

PASTORAL ASSOCIATES AND PASTORAL MINISTERS: STRETCHING OUR IMAGINATION BY LOOKING AROUND THE WORLD

As you may know from this year's conferences of PAAC (Pastoral Associates of the Archdiocese of Chicago) and NALM (National Association for Lay Ministry), people are looking to our Archdiocese for its leadership in the development of the ministry of pastoral associate. For ten years, the Archdiocese of Chicago has had programs of certification for pastoral associates. For 20 years, PAAC has been established as a professional ministry association that advocates on behalf of pastoral associates, supports others in pastoral ministry, and enjoys a good working relationship with the Archdiocese.

PAAC is now involved in conversation taking place around the country to form a national pastoral associate forum under the umbrella of NALM. We are looking for ways to help PAs (and those involved in supporting this ministry in the church) to be better able to communicate with each other around issues of certification standards, diocesan personnel policies, and employment opportunities. Continuing developments underway at the level of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference depend on input from people at local levels of the church. Working to enhance communication from diocese to diocese can help us all to understand both the pastoral needs of the church and the kind of standards and accountability required as formation programs for pastoral associates and other pastoral ministers are established.

It will be helpful for us to learn about models being used in other parts of the world, too. I have been invited to share with you what I have learned from visiting with colleagues in ministry from the Diocese of Munster, in Germany. In offering this story to you, I do not mean to suggest that we replicate their models. Rather, let us allow such stories to exercise our imaginations about what new possibilities may be...

Pastoral Ministry in the Diocese of Munster, Germany

In a February 2003 trip to Rome, I visited with a friend of mine who teaches there. Fr. Andreas Tapken, a priest from the Diocese of Munster in Germany, is a clinical psychologist and a professor at the Gregorian University. During my visit, I was also able to meet with Sr. Katharina Kluitmann, OSF, a colleague of his from Munster. Sr. Katharina is a *Pastoral Referent*, a title for something close to our Certified Pastoral Associate. Sr. Katharina is presently studying for her doctorate in psychology. Both Fr. Andreas and Sr. Katharina are deeply committed to the support of pastoral ministry in their diocese. They took time to tell me something about current formation of priests and pastoral ministers in their diocese.

Lay Pastoral Ministry in Munster

What we in Chicago are now beginning to understand as lay ecclesial ministry began in the diocese of Munster 30 years ago. Sr. Katharina describes lay ministry having a long and fine tradition in her diocese. With the support of the bishop, who is very good at dialogue with others, quality formation programs have developed over the years. While formation for lay

ministry is different there from some other dioceses in Germany, what follows is a description from Sr. Katharina about how things work in her home diocese of Munster.

Thirty years ago, there began to be “helpers” of pastoral ministry. The first were only women and they were not married. Sr. Katharina says this was like teachers were in the early part of the century. There was no vow taken but they could not be married. They went to “special” seminary and helped the parish priest. Eventually, men came who worked like parish volunteers. They came out of strong lay associations – of carpenters, etc. – and they were often leaders of groups like this. They began to think they could do pastoral ministry as a job, not just as a hobby. Over time, things got more and more organized and now there are well-developed programs of formation for different kinds of lay ministry in the church.

Today, there are both lay women and men working in pastoral ministry. Most of the men are married. Many of the women are not married. Those who are married often stop doing church work when they have children. Only a few are women religious. In Munster today, there are several designations of lay pastoral ministry. For each level, there are formation programs designed to meet the level of responsibility held.

Different Levels of Responsibility

In general, a **Pastoral Referent** (“referent” is a word that means professional in the field, and *referenten* would be the plural form of this word) is someone who has a five year diploma in theology, along with three years of experience in parish ministry, during which time he or she is also taking practical parish courses. During these first three years, one is called a **Pastoral Assistant**. This means the person has the theory to work in a parish but not the experience yet. A **Pastoral Referent** is paid more than a Pastoral Assistant, with a salary on the level of others who have completed major university studies. From my discussion with Sr. Katharina, the responsibilities of a **Pastoral Referent** mirror those of our certified pastoral associates. Those who complete their theological study at university to become **Pastoral Referenten** must ask to be accepted as ministers by the diocese. There are more theology students than those accepted.

Another level of pastoral minister is called **Gemeinde Referent**. “Gemeinde” has a connotation of parish and larger community. **Gemeinde Referenten** have three years of a kind of lower university, and three years of practical parish experience and courses. There are also **Gemeinde Assistants**.

There is another way that persons enter lay ministry for the church. People who already have a profession (not in the church) can start working for four years in a parish while doing a special kind of theological studies (via letters and extra lessons), in addition to taking the practical parish courses. There are also permanent deacons serving parishes, in two different ways. There are deacons who have other full-time jobs outside of the parish (their formation sounds similar to that of permanent deacons here in our diocese). Then there are “permanent full-time deacons.” In Munster, these men have to be Pastoral Assistants and have additional coursework

Each year, the bishop sends out the new **Pastoral Referenten** from a celebration of the Mass at the cathedral. In Munster, **Pastoral Referenten** are paid by the diocese and are assigned by the bishop to their “mission” (to a parish or hospital, etc.)

Formation of Priests in Munster

In Munster, there are about 400 **Pastoral Referenten** and 1000 priests. During my visit with Fr. Andreas and Sr. Katharina, I was also able to learn some interesting things about the formation of priests in their diocese.

During the first four years of priesthood, one is still considered to be in formation. During the first two years of priesthood, there are 60 hours of supervision. Supervisors are trained by the diocese and are either priests or Pastoral Referenten.

No one may become a pastor for the first four years. Before becoming a pastor, a priest must take a four week course and make a one week retreat. The course deals with special issues of parish management. One week involves something else (theological studies, etc.). Altogether, there is one additional month of study to become a pastor. Following this extra study, the priest must submit a reflection paper to be discussed with the director of the seminary.

In Munster, there are two seminaries for priests. One is the theologate, where a man studies for 5-6 years. The other is the pastoral seminary. Here, a man studies for six months in preparation for the diaconate. After ordination to the diaconate, men serve in a parish for one year as deacons. Then they go back to the pastoral seminary for six months in order to prepare for ordination as priest.

Ongoing formation is linked to the pastoral seminary. It is the place where exams are done. The first four years of priesthood are very intense. Throughout all of priesthood, there are spiritual exercises of one week each year and study for one week each year. These studies are done with a “batch” of classmates, usually a group of 20-22 men. This study (with a professor of choice) could be on: a Letter to the Corinthians, or Christology, or theology and cinema, etc. While this ongoing formation is required, not quite everyone participates. One must write a letter to the bishop to be excused, however, there are no real pressures.

Up until now, says Fr. Andreas, spiritual and psychological support for priests has not really been present. He fears that many priests do not have spiritual directors. There are three full-time “official” spiritual directors for the diocese: one at the theologate, one at the pastoral seminary, and one at the seminary for lay ministers. All three are priests, however, there are many others (priests and sisters) who do spiritual direction for the seminarians.

If a priest is in crisis, it is difficult to know what to do. There is just one place now where priests can go for spiritual renewal and psychological help. However, when Fr. Andreas gets back to Germany, after his teaching term at the Gregorian University has ended, he and Sr. Katharina will be helping his diocese to open a Center for Consultation. Here, psychologists will be able to do an assessment of new candidates for ministry and they will also be able to provide

therapy as needed for priests and Pastoral Referenten. Final plans for this center are still being developed by the bishop.

Conclusion

This story of ministry in the diocese of Munster is offered as a help to our imagination as we continue to work and dream about the future of pastoral ministry within our country and especially within our own Archdiocese. What is clear is that there are clergy and lay people around the world who deeply love the church and are working to see that God's people are served by ministers who are holy, healthy, and well-educated for their level of responsibility in service to the church.

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