

CHURCH magazine

Ministries

A Parish Guide



NEW!
Introducing our
2005 Parish Survey,
Lay Parish Ministers



The Changing Face of Parish Pastoral Ministers

Who they are • What they offer • How clergy & lay staff relate

Think about your own experience. How many priests did your parish have on staff twenty or thirty years ago? ten years ago? What were their ages? Who shares the leadership now? Who directs adult faith formation, sacramental preparation and the catechumenate? Who trains the servers, conducts wedding rehearsals, makes Communion calls, not to mention leading youth ministry, liturgy preparation, parish spirituality and outreach? Whew!

Few Catholics under age forty can recall when parishes were typically served by a pastor and a rectory full of parish priests (or when parish schools were staffed entirely by sisters). Since the average age of a Catholic adult in the U.S. is forty-four, that collective memory is fading fast. Across the nation rectories once built for five or six priests

house but one. Some have been adapted for other uses.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. Catholics has grown to record levels. How have parishes continued to celebrate Sunday Eucharist and offer so many other sacraments, programs, and activities? How on earth have they done it?

Our church can and does adapt. Rather quietly, barely noticed at times, new recruits have taken on a wide array of pastoral responsibilities that advance parish life. As a result, two-thirds of our parishes are led not only by priests and sometimes deacons, but also by laypersons (including vowed religious) who are employed at least twenty hours a week as lay ecclesial ministers. The term refers to the ministries of committed laypersons who are authorized by the church, exert leadership in their area of responsibility, are spiritually and educationally prepared for it, and work in close collaboration with the clergy.