

January, 2004

**First Call Survey Research Analysis
Division for Ministry
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With the Department for Research and Evaluation, the Division for Ministry conducted a follow-up survey of newly rostered leaders and received 510 completed questionnaires through October 2003. This results in a 65% response rate. In this second survey, respondents were asked to give specific reasons behind a particular finding of significance from the first survey, conducted in the fall of 2002. Some questions also asked for specific suggestions in addressing a problem which emerged from the 2002 findings.

The following analysis is based on a summary report from the ELCA's Department for Research & Evaluation (November 2003 and December 2003 summaries at www.elca.org/re/rptlist/). **Note: In the following paragraphs, the bolded sentence states a significant finding from the initial First Call Theological Education Survey collected in 2002 (with a 75% return rate).** *The italicized comments are direct quotes from first call leaders.*

1. In the first survey, respondents said they felt well prepared to preach, plan worship services, visit members, establish trusting relationships with members and teach adults.

In both this survey and in the follow-up survey, it is clear that first call leaders appreciate the scholarship and theological training they received during their seminary education.

2. In this same survey, respondents indicated they felt unprepared to effectively carry out 11 ministry tasks (out of 23 total, or 48%).

It seems to me that several of the "Competencies to Develop" fall under the category of administration and management. What is needed is a mini-MBA of Ministry for seminary students, embedded within the seminary curriculum. Pastors are not and should not become CEOs of churches, but without these core competencies, the ability of the pastor to lead effective ministry and mission is severely hampered.

I feel like I'm overall well prepared for working with an educated, well established and financially stable suburban congregation. Though I feel certainly called to my current congregation, and though it challenges me (in many good ways), I feel a lot like "swimming" since I'm serving an urban, financially struggling congregation of mostly hard working people.

To probe this finding from the initial survey, first call leaders were asked to choose the best contexts (out of seven options) for learning skills in these 11 ministry tasks. **Internship** was rated the best context for learning seven out of 11 (or 64%) practical parish responsibilities: (a) planning a stewardship program, (b) planning a church budget, (c) managing a church office, (d) visiting prospective members, (e) training/equipping others for their ministries, (f) giving guidance/support to communities and (g) working/collaborating with ecumenical partners. First career leaders rated internship significantly higher as a value than did second career leaders.

Keeping in mind that the respondents in the first survey said that they didn't learn these well in seminary (which includes the experience of internship), one must assume respondents are indicating that internship ideally is where these skills and relationships are best developed. It would be wise for seminaries to re-visit the internship program, its expectations, selection of internship sites, training of supervisors, etc. to look for ways to strengthen this context for learning.

I learned a great deal on pastoring from my home congregation mentor and from internship. Perhaps there should be a detailed checklist of items to be exposed to on internship. Also, interns need to be placed where the best ministry is happening, not the place that can best afford an intern. My experience is that these two are usually inversely related!

STANDARDIZE goals for internship. What is expected to be learned, experienced? Train internship supervisors. From my internship, I learned more about how not to do things.

As a [seminary grad], I am eternally grateful for the quality of preparation for parish ministry. I am also deeply aware that no pastor is ever a finished product - thank God!

3. Four of the ministry skills rated low in preparedness. Percentages indicate "very well prepared."

- **managing disputes and conflict (5%)**
- **addressing social and ethical issues facing congregations (9%)**
- **provide a ministry of healing (18%)**
- **doing pastoral counseling (19%)**

Respondents in the follow-up survey indicate that these can be best taught through seminary classes. They also indicated a strong preference that the skill, "plan a church budget," be taught in seminary.

Also, open-ended responses throughout the survey (especially final comments at the end of the second survey) underline the importance of learning "real-life parish concerns and skills" in seminary curriculum.

There are many things that first-call pastors won't be fully prepared for, but it would help if they were at least addressed at seminary. Just knowing what you're likely to run into can be helpful.

I truly think that what I mentioned a few times is of great importance: the seminary faculty needs to spend more time in the parish." Several newly called pastors expressed a desire for more "practicality in the curriculum (not at the expense of biblical and theological work, though)."

I do believe the MDiv program was (is) designed to prepare people for ordained ministry! Every class had an applied component. For me it was (continues to be) helpful that most faculty are pastors and have parish experience.

It is true that most seminary faculty are connected to congregations in a number of ways; e.g., speaking, doing workshops, or having ongoing responsibilities. It might be helpful to gather faculty together to talk about how to regularly make connections in their courses to congregational realities as well as make more explicit their involvements in congregational life.

4. In the follow-up survey, first and second career leaders responded differently as to where they feel they best learn. The younger, first career leaders value more highly their learning in FCTE programs and in internship settings while second career leaders prefer more independent learning settings - e.g., online, personal study and specific continuing education offerings.

First career clergy need more intensive support in all areas. Second career have faced much or similar situations in their work world, although church ministry is unique in itself. Part of the problem, I think, is that the ministry culture and needs have (and are) changing drastically and quickly. The staff of seminaries and synods are usually those familiar with what was and haven't made the switch to what is.

5. "Continuing education" received the second highest rating as an appropriate learning context for the four skills listed above in # 2, with the addition of two other skills:

- plan a stewardship program
- train/equip others for their ministries.

6. "Peers or mentors" received the second highest rating for learning the following skills:

- manage a church office
- visit prospective members
- give guidance (support to communities)work collaboratively with ecumenical partners

7. "First call programs," "online learning" and "personal study" received less attention as the most appropriate contexts for learning these skills.

8. First call leaders felt very unprepared for "reaching out to unchurched persons."

When asked in the follow-up survey how important this skill is for them, first call leaders said "important" (34%) or "very important" (50%). Second career leaders felt more strongly about this than did first career (or younger) leaders. Asked for reasons behind this gap between preparedness and importance, they said (ranked by frequency of response): (a) not a priority area for seminaries to teach, (b) hard to teach, (c) not a Lutheran concept and (d) would challenge pastors to move out of their comfort zones.

I attended [a non-Lutheran seminary] for my first five quarters of seminary. They require at least one course in Evangelism (which was invaluable) and offer many more. That's been my only real source of education or workshops [in this area].

These findings address a major dilemma for the ELCA. While much of the rhetoric of churchwide initiatives emphasizes the need to get serious about outreach and evangelism - e.g., the congregation as a missional outpost in a secular world - this still appears to be unknown territory for Lutherans who historically haven't developed a common vocabulary or consensual strategies for addressing this need.

9. Then, what should be done? Respondents felt the need for: (a) developing a conceptual Lutheran framework and vocabulary for teaching and learning in this area, (b) having a mentor or seasoned leader who could help with the practical strategies, (c) attending a workshop or special conference on the topic. A common dimension of these desired support vehicles is "interaction" - that is, learning that engages individuals and groups in an active exchange of ideas and practices.

I cannot stress strongly enough that the ELCA needs to employ the coach/mentor approach for pastors. No other professional organization throws new grads into the trenches without any guidance. Law does it, doctors do it, accountants and many others. We know how to do it with youth and now even with the licensed lay ministry programs popping up. Why do we not do the same for pastors? Also, this would allow pastors to model the mentor/mentoree relationship for their congregations.

10. Related to the need to reach out for unchurched persons was the item, "finding ways to move the congregation toward a mission field perspective." This was considered a need for our church and also considered an important goal by first call leaders. However, this goal received the second-highest rating among difficult tasks in one's first call.

In the follow-up survey, respondents indicated a strong interest in learning how to do this from (ranked by frequency of response): (a) mentors/seasoned leaders; (b) workshops or continuing education; (c) attending a special conference on the subject.

11. In addition to the themes of ministry skills and evangelism in the first survey, there were several significant findings around the topic of "spirituality," involving one's own spiritual growth as well as helping members deepen their spiritual lives. For instance, "helping people grow spiritually" was rated as the third highest need for the church but was rated significantly lower in terms of preparedness.

The follow-up survey asked first call leaders what they felt was behind this discrepancy. The most frequent response was a perception of a "deficiency in seminary curriculum" which doesn't place a high value on the topic or practice of spirituality. A close second explanation was "a personal inadequacy" or lack of spiritual disciplines or formation practices. "Conceptual difficulties" in defining spirituality and its relation to Christian faith was offered as a third reason.

I would like to see the seminaries put more emphasis on spiritual growth of students – spiritual formation needs to become a much bigger concern in seminary education.

12. Asked in the second survey what they have found to be most helpful in encouraging people to grow spiritually, these leaders gave the following responses (ranked by frequency):

- providing examples of spiritual life and pastoral care
- having small group Bible studies and prayer groups
- engaging in personal spiritual growth and renewal
- promoting the concepts and importance in sermons and newsletters.

Seminaries as well as first call programs would do well to pay attention to these and other "best practices" that first call leaders have found to be helpful by reviewing and strengthening their programs in this area of spirituality.

13. "Finding time for my own spiritual growth" was considered in the first survey the biggest challenge in one's early months of transition into public ministry.

In the follow-up survey, asked what would help you find more time for this, the highest rated answer was having a spiritual mentor or guide (81% said helpful or very helpful). Support from lay leaders (75%), support from family (74%) and setting clear goals (68%) were also rated as important. It is interesting to note that second career leader felt more strongly about having a spiritual mentor/guide as well as access to related literature than did first career leaders.

14. The results from the first survey pointed out gender and preference differences for accepting a multiple staff position vs. solo call. Women preferred working in a multiple staff setting while men preferred solo calls.

In the follow-up survey, the most frequent reason given for this difference was the "cultural shaping and socialization of males and females." Examples which were coded in this category: (a) males need to be in charge, (b) males value control and self-sufficiency, (c) females are natural nurturers, (d) females value shared responsibility and team support, (e) females are socialized to be home builders, not leaders.

A second most frequent answer was that women's values are behind these choices, especially the values of (a) team approaches to planning, (b) having time for family, (c) living in larger cities, (for help from mentors if single and for spouses' job opportunities).

A third frequent explanation for these gender differences was a perception that congregations and synods are biased toward having males in solo pastoral roles. Examples of this bias included references to sexism and a hesitancy to accept female leadership.

There were a number of respondents (fourth highest frequency) who said that this difference wasn't true for them; that is, women who felt their gifts were better suited for a solo call and men who desired a multiple staff role.

From reading hundreds (958) of comments to this question, it is clear that this church - its overall culture, seminaries, congregations - exert a considerable influence on gender expectations as well as ministry opportunities regarding appropriate calls for males and females. If the church is to witness to Christ's egalitarian challenge (neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female), it will need to not only model a non-gender bias, but also advocate for this in secular and religious contexts, challenging sexism wherever it is found.

15. In the first survey, first call leaders reported that the best way to improve the call process was to improve the communication between candidates for ministry and synod staff.

Responses (916) to what should be done to improve this communication were analyzed by using a content analysis protocol which emerged from reading these open-ended questions. The four most frequent content categories contained the following suggestions for improving communication:

- Synods share honestly and openly about the call process and backgrounds of potential calls and try to match candidate gifts with congregations (254 comments)
- Synods initiate communication, provide frequent check-ins and follow-up contacts after one receives a call (214)

- Synods use communication tools and methods such as e-mail, phone to provide updates during waiting periods (203)
- Candidates be proactive, taking responsibility to advocate for oneself (75)

16. In the first survey first call leaders chose several competencies they wanted to further develop. The following priorities emerged (in rank order):

- **managing disputes**
- **planning stewardship program**
- **training/equipping others for their ministries**
- **planning a church budget**
- **working effectively with congregational leaders.**

The second survey probed the third item, the desire for "training/equipping others for their ministry." Ten types of lay groups in congregations and seven common lay ministry skills were listed in a chart. Respondents were asked to select kinds of skills that would help empower and develop each group. For nine out of the ten lay groups, the most frequently chosen skill was "**maintain spiritual foundations.**" Thus, for almost all types of lay leaders, the importance of working from a spiritual base was considered of utmost value by first call leaders for the following lay leaders/groups (percentages are of respondents that chose "maintain spiritual foundations" for that group):

- teachers (73%)
- stewardship leaders (67%)
- worship assistants (61%)
- daily life ministry (60%)
- evangelists (59%)
- small groups (58%)
- care givers (56%)
- visitors (of new members) (50%)
- task/work group (50%)

Augsburg Fortress and ELCA churchwide units such as Division for Congregational Ministries would do well to design (or recycle) resources to meet this desire for help in grounding one's work with lay leaders in spiritual foundations of leadership.

17. In the follow-up survey, another skill which received much attention was "recruit/support volunteers." This skill was rated of second importance for six of the ten lay leader categories.

18. "Congregational Church Council" received the most attention in terms of skills needed:

- planning/vision/goals (83%)
- maintain spiritual foundations (78%)
- have effective meetings (58%)
- managing conflict/reconciliation (51%)
- problem solving (43%)
- recruit/support volunteers (43%)
- listening/clarifying (39%)

The data, along with the findings from the first survey, suggest that first call leaders should approach the equipping of lay leaders from the spiritual foundations of ministry as a basis for visioning, for planning programs like stewardship, for even managing disputes and conflicts. The data suggests that if lay leaders are clear about how their faith and the Gospel message provide the rationale for strengthening ministry or moving in new directions, the challenges they face will not be insurmountable.

Of course, this is not to say that other, practical skills such as handling conflict or problem solving or planning effective meetings aren't important. For instance, some first call programs are providing training in areas like family systems, self-differentiation, faith-based organizing and conflict management which are extremely valuable leadership skills.

19. The importance of a colleague group and/or a mentor or the support from a designated lay group cannot be overstated. From the follow-up responses, first call leaders recognize this and reported:

- 55% are currently in an ongoing FCTE colleague group
- 43% of those who aren't in such a group would like to be
- 54% currently have a mentor.
- 65% of those without a mentor would like to have one.
- About 25% (or about 125 persons) expressed interest in an online interaction
- 50% are working with a mutual ministry committee.
- 37% said a mutual ministry committee is a new concept for the congregation or the senior pastor (another 22% indicated congregational reluctance).

20. **GENDER DIFFERENCES SUMMARY**

The following data showed significant differences between males and female respondents in what they each value in the processes of moving from candidacy to a first call.

| FEMALES Value More Highly | MALES Value More Highly |
|---|---|
| Seminary classes | Personal study for stewardship and for church budgets |
| Spiritual mentors and mentors for outreach/evangelism | Finding ways to move a congregation toward a mission-field perspective |
| FCTE programs | Literature on the topic of moving toward a mission field perspective |
| Continuing education | Support spiritual growth with help from family and from setting clear goals |
| Personal study for managing disputes | Help for planning effective meetings |

21. **FIRST AND SECOND CAREER SUMMARY**

The following data showed significant differences between first and second career first call leaders and what they value in the process of moving from candidacy to a first call.

| FIRST CAREER Value More Highly | SECOND CAREER Value More Highly |
|--|---|
| Internship | Importance of outreach |
| FCTE | Mentors for outreach |
| Help with recruiting/supporting volunteers | Finding ways to move congregations toward mission-field-perspective |
| | Personal study |
| | Help with listening/clarifying with lay leaders |
| | Online learning and continuing education |

22. Candid observations about the complexities of parish ministry were plentiful in these surveys. Here is a sampling of comments from respondents in the follow-up survey.

I am surprised at how differently I think about these issues just one year later. For myself - and others I presume - we have given over ourselves to our seminary professors. We have not believed in our calls; we expect our first calls to be textbook love-fests. The fact is that ministry is far more complicated (dirty) and complex (wooly) than we could ever imagine. Seeking the approval of others externally does not work in any parish setting. We need to gather up our broken (not crushed) shards of pottery that we are and take a risk. We really need to believe that God the FSHS gives us everything we need to make it through today.

There is tremendous pressure to know more, learn more, implement new strategies, attend more informational workshops, etc. While it is good to learn and grow in these ways, I often wish for a church culture that allows us as pastors/leaders to simply take a deep breath, preach and teach and visit people faithfully and diligently, and trust that God will not let the church disappear from earth. I am trying to quietly and steadily go about my work and to be non-anxious about God's faithfulness.

I'm finishing my third year of ministry. I feel more in control, more poised in handling conflict, counseling and leading/teaching my congregation. I still need help in the areas of reaching the unchurched, planning stewardship campaigns and recruiting leaders.

Sometimes the best support we need is away from the church, with a Christian friend in a different vocation.