

# **New models of pastoral leadership required for a changing U.S. church**

ORLANDO, Fla. – New models of pastoral leadership will be required for a U.S. church that has changed significantly from a generation ago and will continue to change.

The changes include an increase in the number of Catholics, a more-educated laity, a decrease in the number of priests and vowed religious, an increase in permanent deacons and professional lay ecclesial ministers, and growing cultural diversity in the church.

Those changes were identified in a four-year study conducted in response to ongoing shifts in the Catholic Church. The study, commissioned in 2002 by a coalition of six Catholic national organizations, received a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to conduct the study and to assess its findings.

Marti R. Jewell, project director of the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project, addressed the major findings of the study April 21, the first full day of a national summit in Orlando to review and build upon the findings. An attentive audience of nearly 1,200 participants representing all six groups listened, eager to hear the results.

“For those of you who like to flip to the last page of a book, and read the end of a story right away, I’ll tell you what the research concluded,” Ms. Jewell began. “Parish life as we have known it has changed.”

With about 28,000 diocesan priests, 70 percent of whom are older than 55, the United States is moving toward clusters of parishes under the care of a single pastor, she said. Indeed, nearly half of all U.S. parishes already share their pastor with another parish or mission.

Alan Whitson, a deacon in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, was surprised to learn how many pastors are assigned to dual parishes. “The realization that nationally we’re losing priests underscores the need for the laity to step up and live the baptismal

call to discipleship," he said. "It is a challenge to all the baptized."

Collaboration was a key element of the findings. Clergy and laity need to work together, but this also creates human resource issues, the study said. It showed that laity in leadership roles needed education regarding the legal and civil implications of the church being an employer. It also showed that fewer than 40 percent of U.S. parishes provide continuing education, retirement plans or other benefits to its employees.

Multicultural diversity is also shaping the church's future. "It's more than just speaking another language," said Ms. Jewell, who said many parishes include people from Hispanic, Asian and African backgrounds. "We need to be learning from one another, and receiving rich gifts from one another."

Maggie McCarty, president of Education for Parish Service, a lay education program in Washington, wasn't surprised by the study's conclusion that parishes need to be made more welcoming, and not just with greeters and handshakes.

She said a mega-Christian church moved next door to her parish, drawing some members of her congregation.

"Some of our parishioners have gone over and remarked on the sense of welcome they feel as they walk in the door" of the mega-church, said Ms. McCarty. "They long to feel the same as they walk into our church."

At the summit, action groups were to address each of the study findings' six categories, with participants developing recommendations.

Ms. Jewell encouraged the summit participants to talk to each other. "The answer is in the minds and hearts of those around you," she said.

The participating groups were the National Association for Lay Ministry, the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development, the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, the National Association of Diaconate Directors, the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association and the National Federation of Priests' Councils.