



A STUDY OF PASTORAL LEADERS SERVING YOUNG CATHOLICS EXAMINING NETWORK VULNERABILITY AMIDST A WEB OF MINISTRIES

DEVELOPED BY
MINISTRY TRAINING SOURCE

RESEARCH PURPOSE

Like the previous seven decades, in the past twenty years, the fields of Catholic youth and young adult ministries have greatly evolved from models of CYO and youth groups, to a comprehensive programmatic ministry model, and today a renewed focus on relational ministry and accompaniment. With all of these changes, one must wonder if anything has been lost in the transitions.

Similar to major corporations checking their networks for vulnerabilities, a review of the web of ministries is needed; especially in the rapidly shifting network of pastoral leaders. This study seeks to both understand and identify ways to support these leaders serving in this critical ministry for the Church. Important elements of this research will include their call to ministry, intent for future service, ministerial identities, and the current realities of ministry to young Catholics. Hence, the title of the research, *A Study of Pastoral Leaders Serving Young Catholics Examining Network Vulnerability Amidst a Web of Ministries* which is being sponsored and led by Ministry Training Source but working with funding partners, and other research partners to broaden the overall team leading the research.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Ministry Training Source (MTS) has studied longitudinally the fields of Catholic youth and young adult ministry leaders since 2001. While it had already been an observation by those in the field, our most recent study (2015-16) found that these ministry leaders are increasingly being combined or given responsibilities for multiple areas of ministry that include ministering to multiple age audiences. In other instances, youth ministry has been added to the responsibilities of other faith formation leaders. The impact of evolving job descriptions and additional responsibilities must have a profound impact on ministry leaders. Ministry with young Catholics is just one portion of an ever growing web of

ministries for which these pastoral leaders bear responsibility. While we can understand this today from an antidotal standpoint, providing solid research on this impact we believe may diminish the amount of instances ministry leaders feel burned out, face attrition, or become ineffective.

In addition to reviewing the impact of the ever-increasing job descriptions, upcoming research also needs to prepare the Church for the emerging generation of ministry leaders who are considered a part of Gen. Z. In our previous report, we found a majority of parish youth and young adult ministry leaders were considered Millennials. Important differences were found between the Millennial ministry leaders and their older generational counterparts. This included their ministerial methodology, their interaction with parents or families, and how they embrace their professional relationship with the Church. Further, there was evidence of a dichotomy between the multiple generations of leaders in seeing their ministerial role as a career or lifelong vocation. As Generation Z becomes more involved in the Church's leadership, this research becomes necessary so we can learn from past experiences and better equip the new leaders and Church as a whole in partnering with this generation of leadership. This research will assist in identifying where the Church's formation of ministry leaders who serve young Catholics needs to adapt in order to accommodate these new realities.

It has become increasingly evident that while many of us understand these concerns logically, the research is not currently present to assist us in providing the necessary evidence to make meaningful changes. After naming the shifts that have occurred in the Church's leadership, this research will give evidence to support enhancing the Church's formation efforts in light of the current realities. By being able to articulate and better understand the evolution of the multi-role youth and young adult minister, and the experiences of both the current Millennial generation and the first wave of Gen Z leaders, this research can assist in providing the changes that could lead to ministry stability. This stability should in turn have a greater impact on an increase in lifelong discipleship, and hopefully turn the tide of youth and young adults leaving the church.

In addition, we must also recognize that as Church leaders, we do not always know what we need to know to engage, train, and maintain our youngest leaders. To better learn these realities, our research must also change and evolve to compliment the new methods and styles of ministry within the Church. As the web of ministries with young Catholics has increasingly shifted, our study of it must adapt as well. Because of these realities, Ministry Training Source intends to evaluate and update both the research methods and the focus for our next National Study of Youth and Young Adult Ministry Leaders.

RESEARCH PLAN

We plan to conduct our research in two phases. The first phase of the research will be a qualitative study of youth and young adult ministry leaders utilizing focus groups throughout the United States, with a special attention to those who are Millennial and Generation Z leaders. This will provide insight into the current realities of these ministry

leaders and their ministry to inform the next phase of our research. In the second phase, we will conduct a quantitative study and survey of the nation's Catholic youth and young adult ministry field. Together this data will be consolidated, reviewed, and shared with ministerial leaders so the field of youth and young adult ministry may continue to grow and empower our Church's youngest believers to be Disciples of Jesus Christ.

RESEARCH GOALS/QUESTIONS

This research seeks to answer these big picture questions:

- How did the current generation of ministry leaders serving young Catholics discern and understand their vocation to ministry or professional role?
 - How have they been formed?
- What does the future of ministry look like, in light of the transient nature of the Millennial generation serving now in parish ministry or the aspirations of the up and coming Generation Z?
- What is their vision and practice?
 - What influences or shapes their pastoral ministry with youth and young adults?
- How are ministry leaders equipped to address or deal with the challenges of leadership in today's church and world?
 - What's it like to do ministry in a polarized and politicized church?
 - What's it like to do ministry in a digital culture?
 - What's it like to ministry in a post-Covid world?
- What is their relationship with the Church?
 - What does the Church need to know to respond to their needs as ministry leaders and support their efforts to evangelize generations of affiliated and non-affiliated young people?
 - How is the Church supporting them or not?
 - How do they relate to the Pastor and Parish Community? Alignment with Pastors vision?

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Phase One Qualitative Research Elements

Key elements of the research include:

- Leading fifty focus groups in 35-40 dioceses throughout the country with youth and young adult ministry leaders focusing on those who identify as members of the youngest generations, (Millennials and Gen Z). Each focus group will consist of 6 to 8 people sharing at least one common characteristic such as age, culture, diocese, or paid/volunteer.
- The focus groups will be held either online or in-person.
- Partnering with dioceses and national organizations, the ministry leaders included will represent a culturally and geographically diverse group of between 300 and 500 leaders.

- When and where warranted, we will hold a few focus groups in Spanish.
- Each focus group member will be required to complete a demographic survey with some basic questions so that the findings of this study can be generalized to the larger population of ministry leaders.
- An incentive will be offered.
- All focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. This data will be coded to identify key themes, issues, and needs of the ministry leaders who participate.
- We hope to collaborate with national organizations to help identify participants and share our eventual findings.

Phase Two Quantitative and Qualitative Research Elements

Key elements of the research include:

- Creation of a national database of all Catholic Youth and Young Adult Ministry Leaders for research purposes. Invitations would be sent utilizing diocesan and national databases to invite leaders to self-select into the research study.
- Development and Distribution of a National Online Survey of Youth and Young Adult Ministry Leaders
 - o Spanish and English, maybe additional languages as needed.
 - o Partnering with dioceses and national organizations, the ministry leaders included will represent a culturally and geographically diverse group.
 - o Distributed through dioceses in the United States and through research partners.
- Collaborating with national organizations such as the USCCB Working Group on Youth and Young Adult Ministry, USCCB National Advisory Team on Young Adult Ministry, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), and La RED National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana, Life Teen, and Catholic colleges and universities, as well as Arch/Dioceses throughout the country to distribute the survey.
- Host approximately fifty interviews with Youth and Young Adult Ministry Leaders to dive deeper in our most complex findings and issues identified from our initial findings, and consider solutions for the church to respond to the needs of these ministry leaders.
- Development of a written Executive Summary outlining the findings to be published and distributed for free.
- Presentation of the findings to national Church organizations, especially those committed to the field of youth and young adult ministry.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Phase One: November 2021 to November 2022

- Research planning for phase one has begun
- Hosted pilot focus groups at NCYC to test questions and sample strategies
- Schedule focus groups and communicate with host dioceses; contact collaborating organizations, and schedule focus groups.
- Conduct 35 to 50 focus groups depending on funding
- Code Data
- Data Analysis
- December 2022: Research Meeting to Determine Findings and plan for Phase two
- January to March, 2023: Write Research Summary

Phase Two: March 2023

- Establish Questions for Survey from Phase 1 Data; reach out to Collaborating Organizations to determine sample strategy
- Create and Test Survey
- Distribute Survey to Field
- Coding and Data Analysis
- Researchers Meetings to Determine Findings
- June 2023: Publish Executive Summary of Research

PROJECT BUDGET

Phase One Expenses: \$60,000 (\$35,000 fundraised thus far)

- Project Management
- Development of Research Procedures and Focus Group Questions
- Training of Focus Group Researchers
- Conducting 50 Focus Groups for 90 minutes in length both online and onsite
- Possible Incentive for participants
- In-Person Focus Groups: Travel, Hospitality, Recording Equipment and Shipping
- Transcribing Focus Groups
- Coding Transcriptions of Focus Groups
- Analyze Data
- Identify Findings
- Develop Research Executive Summary Report

Phase Two Expenses: \$85,000 (Needs Funding)

- Project Management
- Development of Sample Strategy
- Development and Deployment of Online Survey Instrument
- Coding, Data Analysis, and Data Report Generation
- Hosting of 50 Interviews following Online Survey
- Expenses (Transcription, Travel, Translation, etc.)
- Writing of Executive Summary



A STUDY OF PASTORAL LEADERS SERVING YOUNG CATHOLICS EXAMINING NETWORK VULNERABILITY AMIDST A WEB OF MINISTRIES

www.ministrytrainingsource.org/network-vulnerability

A closer look at:

- How and why some are called to ministry
- The future of ministerial careers
- The rapidly increasing & diversifying ministerial identities
- The current realities of ministry to the young Church
- How the next generation of leaders can be supported

**Join our Web
of Support**
Pray
Donate/Sponsor
Host a Focus Group
Invite Others
Advocate

THIS STUDY IS SPONSORED BY:



To inquire about supporting
or sponsoring this study, contact
Dr. Charlotte McCorquodale at 417-693-1882
or Charlotte@MinistryTrainingSource.org

