August 2017

**Summary Report**

Gathering of Deacons and Lay Ministers Small Group Feedback

horizontal line

# 21082882_1609562962448449_8727318951399055733_o.jpg

# Introduction

In 2016-2017, the priests and parish directors of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee met three times to discuss their concerns and hopes, and to plan for the future of our parishes. The priests and parish directors established a clear vision for parishes and developed parish models that will help guide priests’ placement in the future. Out of these three forums, new models of parish and new models of parish leadership emerged.

On Friday, August 25, 2017, as a follow-up to these Forums, the deacons and lay ministers of the archdiocese gathered to explore how the Church is changing on both a national and local level, facilitated Jim Lundholm-Eades, Director of Programs and Services for The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management. Deacons and lay ministers had the opportunity to engage the new models of parish leadership and new models of parish, and explore how it affects their ministry. As part of the day, participants were broken into small groups, and given the opportunity to dialogue and offer feedback about their joys, their hopes and concerns, and their needs.

65 deacons and 287 lay ministers participated in the Gathering, for a total of 352 participants. 148 parishes, or 75% of parishes in the archdiocese, were represented.

## Small Group Discussion Feedback

Participants were randomly assigned to 35 small groups, each of which was led by a trained facilitator, and each of which was assigned a note-taker to capture themes and important points from the discussion.

Deacons and lay ministers were asked to respond to the following questions:

* What do you hope for, as you look to the future of your ministry?
* What are you worried about, in your ministry?
* What kinds of resources, formation and support do you need for your ministry?

### Ministers of Hope

In response to the question, “What do you hope for, as you look to the future of your ministry,” a number of specific themes emerged:

* Our deacons and lay ministers look forward to greater opportunities for collaboration in the Church, and want to work on building relationships, trust, community and shared culture
* Strong, healthy ministerial teams are a priority
* Deacons and lay ministers desire to build up the greater Church, and participate beyond their parish communities
* We want to draw members into leadership and ministries, and there is a great need for more volunteers
* Deacons and lay staff members are looking to the Archdiocese for clarity of mission, direction, as well as archdiocesan support and formation
* Our mission is to make disciples
* The Synod has been an opportunity for renewal in the archdiocese, and we are all growing more deeply in discipleship, which leads to deeper relationships with Christ and the community, which in turn leads to transformation
* Technology presents us with some unique opportunities, and we want to embrace technology to assist us in our ministry
* Deacons continue to serve as bridges in our parish communities, and we desire for every parish community to have a deacon serving in the parish/cluster
* Greater roles for the laity, and new opportunities for formation are exciting. The priority and support from the archdiocese in lay formation and training the next generation of ministers gives hope for the future
* Collaboration may bring greater financial stability, which in turn, may offer more opportunities for our parish communities. We look forward to using our resources more effectively
* We want the Archbishop to know that we love and are committed to the Church, and here to stay

### Areas for Growth

Throughout the responses, our deacons and lay ministers clearly expressed a deep love for the Church, and respect for our bishops, priests and ministerial colleagues. In the context of their love and concern, deacons and lay ministers identified the following concerns as priorities, and requested assistance in addressing these:

* Our deacons and lay ministers are deeply concerned about the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health of our priests. They are concerned about added responsibilities, and our priests’ ability to handle high levels of stress and expectations, and deeply desire to support our priests
* Our deacons and lay ministers are dedicated to the Church. Out of their love of Jesus Christ and dedication to the Church, they work long hours for lower pay, knowing they are participating in the mission of the Church. At the same time, as resources become fewer and positions are cut or not replaced, many deacons and staff members find themselves in unhealthy situations of trying to do too much, and are under great stress and at risk for burnout. The decrease in staff has coincided with an increase in ministries and expectations. The goal for all is happy, healthy, holy ministers
* Our lay staffs are concerned about job security, changes in job descriptions, salaries, work/life balance, the ability to support one’ s family, lack of ministerial formation, and personal debt
* Both our deacons and lay ministers repeatedly voiced the question, “Who will continue the work and vision after me?” The need for succession planning was identified
* Conflict within staffs, and between staffs of clustering parishes are a source of great tension
* Communication, particularly about change, is key. Communication on all levels - parish/members and volunteers, Councils and staffs/deacons, lay staffs and clergy, parish staffs and the archdiocese - needs improvement. Communication needs to be culturally sensitive and personal, when possible
* Greater stewardship is needed, particularly as older generations who supported parishes are dying
* Better resources for catechesis, formation and stewardship are needed in Spanish and other languages
* We are worried about declining attendance and participation, and the lack of young people. We fear additional closings and mergers.
* Clustering is challenging, particularly when geography and culture don’t match. Additionally, clustering and collaborating can bring competition and tensions among and between staffs
* We need greater collaboration with Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils
* We need to make sure that the Church’s mission (make disciples) is central, not the Church’s busy-ness
* There is some resistance to allowing deacons to function in their ministerial roles
* The shortage of trained lay ministers, and the lack of formation needs to be addressed

### Resources, Formation and Support for the Future

In response to the question, “What kinds of resources, formation and support do you need for your ministry,” deacons and lay ministers identified:

* Ongoing ministerial formation for both deacons and lay staff members
* Affordable formation, with financial assistance
* Leadership training
* The desire and need to learn how to effectively engage Millennials
* Honest, open and credible communication - from pastors, from the archdiocese
* Support from pastors and the archdiocese
* Greater clarity of resources available from the Archdiocese, including regularly updated resources
* Archdiocesan offices gathering, and making available, best practices
* Succession planning for the archdiocese
* Assistance with conflict resolution
* Opportunities for gathering, sharing and networking - including online opportunities and regional gatherings
* Attention to rural communities

The raw data from the small groups, along with this summary, will be shared with appropriate archdiocesan offices for follow-up. Additionally, the raw data, along with this summary, will be posted on the archmil.org website, along with presenter videos and an opportunity to offer feedback for those unable to be present at the Gathering.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan L. McNeil, M.Div.

Director of Lay Ministry