Call, Vocation, & Discernment: A Look at Clergy Morale

Wisconsin Conference
Clergy Day
October 24, 2012
The Clergy Morale Project - 2009

- 657 Clergy – Broad cross-section
- 45 Question “Rating-Style” Survey
- Clarifying Interviews
- Focus areas:
  - Call/Vocation
  - Vision
  - Satisfaction
The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’
Centering Exercise

- Share briefly the story of your call to ministry
  - What form(s) did it take?
  - How clear was it?
  - How general or specific was it?
  - In what ways are you living it out?
  - In what ways are you not living it out?
Some Statistics…

- 21% of clergy report a spiritual/metaphysical call
- 49% report an affirmation/confirmation call
- 23% report a vocational choice based on interest or passion
- 6% do not frame their career choice as a “call”
Some Statistics…

- 69% of clergy describe their call as a call to specific forms of ministry (preaching, teaching, healing)
- 16% describe their call as a general call to parish ministry
- 12% describe their call to something other than parish ministry
Centering Exercise

- Take a moment to reflect on the experiences, incidents, and exchanges you encountered early in your ministry...
  - In what significant ways has ministry been what you expected?
  - In what significant ways has ministry NOT been what you expected?
Some Statistics…

- 81% of clergy say that their ministry is not what they expected
- 70% report having a lower self-esteem now than when they entered ministry
- 54% claim to consider leaving ministry on a regular basis.
A Radical Disconnect

Personal Vision

Congregational Vision

YEAR 3
YEAR 7
Crisis?

- According to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry...
  - 47% of male pastors, and 52% of female pastors ordained since 1998 have left pastoral ministry
  - Reasons given for leaving the ministry:
    1. Burnout/dissatisfaction
    2. Unrealistic expectations on part of church
    3. Negative impact on family
Changes Over Time

- **1965**
  - % of seminarians going into pastoral ministry = 88%
  - Average age of elders at ordination = 26.3
  - Average number of years in ministry = 38
  - % leaving pastoral ministry within first three years = 11%

- **2005**
  - % of seminarians going into pastoral ministry = 60%
  - Average age of elders at ordination = 41.7
  - Average number of years in ministry = 17
  - % leaving pastoral ministry within first three years = 32%
Just a Few More Numbers…

- 80% of clergy describe their ministry as “highly stressful”
- 76% of clergy report being less effective than they desire
- 69% of clergy feel seminary inadequately prepared them to handle ordinary ministry demands
- 78% of clergy claim that their ministry negatively impacts their personal relationships
- 86% of clergy claim they have inadequate time for themselves and their families
Reported Satisfaction

- Most Satisfied?
  - Korean/American males >50/<60 (6.1)
  - Puerto Rican males >50/<60 (6.0)
  - Retired Caucasian males >60 (5.8)
  - Active Caucasian females <30 (5.7)

- By Jurisdiction?
  - SCJ (4.8)
  - WJ (4.4)
  - SEJ (3.9)
  - NCJ (3.3)
  - NEJ (2.8)
The Satisfaction Correlate

- Surveys by Gallup, Alban, Barna, Lilly, and UMCom agree:
  - The healthiest, happiest, most effective pastors report satisfaction in three key areas:
    1. Personal spiritual focus
    2. Time with family and friends
    3. Personal growth and development
Personal Spiritual Focus

- Personal & corporate practices essential and non-negotiable (72% of respondents claim they do not have time for personal prayer, study, retreat, worship)
- Has a spiritual community apart from ministry served
- Positive correlations between spiritual study/learning and satisfaction
Time With Family & Friends

- Strongest correlation between satisfaction & morale = healthy relationships apart from those served

- Strong inverse correlations
  - satisfaction diminishes
    - as work hours increase
    - as BMGC increases (bitch, moan, gripe, curse)
    - as time at church increases

- The stronger the boundaries between church and home, the greater the morale
Personal Growth & Development

- **Healthiest Pastors**
  - Enjoy hobbies/play
  - Get out of town regularly/take vacations
  - Prioritize ministry around gifts/passions
  - Have a learning plan/working toward specific goals/outcomes
  - Use tools instead of letting tools use them
  - Connect regularly with colleagues
Three Surprises

- 3 Things We Were Sure We Would Find (But Didn’t)
  1. **Importance of Collaboration** (Lone Rangers are generally more satisfied in their ministry than team players)
  2. **Rewards and affirmations = higher satisfaction & morale** (those depending on external factors less content than those internally motivated)
  3. **Financial considerations critical** (salary, benefits, financial security are essentially non-issues impacting morale and satisfaction)