a great time to pick up some new information. It’s ongoing education as well. . . . Always a presentation on what is most current on the moment” (Priest D). According to one participant, the diocese should

be much more enforcing . . . that [pastors] attend at least one ongoing seminar. . . . They should be able to, at the end of the year, say “I have fulfilled this by doing the following.” So there would be some flexibility. (Priest B)

**Support for pastors.** The third element to be considered in designing a leadership development program for new pastors was how they were to be supported.

Recommended sources of support for new pastors included mentors, role models, peers, and colleagues; recommended kinds of support included maintenance of mental health.

***Mentoring and role modeling.*** Study participants agreed that this form of support was valuable to young priests' development as leaders, especially over a long period:

There could be mentors for new pastors . . . that continue[d] more than just 2 years. We're supposed to do it for 2 years, and I think most of us eke out a year or 18 months. We never seem to make the full 2 years because of the busy-ness of our lives; it's very hard to get that time together. . . . Set up mentors for first-time pastors with another pastor in the area. (Priest D)

The most important thing, he's going to look at you. That's his first experience of a pastor, is the one he is first assigned to. So you have to model a good example, but in a more analytical way, how do you gradually integrate this priest into the skills of a good pastor? . . . Because these guys are only going to be parochial vicars . . . a maximum of 6 years. That's it. And then they'll be a pastor. (Priest F)

The best way of learning anything is to be an apprentice to a master. We learn more from that than anything else, which is another reason why priests need to learn how to be open and . . . available to people. . . . That's how we learn about them and that's how they learn about us. (Priest H)

Study participants recommended that superiors not only assign mentors to new priests, but also provide enough information to mentors about their charges to be effective:

You're being assigned so-and-so and that's all you're told. We don't know what their strengths and weaknesses are, we don't know what we're supposed to do with this person to help them to be the best pastor. So I really do think more background [from the diocese] be given to the pastor of the associate [parochial vicars], getting what their strengths and weaknesses are, and stuff that would help the pastor develop that young priest into a future pastor. (Priest C)

Skilled mentors "come to understand . . . personalities, and how best to reach out" so as not to "crush" new priests' "excitement"; they "need to be molded and formed



uniquely and individually” (Priest D). A good pastor should “be very direct . . . about ‘this is what I expect you to do.’ . . . Above all, the expectations that the pastor has of this new priest have to be very clear” (Priest F).

Interviewees varied in their understanding of how mentoring support would work in the context of a formal program:

My job . . . is not to train him to be a good priest. He is a good priest. My job is to train him to be a good pastor. . . . In terms of a guy who’s newly ordained, you can’t throw everything at him at once. But some kind of suggestions of how to teach your parochial vicar to be a good pastor. (Priest F)

Not so much to feel that he’s being watched or being made uncomfortable, but just a mentoring. “Can I run this by you?” Or even something as simple as, “I’m having a rotten day, can I just talk to you?” “Come to dinner, yes!” (Priest D)

This last example resembled peer support as much as mentoring.

**Peer support groups.** Relating with fellow priests could be a vital part of the support element in a leadership development program: “People who have been priests for some time” could share their experiences with newly ordained priests and new pastors, which “could be an important component of helping them to learn from each other’s experiences” (Priest J).

There was general agreement among participants about the value of support groups to “come together and learn from others who have studied and applied various situations to [the] modern-day Church” (Priest G); to “assist us in some of the crucial things that are coming up” (Priest B); and to “just talk. That’s good. It gives me some place to say what’s on my mind” (Priest E).

A peer group of young priests can be a venue for “complaining about their pastors,” but eventually “you wake up” and the tone “move[s] from being destructive to

being constructive” (Priest H). Whatever is discussed in the group, its existence is nonetheless valuable: “I know so many young priests who are so disenchanting sometimes because of the action or the inaction of their pastors. I’m very glad that they have an opportunity to sit down and talk about those things with one another” (Priest H). Peer groups provide a form of mental health support.

***Maintenance of mental health.*** Several study participants stressed the importance for priests to have emotional support, if they are to develop as leaders in a healthy way:

So much . . . anxiety and stress in the priesthood come from . . . lack of proper boundaries. Knowing where does my life begin and yours end? What am I responsible for? . . . I think a lot of support and even psychotherapy can help. . . . A lot of priests get anxious because they feel like they’re living in a fishbowl. . . . Just the human formation of the priest—psychosexual, psychointellectual, how all these pieces come together—is very important. . . . A lot of priests are coming from tough backgrounds. Some of them struggle. (Priest B)

Mentors can also help new pastors maintain their mental health through their methods and philosophies of teaching:

We spend so much time trying to become invisible . . . that we don’t learn what we can because everybody is holding their hearts so close to their chests. But the reality of love is that you put it all out there, your entire self, and you allow other people to love you and to the conversion that is necessary. (Priest H)

**Roles of superiors.** In a parish setting, the bishop is referred to as the priests’ superior, which in secular organizations is equivalent to a supervisor with a direct report relationship. Findings discussed in the previous section revealed priests’ frustrations with the actions or inaction of their superiors, including bishops, the cardinal, and priest personnel board members. In designing a leadership development program for new

pastors, the study participants placed greater emphasis on the responsibilities of diocesan leaders and other authorities toward parish priests.

In brief, the study participants recommended that their superiors do three things: end the premature assignments of priests to jobs they are not ready for; acquire and convey better knowledge about the qualifications of new priests and the needs of the parishes to which they would be assigned; and provide adequate training to priests on a more consistent basis.

*Ending premature assignments.* Participants indicated that problems arise when new priests are assigned to positions they are not ready to handle, whether because of age, maturity level, or lack of knowledge of their own abilities and limits:

There are some basic [leadership and management] skill sets that need to be developed by the younger pastors. . . . Younger priests are being made pastors way sooner than they've ever been in our own history here in the archdiocese. (Priest D)

Premature assignments may be due to the shortage of priests or superiors' unfamiliarity with their abilities. Whatever the reason, there were repercussions "if you're . . . gullible or you're naïve" (Priest J). "For those who are immature, there are some mistakes that are made right off the bat that don't have to be made, if they're just made aware" (Priest D). "All kinds of things . . . are going on that we have to be more careful, more savvy [about], . . . that as beginning pastors, you want to make sure that you do" (Priest J).

While the superiors of some study participants were addressing the issue, more decisive preventive actions needed to be taken: "The archdiocese is trying to respond to needs in a better way but . . . they can help him become a better pastor" (Priest C).

***Conveying better knowledge about priests' qualifications and parish needs.***

“We could do a better job of helping our younger priests . . . with better-informed priests on the Priest Personnel Board, and a better knowledge of our priests” (Priest D). One participant recommended the diocese gather more information about its new parochial vicars and convey that information to the assigned pastors. Such information included “what their strengths and weaknesses are, and stuff that would help the pastor develop that young priest into a future pastor. . . . The development of the individual priest, knowledge of his background” (Priest C).

Without such knowledge provided by their own superiors, pastors “don’t know what we’re supposed to do with this person to help them to be the best pastor” (Priest C). With enough information to establish a working relationship, both mentor and protégé benefit: “That would be a helpful experience for the pastor but especially for the young priest” (Priest C).

Which parish a new pastor is assigned to, and when, were also important considerations in his success as a leader:

We need to do a better job of making sure that . . . the Priest Personnel Board are knowledgeable of all of the places, or at least certain regions of the diocese, and also have a better knowledge of the priests that they’re assigning. . . . Some basic skill sets [in leading a parish] . . . need to be developed by the younger pastors in . . . smaller places and then move them on. To put them in these more demanding areas for the first time is too overwhelming. (Priest D)

***Providing adequate and consistent training.*** All of a new priest’s superiors, both pastors and diocesan leadership, should contribute to his training: “There is great benefit to be gained when the diocese itself helps walk . . . younger priests in the fact that these are real responsibilities” (Priest D). The archdiocese also should provide clarification of

what those responsibilities are, especially those less familiar to new priests, such as administration (Priest D).

Commitment to a regular training program was essential: “Sometimes they would put out a program for new pastors, sometimes they won’t. Sometimes they take mentoring seriously, sometimes they don’t. . . . A consistent program . . . is something that they find hard to do” (Priest E).

Finally, sufficient time must be allotted for training to be effective: “They want so many people to talk about so much stuff. . . . They have so much agenda that they just don’t find a way to do it all” (Priest E).

### **Program for Mid-Career Pastors**

In designing a leadership development program for experienced pastors, study participants recommended inclusion of several elements: feedback and evaluation; direction and inspiration—pastoral, spiritual, and cultural—from superiors; continuing education to develop certain skills; and sabbaticals. Also included are participants’ suggestions for a leadership development program in the seminary.

**Feedback and evaluation.** Priest C discussed the importance of meaningful feedback for mid-career pastors, and how it is, and can be, accomplished. “We don’t really get evaluated and I think we should be.” Regular “legitimate evaluation” would be as “helpful” as it is in the secular world: “We’re kind of a business. Pastors are your branch managers and we want to make sure they’re doing the best job they can.”

The pastoral evaluation recommended by Priest C would assess

the skills of the pastor for personal relationships, on conveying the Gospel message, a sense of welcome, joy for what they are doing, the pastoral approach

to the sick, whatever are the qualities that the parish is looking for in a pastor, to see how he does those things.

An “objective” evaluation would be most “helpful.” Following his assessment, the pastor would have a “meeting with the personnel director or somebody with qualifications on issues.”

The results of evaluations would affect individual pastors differently. Priest C said that pastors should ask themselves every “10 years, 20 years, 30 years . . . what can I improve on?” Those who are “serious . . . would want to know that. The ones who are . . . coasting along” would “be pushed a little bit.” Pastors who are “doing a good job” would appreciate “affirmation.” Getting “great feedback . . . helps us to see what we really are . . . in people’s heart[s].”

For long-serving pastors whose “leadership style gets into a pattern of things,” even if it’s “a good pattern . . . evaluation would be helpful to the priest and to the diocese.” Unlike the business world, where evaluations determine “whether you get a raise or a promotion,” evaluations in the parish setting could determine whether a certain pastor “could go to a larger parish or . . . take on this responsibility? Is this somebody you could place in a parish that has some difficulties?”

As currently conducted, pastoral evaluations “do a fairly good job,” according to Priest C, but they are not objective. Instead they are based on “impressions the priests and personnel have about that person,” formed as the deans “go from parish to parish” and “talk to” the staff, deacons, finance council, and parish council.

The participants explained the use of a parish self-assessment tool known as “Indicators of Vitality” launched in 2012 in this particular archdiocese. This tool allows parish priests, parochial vicars, deacons, and parish council members to evaluate their

parishes using identifiable and objective norms in the areas of worship, education, community life, service, and administration to assess parish life and ministry.

Obtaining critiques from deacons and staff was, however, “a little hard because he’s their boss.” Furthermore, “pastors who are unhappy [are] not going to say I’m unhappy, because then they feel like the spotlight is on them and nothing happens.”

Priest C also suggested that “it would be great to have some kind of evaluation by your parishioners.”

**Direction and inspiration from superiors.** Study participants showed interest in receiving more guidance and encouragement from cardinal, bishops, retreat masters, and other superiors, as part of a leadership development program extending to pastoral, spiritual, and cultural matters.

*Personal.* To counter mid-career pastors’ tendency to “get comfortable . . . they need the stimulation of a vision” from a bishop who challenges them: “Have you thought of this? Have you thought about that?” (Priest E). Pastors would also benefit the more often “the cardinal could convene us and make that a priority,” a benefit that would flow to parishioners: “The closer I feel to him, the more clear I am about what I need to do with this parish” (Priest B).

At present bishops were not used “especially well in terms of the pastoral life of the Church and the vitality of the parishes” (Priest E). On visits to a parish every 3 years “to assess how well it’s doing, they don’t send a bishop, they send the dean,” even though “pastors respect the bishop much more” than deans (Priest E). Any inspiration is lost because “a bishop suggesting something means much more than a fellow pastor suggesting it” (Priest E).

As sources of direction and inspiration, cardinals also were “not really able to be a true shepherd of their priests” on account of being “very swept up in the administrative details” (Priest B).

***Spiritual.*** The “spiritual aspect” that mid-career pastors sought was different from that needed by their younger colleagues: “When the experience level has changed, you have to adapt to that. Good spiritual directors and good retreat masters know that in working with priests” (Priest J). However,

The problem the Church has is helping people identify their spiritual path, which varies with different people, different personalities. . . . Just like we need to do it for our lay people, . . . we should find a systematic way to help our priests identify their own spirituality. (Priest E)

Providing pastors with spiritual direction required an understanding of

the authors that they particularly relate to, to put their experiences into words; what they have learned from their life in their ministry, the virtues that they emphasize, the obstacles that they face, their favorite means of prayer, and the retreat experiences that are most likely to nourish them spiritually. (Priest E)

***Cultural.*** As part of his development as a leader, one study participant would like guidance and encouragement regarding “the intersection of faith and culture,” particularly how to lead “in an age of incredible secularism”:

We’re in a very bad state culturally, and where to begin the discussion or even hold the discussion is not easily understood by priests. . . . A lot of people . . . have no idea what we’re talking about half the time and it’s very sad. . . . We priests need some help. We need to know how we can be further developed, informed, to speak to a culture gone mad. (Priest B)

**Continuing education on specific skills.** Among the skills recommended for mid-career pastors as part of a leadership development program were preaching, mentoring, new faith-based initiatives, fundraising, and persuasion and negotiation.



**Preaching.** “The diocese should have a program with a videotape of preachers with professional scholars who can teach people how to preach [at] a professional level of training” (Priest E).

**Mentoring.** The art of mentoring involved insights that develop leadership skills in both mentor and protégé.

I think it’s important that [newly ordained priests] be put with very good pastors. . . . Sometimes you just have to rein them in a little bit because you don’t want them to burn out the first year. But at the same time, you do it without crushing them. . . . You come to understand . . . personalities, and how best to reach out. You could say the same thing to one guy and he understands perfectly, but you can’t turn around and say it exactly the same way to the other one; it would just crush him. (Priest D)

When I became a pastor, what were some of the things I wish my pastors had done for me? . . . If he could have said, “This is what I expect you to do, this is your responsibility, this I’ve done and I’m passing it on to you.” [Those expectations] may be justified or not, but at least the guy has to know that. . . . If they’re not justifiable, there can be some discussion. . . . That’s important. (Priest F)

The structure for mid-career pastors “would have to be somewhat reflective,” wherein “small groups and guys talking about . . . How have you been developing as a leader up to this point? . . . What were some of the difficulties? . . . What are your people skills? How would you rate them?” (Priest F).

**Faith-based initiatives.** Mid-career priests “should be encouraged to introduce new things into their parishes that are likely to survive even when they’re transferred, . . . that will continue even if a pastor comes along who doesn’t have much interest in it,” and which the laity should also “take . . . ownership” of (Priest E).

**Fundraising.** One participant suggested having “an expert come in and do a presentation on how to do fundraising, what are the dos and the don’ts of fundraising.”

This was a topic that “might work for both [new pastors and those in mid-career] but definitely for mid-career” (Priest G).

***Persuasion and negotiation.*** A leadership development program for mid-career pastors should include training in persuasion and negotiation skills to help in their dealings with the diocese such as “when priests are confronted with a challenge” (Priest I). Priests reported getting “hands-on” involvement “about things that the diocese is interested in,” but “indifferen[ce] about things that they’re not interested in,” as well as an unspoken message that “we’ve got problems of our own” (Priest I). Even if this inconsistency in providing direction was “understandable” because “bureaucracies don’t like problems,” pastors still needed a way to get the necessary help from their superiors (Priest I).

**Sabbaticals.** The recommended role of sabbaticals in a leadership development program is twofold: mid-career pastors should take them, and retired pastors should serve as their replacements.

Sabbaticals are important. And it’s harder and harder to let people go for sabbaticals because there are few priests. . . . So it will be very good to have some retired priests who are willing to take the priests’ place to go on sabbaticals. . . . [The Church] should encourage [mid-career priests] to do it and make it possible and help them financially and send somebody to take their place. (Priest E)

Some recommendations for leadership development began with more spiritual suggestions and ended with more practical advice:

It’s about listening. First and foremost, listening to [God], and then secondly, listening to the people that you’re serving. What are their needs? And then as best you can, meeting those needs and meeting them where they are. And then, as any good leader, bringing them to where the Lord wants them to be. . . . As I look at our seminarians, as I look at our younger priests, and I look at our younger pastors, there is so much promise. They’ve been prepared in so many ways.

They have many good tools . . . in their tool boxes. But unless we form them to be good leaders, those gifts will not come to their whole fruition. And so that's why, . . . on this most important aspect of our lives as priests being leaders, it is important for us not to forget that . . . they have what they need to be good leaders and continue to lead us where Jesus wants us to be. (Priest D)

We will all be growing and changing, and I think at some level, you just have to be a little more intentional about that content formation that we need to have as leaders and as men, just human beings. (Priest B)

I would like to form lay communities, men and women, married and single, who are spiritually formed, who could take on ministry in the Church, to which we could turn over some of our institutions. Some of whom would work in the world, some of whom would work in ministry but would form enduring communities, spiritually well formed, to re-image the living of a Christian life in this post-Christian environment. And the communities will draw their spiritualities from the many spiritualities of the Church. Right now that's happening in something called secular monasticism, but that's mostly outside the Church so it misses a lot of the wisdom the Church has to offer. (Priest E)

I think it would be good . . . to regularly send out, whether it's on email or snail mail, information on resources available for pastors. So that when we are sitting down and ready to do some of our reading, or taking a break in the afternoon, we have these resources that are there. Because right now, it's word of mouth. . . . But if there was something regularly coming out of the Office of Ministerial Formation that I could use, find resources that would help me in my role as a pastor, as a leader of a community, that would be great. (Priest G)

## **Summary**

Overall, the study participants' recommendations yielded designs for two types of leadership development programs. Programs for new pastors concerned the roles of superiors (no premature assignments, better knowledge of priests' qualifications and parish needs, and adequate and consistent training); subject matter for training (leadership skills, management skills, continuing spiritual formation, and special considerations for parishes with schools); teaching methods and approaches; and support for pastors (mentoring and apprenticeships, peer support groups, and maintenance of mental health). Programs for mid-career pastors involved feedback and evaluation; direction and

inspiration from superiors (personal, spiritual, and cultural); continuing education on specific skills (preaching, mentoring, faith-based initiatives, fundraising, persuasion and negotiation); and sabbaticals.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has summarized the findings of the research study on the leadership development experiences of 10 exemplary Roman Catholic pastors. Exemplary leadership in a parish setting could be categorized as spiritual leadership as well as organizational and community leadership. Spiritual leadership is expressed as a combination of values and qualities, as well as a set of skills and abilities, modeled on Christ's example of servant leadership. Organizational leadership suggests an experiential combination of qualities, skills, abilities, and values that include having a vision, involving talents in building up the organization, making decisions, or managing people or activities. Community leadership embodies the skills, values, and abilities necessary in leading the parish to foster the building of communities and to address its social problems. The essence of exemplary leadership is characterized as faith in God with self-sacrifice and service using specific skills to fulfill the mission of the Church.

Seven types of experiences were identified by participants as “defining” for their leadership development: impact of family background; drawing inspiration from role models and mentors; dealing with parish challenges and conflicts; experiencing the grace and mercy of God; ministering through priestly service; managing parish projects; and handling diocesan assignments. These experiences occurred at multiple levels of interaction—personal, interpersonal (one-to-one), group, organizational, and external. All 10 participants identified at least one experience in the personal, interpersonal, group,

and external levels of interaction as significant to their leadership development. All but three participants mentioned an experience associated with the organizational level of interaction. Five or more participants described each of the seven types of experiences.

The participants indicated that there were specific characteristics that made the defining experiences significant. These characteristics generally included elements of strong belief in the power of faith and prayer and the modeling of essential Christian values such as genuine self-giving, generosity of spirit, self-sacrificing love, and service. The defining experiences required that the individual possess certain skills and acumen in interpersonal relations, management, organization, and administration. In addition, the defining experiences provided opportunities for learning new skills by doing, observation, and learning from mistakes. Other characteristics that made the experiences significant were regularity, continuity, and determination.

The meaning that evolved from the leadership development experiences included transformation of leadership practices expressed as the participants' striving to learn and improve, becoming more collaborative, having a better understanding of authority roles as well as their obligations to other authorities, and dealing with the ambiguities of the transformative experience.

In considering other influences to leadership development, participants described the support received and recommendations for designing a leadership development program. Numerous changing factors determined the effectiveness of a support mechanism, such as who was supporting whom, and how and how often support was provided. The participants expressed that their leadership development support was not adequate.

In making recommendations for designing a leadership development program, the participants differentiated between programs for new pastors and pastors in mid-career. The program for new pastors included various subject matter for training, varied teaching methods and approaches, and multiple sources of support for pastors, including supportive roles of superiors. Leadership development programs designed for mid-career pastors contained these suggested components: feedback and evaluation; direction and inspiration from superiors; continuing education on specific skills; and sabbaticals.

The final chapter addresses the conclusions, implications, and recommendations associated with these findings.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter discusses the conclusions of this study, identifies contributions to theory, suggests implications for practice, and proposes recommendations for future research.

#### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions are drawn from the study findings in light of the established literature:

1. *Definition.* Exemplary leadership in a parish setting encompasses spiritual, organizational, and community leadership roles; the spiritual dimension is the underlying force driving leadership action.

2. *Types of experiences.* The experience of leadership development shows some of the significant types of experiences reported in the general leadership literature as essential to leadership development.

3. *Characteristics of experience.* Leadership development is a highly individual process of varied experiences, with particular characteristics and crossing different levels of interaction. Spiritual beliefs and positive values are integral contributors.

4. *Learning approaches.* Specific learning approaches are employed in the experience of leadership development.

5. *Transformation of leadership practices.* The meaning that evolved from the leadership development experiences was a gradual transformation in understanding and approaching leadership.

## **Conclusion 1: Definition**

Exemplary leadership in a parish setting encompasses spiritual, organizational, and community leadership roles; the spiritual dimension is the underlying force driving leadership action. Spiritual leadership is used in this study as a way of describing the pastors' core work as spiritual leaders of community worship and ritual activities and of caring for the spiritual life and growth of parishioners (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006); organizational leadership is the ability to work with people toward a common goal and to communicate a vision for the parish community (Carroll, 2006; Duch, 1990); and community leadership is the ability to involve community members in building the parish and in addressing its social problems (Duch, 1990; Schuth, 2006).

The working definition of leadership for this study, based on the literature, was “an influence relationship among leaders and followers, who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1993, p. 102). Two themes underlie this definition: (a) a focus on interaction between leaders and followers, both affecting each other, and (b) an emphasis on real changes that reflect the mutual purposes of leader and followers.

The first element of the working definition—an influence relationship among leaders and followers—was found to be incomplete. First, the findings clearly showed descriptions of the participants' interactions with fellow priests and superiors, in addition to followers. Second, the use of the term “followers” does not capture the Catholic Church's call for shared pastoral ministry with lay people and a “greater sense of mutuality in ministry between pastors and lay people” (Carroll, 2006, p. 13). Thus, the first element of the working definition should refer to “people,” not “followers.” Third, the working definition does not bring out the effective source of influence in the



relationship. In the experience of the participants, the interactions between leaders and “people” find deep and potent motivation in shared spirituality. Because of this spirituality, there is a relationship of mutual influence among members of the community. This spiritual dimension is, in fact, the distinguishing aspect of pastoral leadership as compared to secular leadership. The Christocentric reference is specific and fundamental to pastoral leadership in the Roman Catholic Church (Karpinski, 2002).

The second element of the working definition—intent of real changes reflective of mutual purposes—was also found to be incomplete. Pursuit of real changes that reflect mutual purposes was not clear in the participants’ definitions of leadership. Although leadership as an influence relationship was directed at some verifiable and concrete purposes (e.g., to bring people to God to achieve the Church’s mission; to help people develop and understand church teachings; to make people essential to and interdependent with the community) and included vision as part of the definition, it was not clear whether such purposes and vision for the parish were communicated and shared by members of the parish community.

The study’s findings revealed that participants’ perspective of leadership was focused more on the leader as a person and less about leadership as a function of the relationship between leaders and followers, or about leadership as a process. The participants saw leadership in terms of who the leader is and held the idea that the leader’s traits, personality, and character inform the practice of leadership. This view of leadership is compatible with the first-generation leadership theories that focus on the individual leader.

The participants' definitions of exemplary leadership are also consistent with the literature on servant, transformational, and spiritual leadership whose concepts align with the Catholic Church's leadership norms for pastors and the theological concept of priestly ministry (Karpinski, 2002). Specifically, the study's findings were consistent with the following concepts in the literature:

- The servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1995) characteristics of service orientation, listening, empathy, commitment to the growth of people, and community building, among others.
- The transformational leadership (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978) perspectives of a highly developed set of moral values, creation of a vision, trust, and collaboration.
- The spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) characteristics of altruistic love (the practice of genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others) and creation of a vision.
- The concept of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), which focuses on the development of relationships. Elements of servant, transformational, and spiritual leadership models identified in the study's findings as previously discussed can be found in the root concept of authentic leadership.

The study's findings are generally compatible with the shared leadership concept (Pearce, 2004) and elements of distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007) by the participants' emphasis on collaborative ministry, but to a much lesser extent than the focus on person/role. They are also consistent with situational leadership theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), as revealed in the findings of participants' experiences of success in one parish that did not translate to similar success in another parish context. The study's

findings on the spiritual goals and mission of the Church are, however, not compatible with the emphasis on motivations, incentives, and goals in leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975) and path-goal theory (House & Dessler, 1974). They are also not consistent with complexity theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) when applied to mature and stable parish organizations in this study.

Based on the above discussion, the definition of exemplary leadership in a parish setting can be revised as follows: an influence relationship among leaders and people that is (a) motivated by common spiritual beliefs and values and (b) aimed at effecting change that is in tune with expectations and purposes shared by the parish community. In addition, the findings indicate that contemporary leadership theories can be applied in the parish setting.

## **Conclusion 2: Types of Experiences**

Participants mentioned some types of experiences that the general leadership literature has reported as essential to leadership development. The literature indicates that the so-called lessons of experience are most pivotal to development of leadership skills (McCall et al., 1988), and several significant experiences have been reported (Van Velsor et al., 1998). Overall, five of the 11 experiences described by Van Velsor et al. are consistent with this study's findings. These experiences include developmental job assignments, mentoring, hardships, personal growth programs, and self-help. Table 8 lists the selected leadership development experiences and their appearances in each context.

Table 8

*Leadership Development Experiences Found in the General Literature and in This Study*

<b>Experiences described in the general literature</b>	<b>Experiences identified in the parish setting</b>
Developmental job assignments	Managing new projects, handling diocesan assignments
Multirater feedback	
Skills-based training	
Feedback-intensive programs	
Developmental relationships Mentoring Executive coaching	Influence of priest and lay mentors
Hardships	Personal and work challenges, mistakes or failures, dealing with parish conflicts and problem staff
Action learning	
Outdoor challenge programs	
Personal growth programs	Sabbaticals, graduate education
Self-help activities	Independent reading on spirituality and management

The study's findings confirm past research on leadership development of Protestant clergy, which showed mentoring, learning from role models, hardships (e.g., learning from mistakes, dealing with problem staff, starting from scratch), personal growth programs, and self-help activities as the main approaches to leadership development (Cohall & Cooper, 2010; Gortner & Dreibelbis, 2005; McKenna et al., 2007; Tunnicliff, 2005). The study's findings do not reveal the presence of other experiences reported in the general leadership literature, such as multirater feedback, skills-based training, feedback-intensive programs, action learning, and executive coaching.

The study's findings show that except for one participant who held a doctorate in leadership development, no others undertook leadership skills training, an indication of the lack of attention to leadership development. Feedback-intensive programs (e.g., job rotations), outdoor challenge, and action learning are also not identified. This could be

due to lack of familiarity with these kinds of experiences and lack of alignment between these activities and the essentially contemplative nature of the participants' work. Due to the prohibitive cost of executive coaching, this experience may not have practical application in the parish setting.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that (a) some leadership development experiences identified in the general leadership literature (developmental assignments, mentoring, dealing with hardships, personal growth programs, and self-help programs) can readily translate into the parish setting, and (b) the value of experiences such as leadership skills training, feedback-intensive programs, outdoor challenge, and action learning has not been explored.

### **Conclusion 3: Characteristics of Experience**

Leadership development is a highly individual process of varied experiences, with particular characteristics and crossing different levels of interaction. Spiritual beliefs and positive values are integral contributors. The process of leadership development of pastors appears to be highly individualistic. The same type of leadership development experiences occurred at different times in participants' careers (e.g., in the seminary and after ordination), and the lessons from early experiences (e.g., family background, early schooling) may have been utilized continuously or not utilized until later after priestly ordination. The study's findings indicate the importance of experiences at multiple levels of interaction: personal, interpersonal (one-to-one), group, organizational, and external. These levels may reflect the nature of leadership development as an individual ability that is performed with or supported by others and relating to an organization that functions in a unique environment. The study's findings are consistent with the literature on

leadership development of Protestant clergy, which revealed the influences of mentors, role models, and other people in different stages of their career (McKenna et al., 2007; Tunnicliff, 2005).

The participants noted that many of the experiences deemed contributory to their leadership development were hinged on spiritual beliefs and practices and positive values. In addition to these characteristics, each of the experiences identified by the participants contained other important features (e.g., learning by observation, learning from mistakes, regularity of duties, involving other people, managing the work of others, and determination), implying that spiritual beliefs and practices and positive values may not be sufficient.

This study's findings are consistent with the literature indicating that on-the-job experiences are powerful because of the challenges they present (Lindsey et al., 1987; McCauley et al., 1994) and that learning is a dynamic process that can be planned, but a lot of learning takes place incidentally (McCall, 2010). Although the findings showed that some experiences occurred with regularity (e.g., ministering through priestly service), many experiences deemed contributory to leadership development did not. On-the-job experiences and assignments such as drawing inspiration from role models and mentors, dealing with parish challenges and conflicts, experiencing the grace and mercy of God, managing parish projects, and handling diocesan assignments occurred over time, and much of the learning took place informally and incidentally.

Allen and Hartman (2008) categorized the sources of learning within the framework of Conger's (1992) four primary approaches to leadership development programming: personal growth, conceptual understanding, skill/competency building,

and feedback. The study's findings revealed two primary approaches in use: leadership development through personal growth (e.g., mentoring relationships, fellowships through priest support groups, sabbaticals) and leadership development through skill building (e.g., developmental assignments or on-the-job experiences that provide challenge and opportunity to learn). The two other primary approaches—leadership development through conceptual understanding and leadership development through feedback—were not explicit in the study's findings. Within the personal growth category, individual and group reflection in the context of leadership experience was not identified by the participants. It could be possible that the participants had such reflections during retreats and workshops for other purposes but did not think about it specifically as leadership development during the interview. Self-evaluations are common in retreats and clergy workshops but are often taken for granted. Within the category of skill building, completion of personal development plans, just-in-time training, and action learning were not identified.

Van Velsor et al. (1998) proposed that developmental experiences are most effective when all three elements of assessment, challenge, and support are present. The study's findings indicated that the leadership development experiences of participants lacked the element of assessment of the individual's current leadership strengths, level of leadership effectiveness, and development needs. Although a less-structured process of soliciting feedback from a colleague was reported in order to solicit help with certain kinds of problems, self-assessment such as reflecting on leadership decision processes or analyzing mistakes was not practiced.

Van Velsor et al. (1998) emphasized that situations that stretch or challenge people can be powerful experiences for leadership development because these “challenging experiences force people out of their comfort zone. They create disequilibrium, causing people to question the adequacy of their skills, framework, and approaches” (p. 11). The element of challenge was described in this study’s findings; however, the challenging experiences did not lead the participants to question the adequacy of their leadership skills or the framework and approaches to leadership.

Finally, the study’s findings are consistent with the importance of individual and environmental factors for facilitating leadership development. Van Velsor et al. (1998) conceptualized support for the individual as one of the elements of effective developmental experience. “Support is a key factor in maintaining a leader’s motivation to learn and grow. . . . It [support] helps engender a sense of self-efficacy about learning, a belief that one can learn, grow, and change” (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, pp. 10-11). The particular individual and environmental factors influencing leadership development were clearly described by the study participants (e.g., support of mentors, fellow priests, and lay people; superiors’ support or lack of support for continuous learning and development).

Based on the above discussion, the leadership development experience is highly individualistic, occurs at different stages in the participant’s life and career, is characterized by specific features, and aligns with only some primary approaches to leadership development programming.



#### **Conclusion 4: Learning Approaches**

Specific learning approaches were employed in participants' leadership development experience. The literature indicates that pastors reflect in action as they prepare sermons, teach, counsel, or manage their congregations or parishes (Carroll, 1992). The study's findings seem to imply that participants engage in reflective practice when leading parish communities in worship, engaging in pastoral care and spiritual renewal, and experiencing the grace and mercy of God. The study's findings specific to spiritual leadership roles are consistent with York-Barr et al.'s (2001) description of the elements of reflective practice as time, openness, awareness in thought processes, examination of beliefs and practices, and acquisition of deeper insights that lead to action.

Kolb (1984) indicated that experience is a catalyst to adult education, and learning is both an individual and a continuous process grounded in experience. This study's findings indicated that leadership-related experiences such as dealing with challenges and conflicts, managing parish projects, and handling diocesan assignments were not planned. These experiences were simply ad hoc, occurring by chance or happenstance. As a consequence, the participants learned intuitively and spontaneously, in an unplanned and unstructured manner based on the demands of the situation. Through close observation of people and learning from mistakes and failures, they gained new insights and perspectives.

Kolb's experiential learning theory views learning as a four-step cycle:  
(a) immediate concrete experience becomes the basis for (b) observation and reflection;  
(c) observations are then assimilated into a set of ideas implicating new actions, and

(d) action is taken. The cycle is continuous and reinitiated by a new experience. The study's findings indicated that reflection, the second step of the cycle, did not occur as revealed by most participants who had not thought about their own learning in terms of leadership development until being involved in this study. This indicates that participants are not aware of the value of reflecting on their leadership-related experiences and that they do not understand that the same reflection put into spirituality can be applied to leadership. There is reflection in action but not after action, and certainly not in advance. Most participants did not know how to learn from their leadership experiences, perhaps because they had no conceptual understanding of leadership since they had not attended a leadership training program. Leadership may have been equated merely with spiritual and pastoral ministry. Clergy retreats often focus on reflection about one's relationship with God and others but rarely focus explicitly on how one leads an organization or a group of parishioners. The study's findings also indicated that the experiences were not being developed in accordance with the four primary approaches to leadership development programming proposed by Conger (1992), where reflection and feedback are important steps to learn and improve the ability to lead.

The study's findings are not consistent with Ferry and Ross-Gordon's (1998) view that "the key to expertise does not seem to reside in merely gaining experience, but in how the individual uses experience as a learning mechanism" (p. 107); that the amount of experience a person possesses necessarily indicates the use of reflective practice. Most of the participants claimed mistakes and failures as sources of learning, but acknowledged that they did not spend a lot of time analyzing; they simply repeated what was successful. This approach could be explained by the fact that the participants may

not have any idea that ministering is leading and leadership can be learned systematically. One can analyze all day but may not come up with the solution for lack of guidance or pertinent knowledge.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) described informal learning as unstructured, though planned and intentional (e.g., self-directed learning, coaching, and mentoring), whereas incidental learning “may be taken for granted, tacit or unconscious” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26) (e.g., trial-and-error experimentation). The study’s findings indicated consistent use of informal and incidental learning from the experiences of mentoring and learning from trial and error. However, such informal and incidental learning did not apply Marsick and Watkins’ (1990, 2001) model for enhancing informal and incidental learning that emphasizes individuals’ intentionality, proactivity, and critical reflectivity as affecting the nature of their learning. With critical reflection absent, as reported in the study’s findings, tacit knowledge and beliefs cannot surface, stimulate proactivity, and drive learners’ creativity. However, participants might have learned by reflecting on their experiences through journaling or through group discussions, where issues could be systematically analyzed and solutions suggested and tried.

The study’s findings are consistent with research regarding learning from fathers and mentors (Goldman, 2005) and learning from role models, other people, and God (McKenna et al., 2007). Learning from fathers, mentors, role models, fellow priests, and God were identified as experiences contributing to leadership development; learning from God through Scripture was a specific experience for most participants.

Based on the above discussion, Kolb’s experiential learning theory provides a useful structure for considering the experience of leadership development. However,

there was indication that in leadership-related experiences, explicit reflection did not accompany or follow experience. Incidental and informal learning can become an important part of a participant's repertoire of knowledge if taken up and reflected upon formally and systematically.

### **Conclusion 5: Transformation of Leadership Practices**

The meaning that evolved from the leadership development experiences was a gradual transformation in understanding and approaching leadership. Ackerman (1986) indicated that in contrast to developmental or transitional change, transformation is a journey or a voyage of discovery that may have no predictable end state. Transformation is precipitated by the act of faith that requires "letting go," a process of "profound personal experience for those in position to take the risk . . . empowering the human spirit and changing one's beliefs about reality. . . . Transformation is not possible without a leap of faith, individually or organizationally" (p. 50). Owen (1990) suggested that "the essence of transformation lies in the odyssey or passage of the human spirit as it moves from one formal manifestation to another" (p. 6).

Rooke and Torbert (2005) reported that leaders can transform from one action logic to another, for example, from Experts to Achievers, from Achievers into Individualists, and from Individualists to Strategists. In the context of pastoral leadership as described by the participants, this transformation could be from "benevolent dictator" to collaborative leader, or from the exercise of collective leadership to individual leadership.

Fisher and Torbert (1995) opined that transformation requires a time period of a decade or more because of the "lengthy and up-ending journey" (p. xv) of personal

transformation that individual leaders must go through. In this study, the participants described transformations in their leadership knowledge, skills, and styles as a process that evolved over time from early childhood and in the course of careers that spanned 10 to 25 years. The study's findings indicated that the participants believed their leadership development experiences helped them focus on learning and improvement, be more collaborative, better understand authority, and acknowledge ambiguity. Thus, in the exercise of spiritual, organizational, and community leadership roles, the participants' understanding of and approach to leadership were transformed over time.

However, the findings also indicated that the participants learned leadership mostly through informal and incidental leadership development experiences (except for one participant who had a doctorate in leadership development), and there was no indication that they developed leadership through systematic reflection and intentional acquisition of leadership skills. Failing to show learning from experience, they cannot also reliably prove they have been fully transformed as leaders. Transformation of leadership practices demands prior leadership development experiences capable of providing the groundwork for leadership plans and future actions. Without effective ongoing learning from lived experiences, one will be hard pressed to speak properly of leadership transformation.

Based on the above discussion, transformation of leadership practices characterizes the evolutionary change in beliefs about and approaches to leadership as a consequence of leadership development experience.

## **Contributions to Theory**

This section suggests possibilities for extending the development of theory with respect to leadership, leadership development, and experiential learning. For theory related to leadership, the study's conclusions suggest that the understanding of leadership in the parish setting may require focusing on a broader set of activities than at present, including the nature of influence relationships and the role of spirituality in the overall understanding of leadership. This may suggest areas of opportunity for differentiating theory related to leadership in the workplace and leadership in the religious context. The conclusions also suggest that some contemporary theories of leadership find practical application in the parish setting. This opens up possibilities for understanding leadership through the lens of specific theories (in addition to what has already been reported in the literature).

For theory related to leadership development, the study's conclusions suggest that on-the-job experiences are critical to leadership development; that experiences at different levels of interaction are an important consideration; and that individual and environmental factors are important for facilitating leadership development. These conclusions leave the door open for theory viewed through the lens of specific experiences and levels of interaction, and for understanding the influence of individual and environmental support for leadership development. The conclusions also suggest that some important leadership development experiences described in the general literature are present and that other experiences are not. These conclusions open up possibilities for understanding a wide range of experiences that can provide a basis for designing an effective leadership development program.

For theory related to experiential learning, the study's conclusions suggest that informal and incidental learning resulting from significant unplanned or unexpected events are commonly applied. This may suggest areas of opportunity for understanding how different leadership development experiences lead to different opportunities and priorities for learning. The study's conclusions further suggest that Kolb's learning cycle provides a useful structure for understanding the learning process in the experience of leadership. These conclusions open up possibilities for understanding the learning process with respect to leadership development experience and how that understanding can be used to design leadership development programs that lead to dynamic and effective learning in the parish context. This has important implications for priestly formation and religious education, as discussed in the following section.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study offers empirical evidence for understanding key leadership development experiences of Roman Catholic pastors in the United States. The findings and conclusions have implications for educators charged with priestly formation or with leadership development.

Several of the experiences described in the study could be systematized and integrated into a specific program that builds on components for spiritual formation that are already compulsory in a priest's theological-pastoral formation. The result is a general recommendation for a leadership development program geared toward the needs of new pastors and of pastors at mid-career. A framework for designing such a leadership development program is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Leadership Development Program for New and Mid-Career Pastors*

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Sources of learning for new pastors</b>	<b>Sources of learning for mid-career pastors</b>
Personal growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual and group reflection on leadership</li> <li>• Developmental relationships, specifically mentoring and apprenticeships for 2+ years; training of mentors</li> <li>• Fellowships with peer groups: sharing experiences</li> <li>• Sabbatical leaves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual and group reflection on leadership</li> <li>• Developmental relationships with superiors, for direction and inspiration:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Personal: bishop to provide guiding vision; cardinal available as “true shepherd” of priests</li> <li>—Spiritual: exemplary spiritual directors and retreat masters; help in discerning priests’ own spiritual paths</li> <li>—Cultural: intersection of faith and culture</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mentoring: exemplary pastors as mentors</li> <li>• Fellowships with peer groups</li> <li>• Sabbatical leaves to be enforced for priests’ renewal and restoration; retired pastors to serve as temporary replacements</li> </ul>
Conceptual understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal schooling, classroom-based learning, web-based learning, self-paced learning, satellite programs, and other forms of learning that foster conceptual understanding of leadership theory and cognitive understanding of leadership development phenomenon</li> </ul>	
Skill building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental assignments</li> <li>• Personal development plans</li> <li>• Just-in-time training</li> <li>• Action learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development plans</li> <li>• Just-in-time training</li> <li>• Action learning</li> </ul>
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of assessment tools to obtain feedback from multiple sources, including parishioners, to objectively evaluate pastors’ performance at regular intervals, with results conveyed to the pastors by or through the parish personnel director or other qualified diocesan official</li> <li>• Discussion of pastors’ personal development plan with superior</li> </ul>	

The leadership development program described in the table are consistent with Allen and Hartman’s (2008) model linking sources of learning to Conger’s (1992) four primary approaches to leadership development: (a) personal growth, (b) conceptual



understanding, (c) skill building, and (d) feedback. In creating a leadership development program, it is necessary to employ the list of sources of learning with Conger's four approaches working in concert (Allen & Hartman, 2008). Mintzberg (2003) recommends leadership development to start in the early career stage when the individual has time to engage in such training.

Following individual assessment, conceptual understanding of leadership is provided initially while some leadership skills are practiced. Conceptual understanding of leadership comes from formal schooling or classroom-based training and other educational experiences such as web-based learning, self-paced learning, and satellite programs. Leadership development through skill building involves identifying key leadership skills that can be taught to participants. Certain aspects of skills such as group facilitation, goal setting, decision making, and persuasion and negotiation can be taught, but experience using these skills is required for real learning. Work experiences allow individuals to practice and improve their leadership skills, and implement their conceptual understanding of leadership.

Once some level of conceptual understanding and skill building is achieved, all other sources of learning should be integrated depending on the individual's motivation and career stage. Feedback from various sources, a leadership development approach that plays an important role in secular leadership development programs, has an equally significant role for priests; the more information provided by mentors, superiors, teachers, fellow priests, parish staff, parishioners, and other lay people, the more new and mid-career pastors would benefit as leaders. Assessment tools can be used to generate such feedback from multiple sources. The superiors' feedback through discussion of the

pastors' personal development plans is also beneficial for the pastors' leadership development.

The sources of learning for leadership development of pastors through personal growth aim to improve self-awareness and encourage self-exploration. These include opportunities for individual and group reflection on leadership, developmental relationships with mentors, fellowships with fraternal groups, and sabbaticals. The practice of individual and group reflection on leadership is a source of learning that fits smoothly into the spiritual nature of priests' education and pastoral work. For mid-career pastors, sources of learning are augmented by developmental relationships with superiors who are ultimately responsible for providing direction and inspiration to their priests.

Developmental assignments for new pastors such as parishes with specific challenges provide an opportunity to apply leadership skills. Both new and mid-career pastors can greatly benefit from completion of personal development plans that identify specific areas of leadership they want to improve and specify action steps to be taken. Just-in-time training provides pastors with guidance on specific issues relevant to the changing times (e.g., response to current controversy with government over religious freedom, dealing with millennial parishioners). Action learning as a source of learning encourages pastors to try new things and to stretch their thinking and behavior. This experience allows them to engage in a continuous process of learning and critical reflection supported by other people, with the emphasis of getting things done.

Leadership development strategies should align with each participant's learning style, the subject matter to be learned, and the scope of time allotted for achieving the

stated goal. This suggests that it is possible to frame individual leadership development plans according to a participant's needs.

Some elements of the leadership development program could be standardized such as the assessment tool for feedback and personal development plans. Leadership training programs could be standardized and elements of leadership can be taught. However, to be successful, training must be designed to improve conceptual leadership abilities and develop and hone teachable leadership skills.

For the subject matter or content to be learned effectively, it should be presented using a combination of interventions, teaching methods, and approaches to ensure the participants' personal growth, conceptual understanding of leadership and leadership development, building of skills and competencies in leadership, and self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses as leaders through feedback. Individual-level variables should be considered such as age, learning styles, development level, and self-efficacy as they affect the results of the program.

Leadership development occurs in various circumstances that includes the classroom, job, and organizational contexts. Strategies for leadership development may need to employ all the contexts of the development process using the approaches and sources of learning used for leadership development in order to establish a solid foundation for long-term and comprehensive development.

Effective leadership development experience also requires a supportive environment to foster individual development. Table 10 shows several types of support that pastors can draw from, such as individual initiatives and support from superiors, fellow priests, and parish staff and parishioners.

Table 10  
*Leadership Development Support of New and Mid-Career Pastors*

Source	Examples
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in efforts for mental health maintenance: psychotherapy; human formation (psychosexual, psychointellectual)</li> <li>• Follow mentors' examples of positive methods and pedagogical philosophies</li> <li>• Engage in physical and mental health self-care</li> </ul>
Superiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign inexperienced priests to parishes with mentoring pastors before any major leadership appointment</li> <li>• Improve knowledge of priests' qualifications and parish needs: keep Priest Personnel Board well-informed; give pastors information about new priests assigned to them</li> <li>• Provide adequate and consistent training of priests</li> <li>• Clarify pastors' responsibilities</li> <li>• Encourage pastors' self-care</li> <li>• Express support and concern for pastors; make pastors feel valued</li> </ul>
Other priests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fraternal support groups</li> </ul>
Parish staff and parishioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendships</li> <li>• Mutual support</li> </ul>

In developing a leadership development program for seminarians, leadership education should be integrated into the pastoral formation dimension of seminary formation in order to equip future priests to work with diverse constituencies, understand group dynamics, and handle their roles as leaders in a secular as well as a religious sense. As part of the subject matter for training, coursework in seminaries should teach leadership as such and should incorporate standard leadership concepts (competencies, management techniques, interpersonal skills, etc.) into courses that are not specifically on leadership. Action learning is a teaching method and approach by which the seminarian would learn the importance of applied, hands-on, practical leadership through on-site experience or summer internships in parishes, where he could also learn to integrate all aspects of leadership formation (supervision, feedback, evaluation, etc.). Following

ordination, a consistent mentoring process would give seminary graduates the time and guidance they need to fully develop their leadership capabilities. Mentoring should include direction from the mentor as well as opportunities for the priest to observe, work alongside, and emulate his mentor—all in all, not unlike a course in “how to be a good pastor.” The proposed programs address what is lacking in participants’ experiences of certain essential leadership development characteristics identified in the general literature and in the especially influential studies of Conger (1992), Allen and Hartman (2008), and Marsick and Watkins (1990, 2001).

This study uncovered much that is already present in the leadership development of pastors and identified the main lacunae in that development. The preparation of clergy as future leaders could derive important lessons from the present study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings and conclusions derived from this study present opportunities for future research on priestly life and ministry, as follows.

1. *A quantitative study across parishes.* This study was qualitative in nature, providing an in-depth description of the leadership development experiences of priests in a parish setting. The study provides a starting point for a broader study of parishes by identifying at least the initial content of a survey questionnaire that could be developed to assess the frequency of these findings across parishes. Moreover, findings from a quantitative study, coupled with the results of this qualitative study, could provide a base of data by which theories could be developed to address leadership development in the parish context.

2. *Comparative research of the leadership development experiences of exemplary leaders in Roman Catholic religious orders.* Within the Roman Catholic Church there are religious orders or institutes, whose members are under the leadership of a religious superior. The religious priests typically conduct many different organizational ministries, especially in the fields of education and health care. Similar research employing a different religious context would provide helpful data to enhance the findings of this study.

3. *Exploration of the impact of such personal factors as charisma, personal attitudes and values, and communication style in the leadership development of a pastor.* Several personal factors essential to pastoral leadership have been identified in the literature. The participants felt that personal factors were important, but there was no thematic agreement. One approach to exploring these factors might be to develop an assessment tool for established personality indicators. Once specific personal factors can be identified, research relating to specific experiences might be justified: Do certain factors enhance any of the experiences? Is there a relationship between personal factors and a supportive environment?

4. *Exploration of the general environmental factors that support the leadership development of pastors, including specifics of how superiors encourage and support leadership development.* Such a study should bring the church superiors to engage the current realities of the leadership development programs available to pastors.

5. *Exploration of possible interventions that could be used to support continuing leadership development of pastors.* How can diocesan priests be better linked together in fraternal support groups? How can leadership development be integrated into the

ordinary religious and group activities that are regular features of parish life? How can the Church make better use of experienced pastors as mentors?

### **Reflections Gathered from Participants About the Study**

Before closing the final interview, the participants were asked for their reflections about the study. Several participants expressly thanked the researcher for including them in the study. Most participants gratefully recognized that their participation provided them with the following “opportunities”: “to reflect and . . . organize some thoughts” (Priest A); “to truly talk about the gift of priesthood and particularly my own experiences, . . . to reflect on the gift” (Priest D); “to verbalize . . . [and] reflect on those critical leadership experiences; . . . [to sit] down and [say] this is what it’s all about (Priest F)”; “to look back on all the things I have done [and] learned; . . . [to] pause for reflection” (Priest G); “to think [and] pray about leadership and to reflect on it” (Priest H); “to think a little bit more about this than I normally do . . . about how I’ve learned what I’ve learned” (Priest I); “to think about what I’m doing and why I’m doing it” (Priest J).

A few priests noted that these actions of talking, thinking, and reflecting on their leadership development experiences, prompted by their participation in the study, constituted something they rarely or never did:

It’s not often that I’m given the opportunity to truly talk about the gift of priesthood and particularly my own experiences. (Priest D)

Forcing me to verbalize . . . has been very helpful for me to reflect on those critical leadership experiences, which really I haven’t done up to this point. . . . I’ve been a pastor 22 years, and I’ve never really sat down and said this is what it’s all about. (Priest F)

You sometimes forget about what you’ve done in the past. (Priest G)

Some participants attributed the rarity of these behaviors to the nature of the priesthood itself: “You are so focused on what you’re doing now” (Priest G); “We are putting out fires metaphorically, . . . just going from one situation to another, reacting, reacting, reacting” (Priest J); “We don’t spend a lot of time thinking about these things in a theoretical way” (Priest I); “I wish that every priest were undergoing these interviews . . . [to] have an opportunity to think about their leadership and their pastoring” (Priest H).

A few priests’ reflective behaviors led them to mention areas of vulnerability about themselves or the Church:

I don’t think that we have kept up with the need to change our training process to meet the ongoing needs. I don’t think we knew how. (Priest C)

I often think of [the Pope who] kept speaking of the great springtime that would come. I know we’ve had many things that seem to be holding off that springtime. (Priest D)

What I have experienced these last few weeks is the places where I have failed or the places where I see my own shortcomings. More than I’ve seen my qualities or the aspects of leadership, what I have seen is the other side and the tremendous amount of work that still needs to be done. (Priest H)

Others acknowledged personal or institutional problems such as these, but saw them in a more positive light, one that “helped me to realize how I can go forward and even do a better job, . . . places I can probably improve on” (Priest G).

The participants who focused on their religious beliefs and spirituality, especially in terms of transformation, expressed the most positive reflective conclusions:

“Live the mystery” is my motto for life, [by] which I mean live the mystery of God’s unfolding love. (Priest E)

I am utterly thrilled with what God is doing with my life. I am not what I want to be, but I am not what I used to be. A wonderful change has come over me and God has been good to me. I am more alive at age 50 than I ever was at age 20.



And I expect to be more alive at age 70 than I am today. When I say alive, I mean joyful, confident, serene, and thrilled with what God is doing with me. . . . And I expect to continue growing. (Priest B)

Priesthood has saved me because . . . if I were in the secular world, I know I would be a completely different person. Completely different. Because I am incredibly . . . competitive, and I do not like to lose, I don't. And if I had stayed in the profession that I was in, I think I would have been ruthless in the pursuit of very specific goals in terms of success. And God has saved me from that. (Priest H)

Overall, most participants characterized the interviews and discussions concerning their leadership development experiences as generally “helpful” or “useful” (Priest F, Priest G, Priest J, Priest I) and “good” for them as individuals (Priest A, Priest F, Priest G), even “a blessing” (Priest A, Priest D). They hoped that their remarks were “helpful” to the researcher (Priest A, Priest F). They found it “an interesting process” (Priest I), “enjoyed listening to the questions” (Priest J), and expressed interest in seeing both short- and long-term outcomes of the study itself: “I will look forward to reading your dissertation” (Priest J); “Maybe if some sort of program like this developed, it would help me to be a more effective leader in the future” (Priest I).

I'm kind of excited that you are going to give us a framework for bishops to look at, what are some things we can do that we haven't been doing that may make a difference in retaining our people and giving back. (Priest C)

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This study has contributed to both theory and practice by providing a definition of exemplary leadership in a parish setting, identifying key leadership development experiences, describing important characteristics of these experiences and the meanings derived from them, and delineating the specific learning approaches employed in the experience of leadership development. Three leadership roles in the parish setting were

identified. The leadership development experiences of pastors described in this study suggest that, ultimately, it is the spiritual force that vitalizes the pastors toward the Church's mission. It is hoped that this study will be helpful to scholars and practitioners, and most importantly to the clergy in their quest to provide leadership in this changing world.

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## APPENDIX A:

### RECRUITMENT MATERIALS FOR REFERRAL SOURCES

#### Letter E-mailed to Referral Sources

The attached letter is being sent to you as a request to assist with my dissertation research. I am requesting your help in identifying pastors who, in your experience, are *exemplary leaders* within this archdiocese. I would greatly appreciate your thoughtful consideration. Thank you.

Rosemarie A. Ong

Rosemarie A. Ong  
1401 N Street, NW #702  
Washington, DC 20005  
Telephone: 202-265-1293; E-mail: [rmaong@gwmail.gwu.edu](mailto:rmaong@gwmail.gwu.edu)

Date:

Recipient:

Title:

Address:

Dear [NAME]:

I am a doctoral candidate at George Washington University in the Executive Leadership Program, Graduate School of Education and Human Development. I would like to ask your help in nominating participants for my dissertation research on leadership development among parish priests.

A summary of the research study is attached. Specifically, I am asking for suggestions of pastors who, in your experience, are *exemplary leaders* within this archdiocese. I would like to conduct in-depth interviews with pastors considered exemplary leaders, who have at least 10 years' experience leading one or more parishes in any location.

I request that you not contact any potential study participants, as I will do that once I have all the suggestions. The methodology I am using requires that I make all contact, although I would appreciate the ability to use your name as a way of introduction.

If you are able to assist, please use the following definition when offering suggestions of exemplary pastors. For the purpose of this study, this is what we mean by "exemplary":

*Superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (1).*

In your experience working with all the pastors in this archdiocese, do any come to mind as **exemplary leaders**, using the above definition? If so, please share the names of up to 10 potential research participants. Each name will be given the same consideration—in other words, the list is not a ranking.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

If you can help by identifying potential research participants who meet the criteria described in this letter, and are willing to let me use your name as a referral source, please e-mail or call me as soon as possible with the potential participants' name and contact information.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Rosemarie A. Ong  
Doctoral Student  
Attachment: Research Study Overview

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(1) Nygren, D. J., & Ukeritis, M. (1993). *The future of religious orders in the United States: Transformation and commitment*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers.

## **Study Information Sheet for Referral Sources**

Title: Leadership Development Experiences  
of Exemplary Roman Catholic Parish Priests

**Purpose of Study:** This study aims to better understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary priests assigned to Roman Catholic parishes.

**Problem Addressed:** Demographic and societal changes, the declining number of priests, and a trend toward multiple-parish pastors have influenced the leadership needs of many parishes. There is no coherent body of literature available to guide priests in leading their parishes or to inform them as to what leadership development practices will make them good leaders.

**Significance of the Study:** The research study will identify experiences that may guide individual priests to become exemplary leaders; assist seminary educators and directors responsible for the leadership development of priests; and provide important information to those teaching in graduate programs in priestly ministry.

**Study Design and Participants:** Participants will comprise priests considered exemplary based on the following criteria:

*Superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (1).*

Research participants will be asked to participate in three in-depth interviews with the researcher over a 2- to 3-week period. Participant and parish identities will be kept confidential. The interviews will explore such questions as, What are the leadership development practices that were and are important to your development as a parish leader? How did, and how do you learn these practices? Reflections on how those experiences contributed to leadership development will be solicited.

**About the Researcher:** Mrs. Rosemarie A. Ong is a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University. Rosemarie is interested in connecting research with practice and hopes that her study will provide insight into improving leadership development practice and theory for parish priests.

**APPENDIX B:**

**RECRUITMENT MATERIALS FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS**

Rosemarie A. Ong  
1401 N Street, NW #702  
Washington, DC 20005  
Telephone: 202-265-1293; E-mail: [rmaong@gwmail.gwu.edu](mailto:rmaong@gwmail.gwu.edu)

Date:

Recipient:

Title:

Address:

Dear Rev. Fr. [NAME]:

Leaders in the archdiocese identified you as an exemplary parish priest and suggested that you might be a candidate for participation in my doctoral research study on the leadership development experiences of exemplary parish priests. I am interested in understanding what experiences contributed to your ability to successfully lead your parish, and the meaning provided by these experiences in the practice of your leadership roles.

The attached summary provides a brief description of my research study. My dissertation is being completed through the Executive Leadership Program of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University, in Washington, D.C.

I will give your parish office a call in a few days to see if you would like to participate or discuss the study further. Or, you may also contact me directly before I call. I thank you for any consideration you give this study, and look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Rosemarie A. Ong  
Doctoral Student  
Attachment: Research Study Overview



## **Study Information Sheet for Potential Participants**

Title: Leadership Development Experiences  
of Exemplary Roman Catholic Parish Priests

**Purpose of Study:** This study aims to better understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary priests assigned to Roman Catholic parishes.

**Problem Addressed:** Demographic and societal changes, the declining number of priests, and a trend toward multiple-parish pastors have influenced the leadership needs of many parishes. There is no coherent body of literature available to guide priests in leading their parishes or to inform them as to what leadership development practices will make them good leaders.

**Significance of the Study:** The research study will identify experiences that may guide individual priests to become exemplary leaders; assist seminary educators and directors responsible for the leadership development of priests; and provide important information to those teaching in graduate programs in priestly ministry.

**Study Design and Participants:** Participants will comprise priests considered exemplary based on the following criteria:

*Superior performance in terms of success in job tasks, responsibilities, performance standards, and the ability to ground practices in organizational values. The competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from typical leaders are achievement motivation, long-term initiative or strategy, ability to focus on group goals over individual goals, use of power through consensus building, ability to persuade members to support group goals, and deep grounding in spirituality and humanitarian values (1).*

Research participants will be asked to participate in three in-depth interviews with the researcher over a 2- to 3-week period. Participant and parish identities will be kept confidential. The interviews will explore such questions as, What are the leadership development practices that were and are important to your development as a parish leader? How did, and how do you learn these practices? Reflections on how those experiences contributed to leadership development will be solicited.

**About the Researcher:** Mrs. Rosemarie A. Ong is a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University. Rosemarie is interested in connecting research with practice and hopes that her study will provide insight into improving leadership development practice and theory for parish priests.

**APPENDIX C:**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Research Study: Leadership Development Experiences  
of Exemplary Roman Catholic Parish Priests:  
An Exploratory Study  
*IRB # 101108*

Investigator: Rosemarie A. Ong  
Telephone Number: 202-265-1293  
Electronic mail: rmaong@gwmail.gwu.edu  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ellen F. Goldman  
Electronic mail: egoldman@gwu.edu  
Telephone Number: 202-994-1531

**Introduction**

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Ms. Rosemarie Ong, a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development. This study has no outside sponsor, nor funding from any source, and will be supervised by Mrs. Ong's dissertation adviser, Dr. Ellen Goldman.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as an "exemplary priest" by referral sources within the archdiocese. This form has been designed to provide you with information about the study. I have also attached a Study Information Sheet that summarizes the study. Please read this form and ask any questions that will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Taking part is completely voluntary and, even if you decide you want to proceed, you can withdraw from the study at any time. There are no consequences for deciding not to participate. Your work as a pastor will not be affected in any way should you choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time.

You are one of approximately 10 priests being asked to participate in this study. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, you can stop at any time. The voluntary nature of your participation is of utmost importance.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to understand the leadership development experiences of exemplary priests assigned to Roman Catholic parishes. The study will explore experiences considered important in developing your leadership and will seek to understand the meaning provided by these experiences.

**Procedures**

The research involves three interviews that I would like your permission to tape record. We can meet in your office or another location that is convenient for you as long as

uninterrupted time can be assured and the interview can be recorded clearly. Each interview is expected to last 90 minutes. Ideally, the three interviews will be completed within a 3-week period or less. Hence the total amount of time you will spend in this study is 4.5 hours.

I will share the transcripts of the interviews, which you may review on your own time or during our time together, and I will also share with you summaries of the data. It is possible that you may spend time outside of the interview to review this material, as well as time during the interview. You will have an opportunity to make any corrections or additions to the information gathered during the interviews.

The interviews will explore the following: your formal and informal experiences that have provided leadership development, your definition of exemplary leadership, training or experiences you feel contribute to your ability to lead a parish, examples of experiences that were most important in your development as a leader, what you learned from these experiences, and how they affected your work. We will also explore your thoughts on leadership development preparation and the practices or types of experience that are important to you as a parish leader.

The written dissertation as well as any publications related to it will not identify you as a participant. Data, including quotes, will only be reported in the form of “Priest A said . . .” or “Priest B said. . . .”

### **Possible Risks**

The risk of participating in this study is no more than you would experience in everyday life.

### **Benefits**

Taking part in this research will not help you directly; however, the process of participation may provide greater understanding and insight into your own experiences of leadership development and will be of great benefit to the research on leadership within the Roman Catholic Church. Your participation may also provide practical direction for priests and others involved in their development by identifying specific experiences that build leadership abilities.

### **Costs**

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

### **Compensation**

You will not receive any monetary compensation for participating in this study.

### **Right to Withdraw from the Study**

You may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

**Confidentiality and Privacy of Research Records**

The records of this study will be kept private, stored on a computer with password access and on files that are password protected. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality statement regarding not sharing or duplicating any information that is transcribed. No information will be included that will make it possible to identify you as a participant in the dissertation or any published articles or presentations. Data will be deidentified by the use of descriptors, such as Priest A or Priest B, instead of using your name. The list that links research participants to descriptors will be kept in a secure location, separate from the data, and will be destroyed immediately after all data are transcribed. The audio recording of the interviews will be destroyed at that time. The transcripts of the interviews will also be destroyed at that time. Your records for the study may be reviewed by my dissertation adviser and by departments of the University responsible for overseeing research safety and compliance.

**Questions**

If you have any questions about this study, please call Rosemarie Ong at 202-265-1293. For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human research, you may contact the GWU Office of Human Research at 202-994-2715.

**Documentation of Consent**

By signing this consent form, you agree that you have read this informed consent form, you understand what is involved, and you agree to take part in this study. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent. You will receive a copy of this consent form. Please keep it in case you want to read it again. Thank you for your agreement to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant (Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Researcher Statement**

I certify that the research study has been explained to the above individual by me, including the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks, and the potential benefits associated with participation in this research study. Any questions raised have been answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator (Rosemarie A. Ong)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX D:**

**TRANSCRIBER'S LETTER OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

I understand that I have been asked to listen to and transcribe the content of interviews for research related to a doctoral dissertation. I agree to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of those interviewed and the contents of the discussion.

Additionally, in preparing manuscripts, I will not identify anyone by name.

Furthermore, I will not make copies of the tapes I have transcribed and will return them with the transcription.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Transcriber

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX E:**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDES**

**Interview 1**

*Note: prior to beginning the interview, the researcher will review the consent forms for the study, including permission to tape record the interview, and will have the priest's resume. In addition, the researcher will ask about the size of the parish congregation. For this study, the focus of the first interview is on the priest's perceptions of exemplary leadership and the contextual information on preparation for the roles and duties involved with being a parish priest; issues of seminary training and other formal and informal training related to leadership development will also be approached.*

This first interview is to learn about your current work, and a little about your background which led you here. I'd like to also learn more about your formal and informal experiences that have provided leadership development.

1. Can you tell me about your background? [review resume]
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Can you tell me about your work here as a pastor?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. As you know, the focus of this study is leadership. There are many definitions of leadership. Can you share with me what your definition is of exemplary leadership in a parish setting?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What kinds of training or experiences do you feel contribute to your ability to lead a parish?

I will leave a copy of the interview questions with you in case something occurs to you before our next meeting and you want to jot that down.

## Interview 2

The goal of this interview is to examine in detail what you consider your most important leadership development experiences.

Picking up from our last meeting, did any other thoughts occur to you that you jotted down to share?

1. Can you share with me a few defining experiences—that is, experiences most important in your development as a leader?
  - A. How did you learn?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - B. Did anyone help you learn?
  
2. What did you learn from these experiences?
  
3. What practices or types of experience are important to you now as a parish leader?
  
4. What do you need to support your work leading a parish?

As before, I will leave a copy of the questions we discussed today for you to add anything that occurs to you before our next session.

### Interview 3

In this last session, we will discuss the meaning of the experiences you have shared in the last two sessions. I would also like to brainstorm with you on how to support the leadership development of pastors.

Anything from last session you wish to share?

1. Let's go back to the most important experiences you've already described and review what dimensions or people stand out for you. Why? [*Researcher will have notes from the last session available*]
  
2. Do you think your view of leadership changed as you had these experiences over time?
  
3. What thoughts come to you now regarding these experiences?
  - A. Were any more important than others?
  
  - B. How so?
  
4. What is the one most important thing you want to make sure I write about regarding your leadership development experiences?
  
5. If you were designing a leadership development program for new parish priests, what would you suggest?
  
6. If you were designing a leadership development program for parish priests in mid-career, what would you suggest?



**APPENDIX F:**

**SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS ON DEFINITIONS OF EXEMPLARY**

**LEADERSHIP AND RELATED FORMULATED MEANINGS**

<b>Significant statement</b>	<b>Formulated meaning</b>
<b>Priest A</b>	
An exemplary pastor is one who listens to the people, to their concerns, to their issues, [and] tries to make Christ present. One who is familiar with the Scripture and leads the people to God's presence and God's love for them in their lives.	Leadership is listening to people and their concerns and leading them to God's love.
Compassion is one [definition of exemplary leadership] . . . the ability to listen, work with other people. [To] dedicate yourself to the mission and the task at hand. . . . To be able to speak the truth, and to speak that truth in love. To make challenging decisions at times, not to go forward with a particular endeavor if I believe it would lead to the detriment of others.	Leadership is listening with compassion, dedication, and speaking the truth. Leadership is making decisions that build rather than hurt.
I see a leader very much in terms of servant. A servant of God is certainly what Jesus Christ has set for me as an example. A leader is not someone who just makes all decisions and tells people what to do. A leader tries to serve the people [by] guiding them in what they should do. . . . [Jesus] showed by his example that he was there with [them].	Leadership is service, leading by example rather than by command.
<b>Priest B</b>	
[An exemplary leader] is able to, first of all, have good followers in the disciples who trust him. . . . So I think leadership begins with the preaching task in church on Sunday, the teaching task in small-scale . . . group settings. I don't think leadership is really possible unless the people of God here know that I love them and that I respect them, and that they love me and trust and respect me.	Leadership begins with preaching in big and small settings but requires mutual love, trust, and respect between the pastor and the people.
One of the most important and lasting works that I can do in terms of leadership is not only to be the leader, but also [to] help others step into leadership roles and share the parish life, so that when and if I'm called out of here, there are people in place.	Leadership is not only to lead by oneself but also to develop new leaders.
I can inspire leaders [among] people who have an interest . . . to act on [it] and begin to take leadership roles themselves. A good pastor has got to do that. First of all, there aren't many priests, so we've got to have good lay leaders. Secondly . . . that's the rightful role of lay people, to have roles of leadership in their parish.	A good pastor helps and empowers lay people to take on leadership roles.
When people know that I love them and trust them, I can tell them almost anything and they will hear it with openness. I don't mean to say that everyone will base their [lives] on what I say. Sometimes I'm just sowing seeds that will come to fruition in people's lives later. Sometimes they're able to follow it immediately and say, "You know, I've never thought of it this way. I'm going to change my life."	A pastor who makes people feel loved can more easily lead and help them improve their lives.

Significant statement	Formulated meaning
<p>I often say to people, “I’m just so glad you’re here. I love you, and I’m so glad to be in this parish, and I thank God for every one of you. You show me and help me to become the man I need to be.” I tell them the ways that they help to really change me as a man. That’s what communities are supposed to do. We form each other into the man or woman [who] Christ has meant us to be. . . . And 99% of his gifts come [not] from heaven but through somebody else. That’s the kind of leadership that I mean.</p>	<p>Leadership is developing individuals as part of parish communities.</p>
<b>Priest C</b>	
<p>[An exemplary pastor is] a person who believes in what they’re doing, who is not about themselves, but about the people and [about his] task. [Who] wants to love and be loved. Who wants to share God’s love with the people. Who is not afraid to try something different.</p>	<p>Leadership is believing in one’s self and others and trying new things.</p>
<p>A lot of things function on their own, but community is something . . . [an exemplary pastor] build[s] by inviting people into it, helping them feel that [it’s] theirs, that they’re an essential part of whatever is going on, and [that] if they’re not there, the rest of us are affected by their absence. People then want to be a part because it’s theirs, they have taken possession of it.</p>	<p>A pastor makes people feel essential to and interdependent with the community.</p>
<p>An exemplary leader is someone who is willing to lead not just by example, but who is comfortable delegat[ing] and let[ting] go. I would say to my staff at another parish, “I don’t have time to do what you guys do and [also] do what I need to do. I’ll depend on you. If there’s an issue, I’ll come to you. If you’re doing something great, I’ll tell you. . . .” So unless they were being praised or challenged, they were on their own, to do what they had to do, and to try to find the right people to do the jobs. People thrive on that, to have the opportunity to know that they are responsible. . . . They take charge.</p>	<p>A leader models appropriate delegation and empowerment.</p>
<p>The role of a good pastor is to enable people to rise to their best and to help them do that, whether they are staff or a parishioner. . . . To share the good news that Jesus Christ has been committed to the Catholic Church. To see the reasonableness and the practicality of that, so it’s easier [for people] to respond. A lot of it is helping them . . . understand who we are and why we do what we do. Then the people buy into it, because it makes sense to them.</p>	<p>A pastor helps lay people to develop and understand the teachings of the Church.</p>
<b>Priest D</b>	
<p>An exemplary pastor . . . [is] someone who is well grounded, feet flat on the ground, [who has] the aspect of humility, not wanting to lord his power or his time or his authority over people. That leads to the ability . . . to walk with people along the way. The other aspect or gift that’s necessary [is] being able to sense what the needs truly are.</p>	<p>An exemplary pastor is grounded, humble, and understands the needs of others.</p>

Significant statement	Formulated meaning
<p>We could be told one thing and . . . have an idea of what a parish is or what [the parishioners are] all about, but truthfully, you don't know that until you enter the parish, and then you begin to sense what's going on and what the needs are. And of course, there's also the aspect of the spiritual, that grounded [aspect] . . . being well grounded, feet flat on the ground. But in the spiritual life, you're also open, you know: "Jesus, what do you want me to do here?" Each morning when I get up—I have a large crucifix on the wall of my bedroom . . . I look at it and think, "Good morning, Jesus, I love you. Where are we going today?"</p> <p>[Exemplary leadership is] realizing that this is not my parish—it's [Jesus's] parish, it's his family, and I'm here to serve in [the] role as pastor, but I also want to be open to what he wants done. It's not all about me. It's about what he wants me to do for his people. That's a very important aspect for me. . . . If you just jump in and [say], it's all about me, or what I want, or whether I should want to impose what I want [on] a parish, that doesn't help any of us—I'm not doing the work I'm called to do. . . . I could be missing the very things that [the parishioners] need and why I was sent here. It's a constant dialogue . . . with the Lord on what's necessary.</p>	<p>A leader achieves his goal of fulfilling Christ's mission (i.e., bringing people closer to the Church).</p>
<b>Priest E</b>	
<p>A manager always fulfills the mission and maintains the team for the community. Those [are] two things every manager has to do, and he has to do it with high but achievable goals. A leader is . . . a manager with vision. He knows what he is trying to accomplish. He knows where he wants to go, where he wants to take people. Vision . . . makes [the] difference between a manager and a leader.</p>	<p>A leader is a manager who also has vision.</p>
<p>Does [the pastor] conduct the liturgy as a prayer? . . . [The people] don't seem to have an awareness of the mystery, that they're talking to God. . . . When a priest comes in to a parish, people want to know, is he a human being, first of all, a vulnerable human being? Somebody who likes them and cares about them and wants to know their history? Second, is he sincere in his spirituality, or is he going through the motions? A lot of that comes across in how you celebrate the liturgy and how you preach. Third, . . . does he know the gifts he has and the gifts he doesn't have, or does he think he can do everything, which nobody can actually do?</p>	<p>The pastor must be able to be seen as also human, hence, able to connect to people.</p>
<p>The most important part [of exemplary pastoral leadership] is preaching . . . I preach with a Bible in my hand and oftentimes a newspaper in my other hand, because the whole idea of preaching is wisdom for living—the wisdom that Jesus tried to teach us. I often will read the Scripture for the upcoming Sunday before I read the Sunday paper that afternoon, and I always find that there's something in the newspaper that helps illuminate the Gospel that's coming up. . . . When I preach, it's very visible. I have a Bible in front of me, and I will reference other text in the Bible on that subject . . . [and] connect it with real life. And I preach with some energy.</p>	<p>Leadership is energetic preaching that connects to lived experience.</p>

Significant statement	Formulated meaning
<b>Priest F</b>	
<p>One of the key elements of being a leader is [to] walk with the people [who] you are trying to lead. You're not so far out in front of them, nor are you behind in the sense of "You do the work and I'll just take all the glory." The essential thing is to feel a real commitment to the people who have been put, in some way, in your care because without that commitment, especially for a priest, it is just a job. To sense that the Lord has put you here to shepherd these people . . . you have to develop a sense that, "I am with you, I am one of you, I am part of you." . . . [You] also [have] to be willing to make the decisions that need to be made—in terms of the direction we are going to take, in terms of social justice, or in terms of faith development.</p>	<p>Leadership challenges relationships among people by presenting them with difficult decisions that require changes in the status quo.</p>
<b>Priest G</b>	
<p>An exemplary leader has to be . . . compassionate, approachable, caring, and, to the degree that we can be, outgoing. Someone . . . people can trust and have confidence in. . . . A hard worker as well. A leader in the Church has to have the qualities of Christ, and Christ was compassionate. He went out to people. He extended the Father's love. He listened. He tried to understand. He challenged. But he [also] accepted people where they are, and that, I think, [has] to be the role of a pastor. It can't be about me, because it wasn't about Christ. It has to be about others.</p> <p>An exemplary pastor . . . has to be someone who is willing to . . . lay down his life for others. The responsibility for others has to be primary in [his] mind and heart. If he's not doing it for others, if he's not caring about others, then he's more concerned about himself . . . that's not good leadership.</p>	<p>A leader has Christ-like qualities: caring about others, hardworking, self-sacrificing.</p>
<b>Priest H</b>	
<p>[To be an exemplary pastor is] to be faithful to the will of the Father. To pray. To discern the Father's will. To be able to discern that will in the people and in the activities, and to be able, by the grace of God, to say yes.</p>	<p>An exemplary pastor is a man of prayer who takes action after a process of discernment.</p>
<p>[An exemplary pastor shows] grace and leadership. Well, what is grace? . . . Participation in the life of God, . . . the grace of God, and participating in the life of God means relating to God. We cannot know how to do the will of God unless God gives us the help that is the grace to serve. . . . You can call it collaboration. You cannot do what another person asks you to do unless you really understand what that person wants you to do, which means we have to stay in communion with that person.</p>	<p>Leadership is service, a discernment with God through grace.</p>
<b>Priest I</b>	
<p>Leadership is, of necessity, collaborative. I don't run this parish by myself. I rely on a lot of other people to contribute to the mission of the parish. Understanding that from the beginning is very important. . . . [Pastoral] leadership . . . is trying to recognize the</p>	<p>Leadership is collaboration with people to achieve the Church's mission.</p>

Significant statement	Formulated meaning
<p>talents of the people around you and inviting them to share those [talents] with the parish as a whole. . . . It's recognizing the[ir] talents, . . . treating them as adults, giving them responsibility, and assuming that they're going to respond well to that. . . . Whereas if you treat [people] as responsible individuals [who] you do expect something from, then they will respond to that. But most of us—[it's] human nature, call it what it is—take the path of least resistance. . . . So if we're not expected to do much, then we don't. But if you challenge people, set the bar a little higher, then they respond.</p>	
<b>Priest J</b>	
<p>It's not like being in business. It's very different, being a pastor. In business, being a CEO of a corporation, the bottom line is . . . profitability. In a Church, that is not the case. . . . Our purpose is the salvation of souls, and trying to make sure that is the fundamental mission of a parish. Also, reaching out to people with the good news. Trying to bring back those who were involved, and also reaching out to new people who may be interested. Those are the fundamental kinds of . . . leadership that I have to be modeling.</p>	<p>A leader brings people to God to achieve the Church's mission.</p>
<p>The great model for leadership in the Church [is] the Lord himself. And how he taught by example—he washed his disciples' feet. These are the kinds of things we have to be prepared to do. We are not supposed to be like princes. There's a different model [other than business] we need to be using if we're going to be effective in ministerial leadership.</p>	<p>A pastor leads by the example of Christ, using Christ as bearer of standard of service.</p>
<p>The two words that come to my mind [to define an exemplary pastor] are servant leadership. And that is more of an art than a science. . . . [Pastors] talk about their experiences . . . us[ing] principles of leadership for different things, but part of that is just trying to work things out. . . . I may come in with a vision for what I think needs to be done in the parish. Some people are going to buy into that vision and others are not. When they don't buy in, you've got to listen very carefully as to why they don't, and if they have convincing [reasons], you make adjustments in what you're doing. . . . You've tried to listen very respectfully and you're hearing what they're saying, but then you try to move things along in the right kind of direction.</p>	<p>Leadership is actively listening to people and their concerns.</p>