Articles

Continuing Education for Lay Ministry: Providers, Beliefs, Issues, and Programs

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ABSTRACT

Research into continuing professional education (CPE) has been a constant for many professionals, including those pastors and clergy who work in religious organizations. Continuing education for lay ministers (non-ordained) in churches, however, generally has not been given this close scrutiny or attention. This article reports on research conducted with 35 leaders of lay ministry education programs in Canada, to provide information on their (a) demographics as a group (b) attitudes toward church and church bodies, and the amount of support they received from the community, and (c) programs and their participants. This study contributes to an understanding of continuing education for lay ministry.

RÉSUMÉ

Pour plusieurs professionnels, y compris les pasteurs et le clergé travaillant pour des organismes religieux, la recherche en formation professionnelle continue (FPC) est une activité constante. Cependant, on n'a ni scruté à la loupe ni prêté attention à l'éducation permanente pour les ministres laïcs (non ordonnés) des églises. Cet article fait le compte rendu de la recherche faite avec 35 directeurs de programme de formation pour le saint ministère laïc au Canada. Le compte rendu fournit des renseignements sur les démographiques des 35 directeurs en tant que groupe; sur leurs attitudes envers l'église et les organisations ecclésiastiques ainsi que sur la quantité d'appui reçu de la communauté; sur les programmes et leurs participants. Le but de cette étude est de contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de l'éducation permanente pour le saint ministère laïc.

INTRODUCTION

Research into continuing professional education (CPE) has been a constant for many professionals, including those pastors and clergy who work in religious organizations. Professions such as medicine, law, ordained ministry, and nursing have been concerned with continuing education (CE) and its providers for a long time (see Maclean, 1996). However, in general, CE for lay ministers in churches has not been closely scrutinized, although there are some exceptions (see Reber & Roberts, 2000). It is possible that this issue has not received the same degree of inquiry or interest because lay ministry[1] is a relatively new phenomenon in most church groups or because it does not have the professional status of ordained ministry. Whatever the reason, empirical research on CPE in churches—its providers, its content, and its issues—is limited, especially in Canada. Without such research it is difficult, if not impossible, for experienced CE professionals in other contexts such as universities and colleges to understand the issues and provide much needed support and expertise with regard to codification of new knowledge, establishment of standards, and questions of credentialing and credibility. This article addresses this knowledge gap by reporting on a study of the demographics, beliefs, and program practices of CE providers for lay ministry, all of whom are members of the national Association for Ministerial Programs.

That there are at least 35 lay ministry education programs in Canada is evidence that considerable financial and human resources have gone into organizing and offering CE programs and diplomas for lay ministry. Programs are offered by various combinations of university CE departments, dioceses, seminaries, and schools of theology. According to the Association for Ministerial Programs (personal communication), the directors of these 35 programs have organized themselves into a professional organization, which, although it includes a range of Christian traditions, is primarily Roman Catholic. Members meet yearly for an annual general meeting and to conduct their own CPE. Outside of seminaries and schools of theology, their programs are the main source of CE in Canadian churches, as their growing number of students attests. Significantly, these programs are not coordinated by a national church body, and the association itself is self-monitored and self-governed. In contrast, CPE for ordained ministers is typically provided by seminaries and schools of theology, which usually employ faculty prepared at the doctoral level to provide professional education for ministry by offering programs that are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

RELATED LITERATURE

Continuing Professional Education

Continuing professional education, regardless of the participants, is not without its issues and problems (e.g., see Mott & Daley, 2000). Recently, Cervero (2001) identified three main issues that are confronting CPE. Deciding "Continuing education for what?" (p. 25) is the first one. When applied to CPE for lay ministry, questions are raised about the reason for the programs and their intent. What are these lay ministers being educated for (ongoing faith formation, parish leadership, etc.)? Anecdotal evidence suggests there is considerable confusion over the purpose of these diploma programs and their educational merit, as well as questions about what they contribute to the overall growth and development of the church.

The second issue raised by Cervero is: "Who benefits from the education being provided?" (p. 26). Again, when applied to CPE for lay ministers, the questions are: "What are the implications of CPE for lay ministry? What is the relationship between lay ministers and ordained clergy and how will this be altered by increased knowledge and skill among lay members? What are the implications of CPE for the already unbalanced power relationships between clergy and laity?"

"Who will provide the continuing education?" (p. 27) is Cervero's third issue. The study that is the basis of this article addressed this question, and others, by focusing on the directors of lay ministry CE programs in Canada. It raised questions about collaboration between local churches and these providers and about authority and responsibility in the programs. It asked what these program directors believe and think, and how this might affect a major educational effort by Christian churches in Canada.

Adult Religious Education Literature

Although, in general, churches have long been primary providers of adult education (see Apps, 1989), research on church-based education is absent from the adult education literature. Some adult religious education (ARE) literature (e.g., English & Gillen, 2000a, 2000b; Foltz, 1986; Gillen & Taylor, 1995; Vogel, 1991) does exist, but by and large ARE research is neglected. This lacuna may be accounted for, in part, by the overwhelming attention given by schools of theology and seminaries to the study of philosophy and theology to the near exclusion of education, and also by the overall paucity of empirical work in religious research generally, sociology of religion excepted. One of the few resources that does address the issue is a recent edited edition by Reber and Roberts (2000), which provided various historical and theoretical discussions on CPE for churches. Although the various

writers in the collection provided a solid overview of CPE in North America, its models of delivery, and its broad audiences, they offered little empirical research on which to base their discussion. In response, the study reported in this article attempts to provide relevant empirical data on which future CPE decisions can be based.

(It is nothing less than ironic that the acronym CPE has a totally different meaning in church education circles. CPE is used to denote clinical pastoral education and is used widely in seminary and theological contexts. Keeping with the CE focus of this article, CPE is used to refer to continuing professional education only.)

The lay ministry itself has received some attention in adult education literature (e.g., English, 1999b, 1999c; Fox, 1997), yet there is little refereed research on CE for lay ministry (see English, 1999a; Zeph, 2000). Although I have taught in three such Canadian programs, I am not aware of any critical and systematic research on the viability, the leadership, and the future of these programs. Whereas journals such as the American Journal of Theological Education and the newly revived *British Journal of Theological Education* are dedicated to the professional and continuing education offered in theologates or seminaries, no journal addresses in a particular way non-degree education for lay ministry.

This article reports on exploratory research conducted with the directors/leaders of the various ministerial formation programs in Canada. All study participants were members of the Association for Ministerial Programs. The study is a response, in part, to the dearth of information and to the emerging recognition that lay people have a legitimate right and responsibility to receive CE for ministry. Since the mid-1980s, a plethora of diploma in ministry programs has emerged to address the laity's needs for faith formation, ministerial preparation, and leadership training (all purposes ascribed to by at least some of the ministerial programs). The growth of these diploma programs raises questions about the purpose, intent, and outcomes.

In the United States, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) (Murnion, DeLambo, Dilli, & Fagan, 1992; Murnion & DeLambo, 1999) has initiated research into lay ministry, in part because "just as the number of parish priests have declined by 12 percent from 1992 to 1997, the number of lay parish ministers has increased by 35 percent in the same period" (Murnion & DeLambo, n. p.). The NCCB's (1999) Committee on the Laity focused directly on lay ministry education programs, noting that whereas there were standards of education for clergy, there were none for laity. This Committee expressed concerns about the emergence of these lay programs—in 1998, there were 183 programs (p. 29)—and urged the bishops to take leadership on this issue (p. 26). Committee members also queried

whether the growth of these lay ministry programs "may be helpful for meeting the needs of the Church, or [if] it may unnecessarily duplicate or overextend existing resources" (p. 26). On the assumption that Canadian bishops or church leaders might have similar concerns, they might be expected to make similar conclusions and recommendations for Canada. Yet, in Canada, there is no such national church leadership, although all of the lay ministry programs are church affiliated (either diocesan sponsored, school of theology sponsored, or local church sponsored). This remains the case whether the educational partner is a university CE department, seminary, school of theology, or a diocesan education office.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The directors of the lay ministry programs, all of whom were members of the Association for Ministerial Programs, were primarily Roman Catholic, and there were 2 ecumenical programs among the 35 that were offered. Although the directors' group had its own leadership structure and kept records of programs and members, no information was available concerning its (a) demographics as a group, (b) attitudes to church and church bodies, including the amount of church support it received, and (c) programs and their participants. The goal of the study described in this article was to analyze and contribute to the body of knowledge on this emerging trend in lay ministry education. A logical next step would be to study the students and graduates of these programs.

THE SAMPLE AND THE METHOD

The study sample consisted of 35 directors of lay formation programs in Canada, all of whom were members of the Association for Ministerial Programs. They represented 100 percent of the members of this organization. The list of participants was derived from an existing mailing list of directors of programs. A 50-item questionnaire was mailed directly to the directors in their workplace, with a one-month turnaround time requested. Of the 35 people who were mailed survey instruments, 23 responded, for a return rate of 66 percent.

The survey instrument was developed in consultation with other researchers and with reference to similar work done in Canadian Catholic school systems (Blishen, 1990; Crocker,1990); it was then field-tested with a small population (n=5). The questionnaire had three sections. The first section, "Getting to Know You/Demographics," was intended to generate a profile of the directors, that is, age, gender, education, etc. The second section, "Orientation to Church," was intended to generate information on the

degree to which the leaders were traditional/non-traditional, believed in various theological tenets, and responded to the church and church-teaching. The third section, "Program and Participants," solicited information on their respective programs, such as length, duration, and orientation, as well as on number of graduates. All questionnaires were kept confidential, and the respondents were unknown to the researcher. A research assistant, with expertise in statistics, coded and entered the data, and conducted an analysis using the statistical package SPSS. The primary researcher then wrote the results and further developed the use of the data. This article reports on the actual results of the survey.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research represented 100 percent of the survey population, but the actual number of possible respondents (n=35) made the findings limited. Obviously, it is difficult to make generalizations based on such a small number. However, the research findings can be used in two ways: to profile the respondents and, in turn, provide objective information for further CE initiatives aimed at them; and to give the respondents information with which to continue developing and planning CE for those who participate in their individual programs.

The political nature of the questions may have influenced responses. Given such a small sample size, some respondents may have been reluctant to accurately report on some of the items. For instance, Christian churches generally do not support abortion rights. Thus, a respondent who held a situational or contextual view on this topic might be reluctant to report it given the implications for job security and perhaps because of what leadership in a church-based organization requires one to believe.

As well, the questionnaire forced respondents to take positions and to numerically report on a variety of complex issues. This forced-answer construction was challenging to this group and, in fact, may reflect Fowler's (1981) fifth stage of advanced faith development, "Conjunctive Faith," which he characterized as the ability to cope with ambiguity and with more than black/white thinking. As a result, respondents may have refused to be categorized. Indeed, there seemed to be considerable reluctance on the part of respondents to indicate where they were theologically on items such as "I believe in appearances of Mary" or "I believe that premarital sex is sometimes okay." In some cases, respondents wrote in the margins "depends" or "not easy to classify" or "requires explanation." The research assistant, who met with the principal researcher periodically during the coding, reported that he had never seen a "group so reluctant to answer a question." When similar questions were asked of a Catholic schools' population by quantita-

tive researchers Crocker (1990) and Blishen (1990), few problems were reported. As with any empirical research, one can only speculate as to why people avoided answering or why they answered as they did. Clearly, there is room for follow-up interview data collection to support and probe these questions.

Finding appropriate categories for analysis is a challenge when studying the many lay ministry programs that have sprung up in Canada. The directors of these programs are continuing professional educators in that they provide education for those who have been involved in lay ministry, both formally and informally, within parishes and dioceses, often over a lifetime. However, some program participants would squirm at being declared professional, since their role is sometimes voluntary and informal (e.g., ministry of hospitality in a parish). A further complication is that schools of theology and seminaries already offer degrees (mostly graduate level) to those preparing for professional ordained and non-ordained ministry, as well as CPE to those in ministry. Since much of the work of the program directors is to facilitate the CE of those who have been in ministry for many years, the nomenclature of CPE provider tends to be used. The research reported in this article focused on mapping or profiling this group of CPE providers in order to serve the new and emerging profession of lay ministry. The discussion of who is a professional will be left for other researchers to ascertain (see, for instance, Houle, 1980).

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: Participant Profile

Getting to Know You/Demographic Data

All demographic data are presented in Table 1. Of the population surveyed, 39 percent were male and 61 percent female. This was expected given that this was the ratio indicated by the mailing list that was used. This ratio also reflected the general male/female ratio of participation in church and church-sponsored events. The average age of participants was 55. Marital status varied: 13 percent of respondents were single, 61 percent were married, 22 percent were religious community members, and 4 percent were widowed. All of the respondents were Roman Catholic, although the questionnaire was sent to a variety of groups and individuals, including those who directed ecumenical programs, which might have elicited representation from other traditions.

Respondents had a high level of education. Of the 23 respondents, 78 percent had at least an undergraduate university degree or higher, and 22 percent held at least a diploma. This finding provides support for the view

that these programs require qualified people. Since the directors of these programs are responsible for CPE, it makes sense, in the absence of certifying criteria, that they have higher education credentials.

Table 1: *Demographic Data*

Demographic Group	Percentage
Gender	
Male	39%
Female	61%
Age	
Those born in the 1930s	26%
Those born in the 1940s	39%
Those born in the 1950s	22%
Those born in the 1960s	13%
Average age:	55
Marital Status	
Single	13%
Married	61%
Religious community member	22%
Widowed	4%
Education	
Diploma of Ministry or community college diploma	22%
University degree or graduate school	78%

Section 2: Orientation to Church

The goal of this section of the questionnaire was to understand the theological world view of respondents, their attitude towards the future, their level of job satisfaction, and their perceived levels of support from the church hierarchy and local congregations. Again, the questions were forced answer. The responses to selected questions are presented in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Views on Specific Theological Issues

Data on this issue are presented in Table 2. A distinct trend towards a more liberal attitude to church issues and church teaching appeared in a number of areas. For instance, Statement 7, which measured the respondent's attitude to the ordination of women (allowed but not always "accepted" in most churches, except the Roman Catholic), indicated that only 9 percent of respondents were adverse to or disagreed to strongly disagreed on this item.

This particular item was carefully worded to ensure it only asked whether ordination for women should be allowed, not if they wanted to become priests (increasingly not an option for feminist Catholics). The overwhelming majority of respondents showed support for ordination, which reflects a less traditional theological view.

One very problematic issue was that 15 percent (3) of the respondents did not believe that discrimination against gays and lesbians was wrong because it violates their human rights (Statement 5). This may, in fact, reflect the struggle most church groups have had over this issue. The official position of the Roman Catholic church (John Paul II, 1992), for example, is that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (not practice, however) is wrong (Articles 2357-2359). Still, it is disturbing to have even a small percentage of people who are either unaware of church teaching or presumably support discrimination on any grounds.

More encouraging, however, is the interest shown in a cross-gender issue of lay involvement. In reply to Statement 1, "The church needs to go a long way in accepting lay people as equal partners in ministry," 5 percent of respondents had some commitment to this issue and 82 percent agreed or strongly agreed with it. Undoubtedly, this high level of dissatisfaction indicates that a significant group of lay ministry leaders are concerned about this issue, which may have major ramifications for the church and almost certainly for lay ministry initiatives.

On social justice issues, such as Statements 5, 9, 10, 13, and 14, there was a strongly articulated option for the poor and oppressed. This clearly articulated response to what the church has done, and is negligent in doing, is very significant. How this or any of the other issues relates to curriculum in the ministry program, however, is unknown.

On personal prayer issues (Statements 3 and 12), which often reflect a narrowly conceived traditional, reactionary, or conservative view, the responses were again strong, with most respondents indicating less traditional views. Issues such as Devotion to Mary and charismatic prayer stimulated little interest on the part of respondents, another indication of a less conservative population.

Table 2: *Orientation to Church/Teaching*

Statement	Strongly Agree or Agree	Neutral	Disagree to Strongly Disagree
1. The church needs to go a long way in accepting lay people as equal partners in ministry.	82%	5%	14%
2. I try to follow the teachings of the church in all areas of my life.	86%	9%	5%
3. I see religion as a private matter between me and God.	0%	0%	100%
4. The teaching of the church on sexuality is appropriate for our society.	18%	9%	73%
5. Discrimination against gays and lesbians is wrong because it violates their human rights.	85%	0%	15%
6. The church should allow married men to become priests.	73%	14%	14%
7. The church should allow women to become priests.	73%	18%	9%
8. Abortion is morally wrong under any circumstances.	60%	5%	35%
9. The church has a moral obligation to speak out against injustices in our society.	95%	0%	5%
10. The church should serve more actively the disadvantaged of our society.	91%	0%	9%
11. The church's leadership is acceptable.	19%	33%	48%
12. The church should have more of a stress on prayer and personal relationship with Jesus.	52%	29%	14%
13. The church should confine itself to religion, and not become involved in social issues.	0%	0%	100%
14. I cannot accept in good conscience the current distribution of the world's wealth.	100%	0%	0%

Attitude Towards the Future

Table 3 isolates questions about "Hope for the Future." The responses illustrate that while there is hope for the future and confidence in leadership, there is still some progress to be made. Although 74 percent of respondents were hopeful for the future of the church, 22 percent were not. This is a matter of concern since hope for the future generally is considered important for the life of an institution. On the issue of hope for the church's position on the laity, 70 percent of respondents were hopeful, and on whether involvement in the lay ministry program made people more hopeful, 73 percent said yes.

Table 3: *Hope for the Future*

	Hopeful	**Neutral**	**Unhopeful**
1. General attitude toward the future of the church	74%	4%	22%
2. Attitude toward the church's inclusion of the laity	70%	9%	22%
3. Change in attitude toward the church as a result of being involved in the program	73%	14%	14%

Morale Issues and Job Security

Information on the respondents' perceived level of church support and job security is found in Table 4. This is crucial data since the quality of their work life is directly related to the quality of the CE they provide to their students. Although none of them were looking for a job when they responded to the questionnaire, over half expected to be looking within five years, or presumably on leaving their current positions. While 91 percent of respondents felt little or no risk of being fired for holding non-conformist views, a full 17 percent reported feeling threatened by clergy since beginning their positions, which suggests that these program directors were not always free to do their jobs as they wished.

Table 4: *Work Environment and Job Satisfaction*

Statement about Current Position	Agreed or Strongly Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
1. I have looked for a job elsewhere since beginning my current one.	0%	0%	100%
2. I expect a job turnover in the next 5 years.	50%	9%	41%
3. There are open discussions among staff that enable me to express my concerns.	96%	4%	0%
4. I have been made to feel "at home" (accepted) in my workplace.	87%	4%	9%
5. I feel at risk of being fired for holding nonconformist views.	0%	9%	91%
6. I feel at risk of coming under attack from clergy.	9%	9%	82%
7. I feel at risk of boredom.	14%	0%	86%
8. I feel at risk of being ignored by pastors/religious leaders.	22%	13%	65%
9. I feel at risk of being unable to respond to participant needs.	17%	9%	74%
10. Since beginning my position, I have felt threatened by pastors/religious leaders.	17%	0%	83%
11. I have felt the program purpose was not clear.	9%	0%	91%
12. I have felt the program promised more than it gave.	18%	5%	77%
13. I have felt the curriculum was weak.	15%	5%	80%
14. I have felt powerless to make changes.	10%	5%	86%

Level of Support

Table 5 shows level of support from the local congregation. Presumably, a lay ministry program would be supported by lay people, but the respondents' perceptions of support from them was surprising: 32 percent felt they received little or no support from local congregations. This is noteworthy because the premise of lay ministry is working at the local level to build up the church; it is not intended to be a top-down initiative.

Table 5: *Level of Support*

Church Support	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
1. Receives a great deal of support from local congregations	7	32%
2. Receives more than average support from local congregations	6	27%
3. Receives an average amount of support from local congregations	2	9%
4. Receives little support from local congregations	4	18%
5. Receives no support from local congregations	3	14%

Section 3: Program and Participants

Basic Profile

Information on the programs and the participants in them is found in Table 6. At the time of the survey, there were 3,293 graduates of these programs and 974 students presently enrolled. Given that the first program was initiated in the mid-1980s in Canada, and that this is not a composite of every program in Canada, this is a significant number of people. In contrast, the enrolment in theological schools and seminaries has gone down consistently, especially for women. The lay ministry programs that have been developed are typical of CPE programs (see Cervero, 2001) in that they are collaborative ventures among some combination of schools of theology, dioceses, local parishes, and universities. In some cases, the diocese or local church had initiated the program, but in many cases, a local school of theology had assumed the leadership, often in conjunction with the CE department of a university or a local church and diocese.

Confidence in Their Program

Most respondents (77%) expressed confidence in their program and what it had to offer. Only 9 percent felt that the purpose of their program was unclear, and a full 77 percent felt that the program met their expectations. This high level of confidence lends support to the programs, even though they varied widely. For example, there was no consistent naming of programs, which suggests a lack of a coordinated vision, despite the fact that most church groups coordinate their positions on many other issues. Indeed, program titles varied from faith formation to lay ministry formation, adult faith, diocesan ministry formation, pastoral formation, lay formation, Christian training program, parish ministry formation, diploma in theology

and ministry, diocesan lay formation programme, pastoral leadership certificate program, preparation program for cross-cultural mission, compassionate leadership program, diploma in ministry, and leadership training for aboriginal leaders (only two programs had the same title). This variety of titles was also indicative of a variety of purposes (only two of the programs were intended to provide leadership skills, which are presumably necessary for lay ministry). As well, since only 46 percent of the programs had a practical component (i.e., field education), it could not be assumed that participants were being prepared for active ministry or faith formation. Overall, there seemed to be few links between title and purpose.

Length and Purpose of the Program

Programs varied in length, although the average was three years. A phenomenon not studied here were people who completed one program and then went on to another program (usually a university-affiliated one) or those who were part of lay formation programs that actually involved students in two programs simultaneously. In one eastern diocese, participants can graduate with a diploma or certificate either by attending a weekend program sponsored by the diocese or by participating in a university-affiliated program.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is considerable confusion over the purpose and intent of these diploma programs and whether they contribute to the overall growth and development of the church and individual faith development. (The absence of published research on these or similar programs makes it difficult to substantiate this anecdotal claim.) Significantly, none of the directors indicated employment preparation was an aim of their program; rather, the answers varied from faith formation to leadership to continuing support for lay ministry. These data are not presented in a table since there was no discernable pattern.

Table 6: *The Programs and Their Participants*

Description		
Graduates	3,293	
Current Enrolment	947	
Duration of Programs	**Number**	**Percentage**
1 year or less	3	15%
2 - 2.5 years	6	29%
3 years	10	48%
4 years	2	10%
Requirements of Programs		
Involves a practicum	10	46%
Requires a high school diploma	6	27%

IMPLICATIONS FOR
CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

The language of CE is not common in church circles, yet this is precisely what these programs and the people who lead them are providing to the ministry. Those who were surveyed for this study have been charged with an enormous responsibility, and their leadership is a step removed from the work traditionally undertaken by seminaries and schools of theology. The program directors exist on the continuum of professional education and continuing professional education. They have a variety of participants in their programs, and they both develop and provide CPE for their lay ministry participants. It is possible that the term "lifelong educators" is more appropriate for them since it spans the gamut of educational provision and "refers to educational influences on the person over the entire life span" (Selman, Selman, Cooke, & Dampier, 1998, p. 21).

The apparent variety of program purposes suggests the need for a more unified vision. It also suggests the need for more direction from national church bodies and possibly from experienced CE providers in higher education. This coordination could provide support and direction for existing programs, as well as offer assistance to those who are considering initiating a similar program in their region. Alternately, it could be argued that local programs that meet local needs and have locally established curricula are appropriate. This, however, seems to be a naïve view that misses the fact that church structures are inherently hierarchical and that the appointed

leaders have veto power over all education offered through church groups. Problems of academic freedom arise for CE departments that collaborate in offering these programs. How do government-funded universities reconcile the church's intrusion into the selection and censorship of academic content?

While numbers, especially of women, are declining in schools of theology (see Moody, 1998), they are increasing in these lay ministry programs. This was evidenced by the results of this study, which found there to be in excess of 3,293 program graduates and over 974 students currently enrolled. The church needs to recognize these programs as sites of significant lifelong learning, perhaps the most significant learning sites in the church today. As such, the church should be concerned about who leads, teaches, and directs these lay ministry programs and what their theological beliefs are. It is significant that the data from this survey show that the lay ministry program directors are by and large strongly qualified, theologically moderate, and basically content in their jobs. It is also significant that the study results revealed that many of them are both satisfied with the programs they deliver and interested in continuing in their ministry. All of this matters because the potential effect of these programs and their graduates on the future of the church is great. Indeed, given the declining number of ordained clergy, program graduates are likely to hold more and more critical roles in churches. What they learn, and who they learn it from, will be major factors in the character of the church in the next decade.

The survey data also indicated that there is much more for the church to accomplish in the area of CE. Programs must be strengthened, and the program directors must be supported in their work. Specifically, people in local congregations must be encouraged to take a more active role in supporting the programs, and clergy must be further educated about the need for the programs and how they can support them. There is also room for schools of theology and university CE departments to contribute by working with the program directors to ensure that the program content is academically sound and meets acceptable standards. In the absence of any existing guidelines or national coordination, this may be a very important contribution.

Fostering hope in the future of the church, especially hope in the full inclusion of the laity, was another need that was indicated by the data. Admittedly, increasingly conservative pronouncements from church leaders makes this difficult. For instance, Pope John II (1997) decreed that "it is unlawful for the non-ordained faithful to assume titles such as 'pastor', 'chaplain', 'coordinator', 'moderator' or other such similar titles which can confuse their role and that of the Pastor, who is always a Bishop or Priest" (p. 19).

CONCLUSION

The issues raised by Cervero (2001) bear reiteration. The first issue, "Continuing education for what?" (p. 25) is key in terms of the data reported here. Is lay ministry education intended to be for faith formation or for personal development? Is it structured to prepare leaders for the church? Based on the variety of answers given by study respondents, there seems to be no clear-cut vision of either the purpose or the intent of this education. The fact that considerable resources, financial and otherwise, have been dedicated to these programs makes this lack of leadership and vision even more serious. Experienced providers of CE in higher education contexts may be able to help the church develop a solution to this problem.

At first glance, Cervero's second issue, "Who benefits from the education being provided" (p. 26), is somewhat easier to answer: the directors of the programs, the program participants, and the larger community. The directors who responded to the survey were tremendously committed to their work, basically satisfied with their positions, and generally felt valued by the church community. Their demographic profile indicated that they are well educated, in general, and their responses to questions on theological beliefs illustrated that they are moderate to liberal in their beliefs on church issues and teaching.

Yet, Cervero's real focus in this case was on a larger question: Whose interests are being served? This answer is not totally clear from the study results and needs to be probed further by researchers. Presently, there is no national leadership on this educational dilemma, but how quickly would that emerge if these programs caused "trouble" for the church? Would church leaders allow preparation of ordained clergy to be as unregulated? Evidence from this research study revealed that the local community does not always support these lay ministry programs and that some of the program directors have felt threatened by the local clergy, a situation that undoubtedly affects the curriculum, the reputation, and the credibility of the programs in the church. Are these programs a way of pacifying laity while the status quo is maintained? Further research is needed to probe this issue. Meanwhile, higher education institutions such as schools of theology and CE departments in universities have experience in areas such as making curriculum choices and establishing educational needs, and this experience might well be useful in this situation.

Cervero's final issue, "Who will provide the continuing education? (p. 27), is more easily assessed. At present, lay ministry directors are hired at the local level, and the majority of programs are not certified by a higher education or professional body, nor are they offered at the degree level, even though some are offered through university CE departments. The rigorous

standards attached to professional education for ministry do not apply. That these lay ministry programs are working well in the absence of significant church leadership and that the directors are as competent and sound as reported in this data set should be encouraging to the church. Much more work is required, however, not only on the programs, but also in support of the program directors and participants. To this end, program directors should give serious consideration to increasing their links to university CE departments, possibly through shared arrangements whereby credibility and standardization might be achieved.

ENDNOTE

1. For the purposes of this article, lay ministry includes paid and non-paid work that non-ordained people do in church contexts, including religious education, music ministry, adult education, and chaplaincy.

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