

## Lay Ministry & Planning

Michael Davis, Office of Lay Ministry & Planning



Greetings!

*The first annual reports from parishes and councils are flowing into our office, thank you!*

### Parishioners' & Participatory Leadership

#### Quote for Strategic Planning...

This speaks to the co-responsibility that our baptism calls us to; we are to fully participate in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing ministry of Christ as believers.

*"Given the critical need for leadership in the church and society, the development of leaders needs to be framed as a matter of urgency and importance. It is simply not possible to lead and organize ministry without inviting, recruiting, developing, supporting and training the people."*

— Dan R. Ebener, Ph.D., in *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish* (reviewed below)

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Book provides data to show that servant leadership really works**

If you're looking to make the case that servant leadership really works in Catholic parishes, Dan R. Ebener's new book, *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish*, is an answer to your prayers.

Two things about Dr. Ebener's research on servant leadership's effectiveness in Catholic parishes should be noted immediately:

- **Size doesn't matter** — Ebener reports in detail on parishes ranging in size from 43 to 1,690 families (over 4,500 individuals).
- **Structure doesn't matter** — in fact, structure varies widely among the three top-performing parishes he studies, confirming what we have said all along: *servant leadership is not about structure, it's about relationships.*

"What I am telling pastors is that if they serve the people, the people will serve the parish. That is the essence of my book," says Dr. Ebener. But by showing precisely *how* servant leadership is provided in a variety of parish settings, the author gives readers much added value.

Dr. Ebener's insights and conclusions are the result of two extensive studies conducted in the Diocese of Davenport (IA), where Ebener works part-time as Director of Stewardship and Parish Planning. (He also holds a full-time faculty position in leadership studies at St. Ambrose University.)

- **A Parish Life Study**, which included a series of objective measures of all of the diocese's 84 parishes undertaken in 2005-06;
- **A Parish Case Study**, conducted by the author in 2006-07, which built on the first study by

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investigating what factors accounted for the exceptional dynamics in the diocese's highest-performing parishes.

Dr. Ebener concludes that the very best parishes, as determined by the objective Parish Life Study, are marked by servant leadership — although the form it takes varies widely from parish to parish.

- **In the smallest parish**, which shares a pastor with another parish, the atmosphere is one of *family*. There is just one staff member on site, a woman religious, and people mostly pitch in on an ad hoc basis to address needs as they arise.
- **In the mid-size parish**, with 516 families, a full-time pastor and small staff oversee the contributions of active parishioners. *Commissions* not only serve parish needs but reach out to engage and involve parishioners on an ongoing basis. Here the atmosphere is all about *community*.
- **In the largest parish**, in which a pastor leads a large professional staff, the approach is all about *teamwork*. The parish uses a series of teams and small groups to keep people engaged and support a wide variety of ministries.

The book is a refinement of Dr. Ebener's doctoral dissertation — but charitably, the author endured six rewrites to make the manuscript engaging even for a casual reader. The overall result is an easy to read report that provides more academic rigor and validity than any journalist's profiles could offer.

Another plus: the book is well-organized and each chapter has enough information to stand alone. The downside of this is that if you read it cover-to-cover in just a few sittings, it will seem a bit redundant. But the larger benefit is that if someone wants to hone in on a single parish profile or point of analysis, a momentary glance at the table of contents will take you where you want to go and provide you with all that you need to know when you get there. Whatever you do, don't skim over Chapter 7, "Parish Results: Love is the Measure." Here the findings in all three parishes are analyzed in terms of seven critical "organizational citizenship behaviors" (OCBs), how these behaviors are fostered and nurtured by servant leadership — and how love becomes manifest itself in the outcomes. But when it comes to *why* we should want to foster servant leadership in parishes and how it looks in a variety of parish settings, there is no better choice than Dr. Ebener's [\*Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish\*](#). It offers both compelling arguments for and compelling visions of servant leadership building up the body of Christ in a variety of pastoral settings. If you care about such things, consider this a "must read."

It's also worth noting that Dr. Ebener practices what he preaches. He's donating all proceeds and royalties from sales of his book to charity.

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