



National Leadership Roundtable
on Church Management

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Serving a Church Facing Challenges

National Roundtable on Church Management Meets in Philadelphia

Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, June 27, 2008. Effective organizations require “good leadership,” as well as “good management.” But because “individuals frequently are much better at one than the other,” successful organizations “pick their leadership teams to ensure” that leadership and management skills both “are appropriately present,” said business leader Frederick Gluck. He spoke to the annual meeting of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, which met June 26-27 in Philadelphia.

Gluck, a member of the Leadership Roundtable’s board of directors who is a former managing partner of McKinsey & Company, told the meeting’s 90 participants that while leaders and managers in the church might sometimes wish they could escape their responsibilities, “there is no escaping them.” One can, however, take steps to define “leadership” and “management” – to define a balance between them that works for a given individual.

Ten U.S. bishops participated in the Philadelphia meeting, along with business and financial leaders, pastors and lay pastoral ministers, philanthropists, educators and others. They discussed ways to promote excellence in the leadership and management of Catholic dioceses and parishes.

The 3-year-old Leadership Roundtable was established in July 2005 to promote “best practices” by all serving in the church workplace. Its founding came not only at the time of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, but at a time when the church was facing numerous other significant challenges in a changing culture.

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“As a church, we face a daunting mission and a tsunami of challenges in the decades ahead,” said Francis J. Butler, who commented on this year’s meeting. Butler is president of the Washington-based Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities. Much of the challenge “is related to our demographics -- aging congregations, lack of clergy, costs of operations, new immigrant populations, the diminished connections with younger people and so on,” said Butler.

Against the background of these challenges facing today’s church, participants in the Philadelphia meeting spent time in small groups deliberating a parish ministry assessment tool and other Leadership Roundtable projects.

A group of Leadership Roundtable members was charged with producing a working paper on hope and trust in the church that calls for “the promotion of a culture of excellence where Catholic institutions commit themselves to the highest standards of stewardship, ethics and accountability, with clear performance indicators.”

Father J. Bryan Hehir, the Archdiocese of Boston’s secretary for social services, said during one Philadelphia session that a discussion paper on trust “confronts a major, complex challenge that touches the very fiber of the church.” He said that one cannot minister without trust.

Lawrence A. Bossidy, former chairman and CEO of Honeywell International, delivered a major speech to the meeting on principles of good leadership in organizations, drawn from his expertise and long experience in business. Good leaders take steps to keep growing, he said. Among other things this requires listening to the views of others, he said. And good leaders can change their minds in the face of new facts; otherwise they stop growing, Bossidy said.

Good leaders “embrace realism,” according to Bossidy. He said, “The sooner you recognize reality, the more options you have.”

Bossidy believes the “core of a good organization is to assess and develop people.” For this, it is necessary to identify strengths and development needs” – a process that does not have to be conducted in a negative manner. But “this is a way organizations get better,” he said. He encouraged leaders to affirm staff members. Otherwise, he said, the good people leave and the mediocre people stay.

One interesting proposal by Bossidy urged that the church take steps to learn why people leave the church. He suggested conducting “exit interviews,” asking people why



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they left. Maybe then the church can “come up with programs to prevent the next person from leaving,” he said.

John J. DeGioia, who seven years ago became the first lay president of Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington, addressed a Leadership Roundtable luncheon on the leadership of a Catholic university today. As new president, he faced the challenge of sustaining Jesuit and Catholic identity in the new millennium, and needed to ask, “What would enable us to do what is needed to be who we are?”

His position required resiliency and hard work, DiGioia said. He described efforts undertaken to seek out new talent “that might not ordinarily” be sought, along with new ideas and institutional structures that might “enable you to do some things differently.” Attention was given to tapping into old resources such as Ignatian spirituality in new ways.

DiGioia, responding to a question from the audience, said that he thinks that after Pope Benedict XVI’s U.S. visit this year, “a number of us will feel a sense of confidence and empowerment.” He said, “This is our moment,” a moment to step into today’s culture with a message that perhaps is countercultural, but that might also be presented with new confidence.

Some others who addressed the Roundtable meeting included:

-- Father John J. Wall, pastor emeritus of Old St. Pat’s Church in Chicago and president of the Catholic Church Extension Society, which aids dioceses and parishes in U.S. mission regions. The church is not “member-driven,” it is “mission-driven” he said; it constantly creates experiences oriented to mission.

Father Wall accented the need to address young adults in parish life. This is important at Old St. Pat’s, he said, because it is a downtown church. Father Wall said young adults are “taking over the center of the city” in many urban areas.

-- Franciscan Sister Katarina Schuth, a noted church researcher and seminary educator in St. Paul, Minn. She wrote a 2006 book titled “Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes” about the large number of Catholic priests serving more than one parish.

These priests tend to find their work highly rewarding and to feel appreciated, but also find their work fraught with difficulties, said Sister Schuth. She believes more than 50 percent of U.S. parishes now are served by a priest serving more than one parish.



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-- Jim Lundholm-Eades, director of parish services and planning for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. He introduced a resource titled "An Assessment Tool for Parish Ministry and Management" designed to help parishes assess where they stand "in areas of best practices." It was developed by a Leadership Roundtable subcommittee he chaired.

"You don't need an expert to use" this tool, said Lundholm-Eades. It identifies a parish's strengths and potential for improvement using "quantifiable measures of [parish] effectiveness."

The annual Leadership Roundtable Best Practices Award was presented during the Philadelphia meeting to the school system of the Diocese of Memphis, Tenn. Bishop Terry Steib of Memphis and Mary McDonald, superintendent of schools, received the award. Steps the diocese took over the past nine years to make Catholic schools more accessible to inner-city students have attracted widespread interest.

Participants in the Leadership Roundtable meeting gave considerable attention to "management" and "leadership" as separate but overlapping responsibilities in Catholic communities. The meeting's theme was "Managerial Excellence: Engaging the Faith Community in Leadership in the Church Today."

Butler said in an interview that he believes the challenge at the parish level "is getting both the leadership and management working together." The FADICA head said that if an organization has leadership without management things may not get done, but "bureaucracy and immobility" may result from "management without leadership."

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(NOTE: The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management promotes excellence in the leadership and management of Catholic dioceses, parishes and nonprofits. For more information, call 908-400-3435; e-mail Michael.Brough@nlrcm.org.)