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Handbook for Today's Parish Leaders

- *Responding to the call to lead*
- *Collaboration, communion, and community*
- *Practical ways to develop leadership skills*

GINGER INFANTINO



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Parish leaders, especially compensated staff members and people coordinating major programs and events, need a foundation of basic information to be effective.

About the Parish

BASIC INFORMATION

- + Church mailing address, which may be different from the street address
- + Instructions for getting to the parish from all directions
- + Contact information: parish-office phone number(s), e-mail address, website and social-networking site URLs, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of parish ministers and/or staff
- + Parish-office hours and staff schedules
- + Parish publications, including bulletins, newsletters, websites, and social-networking sites

STATISTICS

- + Approximate number of parishioners and families in the parish
- + Age distribution: Knowing the number of children, teen, young-adult, middle-aged, and elderly parishioners will be helpful when scheduling and planning activities, classes, and other parish events
- + Marital status: percentages of single, married, widowed, and divorced parishioners
- + Educational and social status of parishioners, their ethnic and cultural make-up, and language groups

LEADERS

- + Pastor
- + Priests, deacons, parish administrators, and/or financial officers who help the pastor
- + Other professional staff members who minister at the direction of the pastor
- + The person who administers the parish office and activities, usually the parish secretary. (Many believe the parish secretary is one of the most influential people in the parish. She or he grants access to and schedules appointments with the pastor and has first-hand knowledge of most parish information and activities)
- + Parish-calendar administrator
- + Facility and/or maintenance coordinator

- + Person in charge of the parish bulletin, newsletter, website, social-working sites, and other communication tools
- + School principal and principal's assistant

FACILITIES

- + Method and forms for scheduling events
- + Procedures for opening and locking buildings
- + Process for having a room set up
- + Way to access lights, microphones, heat, and air-conditioning
- + Guidelines for using the kitchen, appliances, and utensils
- + Supplies you need to bring
- + Process for clean-up, including trash removal and rearrangement of the room after an event

EVENT COORDINATION

- + Approval process
- + Speaker guidelines
- + Publicity procedures
- + Financial-accountability rules
- + Program budgets
- + Expense processing

SAFETY AND SECURITY

- + Emergency procedures in case of fire, earthquake, tornado, or other disaster
- + Notification procedures in event of emergency

VISION STATEMENT

- + If your parish has a vision statement describing itself and its ministries, become familiar with it
- + If your parish doesn't have a vision statement, see Chapter 9 for information on developing one

About Your Ministry and Service

DIOCESAN AND PARISH POLICIES

- + Ask your pastor or immediate supervisor for the written policies or guidelines pertinent to your area of ministry or service
- + Give copies to your team members

YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

- + You'll need a job description so you know what is expected of you and to whom you are responsible. It needn't be lengthy—it can be just the following information on an index card:
 - *Job title*
 - *Duties and responsibilities*
 - *Lines of communication*
 - *Length of commitment*

- + Compensated personnel should have a more formal, detailed job description
- + Leaders who work together should have a general understanding of each other's job descriptions. Know who does what—overlap can cause difficulties and misunderstandings

RESOURCES FOR PERSONAL AND MINISTERIAL GROWTH

- + Will the parish sponsor your attendance at workshops or courses?
- + What parish and diocesan resources (persons, print, media, and Internet) are available?

About Families

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

- + *The family is the domestic Church.* The Second Vatican Council reemphasized this statement expressed originally by the early Church. The family is the primary and most basic community in which individuals are molded. Parents form their children in this first school of faith through example and by providing the foundation for belief, ethical behavior, and values.
- + All parents may not understand this call or may feel overwhelmed by this responsibility. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1994 statement "Follow the Way of Love" notes, "We need to enable families to recognize that they are a domestic church.... [A] family is holy not because it is perfect but because

God's grace is at work in it, helping it to set out anew every day on the way of love.”

DIVERSE GROUPINGS

- + Many families fit the traditional nuclear-family model, but many do not. Households may include single young adults, multigenerational groupings, forever-families with adopted children, families headed by single parents, or blended families with his, her, and their children. Sometimes children in the same family have different last names. Adults may be in irregular marriages or living a lifestyle inconsistent with Church teaching. Families may be having economic insecurity, serious illness, divorce, separation, addiction or abuse.
- + As a parish leader it is important *not* to make judgments about family situations, but rather to extend the warm, hospitable outreach of the parish community. The simple task of registering people at an event may make you the first face of the Church to a person who is reticent about being there. Your welcoming acceptance or kind words may be the incentive for a person to return to the Church or to seek counseling or support.

CULTURE AND ETHNICITY

- + Your parish is a community of communities, of families with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, practices, and traditions. The Church welcomes all the faithful, encouraging cultural identity while promoting unity through faith.

- + Learn about the traditions of the ethnic groups in your parish and respect the essential elements of each culture. Culturally sensitive leaders incorporate basic expressions of the culture and language where appropriate, such as including a Vietnamese hymn in a liturgical celebration or incorporating *Las Posadas* in a parish community where many people have Hispanic roots.

About Yourself

CONSIDER YOUR COMMITMENT

- + How much time and energy are you able to give to an undertaking?
- + Will you need to drop commitments to fulfill a new one?
- + Be aware of the built-in guilt factor. It's OK to say no. Be gracious in declining an invitation and leave the door open: "I can't be on that committee this spring, but consider me in the fall." "I can't pick up the donuts for parish hospitality every weekend, but I can do it one weekend a month."
- + Avoid being roped in for life. If there are no established terms, place your own time limit on your yes. This allows you to evaluate your continued service: "I'll facilitate the Scripture group this year, and then we can decide about the future."

YOUR GIFTS AND LIMITATIONS

- + Be up front with your colleagues and yourself about what you can do or cannot do: “I’m great at all the organizational details for the parish bazaar, but I’m not a good writer, so someone else needs to write the bulletin announcements and prepare the flyers.”

Practical Suggestions for Individuals

- ◆ Keep important parish information in a folder or binder
- ◆ Place a reminder in your calendar to regularly visit your parish and diocesan websites
- ◆ Get a sense of the larger Church community by visiting the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (usccb.org) or the Vatican website (vatican.va)

Practical Suggestions for Parish Groups

- ◆ List the ways in which your parish is family-friendly. Brainstorm ways your parish can become more welcoming to families and young adults. Ask your youth-ministry group for input. How can you implement some of the suggestions?
- ◆ Discuss the major cultural groups in your parish. What cultural expressions can be highlighted in liturgy, catechesis, social events, your communication tools?
- ◆ Evaluate your parish communication tools. Are they appealing, up-to-date, and user-friendly? If not, get help from a tech-savvy parishioner.