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# Genius of Women: Giving Meaning to Lay Ecclesial Leadership

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GENIUS OF WOMEN: GIVING MEANING TO  
LAY ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP

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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

A dissertation submitted to the  
Education Faculty of the University of St. Thomas  
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

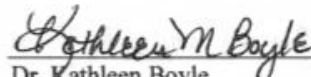
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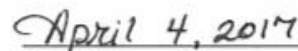
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## ABSTRACT

The development of lay ecclesial ministry in the Catholic Church as a career field began prior to the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) with a burgeoning lay apostolate, but professionalization of various ministries coincided with a decline of ordained (priests) and vowed religious (nuns and monks) beginning in the 1960s. Today 39,000 lay ecclesial ministers (LEMs) provide ministry in U.S. parishes with women serving in 80% of those roles. These women LEMs do more than support ministries or substitute for priests. LEMs create "new ways of ministering, new ways of being a minister, new configurations of the church's ministerial structures, and new arrangements of its pastoral life" (McCord, 2012, p. 8).

This phenomenological study employed both group and individual interviews with 12 women engaged in ministerial leadership in Catholic parishes in Minnesota to explore the following questions about the leadership of women LEMs in Catholic parishes. How do women LEMs working in parishes ascribe meaning to their leadership in the Roman Catholic Church? What experiences, beliefs, and attitudes inform their understanding of ministerial leadership? How does the meaning they give their leadership inform their ministerial practice?

The application of social theory and theological principles in analysis of the data suggests that these women LEMs integrate mission, story, and their experiences as women leaders to both convey and create meaning for their leadership. The findings also indicate that these LEMs integrate their experiences as women who lead into their leadership praxis resulting in a complex vocational commitment to leadership in the Church.

*Keywords: lay ecclesial ministry, Catholic Church, leadership, mission, relational leadership, authentic leadership, storied leadership, meaning making, gender bias.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wrote in a reflection paper for EDLD 910 that my doctoral pursuit was like being on the yellow brick road in search of Oz. When I began, I did not know exactly where I was going, who would accompany me, or how I would get there. Wisdom, Heart, and Courage accompanied me through the shared graces, gifts, and encouragement of many people.

Within the St. Thomas community, I found wisdom and courage among the members of EDLD Cohort 25. Professors and instructors in the School of Leadership, as well as the School of Divinity encouraged me to follow paths of learning that motivated me to grow as both a scholar and leadership practitioner. In particular, I want to thank Dr. Sarah Noonan who helped me find my scholarly voice and assured me I did indeed have something to say. I also wish to thank the Lou Ann Dummer Center at the University of St. Thomas. The grant I received provided financial support for my research allowing me to employ methods of research that fostered a community of regard among the women who participated in my study.

I also wish to thank my doctoral committee, who waited patiently for me to complete my writing. I specifically wish to thank my committee chair, Dr. Kate Boyle, my very own wizard. She guided me as I risked writing about home. Her understanding of my research, my ministerial field, and the challenges of life created just the right balance of demand and flexibility to sustain my enthusiasm for writing. It has been a pleasure to learn with and from a woman whose vocational commitment is as strong as my own.

This dissertation has meaning because 12 women LEMs joined me on the yellow brick road. They trusted me to tell their stories, articulate their mission, and give voice to their leadership. I cannot thank them enough for the privilege of sharing their wisdom, heart, and courage in my dissertation. Their witness to the genius of woman humbles me. Their leadership, along with the tens of thousands like them, gives rise to hope for the Church and for the world.

I must also thank the community where I serve in lay ecclesial service. I am grateful to my pastor and collaborator in the mission, Fr. Thomas Wilson, as well as my mission partners, both paid and unpaid, who have prayed for me and supported me. I am blessed to work and to pray in a community committed to the mission of Christ. Equally supportive were friends in and out of the field of ministry who encouraged me, asked questions, and gave me room to work figuratively and literally.

None of this would have been possible except for the love and witness of some of the most important people in my life. My mother, Patty Wallin, assumed all of her children were smart enough for college. She never let us give up on the pursuit of our academic dreams. Although not specifically dedicated to her, there is no doubt that my sister Jackie influenced my dissertation question. Her death happened in the midst of course work providing a poignant lens through which to see the contributions of LEMs.

God gave me the heart of a learner, and blessed me with two sons who share a desire to know everything. Tim and Dan challenge me to keep up with their thirst for knowledge and to be able to have intellectually informed conversations about thousands of topics. I am now one degree ahead – not that we are keeping track. Thanks also to my daughters-in-law, Brittany and Roxanne. Their willingness to share their experiences, both challenging and joyful, reminds me why we need the genius of women is needed in every corner of life. I also need to thank my grandchildren (Thomas, Ben, Elizabeth, and Charlotte). You always provided the best reason to take a break from writing.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Pope Francis confirmed opportunities for women to contribute to decision making in the Roman Catholic Church have not sufficiently emerged. He called for an investigation into "what can be done to make their role more visible today," as well as to explore women's roles in church leadership because "feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions" (Spadaro, 2013, p. 23). Some critique the Church's commitment to hierarchical male leadership and doubt that new roles for women will materialize. The critics, both secular and religious, typically focus attention on ordination, which historically and theologically excludes women. This focus fails to recognize that women already contribute significant professional leadership in the Catholic Church serving professionally as lay ecclesial ministers (LEMs) in local parishes.

The development of lay ecclesial ministry as a career field began prior to the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) with a burgeoning lay apostolate, but professionalization of various ministries coincided with a decline of ordained priests and vowed religious (nuns and monks) beginning in the 1960s. Non-vowed laywomen, who first replaced nuns in school classrooms, found themselves directing parish religious education and sacrament programs for children. In the 1980s, they took on new roles in parish youth ministry, pastoral care, and liturgy. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) (2016b), today 39,000 lay ecclesial ministers (LEMs) provide ministry in U.S. parishes with women serving in 80% of those roles (Gray, M., Gautier, & Cidade, 2011, p. 59). This number does not include an additional 113,000 laywomen who teach in parish schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2014).

### **Reflexive Statement**

I am one of the 39,000. For more than 30 years, I have chosen employment as a LEM in a suburban parish that serves more than 3200 families. This parish employs almost 90 people in a variety of roles. Women comprise 90% of the parish workforce, hold 7 of 11 direct ministry positions, and three women and one man comprise the pastor's cabinet. I am a member of that cabinet. My responsibility to the parish and pastor involves the ongoing evaluation, supervision, and development of all parish ministries to ensure they reflect the mission of the Church and the vision of the pastor and parish leaders. In this context, I provide supervision of religious education programs serving more than 1500 children, teens, and adults. In addition, I provide direction to worship, pastoral care, communications, stewardship, and parish life. I prepare couples for marriage and provide opportunities for leadership development for both parish leaders and employees. I supervise a professional staff of eight women and four men, and with them more than 500 parishioners in service to the parish.

The beginning of my career coincided with the explosion of parish LEMs in the 1980s, and at that time, I choose to participate in a support network with other women who also worked in Catholic parish ministry. All in our 20s, we sought support and direction from each other as we navigated new territory as women in professional parish positions. During our first decade of ministry, we faced major decisions that altered our lives and ministry. Like other young professional women, we struggled to balance a rich home life with meaningful work, and a desire for personal and spiritual growth. Unlike our peers, we lived out these challenges in a moral fishbowl. For example, we faced challenges and struggles that arose when parish leadership, lay and/or ordained, decided to judge the appropriateness of choices we made as women regarding marriage and family. I still remember the man who told me that as working a

mother I was a poor faith model for his daughter. Thirty years later, a few of us still serve as LEMs and continue to provide each other with support as we exercise leadership in local parishes, where our lives are still under scrutiny. One friend recently lost a child to suicide. She believes that her grief cannot be anything but public so she has allowed it to become an extension of her ministry. My relationships with these women, along with other women in the profession, (co-workers, women I mentor, and women I see as mentors) inspire me to focus my dissertation question on how women LEMs understand and explain their leadership in the local church.

Among the women who influence my research is my sister Jackie Sauber. Her forty years of ministry ended suddenly when she died from complications of lupus in July 2013. In those forty years she taught in Catholic school classrooms, principled a Catholic school, and served as a parish administrator where she contributed her talents to build a new church and school building, supervised a multimillion-dollar budget, and implemented the parish vision with three different pastors. She was also the first no-vowed layperson and woman to sit on the Archdiocesan comprehensive assignment board, which determines pastor assignment for parishes.

On the day of her funeral among the 1200 in attendance were more than a dozen ordained men, including a bishop. At the end of the funeral, as her nephews carried her casket to the funeral car, the bishop instructed the ordained men to line the sidewalk on both sides. They then sang *Libera me Domine*, a requiem hymn historically reserved for the burial of clergy in this Archdiocese. In the days that followed, what occurred to me was that this was the first public acknowledgement that her service to the Church was more than a set of job functions. The Church did not publically recognize the faith and leadership of this woman until her death.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Jackie is not anomaly. She is among tens of thousands of women who have cast their professional skills into faithful service as LEMs. Church law prevents LEMs from exercising responsibilities reserved only for the ordained, most noticeably sacramental presidency at worship. However, LEMs cooperate with ordained priests to provide organizational, fiduciary, pastoral, and theological leadership in most U.S. parishes including directing religious education programs, schools, pastoral outreach programs, stewardship initiatives, justice advocacy, evangelization efforts, and elements of worship.

Prior to the 1960s, parish ministry was the responsibility of priests or vowed religious women or men (DeLambo, 2010). Shifting church demographics and societal changes converged with the emergence of a new ecclesiology, or way of structuring church, to create new forms of ministry and employment. Documents of Vatican II recognized that ministry of the "laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it," and that "modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified" (Catholic Church, 1965a, para. 1). These documents recognized that Baptism gives rights and responsibilities to all to participate in the mission of Christ. Vatican II specifically noted that "women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society [and] it is important that they participate more widely ... in the fields of the Church's apostolate" (para. 10).

Vatican II provided a backdrop for a new theology of lay ministry, but other realities demanded it. Since Vatican II the number of self-described Catholics in the U.S. grew by more than 20 million people (CARA, 2016b) creating an explosion of need and increasing expectations for ministry. At this same time, the Church experienced a steady decline in the number of vowed religious, as well as a decline in the number of priests, which necessitated

leadership structures inclusive of the lay faithful. More recent pressures, including declines in Mass attendance, a new wave of immigrant Catholics, and concerns related to sexual misconduct of priests raised questions about "whether present modes and models of governance" are in need of reform (Keenan, 2005, p. 133). "Faced with a growing and mobile Catholic population and declining numbers of priests, Bishops began drawing on alternate forms of parochial leadership" (Parent, 2013, p. 5). These alternatives rely heavily on the leadership of women LEMs in parish and multi-parish settings.

In the 50 years following the opening of Vatican II the number of priests in the U.S. declined by 34% (CARA, 2016b), and vowed men and women held less than 14% of parish ministry positions, while the overall number of positions increased by 35% (Gray, M. et al., 2011, p. 58). Over the course of 30 years, a typical person assisting a pastor in ministry shifted from an associate pastor or a vowed religious woman to a lay married woman (DeLambo, 2005, p. 5). These women LEMs do more than support ministries or substitute for priests. They create "new ways of ministering, new ways of being a minister, new configurations of the Church's ministerial structures, and new arrangements of its pastoral life" (McCord, 2012, p. 8).

In August of 2003, in a letter to U.S. bishops published just before his death, researcher Msgr. Phillip Murnion wrote about the Church's leadership crisis. "We face the urgent need imaginatively to expand present structures and to create new ones that will enable us to draw more effectively upon the rich wisdom of those baptized in water and the Holy Spirit" (Murnion, 2003). In truth, the Church's paradigm of leadership has been in a state of change for more than 50 years. Previous models of leadership began to "give way to leadership formed in the vibrant, open, rapidly changing, and often unstable Catholicism" (Steinfels, 2003, p. 307) present after Vatican II. For some it may seem too much and too fast, while for others the next phase cannot

come fast enough, but the change cannot be denied. Research reveals the future will bring larger parishes, and more of them will be clustered or merged to assure the faithful have access to Sunday Mass (Parent, 2013, p. 9). The Church will need innovative structures of leadership to meet the needs of a changing church and world while honoring the integrity of tightly held doctrines.

The pastoral structures emerging on the local level depend on women LEMs who are responding in new ways to the call of Baptism. LEMs “teach an implicit curriculum that enriches the imaginations of the parishioners about their own [baptismal] call ... and empower them to express active faith lives” (Horan, 2011, p. 157). LEMs transform the image of leader from distant and external, to one embedded in the intimacy of the community. Their understanding of ministry, leadership, and faith shape what it means to be Catholic.

“We [the Church] stand at a crossroads. Will we choose the right path forward? This is a question for and about leadership”(McCord, 2005, p. xi). Questions about leadership will be paramount in determining the direction of the Church. The ability of the Church to meet not only the needs of the faithful, but to engage the faithful in the exercise of their baptismal commitments depends not only on the credible actions of ordained leaders, but on lay women whose professional ministry careers bear witness to what it means to live a Catholic life. The service of women LEMs is necessary both practically and theologically, but their presence also points to a move away from a traditional ordering of leadership.

A review of the substantive literature regarding women engaged in ecclesial service revealed both opportunity and limitations. A number of scholars (Ecklund, 2006; O’Brien, 2007) conducted research on organizational principles that might account for diverse perspectives among Catholic women contributing to the development of an individual’s religious or

ministerial identity. Additionally, Wallace (1992, 1993) and other feminist scholars (D'Amore, 2009; C. Johnson, 2009) conducted research on the impact women in ministerial leadership had on the communities in which they served. These studies primarily included women employed in institutions of higher education, Catholic service organizations, or parishes where no priest was available to lead. Viewpoints in these studies were organizational in nature and did not intend to explore the meaning women ascribe to their leadership or to study the experiences of women in typical parish leadership roles.

Substantial demographic and qualitative research (CARA, 1998, 2005; DeLambo, 2005; Murnion, 1999; Parent, 2013) identified the rapidly changing nature of parish life and the significant role parish LEMs play in direct ministerial service. Additionally, this research makes clear the need for new paradigms of leadership in both parish and diocesan structures publically affirming the leadership of LEMs. Although this research included observations about women LEMs, it only vaguely touched on the complex issues affecting women in ministry.

My own experience, plus those of my sister and my colleagues, led me to agree with Pope Francis's (2013a) assertion that there is a need to investigate leadership roles for women in the Church in order to ensure a "more inclusive presence of women in the Church," and in its decision-making (p. 28). A review of the literature revealed a need to conduct research that would make visible leadership of women LEMs whose daily presence contributes to the changing leadership praxis in parishes. The limitations in the literature prompted me to consider how women LEMs make sense of their own leadership. I wanted to know what other women LEMs told themselves and others about why they lead in Catholic parishes. With this in mind, I embarked on a qualitative study to address the following questions. How do women LEMs working in parishes ascribe meaning to their leadership in the Roman Catholic Church? What

experiences, beliefs, and attitudes inform their understanding of ministerial leadership? How does the meaning they give their leadership inform their ministerial practice?

### **Statement of Significance**

Responding to the questions above, this study provided an opportunity to give voice to women LEMs who already lead, and whose experience and wisdom could contribute to a broader process of discernment on women's roles in Church leadership. Conducting this study challenged me to set aside my own assumptions and experiences in order to listen to other women LEMs. Their experiences, different from my own, provided rich data and proven wisdom. This qualitative study of LEMs contributes to current literature in two arenas – practical theology and women's leadership.

Practical theology seeks to interpret theological disciplines "in relationship to each other with an eye towards action" (Cahalan, 2005, p. 63). It concerns itself with theological expression necessary for teaching, as well as practical application of theology in the mission of the Church. While current pastoral literature and Church documents present a theology that makes room for the leadership of LEMs, there is minimal pastoral research exploring how women LEMs integrate the Church's theology into meaning making or how they integrate theology into in their practice of leadership.

As a response to that need, my research included both personal and group interviews of women LEMs serving in leadership roles in Catholic parishes. This study, which intentionally focused the question on how women LEMs ascribe meaning to their leadership, also seeks to contribute to literature on the leadership of women, both in and out of the Catholic Church. Among the limits in current literature is a view of the leadership of women in the Church seen primarily from a perspective of absence– the leadership women do not have access to –



ordination. Additionally, although current sociological research acknowledges that the majority of LEMs are women, there is little research exploring how being a woman and a leader in a Catholic parish shapes the LEMs understanding of leadership. My three chapters of findings with analysis provide insight on how being a woman informed each participant's ministerial leadership practice.

### **Brief Glossary of Terms**

**Agentic Leadership.** Demonstrates assertiveness, competitiveness, independence, courageousness, and skill at achieving goals.

**Authentic Leadership.** Leadership theory placing importance on owning and articulating principles, values, and experiences that form ones true self.

**Church.** When capitalized refers to the Roman Catholic Church both global and local.

**Communal Leadership.** Demonstrates concern for others by being interpersonally sensitive, as well as perceived to be helpful, friendly, kind, and sympathetic.

**Double Bind.** Facing contradictory demands or expectations, where any action taken will appear to be wrong.

**Ecclesial.** Pertaining to the nature and mission of the Church.

**Gender Bias.** Preference or prejudice toward one gender over the other. Bias can be conscious or unconscious, and may manifest in many ways, both subtle and obvious.

**Genius.** Distinctive character or spirit of a person or community of persons.

**Lay Ecclesial Minister.** Formed and prepared laypersons, authorized by the hierarchy to serve publicly in leadership for a particular area of ministry.

**Marks of Pastoral Excellence.** Qualities of leadership in ministry, including evidence of collaboration, ethics, inclusivity, pastoral commitment, and prophetic voice.

**Mission.** The intersection of purpose, belief, and action informing an individual's leadership identify and an organization's effectiveness.

**Parish.** A stable community of the faithful whose pastoral care is entrusted to a parish priest under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

**Parish Cluster.** Formal or quasi-formal relationship between two or more parishes sharing ministerial leaders and often ministries.

**Relational Leadership.** Leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance interpersonal relationships, in accomplishing the group's objectives.

**Story.** Organized expressions of events and experiences used to develop and convey meaning.

**Storied Leadership.** Incorporation of story and storytelling as a leadership tool in order to create and convey meaning for leader and for those they lead.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 2, I explore literature that provides the foundation needed to understand the experience of women LEMs. This includes theological scholarship addressing the development of lay ecclesial ministry and roles women hold in Catholic ministry, as well as previously conducted pastoral social research to establish a context for the practice of leadership in the Church by LEMs. My methodology, detailed in Chapter 3, allowed my study to address limitations found in my review of the literature, acknowledging and exploring the abundance of leadership that women LEMs already exercise in the local parish. Within the chapter, I describe how grounded theory, as well as phenomenology informed both my research and analysis.

I have organized my phenomenological findings around three principle themes found in the data. These themes – mission, story, and woman as leader– arose out of my analysis of their

experiences giving voice to the meaning they give their leadership. Chapters 4-6 begin with a vignette introducing one of the participants whose story represents the chapter's themes. Each chapter then focuses on one of the principle themes integrating the reporting of experiences of the participants with analysis of the findings and interpretations of their leadership. In my analysis of their experiences, I included a range of social theories to explore leadership meaning making and theological principles to provide a context for that meaning since all of these women exercise leadership in a community of faith.

In Chapter 4, mission and meaning, I first identify some of the demographic information regarding my participants and then describe them in relationship to their primary areas of ministerial leadership. I then define leadership within the context of ministerial practice, before I explore their ministerial leadership from two perspectives of mission—divine and human. Chapter 5, leadership in story, explores the role that story, symbol, and metaphor plays in leadership meaning making, as well as address how story reveals both strength and struggle to their pursuit of excellence in ministerial leadership. A subsequent chapter considers how the experiences of gender bias and double bind inform the leadership understanding and ministerial practice of these LEMs.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides a brief summary of the research, identifies the strengths and limitations of this study, and then suggests recommendations for future research. In addition, this chapter considers recommendations based on the findings for the Church's leadership and those who support and supervise LEMs.

## CHAPTER 2 RELEVANT LITERATURE

My exploration of the literature began with a review of material in my professional library, which contains multiple church documents and books on the history, theology, and practice of LEMs. This review allowed me to identify keywords, important authors, and an initial bibliography of source material to use in my search of relevant literature. Using these guides, I began an exploration of literature using reputable online sources associated with Catholic research and professional development organizations. Additionally, I used both theological and social research engines available to me through the University of St. Thomas to broaden the scope of literature to include scholarly articles, qualitative studies, and dissertations. In this phase of my research the keywords *Catholic Church*, *lay ministry*, *Catholic feminism*, *religious leadership*, *hierarchy*, *practical theology*, and *parish ministry* provided a pool of relevant literature.

I identified two trails of scholarship through reflection and analysis of the literature. First, I reviewed a sampling of theological documents and scholarship that informs the context of women in lay ecclesial leadership in the local church. I also reviewed a concise, but substantive body of pastoral sociological research identifying the influence of LEMs on the Church. Both sections include feminist scholarship which takes up "the challenging process of creating agency and voice" (C. Johnson, 2009, p. 14) for women in the Catholic Church. I incorporated theoretical scholarship used for analysis into Chapters 4-6.

### **Theological scholarship**

Catholic theology, as an academic science, seeks to understand and explain the world in light of God's universal saving truth (International Theological Commission, 2012 (ITC), para. 5). The root of the Catholic theological tradition is Scripture, which "make[s] the voice of the

Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles” (ITC, para.7). The responsibility to interpret and transmit these truths to the world belongs to the Church’s magisterium and includes dogma, doctrine, and canons promulgated by popes and bishops. Other theologians and scholars provide an additional essential function. Their work ensures the dynamic nature of theology by assisting “the faithful and the magisterium to see the importance of developments, events and trends in human history, and to discern and interpret ways in which through them the Spirit may be speaking to the Church and to the world” (para. 53). The sheer number of church documents, much less the theological scholarship related to the work of the laity is staggering. The brief sampling provided in this review served only to demonstrate how the Church’s theological tradition influenced not only developments in the field of lay ecclesial ministry, but shaped the narrative that gave meaning to the leadership women LEMs provide.

### **Church Documents**

Pivotal documents promulgated during Vatican II created opportunity for lay ministry, and provided a faith based narrative to explain the development of LEMs in parishes. These documents published by the Catholic Church included *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964), *Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. (1965a) and *Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965b). One bishop, in his reflection on these documents, stated that the Church is no longer identified as a "perfect institution, symbolized by a triangle—with a pope at the top—but as a collection of people, men, women and children, ordained, vowed and lay, who build up the Temple of God" (Hubbard, 2013). These documents, along with the burgeoning numbers of LEMs employed in the Church provided the impetus for additional church documents that assigned meaning to the

role of the laity (John Paul II, 1988a) and shaped the practice of church employment in the United States (National Conference of Catholic Bishops-NCCB, 1980, 1995, 1999).

In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) promulgated *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord (Co-Workers)*. Released as "a resource for guiding the development of lay ecclesial ministers" (USCCB, 2005, p. 5) it took up the challenge to articulate a credible theology of an already existing reality. The bishops identified some lay faithful as "equipped with gifts and graces to build up the Church from within, in cooperation with the hierarchy and under its direction" (p. 12). *Co-Workers* generally defined the field of lay ecclesial ministry identifying the kinds of work that constitute ministry. It also articulated a broader understanding of the relationship between ordained leadership and the leadership provided by LEMs in parish ministry. The USCCB did not intend for *Co-Workers* to be the last word on LEMs acknowledging that it will be "helpful to revisit the material here and refine it in the light of our experience" and that there is "a need for a more thorough study of our theology of vocation" (USCCB, 2005, p. 67).

All of these documents recognized and included women as being among those who can and do serve the Church as LEMs. However, Vatican II documents did not specifically address the role of women in church leadership. Rather they presumed and carried forward a theology of women explained in previous church documents. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, authored by John Paul II (1988b) provided the Church with a post Vatican II document on the dignity and vocation of women. This treatise reflected, but did not resolve tensions evident in women's experiences, including struggles associated with balancing public life and family life. Within the letter, John Paul II emphasized motherhood and virginity as vocational virtues for women (para. 17), and hinted at a somewhat essentialist view of gender (para. 30). At the same time, through retelling

scripture narratives John Paul II identified the positive and essential role of women in Christian salvation history (John Paul II, 1988b, para 3). Additionally he recognized “the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity” (para. 6), and expressed the Church’s deep gratitude to all women for their considerable contributions and sacrifices for Christ (para. 31).

### **Theology of Lay Ministry**

Encouraged by the documents of Vatican II, Catholic theologians further explored the role of the lay faithful in the mission of the church. Two theologians, Yves Congar (1965, 1972) and Avery Dulles (1967, 2002; Dulles & McGinley, 2008), provided foundational scholarship that situated all ministries as extensions of baptism. They defined the laity, and the ministry of the laity, from an inclusive rather than exclusive perspective—what they are (People of God), rather than what they are not (ordained). Congar's (1972) work included a broad understanding of the relationship between the laity and hierarchy where "the Church of God is not built up solely by the actions of the official presbyteral ministry but by a multitude of diverse modes of service" (p. 176). Dulles saw that the laity "far from being merely passive recipients of the ministrations of the hierarchy ... are called to make their own contribution to the growth and sanctification of the Church" (Dulles & McGinley, 2008, p. 487). Dulles's (2002) theological scholarship explored tensions in the post-conciliar church through the lens of five models or metaphors that placed a particular ecclesiology as central and compared them to each other. He then proposed a sixth, Church as *Community of Disciples*, which envisioned discipleship, including ecclesial leadership, as rooted in the call of baptism (p. 216).

Multiple Theologians (Cooke, 1976, 1981, 1996, Fox, 2002, 2003, 2006, Hahnenberg, 2004, 2007, 2010; Hoge & Jewell, 2010; McCord, 2006, 2012) built upon a baptismal

foundation. They articulated a theology of lay ecclesial ministry rooted in baptism and community, but also recognized changes in ecclesiology. LEMs "are not simply doing what priests once did, but are creating different forms of ministry and extending the Church's outreach into new areas" (McCord, 2006, p. 626). Cooke (1981) addressed these changes arguing for ministry organized not in relationship to ordination, but in relationship to fundamental areas of church life. He identified the tensions that arose as local churches attempted to "develop new ministries in clear continuity with the centuries-old understandings of the sacrament of orders" (p. 405). Additional scholarship (Callahan, 2013; Cooke, 1996; Fox, 2003; Gaillardetz, 2003, 2006; Wood & Downey, 2003) addressed the theological tension between lay and ordained, recognizing that "neither a theology of ordained ministry nor a theology of lay ministry can be developed in isolation from each other" (Wood & Downey, 2003, p. ix). Gaillardetz (2006) in particular envisioned the whole Church ordered in relationship to community, where the faithful exercise individual gifts and talents for the "strengthening of the Body of Christ" (p. 27).

This vein of theological scholarship served as foundational literature in lay ministry formation programs further shaping the theological story of LEMs. One theologian (Casey, 2010) identified elements of sameness as well as of difference between the new generations of LEMs and the nuns and monks who preceded them creating a link between what was and what will be. Fox (2003) described LEMs in symbolic, almost sacramental language as the "embodiment of Church in the world," for "by their ministry they invite us to move beyond constructs that invite passivity by the laity, and undue control by the clergy, and to embrace a vision of Church as a community of disciples" (p. 144).

In late spring 2015, ten years after the promulgation of *Co-Workers* the bishops held a summit on lay ecclesial ministry. The summit drew upon theological and pastoral social



research to explore essential developments in lay ecclesial ministry including “emerging pathways for culturally and generationally diverse populations, formation and authorization of lay ministers, and the state of parish workplaces, all in the context of the co-responsibility of the laity and the ordained” (USCCB, 2015b, p. 8). Although the summit did not specifically address the leadership of women LEMs, the language of co-responsibility acknowledged the leadership of LEMs and their essential role in parish life.

### **Feminist Theology**

Feminist Catholic theologians have applied feminist analysis to most theological disciplines in hopes that "feminist approaches may ... improve the quality of ministry and spiritual life across the board" (Hunt, 2013, p. 76). This has been particularly true in feminist theology reclaiming the equal dignity of women through a fuller interpretation of scripture (E. Johnson, 2001; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983), as well as ecclesiology (Ashley, 1996; Hunt, 2013; Radford Ruether, 2011) and practical theology (Fox-Genovese, 1999; Schiltz, 2013). These scholars hold differing theological perspectives and propose radically different structures for Church leadership. However, they each contribute to a narrative promoting a human community, and a Church within it, basing its structures on values of mutuality and reciprocity so that "each person in his or her own right participate according to their gifts, without pre-conceived stereotypes in genuine mutuality" (E. Johnson, 2001, p. 99).

A primary theme identified in my review of this literature flows from differences in theological anthropologies of person. Theological developments in this vein inform the culture in which women LEMs work and create tension for them as they publically navigate multiple forms of feminism in and out of the Church. One perspective (Ferder & Heagle, 1989; Patton, 1999; Schneiders, 2004) rejects essentialist anthropologies that define women as ontologically

different from men. Scholars within this perspective questioned whether human society can "ever function within an essentialism that does not serve those in power to retain power, and limit access to power" (Patton, 1999, p. 32) for others, and raised questions regarding the essential nature of gender in ecclesial authority. Generally, these scholars called for an "exploration of new models of ministry and spiritual leadership" (Hunt, 2013, p. 86) that ordains women or incorporates women LEMs into a "discipleship of equals" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2013, p. 223).

A converse theological anthropology credited to the scholarship of Stein (Stein, Gelber, & Leuven, 1996), John Paul II (John Paul II & Waldstein, 2006), and Allen (Allen, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012) became the foundation for additional literature. This scholarship developed a contemporary understanding of integral gender complementarity and called for a new Catholic feminism. Allen's (2006) definition of integral complementarity intended to move beyond an essentialist understanding of gender. "Women and men are the illustrations of a biological, individual, personal, and spiritual complementarity" (p. 103). Regardless of whether particular differences between men and women are shown to be constructed or inherent "complementarity begins from a stance of ontological equity and equal dignity that is nonetheless compatible" (Elshtain, 2003, p. 289) with those differences.

Fox-Genovese (1996) contended a philosophy on and for women needs to be more inclusive than that offered by secular feminism, which "does not provide an adequate response to the problems and challenges that shape [women's] lives" (p. 11). The new feminism that emerged from scholarship "includes a cry for justice while preserving respect for men, marriage, family life, and for the unique contributions of women" (Garcia, 2010, p. 145) and called for a fuller understanding of feminine genius or "way of acting in the world" (Allen, 2009, p. 31).

These feminist scholars rejected the need for the ordination of women (Ashley, 1996; Butler, 1989; Schiltz, 2013) and proposed that women's contributions to leadership in the Church include models of ministry built upon collaboration.

### **Pastoral Sociology**

"Pastoral sociology is the integration of social science methods, theory, and research findings with the theological language and self-understanding of church life and ministry" (Froehle, 2007, p. 85). I consider research compiled for this review pastoral social research (PSR) because it seeks to inform the Church's self-understanding. PSR has been pivotal in "negotiate[ing] a profound staffing transition, moving from a near exclusive reliance on priests and women religious to depending on lay ecclesial ministers" (Froehle, 2007, p. 86). Additionally, findings from pastoral sociological studies informed much of theological scholarship reviewed earlier.

I reviewed the available PSR from three vantage points. First, PSR often takes place as an extension of the Church's responsibility to govern, and serves as a "mechanism capable of aiding an integrated apostolic effort supported by careful study, evaluation, and scientific research" (CARA, 2016a). I have labeled this literature Catholic pastoral sociology. The second viewpoint, includes scholars who "focus research on major social issues as well as ecclesial concerns" (Froehle, 2007, p. 89) independent of church structures. I have entitled this qualitative research on lay ministry. A final category of PSR with research focused on women in the Catholic Church rounds out this review of literature.

### **Catholic Pastoral Sociology**

Decrees following Vatican II opened the door for collaboration between the Church and social sciences.

Forms of the apostolate should be duly adapted to the needs of the times, taking in account the human conditions, not merely spiritual ... but also social, demographic and economic. This can be done effectively with the help of social and religious research conducted by institutes of pastoral sociology (Paul VI, 1965, para. 17).

CARA set the early criteria for PSR and conducted ongoing quantitative research that included topics related to lay ecclesial ministry beginning in 1964 (2016a). In addition, the National Center for Pastoral Leadership (NCPL) directed three extensive mixed method studies on LEMs between 1990 and 2005 (DeLambo, 2005), and the Emerging Models Project in Pastoral Leadership (EMPL) more recently conducted multi-phase, multi-year mixed methods research on a wide variety of contemporary challenges facing Catholic parishes (Parent, 2013). Two themes relevant to women LEMs became evident in the review of literature generated by these research groups – the revolutionary nature of LEMs, and the expansion of parish leadership models.

**Revolution in pastoral ministry.** From 1990 to 2005, NCPL reported that the number of LEMs in the U.S. increased dramatically with 66% of all parishes employing at least one LEM (DeLambo, 2005, p. 45). Most of these minister's (73%) believe that ministry will be a lifelong career (p.71). As early as 1990, NCPL asserted that the presence of LEMs would be "a virtual revolution in pastoral ministry" (p. 145). NCPL's research made two significant contributions to questions regarding the leadership of LEMs. First, it named a distinctly feminine dimension to lay ecclesial ministry. "Many women in parish ministry ... bring a sensitivity to lay concerns, and to families, as well as to issues related to gender and inclusion" (DeLambo, 2005, p. 147). Second, these studies called for church structures to change to accommodate the revolution. "We need structures of ministry that will clarify the various roles, foster collaboration among the

various ministers, and focus the energies of the ministers of the Church, not on protecting the Church, but on building the kingdom" (Murnion, 1999, para. 74).

**Models in pastoral leadership.** Established as a research partnership between five national professional associations representing LEMs, EMPL had among its goals to provide scholarly research to “identify typical pastoral leadership structures and experiences that might foreshadow the next wave of leadership in parishes throughout the United States” (Ramey & Jewell, 2008, p. 2). The 10-year research plan incorporated two overlapping phases. The first, primarily qualitative in nature, sought to “identify typical structures and experience that might provide a benchmark for leadership in parishes” (Jewell & Ramey, 2010, p. viii). From the beginning of the process, it was apparent that the results of the initiative would not match expectations. Economics, geography, and culture influenced organizational structure rather than variations in theology— liberal vs. conservative— resulting in a multitude of parish models.

The second phase of the research began with EMPL collaborating with CARA for a quantitative survey to measure the changing landscape of Catholic parishes (Gray, Gaultier, & Cidade, 2011). In keeping with the principles of collaboration established by EMPL, this quantitative data was “subjected to further analysis at gatherings of pastoral leaders” (Parent, 2013, p. 2). The findings of the quantitative data confirmed the stories and experiences shared in both phases of study. The published results took multiple forms including an executive summary (Parent, 2013), as well as narratives representing the complexity of parish life (Ganim, 2008) and concerns for changing populations (Hoge & Jewell, 2010).

The implications of EMPLs findings for lay ministry are substantial. The EMPL board identified a multi-parish ministry model “as becoming increasingly normative for the Church in the United States” (Parent, 2013, p. 9). This model places qualified women LEMs in a position

of co-responsibility with an ordained clergy to lead parishes. The EMPL executive summary challenged church leaders to be open to new forms of leadership.

The Church has nothing to fear in allowing—indeed fostering—the emergence of new forms of community and ministry. The Holy Spirit has gifted the Church with abundant talent. The only question is whether leadership will be insightful and bold enough to release its full potential—as occurred with the Apostles at Pentecost. (Parent, 2013, p. 11)

### **Qualitative Research on Lay Ministry**

Pastoral sociological researchers working independent of church structures also took seriously calls to explore new forms of ministry. In a speech to theological researchers, Schuth (2009) identified essential characteristics of ethical pastoral research and articulated her belief that in "telling the truth of what we know, the message is grounded in faith and love for the Church" (p. 26). Researchers reviewed here, although at times critical of current structures, told what they knew focusing on how ecclesial environments influence ministry, as well as the minister.

The environment in which ministry occurs has been the focus of qualitative research by notable scholars. Some researchers (Jewell & Ramey, 2005; Fox, 2010; Jarzembowski, 2012; Jewell, 2013) analyzed data from EMPL through a variety of qualitative lenses. Using systems theory, Fox (2010) argued that LEMs signify a changing pattern of relationships and authority in the Church. She speculated that changing patterns of relationships and authority need to be recognized, because when the changes are addressed within Church theology, structures, and practices the "life of the community, leader, and parishioners together [are] better able to unfold in a vibrant way" (p. 201).

Jewell (2013) stressed that the environment of ministry "can impact the ability of lay ecclesial ministers to be effective in parishes" (p. 5), and identified particular tensions between

lay and ordained ministers including differing degrees of acceptance regarding church doctrine on ordination and "how men and women work together" (p. 6). This scholar (Jewell & Ramey, 2005) also identified six marks of pastoral excellence articulated by LEMs and pastors as essential to parish leadership. Jarzembowski's (2012) analysis of EMPL research identified generational tensions among pastors and LEMs. "There are significant differences between today's young adults, and those of prior generations especially in terms of workplace styles, monetary expectations, and technology use" (p. 12). He recommended increasing "collaboration, hospitality, and inclusivity to all those working in the Church, most especially across generational and cultural boundaries" (p. 59) to avoid the erosion of effective ministry.

Generational diversity is but one of the areas of pluralism recognized in the qualitative research. Other scholars (D'Antonio, 1994; Ecklund, 2006; O'Brien, 2007) reported on multiple organizational realities that create diverse perspectives on lay ecclesial ministry. Ecklund (2006) studied six parishes, and "uncovered specific factors that described and may have even acted as mechanisms in shaping the culture of women's leadership in two types of parish"(p. 95) – traditional and conservative. The factors included attitudes the pastor and community held about the priest shortage, the engagement of the laity, and the parishes' experience of women in leadership. D'Antonio (1994) asserted that laity did more than absorb the perspectives of the pastor, they "bring about change, often in spite of the hierarchy" (p. 379). These findings recognized the presence of an emerging pluralism at a personal, as well as organizational level.

O'Brien's (2007) research on emerging ministerial identities among LEMs enrolled in ministerial formation programs affirmed pluralistic attitudes among individual LEMs. Interviewing student LEMs and their supervisors, the researcher determined participants "varied significantly in their self-appropriation" of the term minister (p. 222). O'Brien concluded the

marginalization of LEMs required ministerial identity to be predominantly a self-authenticating activity. The "interplay of the minister's constructed identity ... with those of the community in which she ministers" (p. 231) served as a source of tension and even conflict for the individual and for the community.

### **Feminist Sociological Research**

Carr (1988) defined the principle task of Catholic feminist scholarship as "revisiting Christian categories in ways that take seriously the equality and experience of women" (p. 8). The literature sampled in this review applied feminist methodologies to explore how the presence of women influenced the culture of Catholic institutions and the degree to which the experiences of women shaped their individual religious and ministerial identity.

Wallace (1992, 1993) conducted groundbreaking feminist qualitative research on the leadership practice of women engaged as ministerial leaders in Catholic parishes with no resident pastor. Her ethnographic study included interviews with these women, priests moderating or supervising their ministry, and parishioners in the parishes. Through analysis of data, Wallace found that leadership provided by these women contributed to healthy developments in parish life. "A restructuring of authority in the parish, from a hierarchical to a circular relationship between parishioner and pastor" (Wallace, 1992, p. 84) facilitated ownership of parish decisions by the laity.

The dissertations (D'Amore, 2009; Huggins, 2004; C. Johnson, 2009) I reviewed focused attention on a particular diocese or religious settings. They built upon the premise that changing demographics and the shortage of priests and vowed religious women necessitated a need for laywomen to "function as administrator, spiritual mentor, or liturgical leader, or in host of other important roles ... in parochial life" (Huggins, 2004, p. 1). The findings within these



dissertations recognized the contributions women LEMs have made in sustaining and advancing essential church ministries. This research confirmed Wallace's (1992) findings regarding the collaborative nature of women's ecclesial leadership, and confirmed their participants' motivations for exercising their professional skills within an ecclesial institution stemmed from something deeply personal. This deeply personal call sustained them as they "transform constraints into opportunities in the daily enactment of their new role" (p. 168).

Multiple scholars (Ecklund, 2003; Gervais, 2012; Manning, 1997) conducted research on women's religious identity development, although not exclusive to LEMs. Generally, this research considered how Catholic women navigate relationships and "express their beliefs and feelings about themselves, their church, and the society around them" (Manning, 1997, p. 377) in a hierarchical institution whose "official Church teachings place limits on women's leadership" (Ecklund, 2005, p. 136).

Manning (1997) described church relationships as oriented around theological leanings—conservative or liberal—rather than around being lay or ordained. This theological tension placed women in a position of needing to navigate relationships in parishes with others who hold a converse position. Manning found that although organizational polarization exists in parishes, being in pastoral relationship with each other tended to provide a "moderating influence on both liberal and conservative Catholic" woman (p. 378). Ecklund (2005) questioned Manning's typology and concluded from her own research involving Catholic women that those who are dissatisfied do not necessarily moderate their position to stay engaged in the social network, but instead develop "individually negotiated identities" of what it means to be Catholic (p. 143). Ecklund concluded that Catholic women "remain loyal, in part because they are able to do meaningful service in the midst of their particular Catholic community" (p. 144).

### **Limitations of the Literature**

Theological and PSR literature provided a context for understanding the history and theology that informs a narrative to explain the presence of women LEMs who provide leadership in Catholic parishes. The literature reviewed made evident the significance of their presence, as well as the boundaries on their leadership. Additional scholarship related to lay ecclesial ministry focused on how the presence of LEMs contributed to changing church structures. Although this scholarship added tremendous depth to both theological and organizational concerns, it typically failed to include the voice, experience, and faith of women as women. An acknowledgment that lay ecclesial ministry has a feminine dimension (DeLambo, 2005; Fox, 2006) or including women as participants (D'Antonio, 1994) is not the same as exploring how women lead. The review made evident the need for additional research incorporating leadership narratives heard and told by women LEMs.

Considerable feminist scholarship cited employed methodologies and theories that incorporated the experiences of Catholic women. I discovered in this review, however, that most of these scholars began their analysis from a viewpoint of absence— the leadership women do not have—ordination (Hunt, 2013; C. Johnson, 2009; Wallace, 1992). Although scholars acknowledged women do most of the day-to-day parish ministry, many found resolution to tensions only through ordination or a lay equivalent. For example, C. Johnson (2009) downplayed data suggesting her participants found their lay leadership meaningful without ordination. In this case, the author's expressed counter narrative on women's ordination prevented some of her participants from having their story told. This vein of literature made me aware of the need for additional qualitative research where women LEMs have an opportunity to

provide an account of their leadership originating from their experience and acknowledging the abundance of leadership they exercise in parish life.

Most notable among the gaps in the literature was what I choose to call the missing genius of women. It is not that women have not been asked about their experiences, but the approach and purpose of prior research did not seek a specifically female voice on lay ecclesial leadership or did so from the previously describe position of absence. My study contributes a description of how women LEMs' understand their leadership genius and through this description contributes to an exploration of new paradigms of leadership in the Church, as called for by Pope Francis.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

If women comprise 80% of the parish leadership, my research needed to apply methodologies and theories that take into account the experience, agency, and meaning women LEMs apply to parish leadership. My research design incorporated methods of qualitative research, particularly feminist phenomenology guided by the principles of grounded theory to direct my study. This methodological approach provided a forum where the voices of women LEMs rise above the prevailing organizational and doctrinal tensions to create opportunity for connections rather than division. This research focused on how women LEMs ascribe meaning to their leadership and how they navigate the tensions their leadership signifies, contributing new knowledge to the study of lay ecclesial leadership.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Research on the experience, agency, and meaning women LEMs assign their leadership benefits from qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research examines how people account for meaning by exploring the concepts, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions they use. I situated my research within in a qualitative frame because the "meanings we give to events and things come from their qualities" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 3). The use of research methods associated with a qualitative approach has a number of common characteristics. Five such characteristics support my research questions (Creswell, 2013, pp. 45–47).

- Data collected directly from those studied.
- Researchers engaged directly in the collection of data.
- Research focused on the meaning that the participants give their experience.
- Researchers know and communicate their position within the study.
- Researchers seek a holistic explanation of complex problems or questions.

Multiple philosophies supported in qualitative research influenced my understanding of personhood and leadership. Ontologically, I am a critical realist. I believe "there is world

existing independently of our knowledge of it" (Bazely, 2013, p. 21). We encounter that reality physically, emotionally, and spiritually through our bodies. However, I also hold a constructionist viewpoint when discussing how we assign value and meaning to our experience of that reality. What we call knowledge is "constructed through discourse in the context of individual history and social interaction" (Bazely, 2013, p. 23) so that we can put into words a reality that cannot be fully understood. This combined ontological philosophy influenced my selection of specific research methods and strategies.

### **Feminist Phenomenology**

Feminist methodologies spring from feminist ideas, which recognize "that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understanding" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 7). It sees gender as a basic organizing principle that shapes the condition of all human lives. Feminist methods reflect feminist theories "to correct both the invisibility and distortion of the female experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 29) of previous and current inequalities within the culture.

Phenomenological study seeks "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomena" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). In practice, it attempts to describe what participants experience and how they experience it. Typically, a phenomenological study includes a few essential characteristics, including an emphasis on particular phenomena for a group of individuals, as well as consideration of both the "individual's subjective experience of the phenomena and the objective experiences in something in common with others" (p. 78). It also provides opportunity for researchers to account for their own experiences of the phenomena, in order to bound or bracket those experiences so they can focus on the participants and their experiences.

Engaging a feminist lens on phenomenology allowed me to address three important elements of research on leadership of women LEMs. First, I was able to acknowledge that in Catholic Church leadership, women LEMs have experienced exclusion and devaluation, and that the voices of women LEMs have been mostly absent from recent conversation on women's leadership in the Church. It was not my intent to study women LEMs as a class within the Church or society, but I focused my study on their experiences because they and their work are essential to the Church's mission. Feminist phenomenology honors and respects their contributions to the field because it "requires openness, engagement, and the development of...relationship" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 27). A feminist phenomenology incorporates an ethic characterized by inclusion, commitment, equality, and trust. Ultimately, feminist research seeks to "create new relationships, better laws, and better institutions" (p. 175), and my intent was to provide a platform for the inclusion of women LEMs in the ongoing dialogue on the role of women in the Catholic Church.

Second, this methodology enriched the "double hermeneutics" essential to credible qualitative research, where researchers try to "make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening" (Bazely, 2013, p. 194). A feminist lens compelled me to ask critical questions about exclusion and bias that might contribute to the meaning making of the participant, while providing the researcher with data. A feminist phenomenology starts with the experience of the participant, but moves well beyond developing a description. As a researcher, I not only included the individual's experience in the data, but also intentionally included the individual in the research by using strategies such as interviewee-guided interviews, and the incorporation of symbol and story to convey meaning.

Finally, the application of this methodological lens to my research on women LEMs focused my attention on the experiences and meaning making of these women, while placing my own identity as "one of them" in perspective. Phenomenology allowed for multiple right answers among my participants, while still providing rich data that revealed shared elements of their meaning-making activities. It pushed me to look beyond describing what they do and how they do it and challenged me to hear their description to reveal why they lead. It supported and affirmed questions associated with meaning making. Phenomenology with a feminist perspective placed the research in the context of relationships.

Through this methodology, I recognized any strategy of data collection claiming to be objective could make people feel like objects (Reinharz, 1992, p. 233). This research methodology reminded me that as a researcher who is "a human knower complete with feelings" (p. 215), I needed to encounter my participants as human knowers complete with feelings. In my decision to research a phenomenon I participate in, I had to be aware that the research relationship creates opportunity and obligation; I needed to handle that relationship with sensitivity and integrity. Women LEMs, who participated in my study, deserved to have their experiences discussed, responded to, and reported with dignity. Within this frame, data was not just data. It symbolized a relationship that involved "commitment on the part of researcher to form a relationship" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 29) and sincerity on the part of the participant. In order to address this concern, I employed principles of grounded theory in both research design and data analysis.

### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory (GT) provided a theoretical approach, as well as methodological tools, to create space for women's voice and experience "by placing priority on the phenomena of study

and see[ing] both data and analysis as created from shared experience and relationships with the participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). As a theoretical approach, GT provided a method to discover the meaning participants gave their actions and experience, and then consider how and why that meaning was constructed. As a methodology in my study, GT valued the experiences of my participants while asking me as the researcher to "become aware of [my] own presuppositions and grapple with how they affect research" (p. 131).

I can identify two substantial benefits of GT on my research. First, it intentionally made the leadership of women LEMs the phenomena studied and not merely a dimension of an organizational study. Understanding ecclesial leadership through the eyes of women LEMs is essential to both an understanding of current leadership practices in parishes, as well as the development of new leadership paradigms. Women LEMs gave voice to their beliefs and actions providing new language and images for both theological documents and parish leadership structures.

A second benefit lied in the importance of reflexivity, or consciousness of "bias, values, and experiences" brought to the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 217). GT prompted me to recognize both the expressed experiences of women LEMs and my own experience as the researcher as situated in a particular time and place with implications for interpretation of data. In social research related to religious faith, it can be too easy to allow theological and structural polarization in the Church, which some scholars identified (Ecklund, 2005; Huggins, 2004; C. Johnson, 2009; Manning, 1997), to influence not only the structure of research, but also the analysis and publication of results. GT as a tool for methodology and analysis created space for the differing voices of women LEMs without presuming they shared theological perspectives or created meaning from their leadership in precisely the same ways. Generalizability of the data,



limited to the experiences of the 12 participants, arose out of their expressed experiences and beliefs, limiting bias associated with my personal theology, ideology, or experience.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Strategies**

In order to conduct a feminist phenomenological study guided by principles found in GT, I employed two primary tools for data collection: group interviews and semi-structured personal interviews. Together these methods provided opportunity to gather rich and layered data from individual participants, as well as opportunity to observe and record interaction and exchanges of meaning between women engaged in conversation.

**Group Interviews.** Berg and Lune (2012) defined group interviews, also known as focus groups, as "an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals...for the discussion of a particular topic ... appropriate for investigating motivations, decisions, and priorities" (p. 164). They are guided group discussions where a researcher can observe how participants "arrive at or alter their conclusions" (p. 172). Considered a highly flexible data collection strategy, group interviews can be adapted to reflect the culture and context of the population studied. This flexibility lends itself to inclusion in feminist research methodology, which supports the premise "that the flow of ideas and information would be enhanced by being able to listen to each other's experiences and interact with each other" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 223). The strategy also allows for the inclusion of other mediums such as photographs, physical activities, and art as both data and as aides to stimulate conversation.

Group interviewing, as a strategy in my study, focused not on individual data collection, but on how women LEMs make use of symbol and story to explain the meaning of their leadership to others. Additionally, the group interview allowed me to provide an experience

where my participants felt valued, supported, and affirmed, which are important elements in feminist methodology. Finally, the experience of the group interview laid a foundation that encouraged additional reflection, which added to the richness of data collected in the semi-structured interviews.

**Semi-structured interviews.** A common method to feminist phenomenological research, semi-structured interviews begin with a "number of predetermined questions and special topics" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 112), but additional questions serve as a guide allowing the researcher to follow the participant's thoughts and ideas. Focusing on the participant's thoughts and ideas, rather than strict adherence to getting the questions answered creates an environment where the researcher can attend "to attitudes and feelings, those unqualified things...that are embedded in women's speech itself" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24). This strategy created opportunity for the participant to share detailed examples and stories providing rich data for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were essential in data collection for my study. Through the interview, I explored aspects of ministerial life that shaped both their experiences of leadership, and the meaning they ascribed to their leadership. In the interviews I asked questions about relationships with pastors, heard the stories of how they came to be an LEM, probed beliefs about their leadership, and explored attitudes about the Church's practiced theologies regarding women and leadership.

### **Participant Selection**

I conducted the process of data collection (group and individual interviews) with 12 women LEMs employed in Minnesota in two groups of six. This number of participants generated data sufficient for my study, and had a symbolic association with leadership in the

Church. I chose to limit the population geographically because of limited resources and to reduce variables regarding structures of employment. For example, in some parts of the U.S. parishes are not legally separate from the diocese. Therefore, the Bishop serves as the legal employer of all employees. In Minnesota, however, the parish is its own legal entity, and the pastor is the legal delegate of the Bishop and therefore the employer. Choosing participants from one state allowed me to compare women LEMs whose leadership takes place in similar employment structures. I chose Minnesota because of convenience to my home, and I have contacts within the professional organizations of LEMs in that state.

I recruited women LEMs by contacting leaders of professional organizations associated with LEMs, as well as one of my dissertation committee members who works with LEMs in outstate Minnesota. I asked them for recommendations of women for this study (Appendix A). I provided criteria for these recommendations including:

- Women who have worked at least five years as a parish lay ecclesial minister in Minnesota.
- Currently employed in a parish position that includes ministerial leadership responsibilities (catechetical, liturgical, sacramental, and pastoral) that place them in direct cooperation with the pastor.
- Have a desire to participate in research that will contribute to the dialogue on the role of women in Church leadership.

From the pool of recommendations, I invited participants by phone and e-mail with follow-up correspondence to provide details and gain formal consent. To ensure a balanced representation of LEMs I used location (urban, suburban, and rural), age, field of ministry, and availability as selection criteria. I invited the two women from my pilot study in the summer of 2014 to participate in my formal research. One these women chose to participate and her initial interview became part of my data for further analysis.

The women LEMs participated in one of two retreats involving the group interviews, as well as an individual semi-structured interview, and post interview conversations needed for clarification. Pre-retreat preparation included reading *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (USCCB, 2005), and identifying a symbolic/artistic expression of their leadership to bring with them on retreat. This expression could include an object, music, art, poetry, or book—anything that spoke to the meaning of their leadership. This preparation enabled participants to reflect on their leadership and ministry in advance of the retreat resulting in rich sharing during the group interviews.

In addition to the University of St. Thomas consent form, I asked each woman in advance to sign a retreat code of conduct (Appendix B) that included expectations of confidentiality relating to experiences shared at the retreat. This extra provision, discussed on retreat, created a safe environment for sharing resulting rich and layered data. These women took this confidentiality seriously. One retreat group went further, committing to gather outside of their retreat to share professional ideas and practices so there would be no confusion about what information was protected.

### **Research Procedures**

To conduct my research, I hosted four 60-minute group interviews within a 24-hour retreat (Appendix C). A retreat is a model both reflective of the field and comfortable for women LEMs. It is common for LEMs to attend retreats that blend time for reflection and prayer with structured activities. It is also common to record the ideas generated from group sessions for use in a parish or diocese. During the retreat, I allowed time for personal reflection, as well as group sessions around key ministry and leadership themes. Two of the four group interviews were audio-recorded. I employed an independent research assistant to take field notes

during all group sessions. I composed memos about other interactions I had with participants while on retreat. I used these observations as data in my analysis, as well as in preparing for the individual interviews.

I conducted individual interviews within four weeks of each retreat. I met with each participant for a 90 minutes semi-structured interview. Participants selected among a variety of locations for these interviews. Half chose my home, and I traveled to libraries and private retreat centers for the other six. EMPL scholarship (Jewel & Ramey, 2005) on excellence in pastoral leadership guided the development of initial questions (Appendix D). I audio-recorded each individual interview.

### **Data Analysis**

I contracted REV, a professional audio transcription service, to provide documentation of confidentiality to meet the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I verified the accuracy of my transcription by listening to the interviews while reading the prepared transcript and incorporated "real time" written field notes provided by my assistant into the transcripts. I attached my initial memos and coded them accordingly. Finally, I added additional memos and observations that emerged from my preparation of the transcripts creating a "complete" document to use for analysis. To ensure that I understood the intention of my participants, I followed up through phone and e-mail to verify the accuracy of information where needed.

Allowing the data to drive my coding, I initially generated separate coding themes for my two data types (group and individual interviews). To both further familiarize myself with my data, and spark my conceptual imagination, I employed line- by- line coding and generated themes using the words and phrases of my participants. Additional synthesis took two forms. First, a grounded theory approach allowed the data to tell me about the phenomena of leadership

for women LEMs. This step was important in separating their articulated experiences from my own. It also allowed their voices to rise above assumptions and values I hold. Second, I used additional coding across individual and group experiences to identify common themes between the women and the groups. This synthesis assisted me in creating primary and secondary themes, as well as conceptual maps for those themes.

After a thorough analysis of the data, I used evident themes and related theories to describe how these women created meaning in their ministerial leadership, and the implications of these findings in both the fields of lay ministry and leadership. GT led to the inclusion of theological scholarship, as well as more typical leadership theories as tool for analysis. Further application of GT during writing prompted me to include theology only as it applied to my participant's experiences. This kept the focus on leadership preventing this dissertation from becoming a theological treatise or reflecting only theological perspectives that inform my own meaning making as an LEM.

I used computer software to store and manage my data. This protected the integrity of my participants and reflected the principles of the methods employed. I used Microsoft Office as the platform for maintaining transcripts, field notes, and memos, as well as managing theme development. This strategy of analysis although laborious, allowed me to be attentive to the dignity of women who participated in this study. In keeping with feminist research principles and a Catholic anthropology of personhood, I regularly reminded myself during analysis that my data was never just data, but represented real women LEMs and their experiences.

### **Validity and Generalizability**

I addressed the validity of my data by using multiple sightlines to determine if my analysis of themes and the corresponding implications were consistent with my data. The first of

these sightlines was the collection of data in two different formats. This provided me the opportunity to follow up on inconsistencies in experiences expressed, as well as to evaluate the validity of themes across the platforms of data collection. A second sightline was the consistent use of observer comments and memos as a means of tracking the development of thought from the data collection to application of theory. The final sightline involved the use of multiple theoretical perspectives to validate the data. For example, the application of both theological and social research scholarship to the theme of story served to find points of intersection in the data allowing for rich description and analysis of the meaning women LEMs gave their leadership.

There are limits to the generalizability of this feminist phenomenological study. It involved a small population of women employed as LEMs in a single state, and data collected and synthesized only reflects the experiences and meaning for this particular group of women. However, the experiences of these 12 women, as described and analyzed in this dissertation contribute to scholarship on the meaning of leadership for women LEMs. Chapter 7 addresses the implications of my findings on future research and application to the field.

### **Ethical Considerations**

#### **Consent**

I followed IRB procedures outlined by the University of St. Thomas to obtain the consent of my participants. They consented to the use of data recorded at the retreat and data from personal interviews, as well as memos and observations I obtained from additional conversations at the retreat and following the interviews. Because the women chose to participate as individuals, not representatives of their parish, there was no need for additional consent from other institutions.

### **Confidentiality and Risk**

In this section, I outline the steps I took to protect participants from known risk. I also account for the use of a research assistant and other service providers not previously mentioned.

**Participants.** Confidentiality for participants was a high priority. For all my print data and publications, I used pseudonyms for the participants, their parish, and any individuals or organizations they might reference. All raw data collected was stored on my computer, and backed up on an external hard drive in my home. Transcription data, protected with pseudonyms, was stored in zipped protected files through One Drive—an encrypted cloud storage service provided by Microsoft. Raw data, including printed transcripts and audio files will be destroyed one year after the completion of my dissertation. I will retain refined data protected by pseudonyms indefinitely. As outlined above, I used a process for synthesizing data that made use of my participants' own words to reveal themes. This reminded me to be attentive to what the data actually said, rather than what I wanted it to say, therefore treating both my participants and my data with integrity.

**Professional services.** The transcription service I used (REV) requires confidentiality of its employees, and the company CEO signed and complied with the expectations outlined in the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement in the IRB. In the case of the research assistant, I provided training and supervision so that the individual understood not only the type of data to record, but also understood obligations regarding confidentiality and treatment of the participants. This individual signed the necessary Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement and the retreat code of conduct. Others who provided service to the participants (food service, facility care, and childcare) did not enter the facility during defined hours.



**Situating the researcher.** My role as a colleague to my participants assisted in developing trust, which resulted in rich data. It also allowed me to resonate with their experiences and ask deeper questions. At the same time, I was mindful that the Catholic Church is filled with women LEMs whose engagement in ministry and leadership reflect multiple approaches to personhood, theology, spirituality, and leadership. My perspective as a woman LEM and my relationship with other LEMs inspired my research.

Why and how we lead has been the subject of multiple conversations in formal support groups and just over coffee after a stressful week. Formalizing these conversations in research provides a forum not only to hear the voice of women LEMs, but also to add their wisdom to the study of leadership in and out of the Church. The wisdom of these LEMs inspired the inclusion of a vignette at the beginning of each chapter of analysis. The background and story provided at the beginning of each chapter encapsulates the theme of the chapter and reflective of my methodology, places the voice and experience of women LEMs at the heart of the analysis.

## CHAPTER 4 MEANING IN MISSION

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### *Jean: Prompted by the Spirit*

*Jean has worked in more than five parishes in three different dioceses in Minnesota. At the age of 63, she currently leads family faith formation in a small rural parish. At the time of the research, the parish did not have a pastor. A parish administrator provided operational leadership, while Jean and another part-time LEM provided leadership for the parish's spiritual, pastoral, and catechetical needs.*

*Jean's ministry story began in high school. "I was really bullied a lot... so I went to [a Catholic High School in Minnesota]. I was a boarder four years. I basically left home at 13." Strong relationships with a community of nuns serving the school influenced Jean's faith and informed her vocational views. Jean chose to pursue a Catholic university education initially majoring in history and education.*

*At this same time, Jean's family and a number of close friends became involved in Catholic charismatic renewal, a movement in the church that places emphasis on having a personal relationship with Christ and embracing expression of faith that include outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Jean embraced the invitation from friends and family to participate in the movement and found her life and faith transformed. She soon abandoned the study of history and found herself one of only a handful of women at her university studying theology in the 1970s.*

*In Jean's first parish position, she worked with an "excellent pastor" who fostered not only her spiritual life, but also her vocation as an LEM. Within three years, she began an advanced degree in religious education and pastoral leadership at Boston College. While completing her course work, she moved to another parish and then another diocese to be closer*

*to her charismatic community and to people her own age. She soon married and planned to take a one-year sabbatical when her first child was born. 15 years, and five children later, Jean returned to full-time professional ministry. During her “sabbatical,” Jean co-directed her parish’s baptism preparation and confirmation programs, as well summer vacation bible school on a small stipend shared with another parishioner.*

*Jean returned to full-time parish ministry in the 1990s while living in northern Minnesota, because she felt a “deep call to form the faith of children in addition to my own.” She was part of a highly skilled parish staff where the pastor fostered inclusive and collaborative leadership. In shared leadership with pastor, staff, and parishioners, she ventured beyond children’s faith formation leading opportunities to equip adults to share the faith. During these years, Jean found her “value as a leader and her voice as a woman” engaged in ministerial work.*

*Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Jean and her husband moved the family so her husband could pursue a career opportunity, and become part of an intentional charismatic faith community. Jean hoped not to work, but family financial demands coincided with a ministerial opportunity in their new parish. Again working as an LEM in parish ministry, she felt blessed to be leading again in a community that fostered collaboration and empowered parishioners to lead. A pastor transition just a few years later created leadership challenges for Jean.*

*Today, in addition to her work in her rural parish, Jean and her husband still belong to a charismatic community. Within this community, they have entered into discernment with the Holy Spirit seeking direction for their faith and mission leadership as they approach the age of formal retirement. Her mission leadership will end when she dies. “When the call stops, I stop.”*

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“If our real concerns are people, their salvation, the emergence of the Reign of God, and the health of the Body of Christ, the Church, then all of us in positions of leadership must commit ourselves to humble listening, communication, discernment, and conflict resolution” (Brennan, 2007, p. 15). Women LEMs who participated in this study, like many other ministers, lay and ordained, identified the daily struggle of balancing spiritual needs of the faithful with day-to-day management of a human organization. This struggle exemplifies one of the primary themes found in my analysis – how a LEM sees mission has implications on her leadership. In this chapter, I first introduce my participants, identifying some of their demographic characteristics and then describing them in relationship to their primary areas of ministerial leadership. Within this section, I also define leadership in the context of ministry and identify six marks or characteristics necessary for sustained success as an LEM.

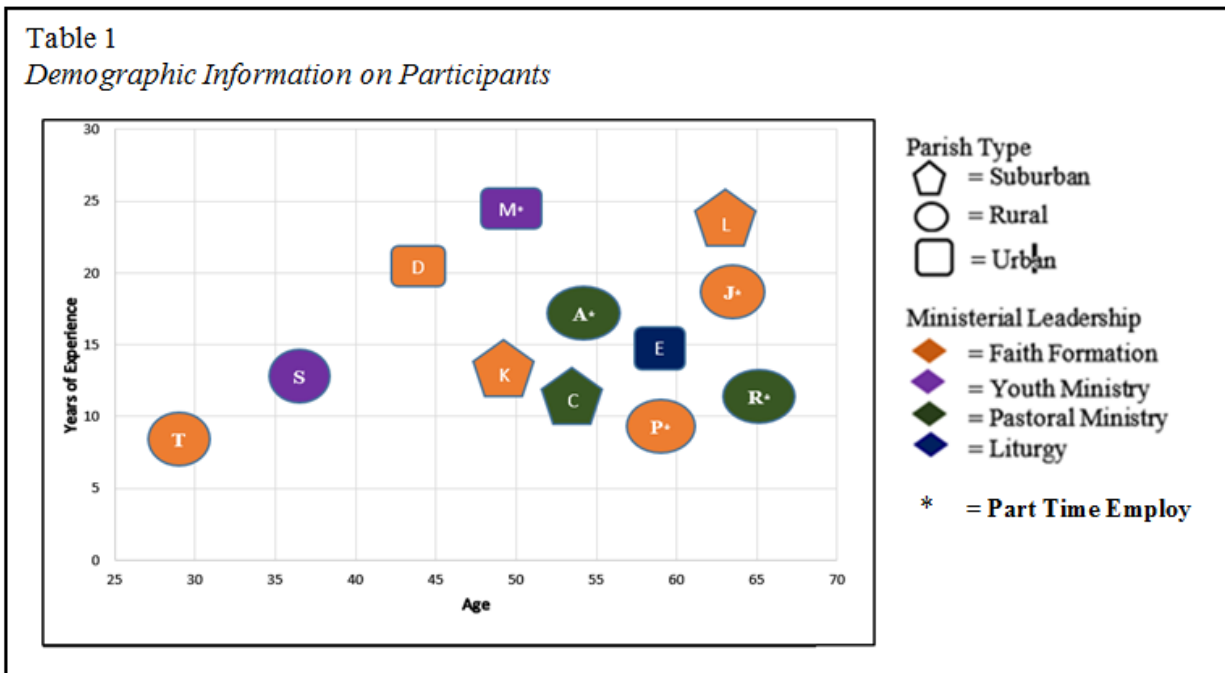
I then explore the concept of mission as a frame for analysis from two distinct perspectives. In the first, divine mission, I consider how their described personal relationships with God informed entry into ministerial leadership. Faith shaped how they came to understand their mission in the Catholic Church giving meaning to leadership. These women also identified the purpose of their leadership with descriptions reflective of contemporary leadership theory. This second perspective, human mission, provides an opportunity to explore the meaning women LEMS gave their leadership through the lenses of relational and authentic leadership theory.

### **Participants Description**

All 12 women in my phenomenological study are professionally employed lay ecclesial ministers in a Catholic parish setting in Minnesota. Each holds a position of leadership on staff and possesses a bachelor’s degree in an area related to their field of service. More than half have additional advanced degrees. All of the women in my study are Caucasian, which is also

reflective of the employment demographic of LEMs in Minnesota. However, three of the women work in culturally diverse parish communities and provide bilingual worship and/or ministry services to a more diverse population.

The women in the study range in age from 28 to 64 and worked as a LEM for 16 years on average. Age was not directly correlated to years of ministerial leadership. Seven members of the cohort came from other career fields before working in ministry. Five have sustained careers in ministry. A number of the 12 have taken periodic breaks in their careers to attend to family needs. This fairly represents the experiences reported nationally by LEMs where multiple paths of education, experience, and invitation lead to professional employment, as indicated in my review of the literature. Figure 1 shows each woman’s age and years of experience as well as other information, using the first initial of their pseudonym as an identifier.



### **Leadership Location**

The LEMs in this study include those whose faith communities are located in rural (6), urban (3), and suburban (3) areas of Minnesota and represent three dioceses within the state. For the sake of this research, I define rural faith communities as those located in counties not designated as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) by the federal government (U. S. Census Bureau, 2016). Parishes identified as rural are located in small cities, towns, and townships more than 40 miles from an urban center. Urban parishes are located in a MSA and in the county of the principle municipality. Minnesota's urban centers include Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester, Duluth, St. Cloud, and Moorhead. Using this guide, I considered parish communities commonly described as first-ring as urban. Extrapolating from the same resource, I defined suburban parishes as those located in counties adjacent to urban centers with local populations of more than 10,000 people.

### **Employment Environment**

Single parish full-time employment was not the norm among these twelve women. Five worked in either formal or informal *clustered parish* communities, where two or more parishes maintain separate identities and facilities but collaborate to meet specific needs. Clustered communities typically share one if not all of the following: Pastor or other clergy, LEMs and other staff, and/or parish ministries and programs. Clustered parishes exist in all MN dioceses in both urban and rural areas. One of the LEMs works in an urban parish that recently completed a merger with another parish, and the remaining six work in single parish communities.

Three women who work in clustered parish communities, plus two additional women, work less than 40 hours a week; yet, they indicated they provide leadership for essential ministries, and the parish's structural leadership recognizes that leadership. In all of these cases,

the number of professionals on staff was smaller than their suburban counterparts, with few if any full-time positions in the parish. Among those who reported being fulltime employees, four work in parish environments with more than five additional LEMs. Three of these women supervised other staff. All supervised unpaid parishioner ministers. Both “part-time” and “full-time” LEMs reported consistently working beyond their contracted hours to meet parish needs. Part-time contracted LEMs have an asterisk after their initial in Figure 1. Among my cohort, being full-time or part-time had no bearing on real or perceived leadership responsibilities.

### **Fields of Ministerial Leadership**

#### **Co-Responsible Leadership**

For this study, I focused on the leadership of women engaged in direct ministerial service in the parish community. The office of pastor held by a priest in a parish has canonical obligations to ensure the “Word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish” (Canon Law Society of American, 2012, para. 528.1). This includes, but is not limited to ensuring the faithful receive catechesis or instruction in the faith, pastoral care in times of need, and opportunities to foster their baptismal commitment through meaningful engagement in the Church’s mission. The office of pastor also includes an obligation to provide for worship in the community and regular access to the sacraments, as well as an obligation to manage effectively the resources of the community to care for spiritual and physical needs of the parish. The code does not require a pastor lead alone. He can engage others, including the laity in this leadership (para. 129; 228). As described in both Chapter 1 and 2, a number of influences both practical and theological resulted in the need for pastors to do more than delegate tasks to the lay faithful. Today’s pastors need to share leadership in order to meet the obligations of their office.

The Church increasingly recognizes the need for relationships of co-responsibility between clergy and lay leaders, in particular LEMs who possess the “necessary knowledge, prudence, and integrity” (para. 228) to assist pastors. “Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset...they [the laity] should not be regarded as ‘collaborators’ of clergy, but as people who are really ‘co-responsible’ for the Church’s being and acting” (Benedict XVI, 2012, para. 2). In this regard, the LEMs included in this study exercise a leadership of co-responsible with the pastor, because the ministerial work assigned places them alongside a pastor, ensuring the faithful can exercise their rights and responsibilities to pray, teach, care, and serve in the name of Christ.

That LEMs lead is evident in EMPL research. The nature of this leadership, rooted in a faith community, reflects both similarity and difference with cultural expectations of leadership, explored later in this chapter. At this point, it is important to identify qualities of ministerial leadership found in the research. These “marks of pastoral excellence” (Jewell & Ramey, 2005) identified during the EMPL research, indicate six characteristics that parish leaders use to evaluate the leadership of self and others.

- **Collaborative** leaders empower the faithful to share their gifts and work together toward the shared mission.
- **Ethical** leaders respect the dignity of the person. Faithful to the mission and ministry of Christ, they are committed to just and appropriate actions in personal and professional life.
- **Inclusive** leaders invite, support, and engage diversity of thought and persons in the life of the parish in ways that are respectful and mutually enriching.
- **Pastoral** leaders are faithful to the mission of the Church, and lead with a commitment to the overall well-being of the community while empowering members to care for one another.
- **Prophetic** leaders, faithful to the gospel, are ecumenical, evangelistic, justice focused, and mission directed.



- **Welcoming** leaders ensure that all who desire a relationship with God are received and welcomed in the community with a spirit of hospitality, openness, and eagerness.

Just as in EMPL's findings (Jewell & Ramey 2005), the participant LEMs in my study used these attributes to assess their leadership and the leadership of others. I use these attributes in the next three chapters not only to explore the meaning these women LEMs made of leadership, but consider how their meaning making activities support or diminish these attributes in their leadership praxis.

### **Fields of Leadership**

The leadership of the women in my study served four broad categories of ministry: catechesis, youth ministry, pastoral care, and liturgy. In some cases, these women lead in more than one of these ministry areas, or had different responsibilities at different parishes in a cluster. Most (seven of 12) worked in at least one other area during their career at the same time or at another parish. Although area of ministry did not prove to be a variable for analysis in this study, it serves as way of introducing and describing the concrete leadership practice of my research participants. Here I describe the primary functions associated with their leadership. It is important to remember, that these responsibilities are not simply tasks performed under the direction of the pastor, but ministries of co-responsibility that are central to mission of the parish modeled after the leadership of Christ.

**Catechetical leaders.** For six of my participant's catechesis constituted a principle area of ministry and leadership. Catechetical leadership is the "effort of forming people into witnesses to Christ and opening their hearts to the spiritual transformation given by the Holy Spirit" (USCCB, 2016). Often referred to as religious education or faith formation the work involves providing opportunities for religious education, spiritual growth, and preparation for sacraments throughout the life of the faithful.

Kelly and Laurie's principle leadership involves directing programs of formation for children. In addition, Laurie supervises other formation staff members. Four of the LEMs, Jean, Diane, Pam, and Theresa identified their responsibilities as centered on total parish faith formation. In addition to formation programs for children and adolescents, they also direct opportunities for adult faith growth. Three indicated they provided leadership and direction for the process called the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults or RCIA through which adults who desire to become Catholic formally enter the Church. Jean's rural parish uses what she describes as "total life catechesis" and she is responsible for providing faith formation for both children and adults. Diane's leadership in an urban parish also supports a thriving committee of parishioners who provide scripture study and other ongoing adult education opportunities each year. Pam leads an informal rural cluster of three parishes that share a Catholic school. Pam indicated that one of her three parishes has a renewed desire for adult enrichment and family ministries, which she supports as time allows. Diane and Pam also squeeze summer youth ministry trips and experiences into their formation responsibilities.

Theresa works 44 hours a week between a parish and parish cluster that collaborate to provide her with full-time benefits, but the focus of her responsibilities at each parish is different. In the single parish, she focuses on what she referred to as all the "regular formation stuff" for children and adults, similar to Diane and Pam. In the parish cluster, she collaborates with two part-time formation staff members to provide "extra opportunities" the pastor and parish identified as vital to today's families. This includes Catholic early childhood education, as well as social, service, and retreat opportunities for children and adolescents.

The faith formation LEMs in my cohort all expressed a passion for education and formation as a means for engaging children and adults in faith. Kelly, whose ministry focuses

primarily on children's catechesis in a suburban parish, has become an advocate not only for her ministry, but also for children whose life experiences make everything challenging including faith. Her own experiences as a child of divorce, whose mother was excluded from a parish community, has made her keenly aware of the need to "meet people where they are at" in order for faith to be a source of joy and mercy during times of struggle. Laurie, who as a young child was a "public school kid" whose parents did not attend Mass regularly, recognized herself in many of the young members involved in the program she directs for families with children in Grades 1-8. "I am always hopeful, simply because parents care enough to bring them to class each week." Theresa wished that she could change her title to include "evangelist" to reflect the purpose of her work and not just its function.

**Youth ministry leaders.** Catholic youth ministry, as a field of ministry works to address the "personal, social, and spiritual needs of youth" (NCCB, 1997, p. 4) through relationship and engagement of young people, parents, parish, and the broader culture. LEMs in youth ministry generally embrace a "whole person" approach to leading and ministering with and for teens and their families. Although Marie and Sandy, the two LEMs I identified as youth ministers, do have formation responsibilities, their principle mission is to "promote the growth of healthy, competent, caring, and faith-filled Catholic young people" (p. 13) through evangelization, formation, prayer, service, pastoral support, and engagement in parish life.

Marie and Sandy utilize similar types of youth ministry events and programs in their ministry, but differences in parish cultures require a different focus in their leadership. Marie leads in the smaller of two parishes in an urban cluster where the pastor is not present daily, and others do not expect him to be the source of the parish's vision and direction. Her priorities in

youth ministry have focused on equipping, training, and empowering parishioners to be her co-workers in the field of youth ministry.

Sandy also leads in a parish cluster, but her rural cluster of four parishes in outstate MN has a population area with many more Protestants than Catholics. A growing permanent Hispanic population presents additional responsibilities. The four parishes share pastor, staff, and programming. The future likely contains the merger or closing of one or more of these parishes. Fostering Catholic identity and engagement in parish life has become essential elements of Sandy's leadership in youth ministry.

**Pastoral ministry leaders.** LEMs engaged in leadership of pastoral care have an “abiding concern for the spiritual, intellectual, physical, psychological, and social dimensions of the human person” (Association of Pastoral Ministers, 2014). The kinds of service provided by pastoral ministers include care and support for the sick, the dying, and the grieving, the hungry, homeless, and poor, as well as the lonely, the distraught, and the oppressed. Specific ministries can be as seemingly simple as a prayer network, and as complex as parish involvement in a health clinic or homeless shelter. LEMs in parish pastoral ministry provide not only direct care to those in their assigned areas of concern, but equip, train, and supervise others to also serve those in need.

Three LEMs identified being principally associated with leadership in pastoral ministry, but held vastly different titles and their areas of concern did not completely overlap. Their specific responsibilities reflected the unique nature of the parishes they serve. For Chris, her work in parish and community life in a suburban community with a growing number of older adults includes being immediately present to those who lost a loved one to death. She indicated she works closely with families to plan the funeral liturgy and lunch, as well as help them

navigate what she calls the “intangibles”— the emotional and relational issues that can arise in family at the time of a loss. Chris’s other identified responsibilities included parish life events, volunteer management, and staff supervision.

Anne described her work as a parish community nurse in a small town that hosts a hospital and multiple care facilities. As a result, she trains and supervises parishioners in a ministry of accompaniment in order to visit all the homebound, ill, and those experiencing a time of struggle. Diverse cultural, educational, and economic differences in the local community create both blessing and challenge for Anne’s leadership and ministry.

Ruth’s leadership as a pastoral care assistant happens in a rural parish that is part of a relatively new cluster. Redefinition of her responsibilities continues because of ongoing health concerns of a full-time permanent deacon. Initially a part-time position, her ministry was “to be the legs” of the deacon, but as needs arose it became a leadership position of its own. She provides principle leadership for a variety of pastoral services including prayer ministries and ministries of accompaniment with the ill and the aging. Ruth’s leadership commitments expanded to include local ministry support for a diocesan initiative for women and a parish scripture study. Through Ruth’s leadership, the parish now provides adult formation opportunities for the first time in many years.

Pastoral care LEMs often contribute leadership that moves beyond meeting specific immediate needs and seeks to either address systemic changes to eliminate the need or to address an area of concern too big for one parish community to tackle alone. When confronted with the reality of rural homelessness in her county, Ruth leveraged her leadership both in the parish and in the broader community to be part of a local initiative to bring transitional housing for homeless families into the county, which area churches support and maintain. Similarly, as a

community nurse, Anne saw a need in her rural county. Immigrant families, poor families, and young adults lacked access to affordable health care. For four years, Anne and a “committed group of like-minded individuals, who saw health care as a right and not a commodity” worked diligently to build bridges with businesses, healthcare providers, churches, and community organizations to establish a free community health clinic. The clinic became a model for other rural clinics in the United States. Whether burying the dead, praying for those in need, or providing free immunizations, pastoral ministers place real needs of people at the center of their leadership.

**Liturgy Leader.** Although most of my participants have leadership responsibilities involving prayer and worship, only one claimed her principle leadership involves the engagement of the faithful in the liturgies that “are the source and summit of the Christian life” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1324). Like many directors of liturgy and music, Elizabeth described her leadership as both “very public and very hidden.” Her musical leadership, which includes playing the organ and directing choirs at Sunday Masses, weekday liturgies, funerals, weddings, and holydays makes her one of the most visible LEMs on staff. In her role as liturgist, Elizabeth trains, supports, and coordinates more parishioners in ministry than anyone else in her urban parish. Elizabeth described the pressure to “get it right” not just because the parish broadcasts some liturgies locally, but because she believes that “when I put a text on people's tongues to sing, it's something that I'm hoping passes on that 2000-year history and truth.” Providing liturgy and prayer that “makes people dig a little deeper in their relationship with God” has required a great deal of unseen leadership, not the least of which is selecting music that invites both an emotional and theological conversation between the assembly and God.

### Meaning in Mission

From the midst of the experiences, principles, and stories shared by these twelve women arose a theme common to all. Each believed her leadership served a purpose or mission greater than herself. For Laurie that mission was more about than parish life. “I say I work for the Church and I'm sitting here contemplating working for *the Church* because I see it not as working for just a parish. I work because it's my vocation for the body of Christ.” Because of mission these women engaged in a *leadership praxis* or “a patterned configuration of action, experience, and meaning” (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014, p. 94) in leadership. Mission proved to be a significant frame to explore how the intersection of purpose, belief, and action gave meaning to these women’s leadership.

Mission viewed from two perspectives proved a helpful framework for analysis of the meaning these women LEMs ascribed to leadership. For the purpose of this dissertation on leadership, I use the term *divine mission* as metaphor to consider how my participant’s faith experiences inform the purpose and meaning they give leadership in the Church. In this context, I explore how these LEMs placed their relationship of the divine at the center of their leadership experiences.

Half of my participants worked in secular organizations before entering ministry, and all serve and lead with people who bring principles of mission and leadership from disciplines beyond the Catholic Church. It was evident that these women identified with values and principles of leadership flowing from these additional sources and experiences. The term *human mission*, to describe the second mission perspective, serves then as metaphor to explore their practice of leadership as directed towards people and communities of people using contemporary leadership theories as the lens for analysis.

As a theological principle, mission places the faithful – both the individual and the community – as both receiver and actor of mission activity. All human action and purpose is seen as a response to God calling humanity “to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1). In this context, mission leadership works for the good of another on behalf of another. “All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer” (para. 3). The reward for engaging in the divine mission, as leader or participant, is eternal life where “those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed” (para. 1045).

From a second different perspective, mission can also be viewed as principle guiding the development of a human organization. “A communicated mission serves as vehicle for communicating an organization’s purpose and values” to members and stakeholders (Carpenter, Bauer, Erdogan, & Short, 2016, section 4.1). In the context of social theory, mission places the needs and goals of an organization at the center and works to ensure that members and stakeholders understand, value, and act to benefit the organization. Members and stakeholders of an organization receive reward when the mission of the organization flourishes.

Both mission perspectives– the divine and the human– have value in the analysis of the experiences of the women LEMs I interviewed. The application of Catholic theology as a frame of analysis served to confirm intent of leadership, while application of leadership theory assisted in understanding their leadership efficacy. Analysis of the leadership of these LEMs through the lens of mission provided a glimpse into both the how and the why of their leadership in the Catholic Church.



### **Divine Mission**

As evidenced in my review of literature, in the Catholic tradition the mission of Christ is the right and responsibility of all the baptized. This mission, for each person and for the faith community, includes living as an expression of *Imago Dei* or Image of God. “*Imago Dei* constitutes almost a definition of [humanity]: the mystery of [humanity] cannot be grasped apart from the mystery of God” (International Theological Commission, 2004, para. 7). *Imago Dei* is distinctly Trinitarian, reflective of the three persons of God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

...the three divine Persons subsist in intimate relationship with one another. The Father does not act alone, Jesus does not act alone, nor does the Holy Spirit. Our God is a triune God, a God of loving trinitarian communion. A community of loving relationships is *the* identifiable characteristic of the Trinity. This characteristic calls us to live a life of similar loving relationships. (Lavin, 2004, p. 77)

Although all the baptized are called to image the Trinity, some seek to express that call through employed ministry in the Church. For them, living out the *Imago Dei* as reflecting unity of and with God defines their ministry and their mission in the parish. The Church understands the ministry of the LEM as “leading disciples in the life of discipleship for the sake of God’s mission in the world” (Cahalan, 2010, p. 49).

In the local parish, LEMs work in collaboration with the pastor and the whole community to create “an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration” (Pope Francis, 2013a para. 28). The call to professional lay ecclesial leadership begins with this mission, where “communion and mission provide the foundation for understanding and carrying out lay ecclesial ministry” (USCCB, 2005, p. 17). For most of the women in my cohort, a commitment to count themselves as leaders of the Church’s mission began with an even more personal relationship with the Trinity.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations. (Ephesians 3: 14, 16-21)

Ruth read this passage of scripture to me in her interview. She drew on it to identify the essential mission of her lay ecclesial leadership. For Ruth anyone who leads as an LEM must “be sure that what they're doing is based in a life of prayer and a relationship, their relationship, with God, with Jesus Christ.”

She was not alone in placing a relationship with God at the center of the LEMs mission. Each of the 12 women shared elements of her personal and communal faith that served as motivation and inspiration for her leadership and commitment to ministry in the parish. The importance of divine mission in meaning making became evident in their stories of faith and belief. Each woman’s story was unique, but three particular stories demonstrated how understanding of the divine source of mission contributed to meaning making.

**Called to leadership.** As a college student, Jean, who was raised Catholic, came to a new and profound relationship with Christ through a charismatic Catholic community that shifted her academic and career aspirations.

I had this really life changing experience and it made me want to pursue theology, because I was pursuing history and elementary education, and at that point, when I started to look at it, the history wasn't doing what I wanted it to, because it really was the theology I wanted much more than history. So, I got a degree in theology and went to work in a parish.

Over the next 40 years, Jean professionally exercised lay ecclesial leadership as a youth minister and faith formation director in multiple rural and suburban parishes, as well as in unpaid capacities directing youth ministry and confirmation preparation for 15 of those years while she

parented small children. Her commitment as an LEM springs from a personal relationship with Christ and a belief that she is “called by the Lord” to this work for the whole of her life unto death. “When the call stops, I stop.” As a ministerial leader, she responds, “to the call of God to love what God loves and live lives that reflect God’s presence in them” (Cahalan, 2010, p.61).

Jean’s experience resonated with the findings of the U.S. bishops as articulated in *Co-Workers*. “Lay ecclesial ministers often express a sense of being called. This sense motivates what they are doing, guiding and shaping a major life choice and commitment to church ministry” (USCCB, 2005, p. 12). Her experience differed from the language of *Co-Workers* that indicated, “The lay ecclesial minister is called to service in the Church, and not necessarily to a lifelong commitment as happens in Ordination” (p. 12). On retreat, Jean shared her reaction to that quote. “It’s frustrating that they say it’s not life-long. It will be my life long! So how will they explain that?” Jean clearly identified God as the originator of her call and as the relationship defining her mission as a ministerial leader.

**Discernment of leadership.** Theresa’s encounter with an invitation to participate in divine mission began in fourth grade when her aunt invited her to co-teach a faith formation class. She did not spend high school and college on a quest for faith, but spent it asking a question of discernment, “Am I called to vowed religious life?” The answer did not come in a dramatic fashion. Theresa’s experience of discernment included experiences described in *Co-workers*.

A variety of experiences may characterize the initial period of discernment, including increased sacramental and liturgical practices, retreats, days of prayer and recollection, and individual or group spiritual direction. Pastors, parochial vicars, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, teachers, and advisors all play an important role in the discernment process. These connections to the Church provide a supportive environment in which one can decipher, test, and strengthen a call. (USCCB, 2005, p. 29)

One day Theresa simply knew that she God had not called her to be a nun, but rather called her to serve the local Church.

I remember my Dad asked me, "Don't you want to be a missionary?" And I thought about going far away and seeing all these places, and I said, "This is my mission field right here, these are the people that I'm called to... God could have called me anywhere...he placed me here."

Theresa made her ministry decision before she knew her vocational call would also include marriage and children, which prompted additional discernment when her son was born. With support from her spouse and her parishes, she continues to provide parish leadership committed to divine mission. "What I do is for the Lord, and it has to be ...You work your hardest, but ultimately it's God's will and God's mission."

After an initial experience of discipleship with her aunt, Theresa recognized her call, but needed to discern the state of life that would accompany her mission in the Church. "Ministry is grounded in the gifts of faith and baptism, but emerge through charisms in adult life" (Cahalan, 2010, p. 63). Theresa's expressed experience indicated that she not only trusted God was present in her discernment, but also that her ministerial leadership is directed towards that relationship.

**Transformed for service.** Most of the women LEMs in my research cohort identified significant sacrifices related to time, benefits, salary, and family life. Two of the women, Laurie and Pam, left successful corporate careers to enter ministry. These women came to lay ecclesial leadership using an "unmarked path, creating patterns and structures, despite the instability and complexity that sometimes marks the journey" (Fox, 2006, p. 189). Pam's story in particular spoke to how faith and life converged to equip her for leadership.

Pam grew up in the same rural area where she leads, as did her husband. They married young. She ran a home childcare for a number of years, but when the family needed medical benefits, she went to work as a teller at the local bank. Intelligent and possessing both soft

people skills and a keen eye for detail, Pam advanced quickly. The bank arranged and paid for her finance education. Pam became a branch manager and eventually a bank vice-president with a generous income.

Pam and her husband were always active members of their parish, as well as other local organizations. For both Pam and her husband “faith was deeply personal and parish life was wonderfully social.” At the invitation of their pastor, they attended a Cursillo Retreat and for both of them the world shifted. Cursillo retreats are intended to help the faithful understand their individual calling and “develop a consciousness that we are called to be leaders” (Twin Cities Cursillo, 2016). Pam described the effect of this retreat on her life.

It wasn't until I made my Cursillo weekend that all of a sudden, things clicked... I have to *be* in order to *do*. Also, I think what I learned about myself that weekend was to be able to bring people to Christ...instead of being out there doing everything, my real goal was to really bring people into the Church ... guide them to that friendship and then bring them to Christ. That boomed my faith and my husband's faith. Just working with that was just a real gift.

Pam's flourishing faith compelled her to share her gifts in volunteer leadership directing youth ministry programs, and serving as a member of a parishioner leadership committee. It also inspired her to become knowledgeable about her faith. She attended scripture courses and took advantage of formation events on the diocesan level. Pam talked about a new pastor who was assigned at her home parish, “He could see things in me” and “opened the door to new forms of prayer and spiritual direction.”

Having completed her finance education, when her pastor recommended that Pam was ready for a program in theology through a Catholic university she initially hesitated. As vice-president of a bank, time was precious and an advanced degree in pastoral studies would not be very useful.

I was praying so deeply because I just felt God wanted something from me, but I just didn't know what. I remember saying in the adoration chapel one day, "Hit me with a 2 X 4. I don't know what you want."

As she walked out of the adoration chapel, she realized the degree program was the 2x4 she asked for. As luck would have it, the program offered a certificate program where Pam could audit courses rather than seek the degree. However, Pam's application landed in the wrong pile, and they enrolled her as a graduate student. Taking this "as a sign from God," she did not correct the error.

As her course work in theology progressed and she took advantage of the spiritual direction offered to students, Pam found herself dissatisfied at the bank. She began to feel troubled about lending and credit practices. She also began to notice differences in how male and female employees were treated.

That started causing a conflict. Consequently, they weren't liking when I was speaking up about certain things like, "You don't treat people like this." Finally, I just couldn't handle it anymore. My husband and I talked quite a bit. The pressure that they were starting to put on because they were recognizing the change in me. I think they wanted me to drop the program. They were trying to add responsibilities ... I was seeing 60, 70 hours a week coming my way. I was like, "No. No. No." We trusted God. I quit.

The sacrifice of her career for the sake of her faith and ethics brought its own reward. Four months later, just weeks after completing her degree, a priest hired Pam to direct faith formation programs for two rural parishes that already jointly operated a Catholic school. A third parish joined the quasi-formal cluster the following year. Pam gave up a prestigious career and a generous salary so she could "struggle to get people at three parishes to step into their own Christian leadership," but she seemed satisfied in her response to divine mission. Pam gave her leadership in the Church more value than her leadership in the banking industry.

Maybe this is also part of my leadership I brought from the bank... Anything I did to make him [bank president] look good was good...so now I know how to make everything good ultimately for Christ. [This] leadership is what I need to do. That's what I'm called to be.

Her expressed belief that she was transformed for service reflects the understanding of call described in *Co-Workers*.

The call may come in a dramatic moment. More often, it comes over time, as the person grows—within the community of faith—in love for God and a desire to do his will. One begins to consider that the graces received could now be put in service to the Church. (USCCB, 2005, p. 29)

In her transformation from corporate leadership to ministerial leadership, Pam discovered not only her ministry in the Church, but a new understanding of mission leadership. Her experience resonates with Cahalon's (2010) description of leadership in ministry as “not a service rendered for self-advancement or to exercise power and authority over others, but a service of offering one's gifts for the sake of building up the community” (p. 57). The depth of Pam's offering will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The above examples speak to the role their interpretation of God's mission had in creating meaning for these women LEMs. Their interpretation of mission also seemed to be a strategy to lead others to their own call to serve. In the case of these women, ministry was motivated by more than a desire to good works, but rather a deep desire to “to help disciples recognize, receive, and respond to God's reigning presence in their life” (Cahalan, 2010, p. 63). Chris, who initially hesitated to use the word leader, instead used the word “disciple” because it cast her as having “the same relationship with Christ, the same obligations as all the parish.” Jean did not see the mission as belonging to her alone. Having taken time off from ministerial employment in the middle of her career to parent full-time she insisted that one's role in divine mission is not limited by employment or education. “If I was called to do this, they certainly are.

Without any degrees or anything else, it's like, you have the gift here to do what is being asked of you, to take a step forward...it belongs to all of us.” For each woman in my cohort, her relationship to God and her understanding of how that relationship called her to reflect the *Imago Dei* created meaning and purpose for her ministerial leadership.

### **Human Mission**

Parishes serve as the local community where through human agency mission are communicated, and as such look and behave like other organizations. Practical theologian and pastor, Patrick Brennan (2007) referred to the Church and its parishes as “an organism forever in need of renewal and adaptation” (p. 13). Brennan contended parish communities, and those that lead them “ought to listen to the real-life needs of the people connected with their parish or organization and either create or find ministries that address those needs” (p. 23).

Brennan (2007) wrote specifically about the role of parish and parish leadership. “Parishes ought to be places and opportunities where we do not experience more of American isolation, independence, and competition. They ought to be places where we enter into genuine communion with God and each other” (p. 21). A parish’s ability to do this requires human leadership. Leaders who “have a selfless dedication to the good of the organization or the movement” are essential to healthy parishes (p. 22).

Although my research participants shared a commitment to mission of the Church as reflective of a relationship with God, each LEM formed their leadership praxis through a unique combination of education, experiences, and relationships. Combined, this cohort of LEMs worked with and for more than 20 different pastors, who interpreted and prioritized the nature of mission in the local parish, and therefore influenced the priorities of these particular LEMs. Additionally, the work of these women literally influenced tens of thousands of Catholic people,



who also interpreted and prioritized the mission, which again influenced how these women exercised mission leadership. Contemporary leadership theories around relational and authentic leadership served as the most fitting vehicles to analyze how these women LEMs created meaning in their leadership within the complexity of their ministry environments.

### **Leadership as relationship.**

When I think of the Catholic Church, I think of it as people first, then I often also think of Jesus and really His message to us was to love each other. It sounds weird to say that, though, that the Catholic Church is love, but Jesus, that was His message. He said, "Love each other." (Anne)

The work of these LEMs allowed them to be present to people at both ordinary and extraordinary moments of joy that mark life's passage including baptisms, first communions, confirmation, and weddings. They also stood with people in the face of tragedy and sin, betrayal and fear, and in the aftermath of destruction and sorrow. Being an LEM in a Catholic parish put them not only in intimate contact with parishioners' lives, but also in a position to invite and engage parishioners as collaborators in the mission.

Diane placed priority on the interpersonal connections. "One of the most important things is to just be a listening presence, be pastoral, and be open to what comes through the door." Laurie identified her leadership as flowing from relationship not authority. "When you're a leader in the Church, I don't think it should be a matter of authority. It's a matter of creating an environment where everyone's gifts can shine." Theresa contended, "People respond to a personal text message, or a phone call, or a personal email. Just getting to know who they are and where they are at is so important. Then together we can do something greater." Nine of the 12 women LEMs self-identified as a "pastoral" or "relational" leader, describing connection, empowerment, and personal invitation as priorities. Analysis of their leadership experiences through a theoretical lens of relationship provided an avenue to explain how these women

identified as leader, how they addressed issues of power, and exercised strategic leadership in parish life.

In the context of relational leadership, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) defined leadership as a “relational and ethical process of people working together to accomplish positive change” (p. 95). Through this lens the human mission is “actively held together not by its policies and rules and procedures, but the web of interpersonal relationships that is built through ongoing interaction” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 663), and relationship is the outcome of leadership, not just a byproduct. The relationship between leaders and collaborators is built upon “principles of equity, complementary, reciprocity, friendship, and care” (Binns, 2008, p. 602). Mission and vision arise out of dialogue and action “recognizing that people support what they help create” (Komives et al., 2013 p. 96). Meaning making is also a shared endeavor where leaders and collaborators in the mission contribute to each other’s self-understanding, as well as to the value and meaning of the organization. In the application of this relational leadership lens, four themes related to the meaning of leadership arose from the data: a) Identifying as leader, b) relationships of power and authority, c) strategic collaboration, and d) boundaries.

*Identifying as leader.* A number of women hesitated to self-identify as leader in a traditional way. This not unusual, many women find it “problematic...to publicly position themselves as leaders” (Binns, p. 611) for a variety of reasons, not least of which is inclusivity. Women in my research described public identification of leadership as “off putting” (Chris) and “counter to our mission” (Laurie). Women on one retreat engaged in a lively exchange about this topic after I asked them how they described their ministerial leadership to others.

Jean: A perception of being “the leader” is not necessarily something people are going to connect to. They're going to connect to me being a mom with kids that would talk about faith, that would form a community of care...

Pam: I agree with that. It's about connecting because otherwise, it seems like you put yourself above and right away the walls are there. "I'm not good enough to speak to you. I might reveal my ignorance" or whatever. It's easier to bring it as a conversation, so they open up and then you can lead from where they're at rather than from above where they're not.

Chris: It has to be relational. Sometimes I'll say I do the mom jobs at church.

MK: In trying to connect, is it necessary to downplay your leadership?

Pam: Don't you think if it seems like we're downplaying it, in some ways, we're still being leaders because you're coming in level and hopefully leading them to a closer relationship by what you're doing. It's not really downplaying your leadership. It's just that you don't have to wear it on your sleeve, that you come to it gently and bring them.

At her individual interview, Laurie talked about leading with a relational approach. "It's not wearing your leadership on a sleeve or a varsity jacket or whatever. Leadership is just being fully present to the people that you're working with." Like relational theorists, these women believe it possible, even essential, to have leadership "relationships other than those built from hierarchy" where "nurturing and supporting roles could be legitimized as a means of influence" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 663).

***Power and authority.*** Beyond interpersonal connections, relational leadership theory provided an avenue to view how these LEMs used relationships to evaluate their power and authority in parish leadership. Using Bolman and Deal (2011), I defined power as "a sense of efficacy and an ability to influence their world" (p. 130). Relationally authority springs from the ability to provide care, to share influence, to affirm contributions, and "weave hearts and souls into a sense of shared destiny" (p. 100). Relational theorists contend that power should not be "a commodity, concentrated within certain individuals, but distributed throughout the social field" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 662). This aligns with the preferences of women from my cohort who

questioned presumptive decision-making authority and desired to invite others into shared leadership.

Kelly, in particular questioned decision-making authority in her assessment of hiring and supervision in her ministry environments. She described multiple experiences with pastors in more than one parish who did not share their authority to hire with others who might have been better equipped to make these choices.

[They are given the task ...of choosing that person, but there's been things that have come up that I've been like, you don't even know what we do. How can you decide what or who we need? You have this authority by your ordination but sometimes you don't admit you don't know what you don't know.

In Kelly's estimation, this resulted in hiring unqualified people based upon the pastor knowing or liking a candidate, and decisions made about program and personnel with insufficient professional knowledge. She expressed a preference for a more inclusive decision-making process that could take into account both the needs and the gifts of the community. Brennan (2007) described this as lateral ministry. "In this approach, the trained or educated person does not vertically hand down ministerial services, but rather spends significant time raising up ministry leaders" (p. 103) who contribute their skills, knowledge, and experience to the parish's mission.

Many of the women in my cohort experienced being seen as leaders and having authority in the broader parish community, although referent power achieved through "nature and strength of the relationships" (Komives, et al, p. 118) between them and members of the community often went unrecognized by one or more persons in positional authority. The care these LEMs provided beyond the scope of their specific responsibilities allowed them to be known as "real, practical, and down-to-earth" (Brennan, p. 35) to those they led. A relational approach to leadership also highlights dissonance between articulated and practiced values in leadership in

parish life. Experiences of discord and tension influenced the meaning of leadership for a number of the women in my cohort. Diane's and Chris' experiences in particular exemplify how the tension between positional and referent power made them more aware of their leadership role.

Diane said that a pastor's desire to engage in relational leadership heavily influenced her ability to empower parishioners in leadership. She described a time when she felt ineffective as a leader, even though parishioners repeatedly sought her out for advice and decision-making. During a very difficult time with a previous pastor, budget cuts and elimination of positions were affecting essential ministries, and she assessed the pastor's decision-making process as lacking transparency.

It was a horrible year. I mean, it was very hard to go into work. It was challenging to think that what I was doing mattered. I did not feel like a leader ... Parishioners still saw me as a leader, but I was in a position where I felt like the pastor that we had at the time and the business administrator did not. What I did didn't matter to them. Money was the bottom line. I think that was the most challenging part for me ... it became more about money than ministry. It was the first time that became really clear.

This pastor left shortly after these budget cuts. Diane described his successor as a relational collaborator who trusted her and included both staff and parishioner leaders in dialogue. "[He] challenges us to think broadly and to not settle...and to really think about things. Is that something that we really need to do, or can we approach this in a different way? How are we best serving our people?" With a relational leaning pastor, she quickly identified herself as part of the "parish's leadership team." Diane's preference for inclusivity in decision-making reflects a key element of relational model of leadership. "Inclusiveness breeds new leaders and creates a positive cycle that sustains the organization" (Komives et al., 2013, p. 108).

Like the women in the earlier examples, Chris also hesitated to self-identify as leader, but for different reasons. Her hesitancy appeared to be connected to “social construction processes by which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). Chris did not see herself among the privileged. She described entering ministry “through the back door,” although she had the education and experience to do the work for which she was hired. Chris moved from volunteer to paid staff without submitting a resume or having an interview. The pastor simply offered her a job doing what she had been doing as a volunteer. Chris perceived that a particular parishioner leader, Richard, who held significant organizational influence, disliked that and her. Richard, a parish trustee, made his disapproval known on multiple occasions. In her parish, Chris saw the title “leader” reserved for those who had administrative influence, like Richard. She preferred to refer to herself as a disciple, because that term “connects her to Jesus and not to the politics.”

That changed after the parish went a year without pastor and she assumed the role of providing spiritual care to whole parish. Chris acknowledged that parishioners looked to her to “hold things together because they knew and trusted me” and that the local priest assigned as the canonical administrator sought her advice over Richard. Once a new pastor was in place, parish members expected Chris to “bring to the table [of the pastor] the sharing of wisdom, and insight, and history of the parish.” This experience changed Chris’s leadership identity. Her understanding of power was no longer aligned with the old constructs of the parish, but with a positive experience of her own relational approach to leadership where “training and forming, empowering and enabling parishioners to own and carry out parish ministry” (Brennan, 2007, p. 103) was valued.

***Relational empowerment.*** Empowerment as an aspect of relational leadership allows people to contribute their gifts, resources, and ideas to the organization. “Empowerment is claimed and shared with others” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 116) recognizing the contributions of all members as meaningful and worthwhile. Relational leaders who value empowerment assist others in discovering their own significance “finding meaning in work, faith in themselves, confidence in the value of their lives, and hope for the future” (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 140).

Elizabeth expressed her experience with relational empowerment in her assessment of her transition into positional leadership. She described her predecessor as talented, strong, and self-assured. Carl demanded perfection from musicians, affirmed only a little, and did not resolve conflict through dialogue. Carl was also Elizabeth’s mentor. Elizabeth’s approach to her new leadership was to lean on two things she valued – personal connection and common vision– both of which relational theorists (Komives et al., 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006) identified as essential to relational leadership.

Elizabeth wrote individual “letters to choir members, musicians, and liturgy people, to people who knew I was coming into a leadership role for the first time.” In those letters, she used the parish’s mission statement to highlight her own goals and expectations, and she acknowledged their personal contributions to that mission. Some parish ministers expressed surprise that the parish had a mission statement. Regardless, Elizabeth intended to use it as set of common principles she and they could use together.

It's my job as a leader to take that shared vision or mission...and send it out, to disburse it to the people that I'm serving with. It's my job to remind them that this is our parish's mission and you're part of this and we're working together towards this.

Elizabeth’s actions reflected her determination to connect them to the mission, which in part stated that the parish serves as “sign of Christ’s saving presence” by “providing an atmosphere of

welcome, warmth, and beauty” for all people. She began welcoming suggestions and ideas from her cantors, choirs, and instrumentalists, as well as affirming the “beauty of their music gifts.” The response to Elizabeth’s consistency in both mission and demeanor was positive. She reported that “choir members have told me that they are just as happy as ever with how choir is going,” and that people with influence within the parish told her “how glad they are that I’m there, how they love ...what’s happening on Sundays.” This kind of response is consistent with relational leadership models that “promote the full involvement of participants by reducing the barriers that block the development of individual talent and involvement” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 116).

Empowerment was a key theme for others as well. Diane’s commitment to empowerment of parishioners allowed a number of ministries to remain intact following the previously mentioned budget cuts. Laurie’s commitment to empowerment came from her own experience of being invited into leadership by nuns at her high school, by her husband, and by the pastor who first invited her to paid ministry. Kelly’s identification of the failure to engage the gifts and talents of others in leadership spoke to the need to move away from vertical relationships where “parish leaders deliver ministerial service” (Brennan, 2007, p. 92) and towards a model where leaders become “empowering consultants” (p. 92) and parishioners become collaborators in the mission.

The above serves as evidence of how relationship and empowerment give meaning to leadership, in order to “mitigate aspects of the organizational climate that can block meaningful involvement for others” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 117). These women LEMs sought to create environments of empowerment where “people can use and hear their voices in the life of the organization or community” (p. 120).



*Strategic collaborators.* Relational leadership, as a theory for analysis, recognizes “an appointed leader as one voice among many in a larger coordinated social process” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 662.). This theoretical position recognizes that mission or purpose of the organization does not belong only to those in positional authority. Instead, accomplishment of any one component of the organization’s mission and the work towards it belongs to all the collaborators in the mission. Relational leaders enter into strategic relationships with these collaborators using processes of reflection, challenge, collaboration, and/or care (Komives et al, 2013, p. 134) not only to accomplish specific goals but also to create and articulate meaning. Ruth and Marie both provided descriptions of relational leadership experiences exemplifying the influence of strategic collaboration on individuals and the community.

Ruth, who perceived her pastor as more committed to “maintenance than mission,” recently focused her relational leadership on finding collaborators among parishioners who would invest in positive change. Ruth made a strategic decision with the hope of encouraging the pastor to reconsider his priorities. She invited a couple of parishioner leaders to attend a weeklong discipleship training conference. Among those Ruth invited was John, the spouse of one of her pastoral ministry volunteers. John just happened to be one of the pastor’s key leaders.

That was really audacious to ask him to do that because it was a week off from his work... He has other things on his plate, a lot of other things. I just kept saying, "I'll leave it up to the Holy Spirit. I really would like you to come." When you put the Holy Spirit card on the table, it's kind of hard for people to say no without taking a look at something. Anyway, he said yes. He was so captivated by the experience that he told me later that he didn't even want to leave to go to the bathroom because he was afraid he was going to miss something.

Following the conference John chose to be the spokesperson for discipleship to parish leadership and he actively garnered commitments from other parishioners.

Ruth's ability to leverage relational credibility and strategic collaboration moved her parish toward positive change. More important to Ruth, the impact of the initial experience on John's faith transformed his understanding of what it means to engage as a parishioner. This approach to garnering strategic collaboration lets people know they matter, giving them the "feeling [they] are significant to others and to the organization" (Komives et al., 2013, p. 123).

Marie's strategic collaboration included both staff and parishioners. In their parish cluster design, the pastor spent most of his time at the other larger parish, which has a school. All of the staff in the smaller parish worked less than 40 hours a week. Without the daily presence of positional authority, the staff regularly negotiated decisions. Recent events that placed the pastor on administrative leave required that "someone step up" to engage parishioner leadership in conversation with the diocese about how to communicate the pastor's absence.

Immediately after the pastor went on leave, Marie initiated contact with the local diocesan office, the parish trustees, and pastoral council chair to request an opportunity for parish leaders and parishioners to gather to get information, answer questions, and spend time in prayer. All parties agreed to the gathering she suggested and she offered her opinions on structure and content.

Marie was present at the gathering with the rest of the staff "actively talking with parishioners one to one, assuring them that the parish would be fine" until the pastor returned. At her individual interview, I asked Marie if anyone in parish leadership thought it unusual that the youth minister stepped into leadership at such a sensitive time. "No. I guess they weren't surprised that I took that on, but our chair of our parish council is also my lead confirmation catechist, who I've been working side-by-side with for many, many years, so he accepted it." She also told me that she had no fear in bringing the parish together. "We have such good

people who love that parish as much as I do that they're not letting this interfere with their faith. Their faith is bigger than the parish. Their faith is way bigger than a pastor.”

In this case, Marie’s longevity in the parish (20+years), a relationship of mutual trust with the council chair, her deep love for the parish, and the parishioner’s love and trust paved the way for a community to be cared for in the midst of difficult circumstances. Her strategic collaboration demonstrated that relational leadership creates a “capacity to be successful in the world, knowledge of the mysteries of the human soul, and opportunities to find your unique gifts, and to live in loving community with other people” (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 123). Relational leaders, like Marie, are often motivated by love and care for their community. This love gives meaning to Marie’s leadership. “Love is the true hallmark of great leaders— love for their work and for those with whom they work” (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 125).

For these women LEMs, strategic collaboration exercised within relational leadership provided them and the community an avenue to ensure growth. In their leadership, these women LEMs recognized that people support what they help create, and that others must be involved in the process. It allowed their collaborators to envision a “realistic, credible, and attractive future for...the organization” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 103).

***Relational boundaries.*** The women LEMs acknowledged that a relational approach to leadership also presented challenges in their life. They desire to be “good leaders who take care of themselves, their families, and some of the community” (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 216), but face multiple challenges trying to balance life and leadership. Public relational leadership means “parishioners feel like they really know you” (Elizabeth), and it can blur boundaries. Parish members who see themselves as friends have asked Elizabeth to bend rules on music choices at

weddings and funerals. One person even requested that Elizabeth “slide in a favorite song” for a spouse’s birthday at Sunday Mass.

Elizabeth was not alone in dealing with blurred boundaries. Sandy and her husband have struggled with infertility. She expressed frustration with people in her parish cluster who do not hesitate to ask her when she will have children. Kelly, unmarried and with no children, expressed a belief that “there’s certainly people who make a judgement because I didn’t reproduce,” and has felt less valued as a Catholic woman in some settings because she “has an unused uterus.” Anne said she embraced the title “church lady” as a sign of affection from people in town, but she and her husband, also in public service, have large parts of their professional lives that they cannot discuss even in private. Anne said that they know some “conversations are off limits” because they both have access to deeply personal and challenging information about the lives of people they consider to be neighbors.

Although challenging, none of the women LEMs in my research identified these boundary areas as an obstacle to leadership. Each willingly struggled with the challenge and invested their “passion, courage, and caring” (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 235). Marie, who described her parish and personal relationships as “stacked” acknowledged the challenge, but for her it is worth it.

I think about would I be better off in another parish and I think part of what I love about ministry are the people that I’ve been working with all these years. Some would say that’s not healthy...because all of my circles are stacked. My friends, my work, where I worship, are all stacked on top of each other...but they are a group of good, professional people who wouldn’t push me to ever say anything that I shouldn’t say.

The theoretical lens of relational leadership, when applied to the experiences articulated by the women LEMs in this study provided language to explain the how and why of their leadership. Seeing leadership as relational creates a fundamental shift in the value of one’s

leadership where “individuals come to see themselves as capable of creating the world they truly want” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 123). In the case of these women, it is through relationship that they see the ability to build a bridge between the human and divine mission of the Church.

**Authentic leaders.** Authentic leadership as a theoretical construct developed as a response to ethical challenges in business environments. Its definition and detailed nuances continue to be refined, but scholars agree that authentic leadership is a valuable theoretical frame. It considers “patterns of leader behavior that promote both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency” (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94) to benefit leaders, followers, and organizations. Three of the common elements of authentic leadership theory namely self-awareness, consistency, and ethics (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 421) provided another theoretical lens to consider how the LEMs in this study attributed meaning to their leadership.

**Self-awareness.** Authentic leadership theory holds that leaders come to know and understand their leadership identity over time, owning and articulating principles, values, and experiences that form their true self. Self-awareness is not formed in isolation. Authentic leaders recognize that the true self is constituted in relationships with others (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 421). Self-awareness was evident among the women LEMs who articulated authenticity as meaningful to their leadership particularly in their descriptions of principles and values that inform their ministerial practice.

Laurie’s “passion is for the Mass” and it is central to her faith, to her mission, and to her leadership. “I am in awe of what that that meal signifies and can do... the idea of getting nourished and being sent out to do it, to live it and to be it...that’s what I’m doing.” Laurie saw

her faith and leadership as maturing allowing her to be “brave” and more willing to make her own principles and values public. This is particularly true as she instructs parents on their responsibilities to make Mass attendance part of their family life.

Things have come out of my mouth that I never thought I would ever say to a group of people. I don't know if it's my understanding of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes I go back and I say, "The Holy Spirit was in me and making me say these words." Now I say, "The expectation is that these children who are preparing for First Holy Communion should be at mass every weekend" I didn't say, "I'm going to take roll," I just said, "The expectation is ..." I've had families come up to me and say, "Thank you for saying that." I think that with experience over the years, I've come to a place where it's not about me anymore. It's for them and for the faith.

Chris spent most of 2015 providing for the pastoral needs of her suburban parish that did not have a pastor assigned to it. She was on call 24/7 for every personal and community crisis and tragedy. Chris's self-awareness of her own authenticity became evident when she spoke emotionally about the importance of being present during this time.

Being present for people and taking the time to really listen and to be there with people whether they're going through a personal crisis, or death, or illness. Where it really came into play was during the year we were lacking a pastor. There were a lot of things that I couldn't do. I had to find a priest for anointing, or for funerals. The only qualification I had was I could be there. I could be there! I could walk through these times with them. I could stand at their side. You can't just pay lip service to that. People can feel it.

Theresa at the age of 28 more recently became aware of how a commitment to her true self, expressed in the value she places on family life, informed her leadership. She said she places family and marriage central to her leadership in the Church's mission. Her ministry provides parents with opportunity for early childhood family education. She has spoken about God's plan for the family in faith formation programs and taught natural family planning to couples in the area. She knew that to be true to herself she needed to make choices to place her own family first.

In a lay vocation...[I] witness to how I raise my family... how do I make sure my family's being put first and not sacrificing some of those things to do work. I try to make one weekend a month a non-work weekend, where it's just for my husband...I don't know if that will happen, and so I'm trying to do better and I need to plan that out. It needs to be intentional at the beginning of the year saying, "This is a no work weekend. I'm not going to do anything."

For each of these women, knowledge of self and of identity as leader grew over time and through experiences of being a leader. They learned to speak from “one’s own voice as a leader—rather than echoing the words of others” (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 420). In this self-discovery all three women described in this section came to resemble an authentic leader profile including being “confident, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient” (p. 420).

**Consistency.** Theoretically, authentic leaders demonstrate “consistency between the leaders true-self— as expressed in values, purpose, or voice— and their behavior” (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 422). Consistency between values and action benefits the leader and those being led. For the leader, consistency provides self-regulation where the leader “evaluates and shapes behavior” (p. 421) in light of the true self. Those being led “look for consistency between the leaders’ true self...and their behaviors” (p. 423) giving them confidence in the person and the mission. Two examples from the research speak to the role consistency played in confirming authentic leadership.

Sandy used the word authentic more than a dozen times in both the group and personal interview. Sandy knows that in a small town her ministerial leadership is “lived in a fishbowl” where her true self is always on display. For her, consistency means balancing public witness to her true self while maintaining professional boundaries.

I think it’s important to not try to live a life and live a ministry that's so very different. The importance of this is who I am...I am not going to tell everything, necessarily, but I don't think people follow a leader who isn't authentic, and who isn't willing to at least share a portion of who they are. To recognize that

everybody's life is a little bit different, and there are similarities and differences in each other's lives.

The ability to adapt to changing circumstances, while retaining the core of her true self is evident in experiences shared by Elizabeth who recently transitioned from associate to primary director of worship. In her new role, Elizabeth needed to discern which values and principles regarding worship music were central to her mission and leadership.

It's kind of interesting to look back on the last 16 years, because I think of when I first got into this ...I was big on using the organ. I thought that was why God put me there. I became really big on hymnody and the necessity for hymnody, and why it was good for all sorts of reasons. That's still the backbone of what I use, but I've come around widening my choices and realizing how we need this whole gamut.

Elizabeth was able to adapt and still feel that she was true to her core self because ultimately her music choices fit her core mission “to get the message [of Christ] into their hearts when we sing it.”

Consistency helped Sandy and Elizabeth evaluate and adapt their choices and actions to meet particular situations without abandoning their true self. Sandy's measurement of her authenticity between her public and private self, with appropriate boundaries, reflected a cultural shift where people are “far less tolerant of inconsistencies between leaders' espoused principles, values, and conduct” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 90). Sandy and Elizabeth demonstrated authenticity not just in the action, but also in commitment to mission where the “self is the same self through the disparate events of one's life so that the unity of character becomes evident” (Sparrowe, p. 432) over time and in their leadership actions.

***Ethical.*** “Self-disciplined and consistent in their pursuit of clear ethical standards” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 102), authentic leaders as decisions makers refuse to compromise these standards in the face of uncertainty, retaliation, or failure. In addition, authentic leaders



“focus on ethical role modeling” (p. 103) encouraging conduct consistent with the organization’s true self. The women LEMs in my cohort provided multiple examples of the value they placed on their own moral integrity in both ordinary and extraordinary leadership activity, as well as the concern, frustration, and anger they experienced when others did not demonstrate the same commitment to moral leadership.

Marie described her moral leadership as beginning with her public integrity. In the shadow of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church, every parish must follow specific administrative procedures outlined by their diocese before parishioners and staff can be engaged in ministry with minors or vulnerable adults. Marie said she takes this responsibility seriously serving as youth protection coordinator for her parish. As coordinator, she annually signed a document attesting that every volunteer and employee have met the criteria for safe contact. This responsibility took on greater weight when the pastor of their parish cluster went on administrative leave.

I actually asked to not be our contact anymore because I knew my coworker was fudging a bit on the forms and not background checking all her people and saying they were. I went to our business administrator and he said he would do it. I was like, "I'm not signing off on this if she's not doing this... [He] just said, "I'll take it on. Don't worry about it." He was okay with it. I wasn't because my integrity was at stake.

As a parish community nurse, Anne often found herself needing to explain Catholic Church teaching on issues related to the dignity of the human person and respect for life. It could happen at lunch at a nursing home with a question about end of life care or with a college student questioning Church teaching on abortion. In these circumstances, her role as “church lady” made her responsible for fairly representing the Church’s principles and mission. This conflicted at times with her personal principle of accompaniment, which requires that she “meet each person where they are.” Her answer has been to keep the principles of dignity, life, and

accompaniment in tension with each other. She said she “can never represent the whole Catholic Church” and her ethical response is to “make a connection and be uncomfortable with somebody, just sitting there with them when we don't know what to do.” Ann articulated the moral principle at the heart of her authentic self in this reflection.

Back to Jesus, He didn't just say, "Love only your own kids," or, "Love only the people that sit by you in the pews." We're all in this together. I do believe that life is very sacred and that we really are called, all of us, to figure out what we're supposed to learn during those challenging times.

Some of my research participants have struggled to find an environment that supports their true self. Four have left a parish over conflicts in principle. These conflicts, never about controversial Church teachings, have centered on issues of fairness, transparency, and protection of the vulnerable. At one time in her career, Jean found herself in what she saw as a “no win situation.” The parish’s previous pastor, who was highly collaborative and worked hard to involve staff and parishioners at many levels of decision-making retired. Over the next two years, a new pastor and new administration moved towards a more hierarchical model of decision-making, but without making new expectations known to staff or parishioners who had previously been autonomous. In addition, they made plans to merge two positions, essentially eliminating Jean’s job the following year. With the intent of finishing the year, Jean continued to make the decisions she had always made and empowered parishioners to lead as they had always led.

I ruffled a lot of feathers because I continued to lead and didn't ask my bosses their opinion or let them take over. I got in trouble. All I know is I had people that were looking to me to help them keep something [passion play] that had been a tradition in the parish for 25 years. The pastor canned it and I fought for it.

As Jean’s year progressed, she came to realize that her choices were not about saving a passion play, but about being true to herself and her commitment to collegiality. “I just decided to leave

[before the end of the year] with grace and dignity, but I did tell them that this was why I'm leaving.”

Kelly expressed feeling alone in her commitment to advocate for children at risk. She experienced anger and frustration when diocesan structures failed to protect those she saw as most vulnerable. She also has grown tired of working in a parish environment that she believes devalues her education and her gender. “I have had issues with this in the past few years. There were moments that I really had nothing left to give and it was a struggle just to show up.” The experience of working in a parish that she identified as lacking an ethical foundation has led her to question her role. “I may not want to do this anymore...not at any church because of this experience.” The professional issues of failure and fairness stand in tension with her personal convictions to advocate and protect. To date she has not left her role as a ministerial leader in the parish.

As leaders who value authenticity, these LEMs “drew upon reserves of moral capacity, efficacy, courage, and resiliency” to “address ethical issues and achieve authentic and sustained moral action” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 324). The purpose of these actions was not solely to maintain their personal integrity. Decisions on the part of these women engage, accompany, and protect in ways consistent with their ethical principles were decisions to act in accord with a divine mission rooted in love and communion.

### **Mission Leadership and Meaning Making**

Meaning is both cognitive and emotional which “allows a person to know a world vision and places that person into the world view” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 96). These women intertwined interpretations of divine and human mission as they talked about their leadership. They used their interpretation of divine mission to explain the strengths and limitations of their

human leadership, and their experience of the human leadership shaped their understanding of their role as leader in divine mission. The integration of mission from two perspectives had implications on both the practice of leadership and the meaning they gave leadership.

### **Mission and Practice**

The marks of pastoral excellence (Jewell & Ramey, 2005), defined earlier, provide an avenue through which to see how divine and human experiences not only inform interpretations of mission, but the practice of ministerial leadership. Clear evidence exists on the importance these LEMs placed on the marks of collaboration and ethical practice in leadership. Diane and Ruth's experiences of collaborating with parishioners, staff, and clergy indicated positive change occurs in a community when there is an expansion in the sharing of gifts for the well-being of the community. The parish's knowledge of Marie as both collaborative and ethical allowed them to place their trust in her during a difficult time in the life of the parish. Their trust in a youth minister to guide the parish's actions in addressing the pastor's leave of absence rested on their belief that she wanted what was best for the community.

The practice of leadership marked by welcome was also evident in analysis through mission. Key elements of both divine mission in the *Imago Dei* and relational leadership theory acknowledges the importance of leadership that creates a community of regard and sense of belonging among members. Kelly and Laurie both articulated the need to make people feel welcome and have voice. Elizabeth's strategy of inviting musicians and liturgical ministers to collaborate with the mission served to affirm their place as valued contributors to the community.

Tension between concepts in divine and human mission also create struggle in leadership practice for LEMs. The same staff community that trusted Marie to guide the parish's

conversation about the pastor also placed her in the position of choosing between collaborating and ethical attributes. The actions of one of her colleagues –“fudging on the forms” in the reporting of sexual misconduct training– created tension for Marie. Would she be authentic or be seen as a team player (collaborator)? Kelly too felt the tension between wanting to be seen as collaborative and ethical. The loneliness she expressed in advocating for the most vulnerable extends from the tension between her call to serve the marginalized, her desire to lead in community, and her rejection by other leaders for her advocacy.

The marks of inclusive, pastoral, and prophetic leadership also provided a way to see how an understanding of mission shapes leadership practice. When Jean said, “If I am called, they certainly are” she was not dismissing her own leadership. Rather, she was explaining how her understanding of mission expressed in relationships motivated her to highlight similarities rather than differences between herself and those she leads. Embracing her leadership as an inclusive, Jean sees herself leading as one among the faithful. This reflects a theological concept articulated in *Co-Workers* (2005), which reminds LEMs that all ministry, paid and unpaid, flows from the right and responsibility of all the faithful to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly work of Christ. To be an inclusive leader requires the LEM to see the work of mission as belonging to a community of persons, equal in dignity and grace, but with individuals exercising their gifts in different roles.

Leading as one among the faithful challenged the leadership identity and practice of some of these LEMs. Chris in particular struggled. Having been an unpaid parishioner minister, with professional skills and education, who moved into professional paid ministry, Chris did not want to see herself as different from those she led. Richard’s negative leadership behavior, as a person with positional authority, further reinforced Chris’s rejection of leadership identity. Her self-

awareness as leader did not blossom until there was no pastor to meet the needs of parishioners. Her ownership of the mission and leadership grew through the demands of pastoral leadership—ensuring the faithful would have their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs met.

### **Mission and Meaning**

Beyond the practice of leadership, mission informed the meaning of leadership. The love of God expressed in the actions of ministry took on character and meaning because these LEMs placed value on integrating both kinds of mission into their understanding of self. Meaning flowed both out of an understanding of mission and the practice of mission directed leadership. Laurie's proclamation that she directed her leaderships towards "the Church" and not just a parish provided an indication that the divine was the source of her understanding of mission, as did Jean's assertion that her call to ministry would last a lifetime. Theresa's understanding of her lay ecclesial ministry as being intimately connected to her vocation commitment in marriage speaks not only to the role family had in her vocational discernment, but a conviction that God works in and through her sacramental relationships.

Mission, as both a divine calling and human endeavor, provided a framework for these LEMs to understand and practice leadership. Within the divine mission, *Imago Dei*, a theologically rich metaphor, is just that—a metaphor that cannot adequately explain how the practical avenues of formation, youth ministry, pastoral ministry, and liturgy become both a response and an invitation to a relationship with the Trinity expressed in their relationships in the world. The terms *relational* and *authentic*, as well as the theoretical components they represent, also serve as metaphors used to make sense of human leadership these women LEMs attributed to a divine origin.

Although the metaphors have limitations, they revealed a known tension between what these women believe ought to be and what they experience as the Church's mission. These women LEMs found meaning by placing the human and divine in dialogue and allowed "a dialectic movement between and among human (and non-human) phenomena" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 664) to result in the emergence of meaning for themselves and those they lead.

CHAPTER 5  
MEANING THROUGH STORY AND SYMBOL

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*Marie: Story of Gratitude*

*Marie, 49, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work in a first ring suburban parish where she also prays. She has been with this parish for over 20 years. “When listening to other youth ministers I feel blessed... I’ve had a fabulous parish to work in all these years. I am grateful to have volunteers to step into roles and see those roles as ministries.” Marie told her ministry stories, both fruitful and challenging, from the perspective of gratitude. Thankful to people she met, for challenges that helped her grow, and encounters with grace that arose in all her experiences.*

*Marie’s understanding of women in leadership in the Church was formed by her experiences in a rural parish in outstate Minnesota. Raised in a Catholic farm family, she attended Mass every Sunday and attended formation classes. When preparing for Confirmation, Marie developed a relationship with a nun who served as the Parish Life Coordinator at the parish, which had no resident pastor. “Sister Anne was one of the first women in the country who actually ran a parish, so I grew up with a model of a very strong woman who was leading a Catholic parish.” This was Marie’s first relationship with a Church leader, and Sister Anne tapped into Marie’s talents encouraging her to be a lector at Mass and attend a youth leadership retreat.*

*After high school, Marie attended college majoring in family life sciences with a desire to work with youth through 4H extension services. She married, and before starting a family, Marie and her husband engaged in a mission experience in South America. This is when Marie*



*said she first heard a call to ministry, but after three months, it was clear that mission work in South America was not the call and they returned to Minnesota.*

*Upon return, Marie worked for 4H extension service and began a master's program that would further qualify her for direct service to youth. It was not enough. "When I worked with 4-H training, the Gulf War broke out and this young girl came to my office in tears because her boyfriend was being shipped off. My natural response was to want to prayer with her, but I'm in a public office working for the University...I could not do that." Marie expressed gratitude for that experience because it gave her "courage to apply for the youth ministry position in my parish." Marie viewed the opportunity as "providential." Pregnant, pursuing her education, and moving into a new community Marie had been looking for "part-time meaningful work." After her interview, she remembered thinking, "This is going to be cool because I can do what I really feel I'm called to do with youth, which is pray." From the beginning, Marie's ministry involved leadership. The pastor who hired her, and the ones that followed him, delegated the visioning and development of youth and family ministry to Marie.*

*When her parish transitioned to become part of a cluster, where a priest would not be present daily, Marie's role, in many ways paralleled Sister Anne's role. Marie valued her relationships with pastors, but also knew a parish could lead itself if equipped to do so. Pastors valued their relationship with Marie, drawing upon her longevity in the community and her commitment to parishioner based leadership. Even in the midst of current struggles, including a pastor on an unplanned leave of absence, Marie expressed gratitude. "I am always so thankful to be where I am, because I do think that I have had a really good ministerial place to be in."*

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My use of qualitative phenomenological methods resulted in rich narrative data, but because these twelve women exercised their leadership within a faith tradition steeped in story, it became more than a data source. Story created and conveyed meaning. On retreat and in the individual interviews the stories of their lives and their ministry served as parables of leadership for themselves, for each other, and for me. They tied the meaning revealed in story to their faith and to their ministerial leadership. If stories “stored and retrieved from memory shape our understanding of who we are”(Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 23), then leadership stories selected and told by these women LEMs easily contributed to the meaning they ascribed to their leadership. For the women in my study, story and symbol served to connect their own story to the story of the Catholic community, and to the understanding of their leadership. In this process these women used story to articulate what Hearne (1984) called “a mysterious *soul-making* in the adventure, farce, tragedy and transcendence of [their] life” (p. 39).

In this chapter, I first define the elements of story, symbol, and metaphor used in my analysis of the meaning making activities of the LEMs in my study. I also describe the story and symbol rich context in which ministry and meaning making took place for these women. Next, I attend to stories and symbols from within the Church’s culture and structure, which they incorporated into their understanding of mission and leadership. This includes symbols of leadership they brought to and explained on retreat.

Following this, I unpack the soul-making stories of these women using self-narrative and story leadership theories from three perspectives: a) life experiences connecting them to their ministerial leadership; b) stories from within ministerial practice informing the meaning they gave their leadership; and c) stories of suffering in leadership transforming them and their leadership. Within each section, I employ theoretical scholarship (Hearne, 1984; Bruner, 2004;

Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe 2005; Noonan & Fish, 2007) associated with narrative and storytelling as avenues to convey and create meaning. I also explore how storied leadership informs the practice of leadership, again applying the marks of pastoral excellence in my interpretation.

### **Story, Symbol, and Metaphor**

Used in both social theory and theological disciplines, the combination of story, symbol, and metaphor serves as a research methodology, and a lens for analysis revealing how people create and express meaning. For the purpose of this dissertation, I define *story* as organized expressions of events and experiences used to develop and convey meaning. Whether cultural or personal, religious or secular, fictional or based on actual events story “has to do with our search for meaning, with the effort to discover or impose a pattern to our experience” (Hearne, 1984, p. 38). Shared and re-shared they become integral elements of life-stories or myth narratives of individuals, cultures, and organizations with implications for leadership. Butler Bass (2007) identified storytelling as “one of the most dramatic cultural shifts of the last thirty years” because “story has become a primary path to meaning making” (p. xiv). Meaning making is seen as essential to “ordering and interpreting life experience” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 15). For leaders, stories— both their own and those belonging to the community or organization they lead — assist them, their collaborators, and their followers in making sense of relationships, conflicts, values, and assumptions. “We interpret our own experience, as well as the experiences of others through story discovering our own mutuality and humanity in the process” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 2). In the telling and re-telling of stories, leaders reframe their experiences, looking at it from different points of view “gaining clarity, regaining balance, generating new options, and finding strategies that make a difference” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 22).

For this analysis, I defined *symbol* through a sacramental lens, as an object, idea, event, or even a person who makes visible what would otherwise remain invisible. In this definition, symbol does not merely attempt to represent or describe, “it opens up reality to human knowing and opens up human knowing to that reality” (Avis, 1999, p. 108). Symbols convey complex emotions, memories, ideals, and attitudes taking on form and expressing meaning. Symbols, both communal and personal, contain more than what we see. “Through our symbol making capacity we make sense of the world and give meaning to life” (Avis, 1999, p. 106). *Metaphors*, a subset of symbol, serve as “linguistic, image generating devices” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 11) providing both clarity and limits to assist with the visualization of meaning.

### **Story and Symbol Rich Environment**

The Catholic faith and its traditions express relationship with the Trinity through story, symbol, and metaphor. The Church, including its organizational structures, theologians, and the community of the faithful depend on story, symbol, and metaphor because it has “no other tools with which to operate...for no significant meaningful statement can be made without them” (Avis, 1999, p. 68). For centuries, the faithful have struggled to find full and complete expression for the presence of God. Popes, mystics, theologians, and believers have used and continue to use story and symbol to explain what cannot be fully explained. Together they express how the wholeness of the Trinity, revealed fully in Jesus Christ, abides in mystery not fully understood until entry into eternal life. Whether one identifies as a conservative, liberal, traditional, progressive, devout, or cultural Catholic people define and redefine the stories and symbols of the faith to share meaning, inspire devotion, and/or promote change. As in any community or culture, the multitude of stories and symbols found in the Church combines with

individual stories “giving us a way to understand and explain larger questions of life” (Noonan & Fish, 2007).

The ministerial leadership of the women in my study took place within the context of their faith story expressed in the gospel story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. In Catholic scholarship the gospel story is “not only relevant to human life, it is about human life— not an abstract, bloodless, stereotyped human life, but an actual human pilgrimage in which God has shown us who [God] is and who we are” (Hearne, 1984, p. 38). When embraced and reinterpreted through one’s own story, Jesus’ story becomes one’s own and makes God accessible to “every life not just [to] the lives of exceptional saints and heroes” because Christ through the “incarnation has in a certain way united himself with every human being” (p. 32).

All of the women in my study identified a deep faith in God and a commitment to the Church. Anne associated her faith with a compassionate Jesus who welcomed, healed, and forgave. “If Jesus is love, then the Church must be love, and my work must begin with love.” For Jean, her relationship with God began with an awareness of the daily presence of the Holy Spirit, who calls her to deepen and transform her life. Although strongly committed to parish ministerial leadership, Jean said prayer makes her “constantly aware of new ways the Spirit is working in my life...there are people called to live in poor neighborhoods and be neighbor... [my husband] and I are discerning this, because the Spirit as asked.” Ruth, who at times struggled with her place as a woman in the Church, recalled her childhood to confirm God as parent always sought a relationship with her. “I have always had a hungering for God in my heart.” She remembered, “Roaming the fields, and the woods, and just having this expanse. I call it joy now. Just being alive and being there with God.” All of the women spoke of God

with descriptions of activity and principles to reveal how the “ultimate story of Jesus” (Ruth) informed their understanding of their own story.

### **Leadership in Symbol and Metaphor**

At my request, the twelve women in this cohort brought to their retreat symbolic expressions of their leadership in order to know each other better. “Mutual knowledge of one being and another” is dependent on symbol “because the inner being is inaccessible to us” without symbolic expression (Leithart, 2000, p. 6). I told them these expressions could take on any form – art, poetry, music, or any other object containing meaning for their leadership. They all brought something; not one “forgot” or waited until the last minute. No one struggled to find a symbol, but only to narrow it to one or two symbols. They graciously unpacked their symbols over the course of the retreat.

As each woman gave voice to her symbol, she told the story accompanying it. Each LEM shared why she chose it, where it came from, how it came to have meaning, and the place it has in her ministerial leadership today. The object became “the invisible tip of an ontological iceberg” (Avis, 1999, p. 107) because through symbol “our mental and emotional life is organized” (p. 104). In analysis, these symbols served not only to understand the personal meaning of their leadership, but also to identify how they incorporated communal stories and symbols of faith into meaning making.

Some women brought ordinary objects like a cup, bowl, apron, cell phone, halo Frisbee disk, rocks, and yeast to represent comfort, gratitude, service, connections, challenge, and transformation. These ordinary objects took on extraordinary meaning. At both retreats, women with ordinary objects told a back-story about the object giving a deeper understanding of the

objects connection to leadership. At each retreat, the symbolism of some of these objects became part of the whole group's experience of leadership expressed in metaphors.

A bowl, brought by Anne was a gift from a friend many years ago. This friend, who also worked in parish ministry invited her to make the bowl a gratitude bowl. Anne said she keeps thank you notes and other small expressions of gratitude received from others in the bowl. It reminds her even in challenging times the work of pastoral care makes a difference. As the women commented upon and affirmed Anne's symbol, one or two women began to talk about their own "bowls of gratitude" or experiences reminding them ministerial leadership matters.

Jean brought yeast as her symbol. For her yeast symbolized transformation and creativity. She explained yeast allows flat ingredients to come alive and become "something wonderful— like bread and donuts." Jean desired her leadership to "be leaven allowing other people's gifts to come alive." She also told us yeast is delicate and easily ruined. For example, "too much heat can kill yeast, keeping bread from rising." She equated the heat to working in ministry environments or with individuals in ministry who place little value on creativity or spend no energy empowering the creativity of others. "Heat kills the yeast" became a metaphor for the whole group. They used it more than once when one of them shared an experience of having their creativity squelched. In this case, the metaphor not only recalls the symbol, but "symbolizes reality...to reveal authentic human meaning— the community's experience of reality" (Avis, 1999, p. 105).

In addition to these objects, a number of women brought religious art as a symbol of their leadership. Art came in the form of statues and paintings. Like the others, sharing included explanation and story about how this image came to symbolize their leadership. In these cases, the story associated with these symbols went untold. For example, Chris brought a framed print

of Piasecki's *Last Supper*. She provided a detailed story about who gave her the print and its importance to her because it depicted women and children present at the last supper. She described her maturation into leadership and the moment she knew "Christ had made a place at the table for me." What Chris did not do was tell the story contained in the print itself. She assumed a shared knowledge and understanding of the last supper narrative found in scripture.

The same was true with Laurie and the symbol she shared. A statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, symbolized her leadership. Aged, small and with broken hands, this statue of Mary "was the only Catholic thing I [Laurie] remembered being in my home as child." Recently rediscovered in her mother's home, this Mary reminded Laurie ministerial leadership was not only for the holy and pious, "but for all the kids and families like mine" referring to her childhood. The broken hands reminded Laurie "leadership was not for the perfect" and God can call anyone to lead, including people like her "who know they need to lead from the heart." At one point, as Laurie spoke making a connection between this statue and service, she simply said, "of course, it's Mary so..." As she said this, every head in the room nodded in affirmation. She did not say another word. Laurie and the others assumed they shared an understanding of the Catholic Church's narrative on Mary and service.

Chris and Laurie's incorporation of art and image associated with the two iconic leaders of the Church— Jesus and Mary— connected their leadership to divine mission, as well as to the theological narratives on sacrifice and service they represent, without ever talking about the narratives themselves. "Symbols, together with myth, sacralise identity and give us individually and corporately, our orientation to the transcendent" (Avis, 1999, p. 109). These symbols of leadership contained both personal and cultural identity stories, which combined to create meaning for themselves and those who heard their descriptions. "Engaging people in the mutual



and shared exercise of meaning making, storytelling aids the development of our individual potential, membership in communities, and participation in leadership”(Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 55). Chris and Laurie found meaning in their leadership, in part, by placing themselves within the cultural story of the Church and within a community of believers.

The final category of symbols shared on retreat came in the form of poems, prayers, and lyrics written by people significant to the LEM presenting it. These women connected their leadership to the words of other men and women. They also connected their leadership identity to the actions of leadership they associate with these writers and composers.

Anne brought a very old hymnal, “not just because I am a liturgist,” but because of what the hymns represented. The hymnal represented the great composers who catechized for generations through song. Like them, “it was through these songs I found faith and through these songs I should share faith.” Marie read a prayer that pays tribute to Bishop Oscar Romero killed by a South American drug cartel while saying Mass. Marie’s mission experiences in South America introduced her to his advocacy for and defense of the innocent even in the face of danger. She described what it would be like to be like him: “brave, direct, making room for and protecting” the marginalized.

“Symbols are the lifeblood of a living faith and the currency of identity formation within a religious community” (Leithart, 2000, p. 105). For Anne and Marie, the symbols they chose not only spoke to the leadership they practice, but the leadership they want to practice. The symbols they chose incorporated communal myths about sainthood, greatness, and service into the meaning of their leadership. These men and women serve as models for Anne and Marie of how to live out a call to ministry that reflects “their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God” (Catholic Church, 1994, p. 871).

### **Soul-Making Stories**

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her. (Luke 10: 38-42)

Stories “ancient as life itself and deeply imbedded within family and cultural traditions transmit knowledge and shared meaning” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. xi). Words woven together invoke the imagination of the teller and receiver calling them to invest in plot, character, emotion, tension, and possibility. With every word and image, story conveys meaning both intended and unintended. “When new experiences are incorporated into the current version of a life story, the story gets revised, and sets off a chain reaction: Lives are ordered and interpreted, meaning occurs through reflection, [and] identity is reimagined” (p. 15). Through story, both teller and receiver create new meaning not only for the story, but also for life, because their response to the story has been shaped by relationships, experiences, work, attitudes, values, beliefs, and other previously embraced stories.

Multiple women referenced the scriptural story of Mary and Martha numerous times in unrecorded conversation on the research retreats. Three or four times Mary and Martha became references in the focus groups. None of the women ever told the whole story, they did not need to, but the meaning they gave the story varied among them. A group of three women discussed over a meal whether their nature was more like Mary (learner) or Martha (servant). Two others discussed whether the scripture could represent the split priority in parishes wondering whether parishes today focus too heavily on maintenance (Martha) over mission (Mary). The liveliest conversation centered on Jesus’ acceptance of Mary and Martha as disciples. The women in this

conversation noted how he allowed them to both sit with the men (Mary) and question him publically (Martha). These discussions illustrate how even an ancient story still intersects with people's lived experience and invites new reflection on their lives.

Like the story of Mary and Martha, the stories told by women LEMs in this study contained multiple layers of meaning with implications for understanding how they perceived their leadership. In the context of this research, the women LEMs not only used story, symbol, and metaphor to illustrate a point; they created story, symbol, and metaphor to transmit meaning. For example, I described earlier how the women shared a symbol representing their leadership. The object's leadership value was not wholly contained in the object itself, but also in the story accompanying it. The story provided meaning and context for the object.

The women transformed experiences and symbols shared on retreat into repeated metaphors. Phrases like "the year that shall not be named" and "heat kills the yeast" and "through the back door" now carried meaning for all those on retreat. In subsequent individual interviews, both the original teller and the hearers of these experiences used these phrases to make comparisons to their own experiences in leadership. Three women used "the year that shall not be named" to reference times of difficulty and Laurie borrowed Chris's "through the back door" to talk about how she came into ministry from a corporate position. Through the telling and retelling of stories leaders confirmed for themselves and others the value of their ministerial leadership. These narratives became leadership life-stories providing "leader[s] with a meaning system, from which to feel, think, and act" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 402).

All of the women LEMs told stories about successful and challenging experiences, as well as important stories about relationships, both personal and ministerial. It was evident they had packed and unpacked some of these stories before, this time looking at it through the lens of

their own ministerial leadership. Through telling stories of rejection, loss, and even moral failure, they “knew that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future” (Gusdorf in Bruner, 2004, p. 695), at least not in their leadership.

In addition to personal life narratives occurring both before and during careers in ministerial leadership, I also found compelling stories of suffering in leadership. These moments of agony, humiliation, and disappointment required them to redefine their leadership identity. The stories in this next section, organized around the themes of life, ministry, and suffering, serve as evidence of how their soul making stories gave meaning to their leadership and shaped their leadership practice. Within each theme, I incorporate theoretical scholarship providing indication of how the story informs meaning for the LEM at the center of the story. At the end of each theme, I consider the implications of the meaning made from story on their strengths and struggles in the practice of ministerial leadership.

### **Life Stories**

“When somebody tells you his/her life – and that is principally what we shall be talking about – it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through the clear crystal recital of something univocally given” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). In the interviews I asked, “How did you come to be an LEM?” Six of the women began with stories about their family of origin, childhood experiences of church, and/or adolescent or young adult experiences resulting in personal and spiritual transformations. Four of these stories, shared on retreat and/or individual interview, made it evident to me and to them “life-stories are not only *who am I stories*, but also *why am I here stories*” (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 403).

**Rejection becomes advocacy.** Kelly was a small child when a priest and a parish rejected her mother. Kelly incorporated her mother's experience into her own narrative and used it to explain the relationship she has to her faith and her leadership.

When we moved [out of state], my mom made sure that we got our sacraments in, but she was told, to her face, in front of us that she was not welcome, because she was divorced. There was always this push/pull for me because she always said I will drop you off at church, and I was like how can I go be at that church when you won't let my mom be at this church.

This injustice to her mother became foundational to her mission and leadership. Kelly's explanation for working in children's ministry reflected her commitment to support struggling families.

It's about being with families and/or individual kids that are in some sort of crisis. I think that those are times when you're stressed, no I mean stretched beyond what you thought you could minister to because you're being called to be with these people.

This conviction springs from her "life-narrative where self-knowledge and personal point of view allows clarity" about values and convictions to develop (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 396). Through these self-narratives we "structure the perceptual experience, organize the memory" and it "becomes the autobiographical narrative by which we tell about our lives" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). These kinds of stories informed a pivotal moment in Kelly's career and redefined her leadership relationships.

After working for a number of years with a priest who was also her family's pastor, Kelly said she felt forced to leave because the pastor wanted to stop her from meeting the needs of an active parish family. She described the situation as "a garbage house and the kids got taken away." The family needed concrete help cleaning their home in order for their children to return home. The pastor refused to allow Kelly to create a strategy to assist them.

Kelly's description of her leadership crisis reflected her conviction to serve, advocate, and protect families in crisis. "What better time to reach out to people than when they're hurting, and not be a roadblock but instead being an open door." She left employment at this parish because she could not remain in a professional or spiritual relationship with a priest who demanded she walk away from what he thought was a "risk management thing" and she thought of as an essential act of ministry.

He wouldn't even be present to them, or let me make contacts for them. But this was a family who were at every event I ever had. That would volunteer and do everything. Clearly, we meant a lot to them, they meant a lot to me. They needed us.

Kelly's life story revealed not only her leadership convictions around serving the vulnerable, but also tensions she experienced with Church authority, especially when she felt their actions compromised the protection of those she saw as vulnerable. Her anger and frustration, even years later, spoke to the need for a person's life stories to "mesh, so to speak, within a community of life stories; tellers and listeners must share some deep structure about the nature of a life" (Bruner, 2004, p. 699) or risk feeling alienated.

**All in the family.** During her individual interview, Chris incorporated a series of personal challenges as a college student and young married woman into her explanation of how the Church and parish became central to her life and leadership.

My brother committed suicide when I was in college, and before he did that, there were a lot of really hard years. I became a lot more involved in my faith than I ever had been before. In fact, I had never been confirmed. I made a profession of faith and was confirmed at Easter Vigil while in college.

After college, when she and her husband found they could not conceive they adopted three boys from South America. Chris again found support and friendship in the Church.

Life changed very quickly, so that when we came back from South America in October, and we moved to Minnesota the following July. I became involved in

the parish, and loved it. That was something. It was a wonderful way to meet people, because I knew absolutely nobody here. The parish became a place to meet people. It became our family here.

As if a move to a community with no family and adopted children were not stressful enough, Chris and her family faced more challenges.

At the time that we moved here, my oldest son already had many disabilities. Our middle son had just turned two in May, we moved in July. Right after his second birthday, he began limping a lot. I took him into the emergency room for an x-ray, we found out his leg was not broken but he had a tumor in it... First week we lived here, we were up at Masonic Hospital. We also lost [my husband's] dad and my mom, all in a couple of years, so it was really just a hard couple of first years here. Parish really was that family away from family for us.

Parish life nurtured her faith and provided her with important emotional support during difficulty and loss. In the absence of family, parish became family, and when she ultimately joined the parish staff, first as a parish life minister and eventually directing pastoral care, Chris took on a new role in the parish family. "It's kind of like I am the mother of a very large family, and that's a good feeling. Like any good mother, I want to take wonderful care of that family, but it's also an enormous responsibility."

The family metaphor, not only permeated her descriptions of relationship with parishioners it was also evident in her descriptions of relationships with pastors. Uncomfortable with a mother/father description she used "supportive sister" to describe the dynamic between her and a previous pastor where she took on a care-taking role. "I was here on the weekends to make sure things ran smoothly before Mass, and people are in place... If all the pieces are taken care of then [Father] was able to minister to people, be more attentive pastorally." When this pastor left, Chris assumed new leadership in the parish, as the self-described "single-mom" when the diocese did not assign a pastor to the parish for nearly a year. A new pastor arrived just a few

months prior to Chris's retreat and interview. Much younger than Chris and in his first pastorate, Chris again found familial language to describe their relationship.

MK: Now you have a pastor. How has your leadership shifted?

Chris: It is wonderful for the parish to have a father there, but I kind of feel aunt and nephew. I can be the cool aunt... [sigh] I mean, he's not my son, but I'm really proud. I mean, it feels, if I had to describe it [long pause]

MK: Cool Aunt?

Chris: Yeah! I very much respect him as my boss, as my pastor. He has been absolutely wonderful, and he seems like he is an old soul. He has incredible wisdom, especially for such a young man, and a deep love for, not only God, but I think for our parish and our community, as well.

MK: Is he already making brownie points with you, because he loves them?

Chris: He made a zillion brownie points with me that way. I want to help him [long pause]. That first year it's really hard, getting to know everybody, getting to feel the culture of the parish, and every aspect of ministry. I am extremely protective of him.

Chris's life experiences, packaged and told through the lens of family revealed much about the meaning and purpose of her leadership. Chris's ministerial practice in pastoral care, described in earlier sections, reflects her own needs to provide care, comfort, and understanding. Family served as a powerful metaphor in her description of ministry and leadership. This metaphor allowed her to "compress complicated issues into an understandable image" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 268). The metaphor allowed her to name her desire for parishioners to treat each other like family. She extended the metaphor into her leadership identity. Out of genuine love and care, Chris committed herself to guide, direct, and admonish her parishioner children. Through use of a metaphor, Chris explained and created meaning for her co-leading with a pastor. The metaphor of family allowed her to take an active leadership role without diminishing the authority of the pastor. The metaphor provides "a unique personal blend of history, poetry,



passion, and conviction” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 370) to shape the meaning she gave her leadership.

**My father was a Father.** Diane grew up in a deeply religious home, which formed her Christian beliefs and practices.

I grew up actually in the Episcopal Church. My father was an Episcopal priest up until his death. So, I was kind of involved in church all my life. You know, there's that stereotypical priest's kid who leave and don't want anything to do with the Church. I was more ... I was always at the church and involved in doing something.

Diane happened to choose a Catholic women's university for college.

I ended up veering toward sociology and social work, and then somehow I made my way toward theology. That was just what drew my interest, so that's where I ended up landing with a theology major in pastoral ministry.

Through both her studies and her college friendships, she found herself drawn to the Catholic faith and chose to become Catholic while still at the university. “There was something about the way they were and what they brought, how they shared the faith that was exciting, enticing. Enticing seems like a crazy word to use, but it kind of drew me in.” When I asked about her parent's response to her decision to become Catholic she said:

My father actually was more supportive than my mother. My mother had grown up Lutheran and become Episcopalian when she married my father because that was the deal; you had to be Episcopalian ....

Ministerial life was not easy for either of her parents. Diane's father suffered from mild bi-polar disorder, which added additional stress to the demands of ministry. This increased her mother's concerns for her daughter.

I think she was concerned about me going into ministry, because my dad had a challenging time in ministry, and we lived with that. She saw what happens when things get overwhelming or when you're not taking care of yourself in the midst of doing ministry.

Autobiographical memory, where past events inform present action, can serve as a protection “from the dangers in our environment as well as serve as the wellspring from which we determine future goals” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 25). Diane’s memories of living in a minister’s home shaped the narrative of her ministerial leadership. Through intentional reflection on these experiences, Diane became more aware of how challenges in ministry affected the rest of her life. She discussed how important maintaining balance between life and ministry has been for her.

With ministry, the challenge is always ... where to put those boundaries. What is the appropriate time to let your life speak, too, and be a part of your ministry and when do you need to separate it—really distance yourself and make your life a priority.

Only three of the 12 women in my research cohort indicated they make an intentional effort to take time away for reflection and renewal. Diane was one of them. She regularly participated in formation and retreat experiences offered in her diocese and chose to be part of a ministry renewal program for Catholic lay ministers offered in her area. These programs provided an environment for her to unpack the role her father’s ministry played in her ministerial leadership. The research experience provided an additional opportunity to revisit the role Diane’s mother played in making self-care a priority. “Now that I think about it, her response to [my dad’s] scenario greatly shapes how I see my life and ministry. I know I have to be almost hyper-vigilant about seeking out friends and colleagues who will help me to re-focus.”

At the retreat, Diane brought a cairn as the symbol of her leadership. Diane defined a cairn as “piles of stones—one stone placed a top another” serving as landmarks for battles, burial sites, trails to “spur hearts and minds to remember sacred, noble, and critical events.” She went on to say cairns reminded her to “mark what is important, to recognize where God revealed himself,” and to “remember what matters and let go of what doesn’t.”

The importance of marking or naming significant events became evident when she repeatedly described a difficult year with a specific pastor as the “year that shall not be named,” and in her current description of the same parish as a “post-Vatican II” community. The image of the cairn, with stacked rocks that can be arranged and re-arranged serves as a symbolic reminder to Diane that “it is okay to place my life and health on top of the pile” when needed. It allowed Diane to ask the question, “Okay, when do I just need to be mom and not on twenty-four-seven for the parish?”

Diane’s ability to draw upon her parents’ life story to make sense of her own leadership demonstrates how “the self is constituted in relation to others” (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 432). In doing so, she created a consistent leadership narrative “representing the relationships between [her] intentions, choices, and outcomes” and “offering an especially effective means for self-regulation” (p. 432). The integration of her father’s life story, as part of but not all of her leadership story allowed Diane to embrace what she valued in her father’s leadership, but also to develop skills and strategies to avoid some of his struggles. Her use of cairns serves as both a strategy for self-regulation and a symbol of the story she wants to live as a ministerial leader. Although not perfect, Diane said, “I am better at realizing when the challenge has become too much, and when I need to seek out others to help me process what is going on and not become burdened and overwhelmed.”

**I was a CCD kid.** In her individual interview, Laurie said immediately, “I went to public elementary school and I am a CCD kid.” In the 1970’s, CCD or Confraternity of Christian Doctrine referred to faith formation programs designed for public school children. Her pre-ministry story, including a brush with anti-Catholicism and a school transfer informed her commitment to ministerial leadership supporting children in the parish.

I grew up in a predominately Jewish neighborhood in a suburb on the east coast and I went to the public school and loved my public school experience. I went there through junior high and into 9th grade. I also spent a lot of time at the Hebrew academy down the street. It was a synagogue and a Hebrew academy and it was kind of like our community center too. I had dance lessons and everything, so I was in this building more than not, which helped me form my foundation as a Christian, because of the Jewishness of my elementary school years, my junior high school years, and all of that.

Laurie's family made sure she attended formation on Saturday mornings and received Sacraments at appropriate times, but "once I was confirmed in fifth grade, it was kind of like I was all on my own." Her parents did not attend Sunday Mass regularly, and neither did she. In junior high, a friendship with the only other Catholic girl in her school altered the direction of her faith life.

Jane, her parents were diplomats, were in the diplomatic corps and she was the only Catholic other Catholic in my grade and we're baby boomers, so there's like eighty of us. On Jewish holidays, it was me, Jane, three Baptist boys, and the Methodist preacher's son. She would invite me over to spend Saturday night and in the morning, their family went to Mass. So, I started going with Jane.

You want to talk about evangelization – this family evangelized me, they brought me to church. She got me involved. We went to religion class together and CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). Then they transferred to Taiwan. I remember my non-Catholic dad coming in to my room. He said, "Aren't you going to church?" I went, "Jane's not here, so ...", and he said, "Come on, I'll drive you." I just started going, every week on my own.

Being Catholic in a virtually all-Jewish community posed no problems for Laurie early on, but late in junior high an encounter with anti-Catholicism prompted her to make a dramatic change.

In 9th grade it was kind of like, you know, I'm Catholic and their questioning me. I had one girl who came up to me. I thought she was a friend, but she came up to me and she said – I can still remember, it was at the water fountain right outside of French class. She said to me, "My mother would rather I marry a Black man than a Catholic." It felt really weird and out of place, but it made me think, "I'm Catholic, why am I Catholic?" It was a conversion, like a falling off the horse kind of thing and I was like, "I can't even respond or talk about my faith." I went home that day and I said to my mom "I think I want to go to Catholic high

school." In tenth grade, I transferred into Catholic high school and the Catholic high school was run by the Holy Cross sisters.

Laurie talked about the community of "strong-willed sisters that formed me in high school" as important to her college formation as well. She chose to attend a Catholic women's university also led by the Holy Cross order. Laurie acknowledged they provided "an opportunity for me to become a female voice" and "begin to take leadership roles and learn what it meant to be Catholic."

Laurie also experienced being a young mom whose ability to form her children in faith grew through the witness of someone else. "When I met my husband I was not really practicing, but he was. Our dates included going to Mass. I truly re-fell in love with the whole thing because of him." When they married and began a family, she leaned on her husband, and with her children learned the traditions of the faith.

I wasn't raised in the rosary. I wasn't raised in Stations of the Cross. I wasn't raised on a whole lot of other things. I knew they existed but as a devotional, as part of my own prayer life? No. It was through my relationship with my husband that I came to that. I'm very upfront with people about that, especially my catechist and parents because they may think I walk on water or know it all or have done it all and I'm like, "No, I'm like one of those kids that you're teaching."

Laurie's path to ministry took a few twists and turns including a lengthy career in public affairs with health based organizations, but once she committed to lay ecclesial leadership in faith formation "it was like I was home." Laurie closely identified with children and families at her parish. She understands the challenges of what it means to be a "public school kid" whose parents are not "ideally engaged," and empathizes with teens and adults who feel ill equipped to respond to faith challenges.

For Laurie, leadership authority rises out of "talent, care, sensitivity, and service rather than position of force" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 316). She experienced invitation,

accompaniment, respect, and empowerment in her journey of faith. I found evidence of those principles in her description of her own leadership practice.

I don't have a collar that gives me away as a leader. I have a nametag, which means I can be asked. It [leadership] is just being fully present to the people that you're working with and being appreciative, sincerely appreciative of what gifts they're sharing and not trying to be judgmental about the amount of the gift and see how you can use that gift even though it may have its flaws.

Laurie's pre-ministry story, including recognition of those who accompanied and mentored her – Jane, the Holy Cross Sisters, and her husband – shaped her ministerial practice and revealed important elements of the meaning she ascribes to her leadership. Laurie uses her own story to connect with others “to transmit knowledge and shared meaning, linking people together in human chain of history and memory” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 237). As a “story-telling leader” Laurie tells her own story to help people “move away from deadening stories...toward life-giving possibilities” (Butler Bass, 2007, p. xii).

**Implications for leadership.** “Life is not how it was, but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (Bruner, 2004, p. 708). Stories told from life prior to ministry shaped the sharing of leadership values and perceptions held by these women LEMs. They re-interpreted stories to articulate priorities for actions as ministerial leaders. In my reflection on these stories as both researcher and LEM, I saw how story provided not only an explanation for why they lead, but why they made specific leadership choices.

For example, through a lens of story, I was able to identify clearly the priority Laurie places on the pastoral marks of inclusion and welcoming, and why she felt the need to use the word “brave” to describe her leadership decision to speak directly to parents about the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Being prophetic risks alienating others. Laurie's life story suggests her own fear of alienation makes it difficult for her to lead prophetically in some circumstances.

Chris's life story suggests a reason pastoral leadership took center stage in her ministerial practice. The desire to provide quality spiritual and emotional care flows directly from the pastoral ministry she received when she experienced loss and struggle. The consistent use of familial metaphors to explain relationships of authority suggests both grace and challenge in her leadership. Grace flowing from a commitment to care, growth, and welcoming allowing her to attend to those in need, build connections with those distanced, and foster members to engage in the work of the parish. Challenges, however, arise with the application of roles of authority in the parish family. As mother with an absent "father", Chris experienced increased expectations to lead, but was not given formal authorization to lead. When a new pastor arrived, Chris no longer felt she no longer held the position of mother, and stepped willingly into the role of aunt. Although Chris identity as leader has grown substantially, her life story suggests her perceived place in the parish family still influences her leadership identity.

Viewing leadership through autobiographical family stories also suggested LEMs face challenges when their ministerial priorities come into tension with the ministerial priorities of others or the demands of the community. Kelly's leadership crisis involving the family who lost custody of their children serves an example of this. Leaning heavily on the marks of ethical and prophetic leadership Kelly saw one direction for ministerial action and did not waver from her convictions, even when her employment was threatened. I cannot help but wonder if other avenues of support might have surfaced if Kelly employed a more collaborative leadership strategy, or in the spirit of inclusivity acknowledged there was more than one way to frame the pastoral situation.

Diane's integration of her family's story into her ministerial leadership suggested inclusion of multiple viewpoints of the same story potentially results in a mature leadership

practice incorporating all six marks of pastoral excellence. Diane's leadership is not perfect, but her willingness to include her mother's version of her father's ministerial leadership, allowed her to identify areas of strength and struggle and to build a community of support. Her symbol spoke to how a leader incorporates story, symbol, and metaphor in to the practice of leadership. Diane made cairns an intentional component of her reflexive practice as a leader. Their presence reminds her that life and leadership need to be dynamic to be fruitful.

### **Ministry Stories**

In addition to life stories, women LEMs in this study told stories about ministry providing another avenue for expressing the meaning they give their leadership. Stories from within the context of their leadership environment contributed to "self-knowledge and self-concept clarity" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 402) theorists identified as necessary for value based leadership. Each woman in the study told me stories, which clarified or deepened the values informing their ministry. Additionally, telling stories in a community revealed new insights on how these experiences shaped their practice of leadership. On retreat, they became storytellers "sharing stories to interpret the significant events of our times and forecasting how these changes affect us now and in the future" (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 33). When they revisited the same story in the individual interview, none of the facts changed, but the meaning they expressed incorporated ideas gained on the retreat and in reflection after the retreat.

Stories of success, challenge, and even moral failure told in this next section happened within the context of ministry. The experiences shared reveal meaning, but just as importantly, the story telling itself contributed to meaning making. Analysis of these stories focuses on how the story and storytelling contribute to the meaning of their leadership.



**Collaborative success.** Diane and Marie both told stories of ministerial success where their leadership empowered parishioners to collaborate in either establishing or sustaining ministry. Diane's success story began with "the year that shall not be named," when parish leaders made substantial cuts to staff and programs. This resulted in Diane having more responsibilities and fewer hours to complete those responsibilities. Even after a change in parish leadership, financial concerns and an impending merger with another parish made it difficult to increase staffing or add programs. However, the merger also made it essential for adults in both parishes to gather for spiritual, educational, and social opportunities. She described her leadership role with an adult formation committee.

Being able to listen and bring some life to some of their endeavors in the area of adult faith formation is important to me. It's important for me and them to realize that we have a parish that is hungry for this. My job is to listen to people, find out what is it that they want, what would be helpful for them. You know, just looking at different ways of approaching things and help them to be willing to take a risk.

One of the things we did this fall, and at first people were grumbling and saying, "What do you mean you're not doing Bible studies this year?" "Well no, we're not doing Bible studies this year. Pope Francis has declared this a Year of Mercy. We're going to do a book study on *The Church of Mercy* by Pope Francis." I was very nervous about how many people would do this... We had more and more people sign up. I had to keep running to the bookstore and order more books. People are excited to talk about what's going on with the Pope and what's on his mind. I think that's exciting for us to be in that venture of learning together. I help the committee by giving people an opportunity to do that in a facilitated, safe manner.

Marie's story of collaborative success required her to "step out of the way" and let someone do something she liked doing, just because they could. In order to make this decision, she asked herself some important leadership questions.

I had this happen years ago with a volunteer. I got to the point where I was like oh, my gosh, she's trying to take over my job; she wants to do all the things I want to do. Then I had to step back and say what is my job? Is it to work with kids, inspire kids, teach them the gospel, and inspire them to live as Christ? If this person wants to work with kids to do that alongside me, isn't that a good thing?

As long as I can say their goal is the same as mine and it's for the kids to grow in their faith, then this is a good thing, and I need to welcome them.

Now it's easier. This Saturday night, we will have our annual Parents Night Out event. I will be there and I'll be present, but I have a volunteer who's really in charge, so she does the planning with the kids, but I was there. She met with the kids to decide what they were going to do, and she's in charge on Saturday night. Technically, I am, if something happens, but she will be the person the kids will ask what to do. I'm there. I'm supportive, but I let her as a lay parish minister lead that event.

Analysis of Diane and Marie's collaborative leadership stories shows indications of the value and respect they have for parishioner leaders. Each reframed a leadership challenge by embracing a humanistic approach "communicating their strong belief in people," making themselves "visible and accessible," and "empowering others" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, pp. 362–63) to engage in the mission. The experiences reinforced beliefs, both religious and personal, about the value of collaboration and empowerment. Diane recognized the difference with a pastor change. "Now [we] are a collaborative parish. People do care about what I'm doing, and we work on doing things together so that it brings more consistency," as well as an "ability to see and include those who might be more marginalized."

**Leadership challenged.** Not all of the stories about growth as a leader included successful collaborations. Both Theresa and Pam dealt with challenges to their leadership where they needed to "map the political terrain by thinking about key players, their interests, and their power" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 365). Both told leadership stories where others publically challenged their role, their competence, and their authority as a leader. In telling their stories, they unpacked the meaning they gave the experience and connected it to their ministerial leadership.

**Young competence.** Theresa's experiences as a young LEM provided her with ample stories of challenge. In her leadership setting, only she and the two pastors have academic

degrees reflective of the field. Her Master's degree in theology from a university seminary is in many ways equivalent to most priests. The pastor at one of the parishes where she works is in his first pastorate and has less practical parish experience than Theresa. She enjoys working for him and respects his pastorship, but on at least one occasion, she said she respectfully challenged his knowledge and leadership.

I started the RCIA because we really did not have a formal program at all. So, this year I had two adults that were unbaptized. [The pastor] made this comment that he really wanted to "just Baptize them" without dealing with canonical issues. One of them wanted to be baptized, just to get married in our church, not to be part of *the Church*. To be baptized you have to have a desire for Baptism, not a just desire to get married. The man she was marrying had been married multiple times, and was in the annulment process, which can take a while. I thought we should provide catechesis and wait a bit, but Father just kind of said, "Well, then I'll just baptize her, before they get married" and I'm like, "I don't think you are supposed to do that, Father." Before I talked to my pastor again, I did email the diocese, the chancellor actually, to kind of get back up, make sure I was right. I was.

Theresa acknowledged the risk in this strategy. "I think it's easy for pastors to forget that you're educated in these things, even if they are confident in you 90% of the time, they occasionally forget." Generally, Theresa trusts the competency of the two pastors assigned to her parishes. She described both priests as "usually knowing what they don't know," but understands she will likely need to re-prove herself with subsequent pastors.

Being young and educated also created leadership challenges for Theresa with co-workers. Other staff members, all substantially older than she, assumed only an ordained man could provide the theological and ministerial knowledge needed in the parish. In some cases, these co-workers erroneously concluded a priest could or should only perform certain functions, like leading communal prayer outside of Mass.

I think it's harder with older women for me to be assertive and to be confident, they judge me more. I don't know if it's the age, they're mothering me thing or what, but it's hard to change perceptions. We had a fundraising dinner that we

had the youth work at. It's about time for dinner, right after mass, so it's 7:00pm. People were coming and this is a formal dinner so they all sit down. The kids served them their salads and their food, and so I questioned her, "Are we about ready?" and she says, "Yea", and I ask if we going to say grace. And she said, "Well, what time is Father going to get here?" She really thought we would not have grace if the priest didn't make it there in time... She wouldn't lead it and was not okay with me leading it.

This same staff member made it difficult for Theresa to communicate with parishioners.

In Theresa's estimation, the woman became resentful of time and resources provided to youth and family ministries. Theresa made it a priority to build relational and professional credibility with this co-worker.

A lot of my success depends on [her]. [She] has to promote youth and family ministry, because with two parishes I am not always there when the kids are. I talked to some parents and they definitely don't get the info all the time... She had a time with the previous pastor that she felt like youth ministry was getting a lot more money than faith formation, and so she was very resentful. She quit promoting youth ministry. Rebuilding that has been a challenge. We get along personally, but I know our visions are not the same.

Theresa managed to identify people who can help or hurt her as she leads in these two parishes. She carefully "focuses [her] attention on building relationships and networks" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 367) in order for others to have more confidence in her ability to lead. Telling her story allowed us both to see the political environment in which she leads, and the degree to which she "avoids letting what [she] wants cloud [her] judgement about possibilities" (p. 364).

On some of those things, our vision is not always the same, and just trying to figure out what's important to discuss and what's not is important so that I can try to lead. Because I need her to be on my side to promote things and to try to work together on things, but I am not just here to do the day to day, anybody can do that. It takes a leader to get somewhere new— to make change."

**Professional sabotage.** Pam, like Theresa, told a meaning-making story involving a co-worker. Like Theresa's, Pam's story included a need to be acutely aware of the political environment where she leads. Pam's story started as a relatively common struggle for influence

in the work place, but required her to rise above a painful and humiliating experience of professional sabotage. Initially Pam told this story on retreat during an unrecorded session. Later she referenced the incident during a recorded focus group. At her individual interview, Pam talked about the implications of the experience on her ministry. I followed up with her after the interview to seek specific permission to use this story.

Pam's leadership environment includes three parishes. Parish A serves as Pam's "home base" for ministry. Parish A, also her home parish, had experienced a change in pastors four times in the last eight years. Parish B, the largest parish did not have a pastor assigned at the time of her interview, and a semi-retired priest leads Parish C, the smallest of the three parishes. Soon after joining the staff, it became evident to Pam that the secretary at Parish A disliked the pastor who hired Pam and as a result resented Pam.

This secretary was left alone for a lot of years. Too long. She thought she was in charge of everything as a secretary... I was the easy scapegoat, but I did not know that there was already a terrible history with [the pastor] and her prior to me coming in. That just topped it off... All of a sudden, there was another person in the office that the secretary didn't want. That didn't go so well.

Prior to this time, the secretary held significant influence over parish decision-making, and believed she did everything necessary for faith formation specifically scheduling, conducting registration, and creating class lists.

She was very angry and upset and could not understand because she'd basically coordinated RE (religious education) but didn't see the need for somebody with a theology background in it. I was now to work directing a program with all three parishes but maintain the identity of each, but the secretary at Parish A would now work with me, but only doing the coordinating of registrations and processing payments for all three parishes – and be paid by all three parishes mind you.

As tension between the pastor and secretary rose, Pam found the secretary capable of sabotaging formation programs. Claiming there was too much parish work, the secretary would

leave the formation work undone or tell Pam to do it herself, “but she still got paid from the other parishes.” Pam worked hard to build a relationship with this secretary. “I constantly gave her the benefit of doubt and just as I thought things were improving something would happen again. I thought I could work through her issues and make it work; she certainly was in my daily prayers.”

Eventually the pastor sought assistance, hiring a diocesan consultant to make recommendations regarding job-descriptions and parish business practices, as well as providing direction for the internal conflicts. Pam said the consultant initially “asked me to help mentor the secretary through this transition of having someone else in the office.” When the consultant was in the office, the secretary behaved professionally, but when absent negative behaviors resumed and the pastor chose to tolerate them. Pam gave this example, “We prayed mid-morning prayer together each week and then had a meeting. [The secretary] hated the meeting and the prayer. Her door slammed when it was over.” The secretary moved from sabotaging Pam’s work to sabotaging Pam and the pastor’s credibility in the community. “Considerable gossip spread amongst the elders of the parish and the source seemed to be from the secretary. Her behavior was undermining both religious education work and [Father].” Most of the gossip focused on Pam and the pastor being difficult and bossy, and raised questions about whether the parish cluster needed a formation director.

When the consultant completed her review and shared her recommendations, Pam felt blind-sided.

The secretary, [consultant], the pastor, and myself were at the meeting and then at the last minute our teaching parish seminarian. This meeting was uncomfortable, as [the consultant] became the spokesperson for the secretary, telling the pastor and myself how to act toward the secretary. Then I was told that she was only going to work 20 hours a month for RE ...I was also told that the secretary would tell me when she had time to work on RE. If it conflicted with her schedule, I

would just need to find volunteers to get it done. I would also have to fill out a detailed work request for everything I wanted her to do and give her a full week's notice. When I asked about the loss of help and what was the plan financially for the other parishes that were paying her, I was told by the secretary that I would have to figure out how I could get volunteers to do more. Much of this work was with registration, money, private information, and during the day.

At this point Pam was angry with the consultant and the secretary. She was also angry with the pastor for letting things get this far. "If she would have been an employee of mine at the bank, I would have let her go for insubordination a long-time ago."

A deeply personal attack in the guise of a space issue quickly overshadowed the initial professional challenges Pam faced.

The issue of workspace also came up. I was in the secretary's way in the parish office. She said they would have to find room for me at school because "the parish building had too many stairs and with my being handicapped it must be difficult for me to move around."

When Pam told this part of the story, the other five women on retreat all gasped. Pam is not handicapped, but she is overweight. With tears in her eyes, Pam told us her weight had never kept her from doing anything important or necessary, and now based upon the desires of "an angry co-worker" she was labeled "less than because I am heavy."

"When a series of events stack up, inflicting multiple blows to the spirit, a feeling of defensiveness emerges" (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p.171). Different people respond to this kind of wounding differently and Pam chose to defend herself in the community through hard work, but in the office, she struggled to keep it from defeating her.

She undermined my confidence to make decisions. I suffered through for the sake of the parish and the people. I felt called to be there for the parish and for the faith... It was so difficult dealing with the secretary. I stressed so much about giving her work that I just did it myself and put in countless unpaid hours to get everything done, not to mention the amount of time put into filling out those work request forms with step-by-step instructions. It was less time consuming to just do it myself. I felt micro-managed by her.

Pam described strong relationships in the local community, including parishioner friends, key volunteers, and people in the “other two parishes who did not engage the gossip” as helping her to keep focused on ministry and preventing her from becoming bitter. Over time, relationships with the other two priests who “seemed to appreciate my leadership, even coming to ask questions and hear my perspective” restored her confidence. Eventually, a change in pastors at Parish A also helped. “[The new pastor] was determined I should just give her the work, but again it only caused me more grief.” Pam began to think about working elsewhere, but chose to stay when “the secretary decided to leave as she could not get along with yet another new pastor.”

Theresa and Pam’s ministry stories of challenge in their early years of ministry became a source of meaning and affirmation. Theresa’s encounter with the political realities of parish life, when seen as story, revealed the importance of relationship in her leadership. In her story, I recognized her desire to embrace the “inescapable tension between abstract truths and concrete realities” (Hearne, 1984, p. 32) playing themselves out in parish leadership. Theresa, in these examples, led by allowing her commitment to divine mission stand in contrast to the human endeavor “hoping Jesus will be made known” (Theresa) in the struggle.

When viewed through the theoretical lens of story, the hearing and telling of Pam’s experience “cause[d] the listeners to imagine how they would feel if the tragic event had happened to them (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 171). Those on retreat with Pam instantly responded with compassion and empathy. During breaks and a long late afternoon walk, these women privately shared some of their own moments of professional sabotage and humiliation and how they rose above it to continue to lead and serve. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (2008) wrote, “Some react to humiliation with anger, others with patience, and others with freedom. The first



are culpable, the next innocent, the last just... It is the possession of a joyful and genuine humility that alone enables us to receive grace” (p. 208). The sharing of tales of ministerial challenge freed them, and the shared grace created new meaning for their leadership. One woman, in a thank you e-mail to her retreat group, wrote, “You inspire me to think more, to tell more, and to claim more of my leadership. Thank you.”

**Moral Failure.** Leadership exercised in light of divine and human mission is a moral endeavor intended to “engage us in the pursuit of goodness realized through loving action toward others and ourselves” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 79). In Catholic tradition, which is the context for these women LEMS, pursuit of goodness and the avoidance of sin become the goals of the Christian life (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1706). Because of the limitations of humanity, we fail in our pursuit of both as individuals and in community. The mission consequently suffers. These moments often inspire the faithful to place “hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace” (para. 1431) and re-orient their hearts towards God and their actions toward loving their neighbor. Through sincere expressions of sorrow, humble acts of restitution, and true conviction to right action a moral failure holds the possibility of becoming a public witness to God’s mercy and love, and the accompanying stories of redemption become parables of love for all who tell them and hear them.

**Redemption and justice.** This lens of redemption provided an avenue to understand how stories of moral failure informed leadership for some of these women LEMs. Stories of sin and weakness told both on retreat and in individual interviews spoke to a fervent belief in redemption and justice. LEMs told stories of how the sin or weakness of another brought challenge to their leadership, which demonstrated their willingness and need to forgive. For example, Theresa and

Pam both exercised charity with their co-workers, and Chris offered an olive branch repeatedly to Richard, the trustee who publically devalued her contributions.

Conversely, those whose stories expressed concern for victims of sexual abuse, like Kelly, advocated for justice and redemption, not necessarily forgiveness. Kelly expressed a desire for diocesan leadership to become more accountable and responsible, and took her advocacy story public to make her commitment known.

I've spoken to the media on numerous occasions. I speak out on it (abuse). I don't want to say every chance I get. I'm not seeking them out, but it's something I continually bring to the forefront in my conversations... [What] I want from the bishop right now is child safety, period. I don't care about the overreaching la, la, la stuff. That's what I want the bishop to be working on right now because it is so messed up.

Anne's account of implementing new youth protection protocols contained anger and concern. In her estimation, the protocols only provide protection from legal culpability, and restoration of trust lies in authentic relational leadership.

It really makes me angry because we have to jump through a whole lot of hoops not because of what our volunteers have done, not because what the person in the pew has done, but because of what some people in clerical leadership have done. Sometimes, it makes me really sad, too. It affects our relationship as a faith, in our churches, and our community.

So that's part of why I say a background check is something that we have to do legally, but what's really important is the conversation...the relationship, the time spent with somebody before I'm going to let them visit one-on-one with a vulnerable adult...others being able to trust me is what changes things.

These two women represent “the voice of the laity arising from pain and suffering” (Keenan, 2005, p. 129). Their commitment to justice, redemption, and authenticity in the face of sexual misconduct exemplifies how the role of “the laity is integral to the solution of this [sexual abuse] crisis” (p. 130). Their stories convey a commitment to moral leadership where they “apply their knowledge of ethical philosophy, values, and beliefs to real world-dilemmas,

determining morally justified actions” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 81) and holding those they lead with to the same standard.

*Failure to lead.* For one woman, application of a critical lens to moral leadership through story was not cast on the actions of another, but on her own actions as a leader. Sandy’s soul-making story springs forth from an experience where she failed to be ethical in her lay ecclesial leadership. She recalled a painful time when she let fear and self-preservation prevent her from doing the right thing for a priest, herself, and a parish community.

Sandy: I worked under a pastor who had an alcohol problem. I went and spoke with a friend who also worked in the diocese, and just said, "I don't know what to do. We're covering for him, it's not being covered very well, he smells like alcohol all the time. He does sporadic things when he's either in a high or a low. I don't know what to do." She said, "You need to go and talk to the diocese." I said, "I don't want to lose my job." I didn't say anything. He eventually ended up having an accident – not a car accident or anything. He hit his head and ended up with some brain bleed stuff. He was automatically taken out of ministry. It was hard...

MK: So, in hindsight, what would you do differently?

Sandy: Then, it was really a personal concern about, if I go and tell am I going to lose my job? If I lose my job, then, what do I do? At the time, I was just trying to be the glue that held everything together in the parish. I felt like, well, if we can cover it up as much as we can, and if we can just make things go as smoothly as possible, that the community is still there... I didn't realize that we weren't able to cover everything. Some of the things that he was saying, and some of the things that he was doing were more painful to the community than if I would've went and said something.

Sandy, like Diane, chose to belong in an intentional community of LEMs who provide her support and accountability. This group provided her with a trusted place to reflect critically on this ministry story. They serve a vital role in her leadership development as “significant others [who] teach us, confirm us, challenge us, and contradict us (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 249). Her community of support provided a place to tell and reflect on the stories of her leadership. Sandy counted on them “to be a reflector on my ministry and choices, to be able to

reflect both theologically and culturally, and look at what I am not seeing so that I can learn from that process.”

Sandy’s reflection on this story over the years transformed this experience from being a moment of moral failure, to an opportunity for clarity. She referenced Romans 12:12 to explain: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” Through storied leadership Sandy found her way because the “sharing of stories in a spirit of mutual confession of weakness and guilt, as of joy and grace leads to a recognition of the good ways” (Hearne, 1984, p. 44). Through her own process of redemption, Sandy came to own an essential moral principle giving meaning to her leadership.

My mom would say, “If you’re trying to be inauthentic, we can see it on your face.” I don’t do well with trying to be pretend like I’m on board with something when I am not... Now, it really, for me, is much more about what is the best thing for the community. I didn’t see that at the time. I know it now.

**Implications for leadership.** EMPL research (Jewell & Ramey, 2005) which identified the six marks of pastoral excellence, suggested, “Some aspects of pastoral excellence may be more challenging than others” (para. 1) and indicated stresses in parishes and in the Church itself contributed to many LEMs assessing their leadership as less effective. The storied leadership of these 12 LEMs supports this finding. All of the LEMs told stories of faith and witness in ministry. They founded clinics, established homeless ministries, they brought beauty and art to liturgy, they comforted the grieving, and celebrated the grace of sacraments with families. They poured out their gifts to stabilize parish mergers, and equipped and empowered parishioners to lead. Each could identify leading alongside a pastor of deep faith and integrity. However, in choosing a leadership story to tell, they inevitably turned to ones that exemplified struggles in ministerial leadership.

Their choice of stories, which gave meaning to their experiences as women LEMs leading in the Church, suggested adversity honed attributes of leadership they value. Laurie's valued attribute of inclusion insisted others have a voice in "her little corner of leadership", and Sandy found her "authentic self" that required her act in accord with collaborative, ethical, and prophetic leadership attributes. It would have been easy for Pam to return to the world of finance. Instead, she placed the relationship with the secretary in perspective, and focused on healthy relationships with clergy and parishioners—relationships that allowed her to reclaim mission leadership steeped in pastoral care and collaboration. Even stories of leadership success contained elements of struggle and sacrifice. Diane's empowerment of parishioner leaders grew out of consequences of the "year that shall not be named" and Marie's ownership of inclusive and prophetic leadership occurred when she sacrificed something she did well to make room for another person's gifts of leadership.

Telling ministry stories provided a way for these 12 LEMs to identify and articulate meaning in their leadership and explain the purpose of their practice. "Self-story is told to both the other and one's self...the act of telling is a dual affirmation. Relationships with others are reaffirmed and self is affirmed' " (Frank as cited in Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 43). The storytelling revealed the attributes informing their leadership. As Marie said a "true leader involves everybody and builds other people's skills so when they move on, the organization moves forward without falling apart because it's about the organization, not about the leader."

### **Moments on the Cross**

My sister, Jackie, once advised me with these words, "Crucifixions in ministry are plentiful. Pick your cross carefully. Proceed knowing Christ went before you." In this section, I explore the stories shared by three women LEMs who faced substantial suffering in leadership.

Actions of others placed them and their leadership in jeopardy. These *moments on the cross* are crucible stories of leadership where in examining the wound left by the crisis a leader discovers meaning. “Like phoenixes rising from the ashes, they emerge from adversity stronger, more confident in themselves and their purpose, and more committed to their work” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 1). Through telling a story of “significant crisis in professional life, [the leader] is providing structure and giving order to what has happened” (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000, p. 217). This assists in making sense of leadership and “aids in the healing and growth of leaders” (p. 228). Crucible stories vary. “Some are violent, life-threatening events. Others are more prosaic episodes of self-doubt,” but they always require leaders to “examine their values, question their assumptions, hone their judgment” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 3). A leader’s story of woundedness contains a precipice, a moment where the protagonist knows the next step will change them forever.

In Catholic theology, woundedness becomes an opportunity to join one’s suffering to Christ and live in hope of resurrection. In “discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, he [/she] also discovers in it his[/her] own sufferings” (John Paul II, 1984, para. 20) and also enriches the meaning given to faith and life. What differentiates the stories in this section is the decision each woman must make to stay or leave ministry. As I heard and reviewed the stories of these women, I recalled the words of St. Paul: “Affliction produces endurance, and endurance proven character, and proven character hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts” (Romans 5:3-5). In this section, I have chosen to let the stories speak for themselves, because the stories of Anne, Laurie, and Sandy, although varying in intensity and danger, need little explanation to support how their suffering gave additional meaning to their leadership and changed their leadership practice.

**Averting Scandal.** Anne found herself in an unwanted and unplanned circumstance, which threatened her employment, her professional credibility, her reputation as a woman of faith, and the free clinic she founded. As Anne began her story, she reminded me the “community clinic was founded in a church, not by a church.” The community clinic came into existence because a number of “like-minded people” from the “faith community, health care community, political community, and business community” pooled their knowledge and resources. For over four years these collaborators worked to secure funding and work out the specifics of their mission to “provide quality healthcare, advocacy, and wellness education to people within our community who have limited healthcare alternatives” (HealthFinders Collaborative, 2016). Although not an affiliated pro-life clinic, Anne said the board of directors and practitioners agreed not to “cross into that area” to avoid alienating donors, volunteer health professionals, and clients.

As a founding collaborator, Anne served as a member of the board of directors and volunteered in the clinic as a nurse. As a parish nurse, Anne referred parishioners without insurance or in need of free services to the clinic. Occasionally a parishioner would call to ask about the pro-life status of the clinic, and Anne answered truthfully. The clinic did not perform or refer women for abortions.

One day, the pastor called Anne to tell her the bishop said she could no longer serve on the clinic's board and remain an employee of the parish. When she asked the pastor why she could not do both he said, “There is some question about the pro-life position of the clinic.” Anne was stunned. The parish contributed financially to the clinic since its opening, and the pastor knew the articulated position of the clinic.

I didn't like it from the very beginning because I was never asked any questions. I was never even talked with or to by [the diocese]. There was nothing ever in

writing. There was nothing – no investigation. It was all about word of mouth, gossip, which to me was really sad.

I don't know if perpetuates is the right word, but it's that same sort of secretiveness that was already there in [the diocese] “We don't want to say anything out loud or write anything down, but we're going to tell you this.” It was clear, if you want to work for the Catholic Church, then you can't be on [the board] just because of perception ...without any evidence of scandalous activity. If it's that serious, then why can't there be a discussion? Why can't there be something in writing that would say this is what we want? Why wasn't I or the board given a chance to respond?

Placed in a difficult position, Anne tried to find out and address the source of the complaint. It turned out a member of another Catholic parish, who did not trust the clinic's stance on abortion and had connections in the diocese, conducted what Anne described as “sting operation.” Someone called the clinic looking for information on abortion. A new intern, when pressed repeatedly, finally succumbed telling them to call another agency. The agency the intern named makes abortion referrals. The person with diocesan connections leveraged an “accusation that the clinic essentially referred for an abortion.” This accusation threatened not only Anne's board position, but also the financial support of previously committed faith communities.

Anne attempted dialogue and reconciliation with the accuser, but she believed they “were more concerned in supporting their ideology” than with the damage they did to her reputation. They later twisted words from their meeting with her in communicating with the pastor of her parish. He recommended she resign to avert the perception of scandal for the parish. To compound the pain, the bishop who demanded she step down resigned a few weeks later in the wake of his own moral failings, but his resignation did not change the diocese's demand that she choose between her employment and the clinic board. Anne reflected on this pivotal moment.

This was an authoritative directive, not leadership. I debated do I argue and fight this? How much do I do some of those things? At the same time, I'm moving my mother from another state to Minnesota to be in assisted living after an emergency hospitalization ... I didn't really want to spend a million hours fighting this but I



also looked at it this way. Even if that is a perception, how are we going to change that perception if I'm not there to do that? How are we going to continue to evangelize to others just what our views are or what my personal view on abortion is? If I'm not in that role on the board anymore then I don't have any say on policy... I have zero influence of any kind on ethical issues that may arise.

Anne stepped down from the board of directors. Trying to salvage what she could Anne sought and received an assignment on the clinic's governance committee. She also recommended her replacement on the board, a member of her parish, who she counted as a "like-minded collaborator." This person held no professional obligations to the parish or the diocese, but could represent well the Church's commitment to life from conception to natural death.

The wounds were still fresh at the time of her interview, but Anne had already begun the task of evaluating her story. The telling of her moment on the cross story on retreat and reflecting upon it at the interview allowed her to see her leadership from a new perspective. Anne used her sense of humor to talk about how she now sees herself. "Sometimes I think in my own little head, Jesus hung out with the tax collectors. That's kind of who I am now; the tax collector that others might assume is sinful." Anne can also be hard on herself, "I am not sure others think I am an ethical leader. I resigned after all." Beyond the humor and the harshness, Anne articulated hard-earned wisdom about leadership, the kind of wisdom arising from suffering. She made the following leadership statements independent of her crucible story, but they serve as evidence of how her moment on the cross shaped the meaning she gave her leadership.

There is a difference between leadership and authority. We have lots of leadership that comes from many people, but we still have a hierarchy in our Church for an authority, which at times ignores the leadership of many and assumes it should fall to one person, whether that works well or not.

I can't represent the whole Catholic Church. I think what others perceive is probably different than I. I really see myself as one person in the Catholic Church making human connections.

I think I really have to keep thinking of leadership as servant-tude...is that a word...or maybe servanthood. Really as an effective leader, I can't have an agenda ... so I think that as a leader I have to be open. For myself, I definitely meet people on all spectrums of their faith journeys, so from the struggling to the very connected to, like I said, the people who forgave me. That's my leadership.

**Do you want me to go?** Laurie and her current pastor have ministered together for more than a decade. Over time, Laurie said, she has come to recognize his gifts and his limitations as a leader. The pastor believes he collaborates well, but in Laurie's assessment, "He collaborates with only certain people" and whom he chooses to "work with and confide in changes without notice."

You never know who's in and who's out. We jokingly say, "You're the star of the hour." Because you had a really strong honeymoon period, where everything you uttered was like pearls of wisdom. Whatever idea they come up with is the idea that [the pastor] goes with, even though it was an idea that had been shared at a staff meeting two months ago and nixed.

In addition to the star of the hour Laurie also shared, "Someone else always had to be on the chopping block" living in fear of losing their job. Staff leadership strategies always included identifying the current star and knowing who might be on the chopping block. "If we are working together and we want to see something happen, we've got to carefully feed it to the star so that it can be interpreted in such a way that [the pastor] will be open to the possibility." Laurie knew she was never the star. "It was never me because he inherited me... He knew me but he didn't hire me, so I didn't have the same relationship with him. I never was a star, but I was never not a star either."

A few years ago, the pastor upended their relationship during a performance review.

I was on a needs improvement in every area. I was like, "Excuse me?" I understand that you can always have areas of growth but there was not one positive word in the evaluation. I had never had a bad review before from him. Now I was on the chopping block. I thought it was my turn, that it was my turn to go.

Laurie tried to make sense of the review. His previous reviews typically praised her work, with helpful recommendations for growth and development. She began to recall a few recent experiences with staff and parishioners where she motivated shifts in attitudes and activities – the inclusion of lay speakers in adult education events and supporting parishioners who proposed new ideas came to mind. She also remembered asking pointed questions at staff meetings and questioning the way he notified staff of position re-alignments. “I think he saw me as bucking him or being more than him... I didn't feel that I was. I wasn't doing it on purpose, if I was doing it, but he somehow felt that he couldn't trust me.”

Laurie recalled her initial reaction was to do what every other co-worker previously on the chopping block had done. She looked for a new job. She found one quickly.

I went and looked for a job and I was interviewed and they were very interested in hiring me...it was to the point where they were going to meet my current salary and they were going to bring over my vacation and all of this stuff. It was really serious. I'm just like, oh my gosh, is this really what I want to do because I love my parish...I love the kids, I love working with the catechists. In my discernment over this offer, my husband's like, "You should take it. You've got to take it. You've got to take it.

She described her next action as “crazy and brave.” Instead of simply putting her notice in writing, she called the pastor and put her employment in his hands. She did this “to give him a wake-up call...to know that he couldn't devalue someone of significant service without consequences.”

I called him and I said, "I just want you to know I sought and I applied for a position at [another] church. They have given me an extremely good offer. Now is your time to tell me if you want me to stay or go,” and I put it just that way. "Now's the time. If you want me to go, I'm gone. If you want me to stay, I'll stay, but you need to tell me right now."

His response surprised her.

He said, "I don't want you to go." I said, "You have a very strange way of showing that you respect me and what I've been giving to this place," and so we had a long conversation. I think he was just dumbstruck that I would get up out of my comfort zone. I think he just thought I would just take it.

In Laurie's assessment, he still gives stars and places others on the chopping block, but Laurie thinks her choice to include him in her decision re-established trust. When Laurie stood on her precipice, with the opportunity to step away from her leadership she rediscovered the source of her passion – her "love of the parish, the catechists, and the kids." She also said reflecting on the experience made her "more confident in my abilities and their value to the parish, the Church, and the work we are trying to accomplish." Laurie also said she learned she "can challenge [Father] when necessary."

I saw evidence of this renewed commitment as she described an experience of leadership beyond the parish, but on behalf of the parish. Soon after her decision to stay, Laurie became the parish representative on an ecumenical board of more than 20 faith communities. She happens to be the only non-ordained member of a group collaborating each year to host one of the largest mobile food packing events for Feed My Starving Children (FMSC). In 2016, the seven-day event hosted more than 14,000 volunteers who packed more than 4 million meals to be shipped globally (South Metro Meal Pack, 2016).

In her description of her leadership, Laurie acknowledged differences in power, but also saw those differences did not diminish her own leadership.

I sit on the board and I am definitely with leaders in their congregations because they are all ordained Lutheran ministers and I'm sitting there as one representative of a Catholic Church... I am not a [parish] decision maker. I don't hold the purse strings. They're truly the titled leader in their congregations, but I see and they see my leadership as being a coworker in the vineyard working with them and with my peeps.

**How can I serve them?** Sandy's story of moral failure allowed her to recognize the importance of integrity in her ministerial leadership, but two experiences of suffering in leadership told as story forced Sandy to grapple with the consequences of being committed to authenticity in her leadership practice. Prior to her current leadership in a cluster of four parishes, Sandy worked as the director of youth ministry for Tri-County Community, another cluster community in the state. In her years with Tri-County, she worked with three different pastors and another priest assigned as an associate in one of the parishes within the cluster. The pastor who hired her and mentored her into ministry moved to another parish assignment a few years after Sandy began working at Tri-County. The transition to a new pastor presented substantial challenges for the parish.

Sandy: The priest who came in after the person who mentored me [was told] we were using the church for a faith formation night; we were doing a big speaker. He specifically said, "I want you to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the church because you're not using it as a church, you're using it as a hall where you're doing a talk." We had used the church as a hall, doing talks, with Jesus there for a long time. Now, all of a sudden, it was a new person and this was what he wanted. I didn't totally understand it, but I did it because he's my boss and I'm supposed to follow what my boss says to do.

At the end of the talk, I have all these parishioners – ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders, and all of their parents there. I don't even remember what the talk was on. At the end, we always asked if anybody has questions, and one of the parents stood up and she was, you could see, just visibly irritated, or angry, or upset about something. She said, "Why is Jesus not in the tabernacle?" My response was, "I took Jesus and put Him in the music room."

In hindsight, it was not the best way to say what I wanted to say, because then, of course, it just made her even more upset. Now, she's really angry and she's yelling at me about how Jesus is in all of us and why do we feel the need to remove Jesus from the sanctuary when Jesus is here?

Now I am stammering, "Yes, Jesus is here, and yes, Jesus is in all of us, but we're not using the space as church, so..." I'm trying to defend somebody else's reasoning, which for many of these people was never a problem before and now all of a sudden it is. It wasn't even about that, I don't think. I think it was about all the other changes that were happening.

Mary Kay: It was symptomatic of change?

Sandy: Yeah. It was like, this was just the straw that broke the camel's back for her. I've got 150 people looking at me, watching this play out, and I'm thinking, "How did we get to this point?" That's just an example of how I had to pretend like everything was okay when it's really wasn't. The people that sat in that room trusted me. I had five years or six years with these people and they knew me and I knew them... This was their way of screaming, "This is not us."

The situation at Tri County got worse over the next year and Sandy realized the priest initiated change not to better the community, but because he wanted the community to accommodate him.

It was like, "I'm almost 70 and I'm kind of checking out, just do it my way because in a few years you can do whatever you want because I'm not going to be here anymore." I was leading under him and trying to put out what he want[ed], and I had to put out the fires that he created.

Sandy stayed because parishioners and other leaders repeatedly told her she was the "glue holding it all together," but eventually personal attacks placed Sandy on her precipice needing to make a difficult leadership decision.

I did my darnedest to be the glue and really started to pray about should I change. Should I move on to another community? I was told about this other job with a previous pastor that I had worked with, that had really mentored me. I just really didn't know.

Then I found out that one of the priests working in the community was spreading lies about me, and some of the community members in that specific church with loyalty to that priest were also spreading lies about me. That was the breaking point. That was the, "I can't do this anymore" moment. I still remember going in to the pastor and saying, "I can't be here anymore because I can't be my authentic self. I can't love these people because of what they've done." If I can't love them, how can I serve them?

Sandy decided to leave the community, but not to leave ministerial leadership. She took the position mentioned with another clustered community in another part of the state. In her

current community, Sandy provides support to a number of other formation and youth ministry staff, and works closely with a pastor strongly committed to the health of the community.

Sandy's reflection on her moment on the cross and her transition to another parish cluster brought clarity to her leadership commitment and concretely shaped her leadership practice. She recognized she would likely exercise her call to the lay ecclesial leadership in multiple communities over the expanse her career. Sandy's moment on the cross also changed her understanding of the leadership relationship she wants to have with pastors. Trust, as well as a shared understanding of mission leadership, became essential to her definition of authentic leadership. For Sandy, this mutual trust means a pastor supports her decisions without making them his own.

My current pastor said to me the other day, "Blame it on me, I got strong shoulders." I said, "No." Maybe I would have wanted that years ago, when I was just new and I didn't really know what I was doing. Now, it's "You know what, this is the decision I'm making and I have reasons as to why I'm making this decision. I can stand on my own two feet." I'm glad to know that he's behind me backing me, if I need it, and vice versa, but I don't need him to own my decisions.

If he comes out with something, and he's done that before, he's made a decision and I'm going, "No." I can go and say to him, "I don't agree with you, could you explain, maybe a little bit differently, why we're doing this?" Ultimately, when we get out into the public, I have his back just like he's going to have mine.

Her wounds as a leader taught her to look for leadership relationships based upon mutual respect and authenticity.

Even though I love the staff that I'm working with, and I love the community, when this pastor leaves, depending on who's coming in, I don't feel like this is the beginning and end of my ministry. I feel that if I can be authentically who I am and work with somebody who can respect that, then the community and myself, as a minister, are both going to be much healthier than trying to work under a structure that just isn't going to work... I truly believe that I've been gifted by God with this vocation, and my vocation isn't to serve Father ... I believe it's about working together to carry out God's mission.

All of the above stories, told and retold on retreat and in personal interviews, revealed to them and to me more than what a single dissertation can describe. Each LEM comfortably used story to explain not only who she was as a leader, but also why she continues to lead. All 12 women LEMs embodied a storied practice of leadership as “a process that entails the capacity to create stories, to understand and evaluate these stories, and to appreciate the struggle among stories” (Gardner, 2011, p. 21). The stories told from life, from ministry, and from the cross revealed for each woman her commitment to her own understanding of the mission of the Church and her place as leader in that mission.

### **Meaning Making and Story**

A person is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories, and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it. (Sartre, 1938, p. 39)

Story as a theoretical frame through which to view the leadership of 12 women LEMs working in Catholic parishes provided opportunity not only to hear what leadership meant to them, but also to witness the process of meaning making. It allowed them and me the opportunity to “trace the path of development, providing a map of life experience and its meaning” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 15). Autobiographical memories from childhood, as well as self-narratives from within parish ministry shared by these women support a theory that story not only conveys personal meaning, but contributes to the meaning of leadership within a community. These stories of “personal and identity culture reveal the authentic self, drawing us into the world to take authentic action as an expression of our true and authentic self (p. 48).

The story also shapes the actions and choices of leaders. For women LEMs committed to the mission of the Church and the work of Christ, story, symbol, and metaphor become part of a reflexive practice of leadership reminding the LEM that the mission—divine and human—must be



reflected in their leadership practice. For example, Kelly believes her ministerial leadership must serve people others reject. She said she never hesitates to challenge or “go public” with her concerns. She made herself available to the press over issues of priest misconduct automatically placing her parish and her pastor in the public eye compelling them to respond as well. Her conviction allows her to assess her leadership practice, but it also provides criteria for judging the leadership practice of others she identifies as leaders. As mentioned earlier, criteria that fail to include other points of view can limit leadership and distract from the mission.

Finally, from the collective gasp when Pam shared her story, to embracing symbols and metaphors on the retreat like “heat kills the yeast,” these women could and did place themselves into the story of their colleagues. In doing so, they allowed the story of another to give meaning to their own leadership. Stories of test and trial in leadership became powerful cross moments for these women and spoke not only to the role of wounds and suffering on the decision to be a leader, but on the meaning suffering gave their leadership. Chris, Laurie, and Sandy’s prior conviction and values situated in deep faith equipped them with hardiness or the capacity “to emerge from devastating circumstances without losing hope” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 8).

Together and alone the 12 did the work of making meaning in the midst of divine mission “gathering people together, so that all our different stories may somehow be shared; in this sharing we discover aspects...of the One who accompanies us on our way – the one we name God”(Hearne, 1984, p. 34). Their storied leadership “provides continuity with the past and allows people to see the connection between their lived experience and people from the past (Cahalan, 2008, p. 108). The storied leadership if these LEMs make connections the story of salvation history.

## CHAPTER 6 LEADING AS WOMEN

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### *Ruth: Being a Woman is no Excuse*

*Ruth, 64 years old, spent most of her career teaching often, but not exclusively, in Catholic schools. Throughout her married life, she and her husband practiced their faith and engaged in parish life wherever they lived. Eventually they came to live in Ruth's hometown and she gained a position teaching in the Catholic School. Her transition to ministerial leadership began with an invitation by the pastor to leave the classroom and join the formation program designing, directing, and implementing preparation for Confirmation. Later, Ruth became assistant director of pastoral care, under the supervision of a deacon. In the past few years, the deacon's health has suffered, the parish went through a clustering, and the parish's population began to grow and change. Ruth's responsibilities changed with these realities, and her public presence in the local community contributed to her identification as a parish leader.*

*A number of years ago, before Ruth became a LEM, her husband made application for and began discernment towards ordination as a permanent deacon. His pursuit of this possibility coincided with a period of struggle for Ruth. She saw the lack of access to ordination for women as a sign of misogyny in the Church.*

*My husband's experience in the diaconate program was very difficult for me. It was a time where I felt most intensely the anger at the place that women are in the Church. My husband and I had been involved in many, many ministries together, but I always took the lead. I really did. The fact that he could go in and seek ordination, but that I couldn't, it just seemed to me to be so unfair. I didn't understand it. I really agonized over why this was so, and should it be so at that time. I have to admit I was very angry. I did a lot of reading, and my husband bore the brunt of my anger and I was angered because they might want his gifts, but not mine.*

*Ruth's husband did not become a deacon, but the struggle and accompanying anger motivated her to address her pain, and attend to her own spiritual formation.*

*I had to try to find a way to manage my pain. I came across the term "negative capability," where you just have to be able to embrace the contradictions. You're not going to be able to resolve everything that doesn't fit ... You have to learn to live with the paradoxes. That helped me settle down my anger.*

*I had also looked into the secular Franciscans quite a while back. It just fell through, but when my husband was in the diaconate I kind of thought to myself. All right, if he is going to do this, then I am going to do my thing. I'm going to look into the Franciscans.*

*Ruth's formation and subsequent engagement in the Secular Franciscan Order provided her with an avenue through which to explore the value of ministry in the Church, without leaving behind her convictions about women and leadership. Formation, spiritual direction, and the Franciscan community affirmed her gifts and leadership as a woman. Subsequently, Ruth sought opportunities to lead in the parish and in the broader community, including the establishment of a community based homeless ministry. She found peace with herself as a woman and a leader. "I cannot use my being a woman in the Church as an excuse for not exercising the gifts that God has given me."*

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As the experiences shared in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal, knowing and naming their leadership has been and continues to be “a fragile process of coming to see oneself, and to be seen by others as a leader” (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013, p. 62) for these women LEMs. Binns (2008) argued, “A capacity and willingness to critically re-examine one’s beliefs and practices is central to leading ethically” and “such self-appraisal must be embodied and emotional” (p. 608). The process of meaning making involves more than a cerebral exercise. For these 12 women

making meaning of their leadership involved their whole person, which is “inscribed with gendered images, symbols, roles, and expectations” (Binns, 2008, p. 605).

Analysis through a lens of gender proved important because I not only chose to study women LEMs, but also because these LEMs exercised their leadership in a hierarchical structure where some—both in and out of the Church—presume the Church actively excludes women from leadership. Yet, as noted earlier, women LEMs are essential to mission of the Church and the practice of leadership in parish life. The data gathered on retreat and in interviews prompted me to analyze their experiences as women employed in church structures and their perceptions of being a woman leader in a Catholic parish.

In this chapter, the focus of analysis considers how the experience of being a woman leader contributed to the creation and expression of meaning for these 12 LEMs. In using gender as a lens to understand leadership, I presumed “gender and leadership norms shape how leaders see themselves and how they relate to others, but not in a fixed predetermined way” (Binns, 2008, p. 605). I did not view their experiences as women as prescriptive, but simply a means to “provide a good starting-point for the elaboration of new paradigms of knowledge” (Braidotti, 2003, Standpoint feminist theory, para. 1). With this in mind, I asked about and explored how these women perceived the influence of gender on their role, their experiences, and the meaning they attributed to their leadership. A grounded theory approach to phenomenological method prompted me to avoid drawing conclusions about the theological nature of woman and their leadership. Instead, my approach allowed these women to give voice to their own understanding of what it means to be a woman who leads in a Catholic faith community.

From their voices, it became evident any pre-conceived notions of analysis based upon attitudes about Church teaching on ordination or based upon binary theological leanings

(conservative vs. liberal) would not benefit my analysis. All 12 women in their individual interviews indicated ordination was not a factor in their ministerial call and leadership. Only two saw ordination as a right denied to women, with five more open to changes in Church theology to include some form of orders available to women. The remaining five varied in their degree of support for male only ordination. All 12 preferred to focus their attention on avenues for leadership for laity beyond ordination.

None of the women in my research cohort identified themselves specifically as feminist, but all articulated strong egalitarian ideals regarding work, family life, faith, and access to authority. Most of these women exercised caution when describing particular traits as being feminine or masculine often acknowledging overgeneralizations or stereotyping in their own statements. The women who saw no need for women's ordination, still identified a need for parish structures of decision making to "make room for all people, including women", and for priests and other leaders to "acknowledge my education and experience matters". Others who self-identified as "sensitive to social justice issues" had not previously considered gender as a contributing factor to challenges in parish leadership and hesitated to identify bias as a cause for behavior of leaders in their experiences.

Those whose stories suggested more feminist positions – Diane, Marie, Anne, Elizabeth, and Kelly – found ways to distance themselves from the descriptor in casual conversations on retreat. For example, during a break on retreat Diane remarked, "I am all for equality but I am not a radical," and Marie tied feminism to a pro-choice position on abortion, which she rejected instantly. Their expressed views on women and ministerial leadership appeared to make a case for Fox-Genovese's (1996) assertion regarding the hesitancy of some women to identify as

feminist. “Feminism, as they perceive it simply does not provide an adequate response to the problems and challenges that face their life” (p. 11).

To explore the implications of leadership as a gendered experience, I begin by exploring their descriptions of what it means to them to be a woman who leads in the Church. Most saw being a woman as an asset in leadership with parishioners and families. I will then consider two strong but broad themes connecting gender to meaning making emerging from the data. First, experiences of gender bias and discrimination affected the employment and leadership practice for all of the LEMs in this study. What differed among my participants was the degree to which they recognized the role of gender in those leadership experiences. For some of these LEMs, participation in this research provided them an avenue to give voice to experiences they recognized as biased. For others, engagement in the research cohort, where they heard the stories of others, provided an opportunity to consider bias as a possible factor in their own experiences.

Research on gender bias in the work place, as well as scholarship on gender and leadership aided analysis of this theme. The scholarship of Eagly (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009) and others (Barreto, Ellemers, Cihangir, & Stroebe, 2009; Binns, 2008; Ely & Ibarra, 2013; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Ibarra et al., 2013; Ridgeway, 2001) provided a back drop to articulate the implications of experiences of work place bias on meaning making. Theories contained in this scholarship, particularly gender status, gender bias, and microaggression provided theoretical language to articulate the role both overt and subtle experiences of bias had in leadership identity development.

A second theme became evident in analysis of their experiences through the lens of the scriptural images of Mary and Martha. This metaphor contributed to understanding how these LEMs experience a complex form of double bind they saw as presenting both challenge and opportunity in leadership. Most of the LEMs in this cohort identified personal and cultural expectations to demonstrate *agentic leadership* qualities— to be assertive, to take risks, and to be efficient— in their parish leadership. They also recognized personal and cultural expectations to be *communal leaders* who provide care, comfort, and nurture parishioners. All 12 women saw navigating the tension between these attributes as important not only to the tasks of leadership, but also to their understanding of mission. Employing scholarship on gendered leadership (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Ely & Ibarra, 2013), I describe their experiences of navigating the tension between these leadership expectations, and then explore the ways they experience the double bind as both challenge and opportunity in leadership. I close the chapter with a description on the reflexive practice these women employ in order to interpret the mission that informs the meaning they give to their leadership as women in the Church.

I hesitated to compartmentalize their experiences of leading as women too narrowly, just as they hesitated to apply generalizations and stereotypes to their own experiences. In the application of theory in this analysis, I do not intend to restrict or confine their leadership to a gendered type. Incorporation of these theories serves only to provide an avenue to articulate the role of gender in the meaning making of individual participants in my research.

### **Leadership Experienced as Women**

On retreat, one group of women LEMs discussed whether they approached their leadership with an “eye on the tasks” or a focus on the spiritual lives of those they served.

Ultimately they decided this was not an either/or choice. Successful ministerial leadership required them to be effective at both. They went on to discuss how experiences as women might shape their approach to “maintenance and mission” in the life of the parish. Pam shared that even though she often focused on tasks, she always directed tasks “towards the good of another” in order to create opportunities for others to come into relationship with God. Laurie’s experiences as a young mom, who had little experience with Catholic devotional prayer, motivated her to provide detailed resources to families of small children. Behind the task lies a desire for families to know God in prayer. On the other hand, Marie believes her experiences as a woman gave her “an ability to have some compassion for people's life stories.” She thinks her experiences as a parent allowed her to understand the challenges families face, and as a woman be sensitive to the struggles. “I get the life situations because I've been there. I've been in the trenches. I've been a mom who had my gut twisted” and this “helped me to see the bigger picture and try to balance how do we live as a Christian” in addressing those challenges.

Other women spoke at individual interviews about the value being a woman brings to ministry, and the value of other women in ministry. Anne, careful not to over generalize about all women, expressed a belief that how she sees herself as a wife, a mom, a nurse, and minister reflects how she exercises leadership. She described herself in language reflective of communal leadership— caring, relational, inclusive, but also acknowledges a streak of activism that she also sees as feminine. “We can’t leave people suffer.” Anne indicated that as woman who worked in a nursing community of woman for years, she knew her dream of a community health clinic would only happen if she worked with “community leaders to find common ground and to build trust” because once they trusted each other anything was possible.



Pam shared the importance of her relationship with women in her transition from the bank to ministerial leadership. Deep relationships with women in the three parishes provided her support and encouragement in ministry, and affirmed a more complete view of her leadership when facing sabotage and humiliation. “[The parish priests] were fine men. During that time they affirmed my work and assured me I did nothing wrong, but my women friends understood my emotional pain supporting me that way.”

Some women LEMs in my cohort (Jean, Marie, and Laurie), reflected back on their leadership to see how being a married woman with children allowed them to create a real connection between those they led. Laurie suspected some women in her leadership teams and among her catechists saw her as credible “because I was like them” trying to balance work and home life, and until coming to ministry “unaware of the need to grow spiritually.”

Chris’s witness included parenting adopted children with substantial medical and developmental needs. This witness, she believed, “makes me approachable. Other mothers aren’t afraid to share their challenges, because they see mine.” Chris’s leadership style reflected her own experiences as a woman advocating for her children. Chris tapped into what people care about and empowered them to create new pastoral ministries and services in the parish. “As a woman and a mom I listen and know what this parish family can do” and as a leader equipped them to make it happen. Chris established multiple ministries of service, prayer, and hospitality by inviting people to apply their gifts to their passion. A group of women wanted not only the parish to pray for those suffering, but also wanted those being prayed for to be comforted by the knowledge of parishioner’s prayers. Knowing these women also knitted, Chris led them to develop a prayer shawl ministry. Now when the pastor or Chris make a first visit to someone in need, they present a handcrafted shawl and a handwritten prayer from a member of the

community. Women in this ministry see themselves making a powerful contribution to the prayer and pastoral mission of the parish.

Other LEMs in the cohort perceive themselves as contemporaries of those they often lead. Those who have children still at home, engage daily in struggle Laurie described. Although not always easy, they accept that much of their life, not just their ministry work, bears witness to what it means to be a Christian woman. Elizabeth, who worked as an educator for many years before transitioning into full-time ministry, seemed attuned to the idea. “The next generation, including my daughter” watches how we “handle leadership in the parish.” Marie felt the pressure as a mom, “knowing that others look to my parenting as an example.” All of them desired to do their very best, to be good models of women of faith, but they did not place a burden on themselves to be “perfect” Catholic women. As one of them quipped at breakfast on retreat, “I try to remember I witness in my failure. Someone has to model that everyone needs God’s mercy.”

### **Experiences of Bias in Ministerial Leadership**

“Although women’s status has improved remarkably in the 20th century in many societies, women continue to lack access to power and leadership” (Eagly & Carli, 2003, p. 629). Like most women, the LEMs in this cohort would generally accept this statement to be true in society and in their own circumstances. They would also contend that generally pastors and parishioners appreciate and welcome their daily leadership in parish life. Nine of the 12 currently work with a pastor they consider an effective leader, who gladly shares leadership with them. Sandy’s current pastor has hired her twice, and both of Theresa’s pastors regard her leadership “as an extension of their own leadership.” More than half of the LEMs, including Elizabeth, believe their pastor recognizes the “unique perspective we bring as women.”

Although they acknowledge the value being a woman brings to their leadership, they also know that others take their leadership and commitment for granted. On retreat Pam asserted, “We do 90% of the work out front. Where would the Church be without us?” Jean countered, “They know we will do extra for the Lord.” Others reported working in parish environments where identification as a pastoral leader, although important, was not the same as being the “financial decision-maker” (Laurie), where education and experience could be “trumped by a collar or a tie” (Kelly), and where “the title leader did not apply” to those in ministerial leadership (Chris).

LEMs in my research recognized experiences of being valued as women and leaders, but a number lacked awareness of the negative impact gender had on their leadership experience. Four women in this research cohort initially reported they never considered gender to be a contributing factor to challenges in parish leadership. In my observations on retreat and at individual interviews, I detected a number of reasons for reduced awareness. For some, a perception of negative events as occurring because of personality or generational differences prevented them from seeing gender as a contributing factor. Like many, they believed “gender discrimination is no longer a problem in contemporary societies” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 101) and saw failure or struggle in leadership as personal. Until the retreat, Chris saw the tensions between her and Richard as personal and associated with “the pastor hiring me through the back door without an interview.”

For others a naiveté about what constitutes gender bias limited their view. All could recognize overt bias present in stories of harassment or dismissals, but only through reflection on experiences of others could they recognize subtler forms of bias found in language or perceptions. Kelly and Ruth, the two most conscious and critical of the Church’s treatment of

women, failed to recognize the power of gendered language and attitudes in their own ministry environment. Hearing each other stories, as well the questions asked in the individual interview, brought to their attention for the first time the ways in which gender biased experiences in ministerial leadership influenced how they “feel and act, even leading them to unwittingly behave in ways that contribute to justifying or perpetuating their own inferiority” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 106).

Aware or not, these women gave voice to leadership and employment experiences where the presence of gender bias informed how they perceived themselves and their leadership. In particular, overt discrimination and bias experienced by these LEMs, contributed to the value they placed on their ministerial leadership. In addition, I identified evidence of subtle, but powerful microaggressions shaping the language and story of their leadership. The experiences of bias shared in this chapter are troubling, and do inform the meaning these women give their leadership, but it would be unfair to say they are the only experiences that inform their leadership self-efficacy. All of the women in my study placed their challenges in leadership within a larger context of life and ministry, which I explore in the final section of this chapter.

### **Did That Really Happen?**

After Pam shared her story, where a female consultant labeled her as disabled because of her weight and the room gasped, one of her retreat colleagues asked, “Did that really happen?” As she dried her tears and regained composure, Pam simply said, “Yes.” The colleague asked the question not because she believed Pam lied, but because she could not believe such blatant disrespect still happened in today’s culture, especially in an organization “claiming to protect the dignity of all human persons” (Jean).

Pam said she believed even though the mediator was female, the decision to identify her as disabled, and to relocate her office was sexist. “They would have never done this to a man.” Even though the other five women on her retreat agreed the remarks and action were unwarranted and unethical, not all readily agreed the actions reflected gender bias.

**Recognition of Bias.** It is not unusual to set aside gender as a reason for unethical behavior in employment practice. Research indicates people prefer to “believe that gender discrimination no longer exists” when in fact “the changed nature of sexist expressions...has made them more elusive and harder to recognize” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 101). In Pam’s case, some women may not perceive her experience as sexist because “blatant expressions of sexism are less accepted today” (p. 102), and people are more likely to “promote explanations of experiences to individual causes for success or failure” (p. 103). Those who expressed disbelief on retreat essentially hoped Pam experienced an isolated event unique to her circumstances. However, Pam’s story turned out to be the first of many, where my participants knew or came to know how biased beliefs and attitudes influenced their employment environments.

Prior to the retreat, Chris was like many women who “deny bias even when it is objectively true and see that women in general experience it” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 62). Even when ample evidence existed to suggest it, Chris found it necessary to dismiss or excuse Richards’s blatant sexism. For example, Chris came into the office one day and overheard Richard telling the pastor about salary decisions for the coming year. Richard said, “David has a family to provide for, so we will give him this salary next year, and we will give her this amount because it’s a woman and a second income.” She knew it was wrong, but chose not to speak up because she “wasn’t supposed to hear” the conversation. During the year the parish had no pastor, Richard grudgingly acknowledged Chris as “the face of the parish” to the priest

administrator. This did not mean he made leading easy for her. He maneuvered responsibilities so he could weigh in on human resource management issues and began to micro-manage employee schedules. Richard went so far as to demand the parish administrator (also a woman) “write-up” Chris for “taking time off to go home and change clothes” before the wedding of a co-worker, even though she had already worked more than forty hours that week. The female administrator did as Richard requested out of fear of reprisal and later apologized to Chris.

Chris assumed challenges in her relationship with Richard stemmed from “personality conflicts and generational differences” carried over from how the pastor hired her. She believed his behavior grew from “resentment that a volunteer came on staff” because he contributed his business skills for more than 35 years without the offer of a paid role. Laurie also thought, “He did not think I should be employed in my role” because she lacked traditional credentials.

Laurie, like Chris, knew starting salaries for male LEMs at her parish were higher than the salaries for comparable female LEMs. Through participation in this research she became acutely aware of how gender status favoring men in her environment created “obstacles that women face in their efforts to exercise leadership” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 638).

Laurie: The men are paid more. I know our music liturgist is and so probably is our young pastoral associate who was brought in at a level of pay that I had to spend twenty years working to achieve. There's no sense of equality or whatever. There's also unstated things, like when women get together we are called a coffee clutch.

MK: Where does that perception come from?

Laurie: I would never perceive my parishioners thinking that about us. I don't think it's the parishioners who see that at all. I think it's other staff members judging us. So generally male staff members judging female staff members. For example, youth ministers and catechists [all women] have shit hours. Excuse my language. We don't have a nine to five. We don't have a Monday through Friday.

MK: You are unscheduled, but you work 40 hours right?

Laurie: Yeah. It just means we are often there when nobody else is around. But to be judged, "You're not going to be here tomorrow? That must be nice not to have to be here tomorrow." I want to say, "If you want to spend the night with seventy-five third graders this Friday, go ahead and then maybe you get a day off too." Those are the kinds of comments you don't need to hear from coworkers. Or I answer the phone and it's the pastor, "Oh, you *are* here." What happened to hello? Why is my presence a surprise or whatever? It should be, when I'm there, I'm there a hundred percent. When I'm not there, respect that I need the time off.

**MK:** Does this happen differently for male staff members who have unscheduled time?

**Laurie:** Yes – our liturgist. There's a presumption, because he's male and creative, and he works all weekend long. I don't work all weekend long? I sure do. My early childhood person who works Sunday school, she doesn't work all weekend? Our youth minister doesn't work all weekend long? But [the liturgist] does. He works. He works evenings and all weekend long, so he should have Monday and Tuesday off. The men get weekdays off without question. I never even thought of it until you just asked.

Kelly's employment experience in multiple work place settings made her aware of how gender bias could contribute to more than discrepancies in pay. These experiences supported research suggesting, "Sexist attitudes and beliefs... are likely to be responsible for the endorsement of policies" that "impede rather than facilitate women's leadership" (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 100). Kelly indicated she consistently recognized and challenged sexism related to policy, compensation, behavior, and opportunity in multiple employment environments in and out of ministry. She assessed her current leadership environment as "being totally biased" where the "men are treated differently."

In her case, the arrival of a male business administrator a few years ago contributed to actively devaluing women on staff. Kelly said she believed the pastor allowed this because of his dependence on "this person who has his hands in everything." Her examples of gender bias in her parish included women LEMs not being consulted about program and schedule changes in the departments they lead, engagement of male co-workers by the administrator in consultation

about programs they do not lead, and job title's for women not reflective of position requirements or education. Although Kelly does all the work of other directors on staff, she believes she remains a coordinator because the administrator believes her advanced education in organizational management was "a useless degree."

According to Kelly, "gender things have been pointed out to them [pastor and administrator] on more than one occasion, and it's actually been pointed out to them by some of the guys." Although men on staff pointed out bias, the women suffer the consequences.

The men experience way less sabotage than the women, even within my same umbrella and that's been really challenging for me ... with our administrator. Karl [co-worker] is like Jesus to the administrator. So, that's been really hard because first of all I brought Karl here. He's here because I told him to apply for this job, so it's been really hard because he can do no wrong at any time for anything.

We came to blows a couple of weeks ago. I told Karl you've got to look at the bigger picture. You saying no to this thing screwed me and this is why. It was unfair for our administrator just to check with him on this particular thing. He really needed to check with me and other staff... but he just checked with Karl. Karl was like, "Oh I don't think it was a big deal."

Yeah it is a big deal, he [the administrator] sidestepped staff, and I'm so sick and tired of this bogus BS. So, we had this huge blow out, and then Karl came a couple of days later and he's like "I know there's other stuff going on but this is why I answered it this way." I said, "but Karl there is stuff going on and I'm tired of getting screwed, because you never get screwed Karl, it's always me that gets screwed." It comes into the whole gender thing.

**Integration into leadership identity.** The previous cases serve as four examples of parish employment systems where "a deeply entwined social hierarchy...that associates greater status, worthiness, and competence with men rather than women" can be used to "penalize assertive women leaders for violating the expected status order" (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 637). Gendered status beliefs containing perceptions of "men as not only generally more competent [as



leaders], but also more status worthy” (p. 649) contributed to biased attitudes and discrimination in these women’s ministry environments.

Pam, Chris, Laurie, and Kelly provide leadership in these flawed systems, and it shaped how they envision themselves as leaders. As storied leaders (Chapter 5), they incorporated all of their experiences, including those of gender bias and discrimination into their meaning making stories. The women LEMs who experienced bias, engaged in reflexive practice either before and/or during this research prompting them to “uncover, challenge, and change the discourses which shape their own subjectivities” (Binns, 2008, p. 617).

Application of reflexive practice on overt experiences of gender bias among these women negatively and positively influenced self-perceptions of leadership. Pam and Kelly’s previous career experiences provided a broader perspective of these events. Pam left banking in part because of her perceptions about how the industry devalued women. Kelly acknowledged secular employment environments encounter similar problems, but believed secular environments “provided more resources to address concerns” through corporate human resource offices. Even with their backgrounds, they each experienced doubt regarding their leadership.

Pam described it as “losing confidence in what I know to be true about myself.” It took more than a few years, as well as changes in pastor and staff to regain her footing as a leader. Even with a renewed confidence, the experience still takes an emotional toll on her. When I asked her if she would consent to the inclusion of her story in the research, she agreed but said, “It still hurts to say it out loud.” The pain for Pam comes from two places, the devaluing experience itself, and her own failure to advocate for herself the same way she advocated for women at the bank.

In an e-mail exchange following her individual interview, Kelly indicated a female colleague who also invested in advocating for fairness recently moved on to a new parish. Kelly now feels alone in facing “male-female employment differences that are astonishing.” The gender issues along with her concerns about protection of children raised questions for Kelly about how much longer she can stay employed in parish ministry. The question of continued engagement in lay ecclesial leadership reflects research suggesting, “discrimination that is portrayed or perceived as pervasive is more damaging for individual well-being than is discrimination that is portrayed as rare” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 107).

Pam and Kelly re-evaluated the meaning and meaningfulness of their leadership in light of these experiences. For both women, the poor resolution around issues of gender bias contributed to ongoing feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration, as well as fear. In Pam’s case, she fears a repeat occurrence, and for Kelly, she fears it will never end. This reflects research findings indicating some women experience “feelings of exclusion and devaluation [which] also imply negative expectations about future interactions, not only with the particular source of prejudice” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 106), but also with the group as a whole. Pam and Kelly’s experiences of overt discrimination, in both secular and church settings, continue to be a factor in the value they place on being a leader in the Church.

On the other hand, Laurie and Chris’s transformative experiences, described in earlier chapters, allowed them to incorporate these experiences into a new leadership narrative with more hopeful results. Although neither woman initially indicated an awareness of the scope of gender bias in their work environment, new reflections on their experiences strengthened their view of their own leadership. In both cases, the transformative experience, along with intentional reflection, prompted them to define their leadership using “standards based on [their]

own values and principles rather than working to meet other people's expectations" (Galindo, 2003, p. 19). These new narratives allowed them to redefine their leadership "not by the masculinized norms of formal equality" where they suddenly get equal pay or the parish dismisses disrespectful individuals, but rather through the application of "feminized principles of equity, complementary, reciprocity, friendship and care" (Binns, 2008, p. 602).

Through reflection, Laurie saw her decision not to leave the parish when she was "on the chopping block," but rather to assert herself as a valuable leader, released her from comparisons to men on staff. "I know that when I was having my issues, my very direct issues with my pastor, I was jealous of those who had his ear. I'm not jealous of them anymore. I don't need to be. I do my job really well and that is enough." This redefining of her leadership allowed her to see the behavior of her pastor, but not fear retribution. In her leadership with staff, parishioner leaders, and catechists, Laurie intentionally chose a leadership style different from the pastor. "In my corner of leadership... ideas are allowed to be communicated and people can differ and work through their differences in a very relational, nonjudgmental way." This intentionality in Laurie's practice of leadership became necessary in order to "unite the disparate events, actions, and motivations of [her] life experiences" to the authenticity of her leadership (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 420), which gives it meaning.

For Chris, discovering gender bias really happens and it happened to her necessitated her incorporation of these experiences into her leadership narrative. With enthusiasm, she discussed how her year leading in the absence a pastor changed her perspective. "The pastor who was our temporary parochial administrator, and the priests who came to assist with liturgies and funerals treated me with respect, they valued what I did and who I am." Through the challenges of the year, Chris began to see herself as a leader not only because priests did, but also because

parishioners did: “I am the mom, the parish is my family...I was a single parent for a year in the parish. They needed me.”

Conversation on the retreat also helped Chris see Richard’s behavior differently. Over meals on retreat, her colleagues acknowledged Richard’s action as personal, but they also pointed them out as biased. Later on the retreat, Chris acknowledged, “He was never comfortable with a woman being the leader. It wasn’t just me.” Chris also expressed her gratitude to for the experience and the insights gained on retreat: “I have so many emotions that I really don't think I got an opportunity to talk about it before.”

The retreat and interview provided an opportunity for Chris to look at “relational power through a gendered lens” (Binns, 2008, p. 602) and see her relationship with Richard and the parish from a new perspective. Over the course of a year of dialogue and reflection, Chris moved from being weighed down by Richards’s judgements of her competence to embracing a “state of leadership” (Noonan & Fish, 2007, p. 161) where her actions became focused on the Church’s mission and not the judgements of others. She wrote about this in an e-mail exchange.

I have found a sense of confidence and purpose in my ministry. I have found joy in it – not necessarily every day, but it is there! I still get push back and I hate office politics (another story), but I feel worthy to have my place at the table. Outwardly, my relationship with Richard doesn’t *look* a lot different, but it doesn’t affect me in the same way any longer. I know that I bring value to this parish, and to the areas of ministry I lead. I am comfortable in my own skin now and that is a good thing.

Chris’s narrative as a woman who leads in the Church changed. Now anchored in purpose she “redirects attention toward shared goals and to consider who [she] needs to be and what [she] needs to learn in order to achieve those goals” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 64). She changed because the community she cared for needed her to change.

### **Unseen Subtle Bias**

Like many, the women LEMs in my cohort “have worked hard to take gender out of the equations – to simply be recognized for their skills and talents” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 63). However, analysis of their experiences through the lens of gender bias suggests, “discrimination is not disappearing but rather has become more subtle in nature” (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014, p. 340). Human resource policies may prohibit blatant acts of discrimination, but powerful and often invisible forms of gender bias not accounted for in employment policies “arise from cultural assumptions and organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 62). Unlike blatant experiences described earlier, the women LEMs in these examples failed to recognize subtler forms of gender bias in their employment. As I read and re-read their stories, I found myself asking the question, “Would that have happened to a male LEM?”

This question prompted analysis of their experiences through the lens of *micro-aggression* theory. The manifestation of subtle but powerful gender biases called micro-aggressions is defined as “intentional or unintentional actions or behaviors that exclude, demean, insult, oppress, or otherwise express hostility or indifference toward women” (Basford et al., 2014, p. 341). Micro-aggression theory provides a framework for viewing awareness of bias on a continuum. This includes *micro-invalidations* negating or dismissing a person’s contributions, which is often less recognizable than overt discrimination. It also includes culturally unacceptable language or behavior for the purpose of hurting or oppressing women. Although more easily recognized in insults and stereotypes, micro-aggressions often hide within “behaviors that may seem friendly on the surface but which can have pernicious consequences” (Basford et al., 2014, p. 341). Research suggests micro-aggressions “disrupt the learning cycle at

the heart of becoming a leader” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 62) regardless of the form. Application of this theory revealed not only the presence of micro-aggressions, but also implications for meaning making for some of the women in my cohort.

**Proliferation of subtle bias.** In reviewing the experiences shared by these women leaders, I found multiple examples of subtle bias. The proliferation of bias existed in employment practice, as well as in attitudes held by parish members, pastors, and co-workers about attributes required to be a good Catholic leader and a good Catholic woman. The presence of subtle bias revealed perceptions these LEMs hold about how others judge their leadership contributing to their meaning making.

Sandy endured repeated questions about her intentions to have children, while Kelly indicated others made unfair judgements about her because she never married and she “possessed an unused womb.” As a new parent, Theresa needed to negotiate her return to work in an environment that socially rewards women who stay home. The pastors in both communities where she works wanted her to return to ministerial leadership after the birth of her child. Their benefit offer reflected bias about motherhood and childcare. The pastors made policy concessions allowing Theresa to bring her child to work and to parish events. They did not consider a salary increase for child-care or to cover increased benefit expenses. Theresa saw the offer as generous, but also acknowledged the assumed values present in the offer. “We don’t have to deal with high child care costs, they get to keep me, and I am seen as committed to family.”

For all three women assumptions about the role of motherhood allowed others to make judgments about both their womanhood and leadership. For Sandy the priority of motherhood adds to the pain she experiences dealing with infertility, and Kelly finds it necessary to describe

the “important role I have in the care of my nieces and nephews.” In Theresa’s case, the judgments inform how the parish structures her employment. Theresa does not know what will happen as her child ages or when she has more children. She wonders if the need for her ministerial leadership will out-weigh the presumed values about full-time motherhood.

Marie expressed concern because others sometimes call her part-time leadership role a “second-income job” in the parish. For her the job does provide a second family income, but she knows other part-time women on staff face a different financial reality. Beyond the truth of the statement lies an unspoken judgement about their value in comparison to “first income” earners. Marie expressed feeling guilty because she “likes being part-time,” but fears that “she makes it harder for other part-time people to be valued.”

Early in my research, before the retreat, I was in the parish office where Chris works. I witnessed Richard call a female staff member “dear” while asking her to make him copies. No one blinked, except me. When I asked Chris a general question about Richard’s chauvinism, she dismissed it saying, “He’s from that generation you know. I was taught to respect them.”

Men were not the only people identified as making judgments about these LEMs as good women and good leaders. Theresa’s challenges navigating relationships with women co-workers represented the belief among my research cohort regarding damage done when women judge each other harshly. To demonstrate this point, Anne told a story about a woman vendor visiting their parish office for a few days. The two women engaged in conversation throughout the day and the visitor noted Anne mentioned her adult daughter with children worked outside the home, and wondered why. Anne offered a casual explanation providing a mix of reasons including both her daughter’s love for her work and a need for medical benefits. The woman responded, “My daughter had to make the same choice, but she stayed home. She loves her kids.” Anne

appalled, replied, “She loves her kids, too.” To which the woman said emphatically, “No. She *really* loves her kids.”

The evidence revealed in my analysis not only identified the proliferation of gendered micro-aggressions among my cohorts’ articulated experiences, but also how they incorporated some of these experiences into their identity as leaders. Chris’s transformation as a leader, for example, allowed her to put Richards’s gender bias and discrimination in perspective so that it no longer harms her; although, she still hesitates to identify his biased remarks publically. Anne refused to let negative views of gender influence how she sees her leadership. She told the story about the woman in the office to make a point about how important it is for woman to support each other. When Anne finished telling the story to her retreat colleagues, she admonished them, “We simply have to quit hurting each other this way.” Anne also shared about a parish trustee who tells every new pastor to “surround yourself with strong women leaders. Women get things done.” Although this statement carries a stereotype about women Anne dislikes, she decided to look beyond the stereotype and own her place as a leader. “Every time this man makes the statement, I say to myself, okay, I guess I am among the strongest leaders in the parish.”

For two women in my cohort, analysis suggested something different. It suggested persistent presence of subtle bias “creates a context—akin to *something in the water*” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 64). This “something” contributed to struggles and questions about their place in professional ministerial leadership.

**Words have power.** Blatant sexism Kelly attributed to her parish administrator was not the only evidence of bias informing her meaning making as a leader. Analysis suggests subtler forms of gender bias in her work environment also contributed to the erosion of Kelly’s commitment to leading in a Catholic parish. One particular microaggression stands out—the use



of the word *bitch*. “I’m totally bitchy Kelly. Everybody says it, I’m bitchy Kelly because I’m just like pushing back and saying no this is not right.” The use of this descriptor contributed in part to the meaning Kelly gave her leadership.

In conversation, music, and media society uses the word *bitch* to describe all kinds of difficulties—an exam, work, relationships, and general complaints about the day. This broad application masks its meaning and contributes to the diminishment of women’s leadership. The word *bitch* defined as pejorative “against women (and non-conventional men)” also serves “as a means of expressing dominance over a person or object” (Keinman, Frost, & Ezzell, 2009, p. 47). The word “cannot be understood apart from its place in a society in which girls and women of all ages are members of a sex class that is subordinate to men” (p. 50). When applied to the leadership of women it “sustains a social climate in which women’s opinions, women’s work, and injustices done to women are not taken seriously” (p. 57). Even in common use, the word retains power as a micro-aggression.

Kelly incorporated the noun *bitch* and the verb *bitching* into descriptions of herself and her actions both on retreat and at her individual interview. Twice Kelly referred to herself in the third person as “Kelly the Bitch” as though it was her name. In each case, she used it in describing the negative ways men in authority perceive her actions and advocacy. She expressed anger and frustration in tone and posture, but the emotions did not stem from the use of word, but from what it implied about how others responded to her efforts to protect or advocate for those in need.

Kelly’s incorporation of the term in self-description, as well as the accompanying emotions indicated an unspoken knowledge about what the word *bitch* implied. A person labeled as “*bitching* is not someone who is seen as making a good argument, pointing out an

injustice, or saying something to which we should sit up and listen” (Keinman et al., 2009, p. 54). The term, incorporated into her leadership identity and meaning making reminds her every time she uses it that others do not share or value the meaning and purpose she gives leadership. The word, although used casually by Kelly, carries powerful meaning for her leadership identity.

### **Patterns of exclusion.**

Given Ruth’s ministry history, including the intensity of her struggle to be at peace as a woman leading in the Church, it surprised me when Ruth did not recognize gender bias present in her leadership environment. The casual description of her pastoral care role, as “being legs for the deacon” suggested bias, and Ruth embraced the role and the description. In analysis, I asked myself if a man would offer another man a job commonly described as being someone else’s legs. This question led me to explore Ruth’s story using microaggression theory as a guide.

In her own words, Ruth described her change in roles – from a member of the faith formation team to being a pastoral care assistant – as being specifically about service to a man not the parish.

It’s physically very hard for him to get around. There are a lot of little catch all things that you do when you're in pastoral ministry like getting the rice bowls out to church, and getting them where they belong. There are just so many things that take legs...I just thought that was what I needed to do. Be his legs.

Soon after her transition into pastoral care, the single parish she worked in became the lead of a clustered parish community, and the deacon’s health continued to decline. Ruth saw the needs of the community and felt called to lead.

I really pushed the boundaries of the job description...but I just did what I felt I was being called to do... For example, I felt the need to support people after their losses so I developed, with a lot of input and a process over time, a ministry to the bereaved.

Her leadership took new shape when she began to minister out of a sense of call and towards mission. Soon Ruth invested in leading ministries for grief, homelessness, intentional discipleship, adult formation, and women. Parishioners, including the lawyer who invested in intentional discipleship (Chapter 4), saw Ruth as integral to the parish's vision and mission.

Ruth's pastor met regularly with each parish department – faith formation, school, and pastoral care, but Ruth was not included in department meetings for pastoral care. He met with other clergy and the male parish administrator.

I guess you could say I don't have that privileged communication. Something just happened last week that kind of gives you just a little idea of what it feels like. I wanted to get a summer schedule down because the deacon is going to have another surgery, increasing my responsibilities, so I said, "I would like to meet with the three of you so that we can all get our calendars together." This was really important to me because I was finally going to be talking with this group.

Well, the day of the meeting was a snowy day, and when I called the parish office to confirm that the meeting was still being held... I actually called the deacon directly. I said, "Are we still on for the meeting at 2:30pm?" He said, "Oh. Yeah, but we moved it to 1:30." It was now 1:20pm. "You moved it to 1:30 and you didn't tell me? You didn't even tell me?" I was so angry.

The three men met. They attended to the agenda Ruth created without her. The deacon knew she was angry, but offered no apology or explanation. Although angry, Ruth passed off the behavior as "cluelessness" on the part of the deacon. Analysis of their behavior – exclusion from the meeting, dismissing the importance of her presence, and the failing to acknowledge the import of their actions – through the lens of gender micro-invalidating suggests their behavior served to "exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences" (Basford et al., 2014, p. 341) of Ruth.

A few months later, with the full-time deacon unable to do full-time ministry, and seeing increased demands from parish leadership groups to embrace efforts towards intentional

discipleship, Ruth recognized she could not address all the needs. She turned to the pastor and requested a conversation to establish priorities and to set boundaries on her ministry.

I told my pastor, "I cannot do everything you are asking that I'm doing. I can't keep doing it." I had moved into adult faith formation because that's part of this vision. We have to be encouraging adults to grow in their faith if we want to make disciples. To make a long story short, he took my job description and chopped it.

Without consultation with parish leadership, and without regard for her gifts, the pastor "took the list of things that I was working on and he said, 'This is not part of this position.' He took out everything I was most passionate about, and set it to the side." He left in the job description the tasks serving the needs of the deacon, as well as responsibilities to provide programming for women.

When a person experiences micro-aggressions, including experiences of invalidation, they may not perceive the bias, but still experience the consequences. Although Ruth recognized the experiences as unfair and difficult, she saw each as a separate incident, and shrugged off the notion of gender playing a role. In my analysis, I saw these behaviors as part of a pattern where the "perpetrators might have intended no offense" (Offermann, Basford, Graebner, Basu DeGraaf, & Jaffer, 2013, p. 376), but nonetheless caused Ruth pain and contributed to "devaluing [her] identity membership" as leader, and "minimizing [her] importance or relevance" (p. 376) to parish ministry. Ruth told me she considers exiting professional ministry through retirement in the near future. She said she intends to lead in the parish, but believes severing her formal employment relationship may allow her to feel more accountable to the "mission rather than maintenance of the parish."

The examples of subtle bias experienced by these women suggest micro-aggressions in varied forms contributed to their meaning making. Whether recognized and reflected upon or

not, these experiences required the LEM to make sense of them in order to remain in leadership. Through meaning making experiences of story-telling and reflexive practice Chris, Anne, and others found paths to overcome the bias. For Kelly and Ruth, the challenges brought about by bias raised questions about their place in parish leadership without diminishing their commitment to sharing their gifts in service to mission. Both consider leaving the professional field of parish ministry. Neither of these women indicated walking away from their call to serve God's people as an option. Instead, they would find avenues to respond beyond church employment.

### **Mary and Martha in the Mission**

“Perhaps no passage of Scripture better describes the conflict we feel as women than the one we find in the gospel of Luke...We've all felt the struggle. We want to worship like Mary, but the Martha inside keeps bossing us around” (Weaver, 2000, p. 2). As discussed earlier, these women LEMs referenced the gospel story of Mary and Martha on retreat where conversations over meals provided for multiple interpretations. Weaver's (2000) popular theology on Mary and Martha attended to the struggle, but paid particular attention to Luke 10:42 where Jesus said Mary “has chosen the better part” when she chose to be at his feet rather than working to serve the guests in their home. Weaver (2000) identified this as the moment when Jesus “swept away centuries of chauvinism and bias, tradition and ritual,” and where “women were no longer to be on the outside looking in when it came to spiritual matters” (p. 54). On the other hand, when I was part of a study group that read this book a number of years ago, one young woman in the group made a different point. She wondered whether male church leaders ever interpreted the “better part” as passivity in order to justify excluding women from decision-making.

### **Complex Double Bind**

In my reflection and analysis, the scriptural persons of Mary and Martha became symbolic of what I saw as a complex double bind. Webster New World Dictionary (2010) defines a double bind as occurring when “a person is faced with contradictory demands or expectations, so that any action taken will appear to be wrong.” This complex double bind involved not only contradictions about being female and being a leader, but also about being a female leader navigating the tensions between a divine mission and human leadership.

Mary and Martha represent multiple facets of a woman LEMs leadership challenge. On the one hand, Mary seen as docile, obedient, and attentive to Jesus represents an expectation of leadership conforming to the will of a pastor or bishop. However, Mary, the woman who chose to put the anxiety of the world second to the Christ, also represents a commitment to leading in the *Imago Dei*, guiding others to know and serve as Jesus does. Martha, too, is complex. She represents the concerns of human leadership – the need to tend, to teach, to work so the whole human community can receive Jesus, but Martha, in scripture was also unafraid to challenge, to question, and to demand acknowledgment. Mary and Martha, apart and together, represent a complex double bind of women’s leadership in Catholic parishes.

The experiences described by the women LEMs in my research contain all of the tension associated with Mary and Martha leadership, but at the heart of the tension is the internal struggle to make sense of leading as a woman. These LEMs expressed deep devotion to the Church’s mission, but also a deep desire for Church’s leadership to incorporate the voice and experience of women. Ruth talked about coming to terms with being a woman and leader in the Church at her individual interview.

I look at where all the decisions are made, where the vision is set forth, the documents that are written to support church teachings, and how that's lived out,

it's all male dominated. I just don't see that many women's voices in the process... I cannot use my being a woman in the Church as an excuse for not exercising the gifts that God has given me. All I have to do is look back in Church history and see all of the women who let their light shine in so many ways that I can't use that as an excuse. I still have to just be who I am and what I'm called to be.

Pam described herself as a more traditionally Catholic, but she felt some of the same struggle. Her concern stemmed from an experience of male parish leaders – priest and lay – “being so worried about our bills, yet they are not worried about ministry...when they put that as the last thing on the list, they are harming the mission.” Pam believed, as a woman in ministerial leadership, she needed to make sure her partners in parish leadership keep the mission in view. Laurie also saw her leadership role as advancing the mission, with or without the pastor. The pastor has “not talked about any of these trends of discipleship. We've never had that conversation at staff but yet, [he] wants cheeks in the seats,” but Laurie said she pushes on “being a voice in the wilderness” calling those who serve with her “to attend to the mission and not just to the numbers.”

These women leaders expressed deep care for divine mission, but they also cared about how the mission manifests itself in human action. Their engagement in the human mission of the Church reflected communal characteristics of leadership “which are ascribed more strongly to women than men” and are “described primarily as a concern with the welfare of other people” (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 783). This would include Martha like activities such as teaching, nurturing, supporting, guiding, and tending responsibilities often found in the ministry assignments of these LEMs.

Chris's leadership, reflective of a complex Martha role involved not only tasks associated with planning funerals— scripture selection, meal volunteers, worship aids, but also community hospitality, and sensitivity to the tensions within families. In this role, she is also Mary, listening

to their needs before creating a response. Chris described these as the “intangible” parts of ministry she does to “give peace and create community.” Anne also provides Mary and Martha leadership when a family experiences death, and says, “This kind of leadership requires a lot of time. It takes a lot of listening, a lot of being with somebody ...and I think women do that in a way many men don’t.” Diane expressed a similar idea when talking about leadership in faith formation as being both organizational and pastoral in nature. She further speculated, “Sometimes as women, we shoot ourselves in the foot” because priests know “we’re willing to go the extra mile and to do more” to care for the needs of parish members “even if it is outside the scope of our jobs.”

They assumed, as woman LEMs, they must embrace the complex double bind, fulfilling care responsibilities, planning with efficiency and effectiveness, and advocating mission based priorities. This assumption informed the meaning of their leadership. On the one hand, as disciples and leaders in the name of Christ, others expect them to be assertive, vocal, and take risks to advance the mission. On the other, they are also “expected to be nice, caretaking, and unselfish” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 649).

The discovery of this Mary/Martha tension suggested I look at their experiences through a lens of a traditional double bind, where a mismatch exists between “conventionally feminine qualities and the qualities of leadership” (p. 66). Eagly and Carli (2003) contended women typically need to find ways to authentically balance agentic leadership qualities more often attributed to men, and communal leadership qualities typically attributed to women. “Easing this dilemma of role incongruity requires female leaders behave extremely competently while reassuring others that they conform to expectations concerning appropriate female behavior” (p.



825). The challenge to simultaneously be Mary and be Martha was evident in the experiences of these women.

### **Communal and Agentic Tensions**

As described in Chapter 4, Kelly's commitment to mission centered squarely on the needs of children and families. Her articulated leadership praxis included both agentic, as well as communal attributes she believed necessary to respond to the needs of children and families. Her commitment and desire to care for them reflected communal qualities of leadership, as does her willingness to adapt programs and schedules to meet the needs of both families and parish leaders.

I do that with volunteers all the time. I don't try to beat them up. I know when they're calling with a conflict or whatever it's not well I'm just going to screw with Kelly tonight. There is a woman who helps out whenever she can, but she also has two special needs kids at home. Her best intention is that she's going to be there, but I might get that text message that says I can't be there...I can't exclude her. I make it work.

Kelly believed others view her care for and protection of children and families exercised in program development, pastoral care, and adaptable programing as positive leadership attributes. She described a male co-worker as introducing her to others as a "fierce advocate for children and families." Kelly acknowledged the intent of his description as positive, but also knew when she acted beyond her assigned roles questioning or proposing change in the parish to prevent the "needs and safety of kids from being secondary to the budget," she faced social and professional disapproval.

In the context of Kelly's other experiences, the term "fierce advocate" by the male co-worker could represent another micro-aggression. Often, "women who attempt to assert authority ... encounter a resistive, *backlash* reaction that reduces their ability to achieve influence over others" (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 649). Describing Kelly to others in this manner may

actually serve, intentionally or unintentionally, to damage her role as leader. Perceptions of her agentic leadership qualities, like problem identification and direct communication, as well as her skills as a public advocate contributed to her identification as “Kelly the bitch.” Her experiences as an advocate for the protection of children from clergy sexual abuse highlighted the challenge of leading when she faces conflicting expectations.

Through previous public advocacy on issues related to the protection of children, Kelly established relationships with a number of public figures including journalists. Previously, she spoke to the press about efforts to protect children in parishes. When local and national media broke news about a local diocesan cover-up of sexual abuse allegations, Kelly’s media connections reached out to her for comment. “As somebody who works with kids and has worked with kids ... in the Church and out, for me the only ethical thing I could do was speak, because otherwise I would be condoning these actions.” Kelly chose to speak to one well-respected news outlet. Kelly’s pastor was out of town when she gave the interview and they were both out of town the day the article containing her comments went to press. “I was quoted as saying that clearly the system is broken...not exactly a revelation.” The article also reported on the priest at the center of the controversy who once served at the parish where Kelly worked.

Upon return to the office, Kelly sought out the pastor and asked him if they “needed to have a conversation about this” referencing her remarks to the press. The pastor both dismissed her and chastised her saying, “I’m going to chalk it up to you being out of town” and “Sometimes you love to put fuel on the fire.” She described herself as furious because he dismissed the importance of her role and his in protecting children.

Really! Really! This is what you think? You son of a buck! I told him I was going to protect children no matter what...I think my challenge has been this specifically, how little I feel our Church leaders have spoken out...I tell everybody we [her parish] have zero degrees of separation [from perpetrators].

There is no way for me to stay here if I'm not speaking out and if that becomes a problem for [the pastor] then this is going to be a problem, because I won't be silent about it. I can't see how he would want somebody working with kids who just poo-poops the issue as not a big deal.

Kelly's experiences substantiated the importance of mission and purpose in navigating the double bind for women leaders. "Anchoring in purpose enables women to redirect their attention toward shared goals and to consider who they need to be and... focus on behaving in ways that advance the purposes for which they stand" (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 66). Leveraging both her communal and agentic leadership attributes, Kelly remained committed to her leadership mission, advocating for and protecting children and families both in and out of church employment settings. The particular parish or ministry setting has changed over the years, but her commitment to her interpretation of the mission remains constant.

Diane's struggle with the double bind came following the birth of her third child, when she encountered a dangerous element of double bind in the work place. It begins with the "myth of separate worlds" (Hesse-Biber & Lee, 2005, p. 221), which assumes a person's professional life and family life can and should be completely separate from each other. This myth, partnered with the myth of competency, where "self-worth, relevance, and meaning reside in external definitions and assurances of being competent in all that one does" (Galindo, 2003, p. 18), often overwhelms a leader. For women in particular "trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 122).

When Diane's infant son became acutely ill, she felt the pull from every side. Her son needed her, but so did parish families. She struggled because she cared so deeply about both her family and about her parish. Diane wanted to keep her home concerns separate from her workday, but found it difficult. When home, she was aware of calls and e-mails needing a

response and when at work, she worried about her son. Her pastor attempting to support her said, “Your family is your priority” and often would ask her, “What are you doing here? Your family needs you.” The pastor’s encouragement reflected his commitment as a leader to provide a healthy work environment. He had no way of knowing that his encouragement contributed to Diane’s self-imposed double bind.

While I appreciated the support, it was also very hard for me. I got into the position sometimes where, depending on what’s going on ... If I’m at home, I feel like I should be at work. If I’m at work, I feel like I should be at home. It is hard to balance that out and figure out, “Okay, when do I just need to be mom and when do I need to be a minister?”

For Diane the issue was more than work-life balance, it was about her identity both as a leader and as a mother. “Integrating leadership into one’s core identity is particularly challenging for women, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 63) women lead. For Diane, whose authentic leadership style motivated her to “bring the richness and the best of my personal witness into ministry,” leadership required seeing herself as capable both at home and at work.

Other LEMs did not share detailed examples, but did express an awareness of the tension between agentic and communal leadership styles. They articulated fear or concern about what would happen if they stepped over a perceived boundary, demonstrating traits more associated with men. Women “often have good cause to be reluctant to advocate for their own interests because doing so can easily backfire” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 45).

Chris wondered aloud about potential ramifications of standing up to Richard, who disvalued her and other women on staff, and Anne wondered if she was a good leader because she resigned her role at the clinic without a fight. Sandy, in particular, seemed acutely aware of what could happen in her leadership setting.

I do think there are times, as a woman, if I were to stand up and say that something was wrong, because this is what I truly believe and all my schooling backs it up. People take it different ways because I'm a woman, versus if I was a man. If I stand up and I'm going to stand behind what I said, somehow in some cases, excuse my language, but people will call me a bitch because I did not bow to what they wanted, and yet if I was a man I wonder what their reaction would be that I'm standing behind what I believe.

This concern resonates with research suggesting when women “act in ways that are inconsistent” with perceived stereotypes “their performance goes through additional scrutiny and [they are] more likely to be criticized than men” (Catalyst, 2007, p. 13).

Some of the women LEMs indicated navigating the tension between agentic and communal leadership brought rewards to their ministerial leadership. When Laurie did the unexpected, speaking up to her pastor instead of leaving the parish, she turned the tide on their relationship. She does not think her approach would have worked the same way for a man. The pastor did not expect directness from a woman. Even after her experience of blatant bias, Pam, who described herself as “a strong vocal woman,” is certain she makes a difference in her parishes. Her ability to lead as both “banker and mother” she says allowed her to adapt to a wide variety of situations including the ability to challenge other parish leaders “not to put bricks ahead of Jesus.”

Elizabeth’s transition to director of liturgy following a male director suggests gender expectations related to agentic and communal leadership characteristics can present opportunity as well as challenge. Elizabeth’s description of her leadership attributes included both communal and agentic characteristics. Years of teaching honed her ability to work with people’s individual talents and affirm what they brought to music. She also described herself as being organized, direct, and visionary. She readily took concerns to the pastor, asked other leaders for feedback, and responded to criticism professionally.

Having worked in the parish for over three years and in the diocese for an additional 10 years, Elizabeth's skills and capabilities were well known to the pastor and community, yet when the previous director left, they offered Elizabeth only an interim position. Elizabeth suspected they wanted to see if this "retired elementary school teacher" could meet the expectations required of the job. She replaced a man considered to possess tremendous musical talent and well-regarded in professional circles locally and nationally. Following him, even in the interim, gave Elizabeth pause because "some in my world of liturgical music would say I'm not in fact properly credentialed." Women commonly discount their own credentials, particularly when they "evaluate themselves in front of other people or in stereotypically male domains" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 37). Elizabeth accepted the interim position in part because she knew from another parish experience "credentials did not guarantee good leadership."

Elizabeth's well-planned use of both mission and community, as described in chapter 4, provided a foundation for a successful transition of leadership benefitting not only her position, but also the ministries she led. Personal communication and invitation to collaboration demonstrated her communal capacity, while her use of the parish mission statement to identify how together they would measure success revealed her agentic leadership strengths. In a situation ripe with opportunity for failure, Elizabeth creatively leveraged agentic and communal leadership skills for a successful transition. Three months into her interim role the parish offered her the director's position without a public posting.

Elizabeth acknowledged attributes she brought to leadership positively influenced the parish. Her smile and tone revealed pride when she reported members of the music community saying, "You do this job way different than he did, but I think we sing better because you don't glare at us and don't scorn at us but you smile at us." Her experiences support research

indicating for women “to be considered as instrumentally competent as men, perceivers must be given clear evidence of her greater ability or superior performance compared to male counterparts” (Eagly & Carli, 2003, p. 819).

### **Women and Mission**

Instead of defining themselves in relation to gender stereotypes – whether rejecting stereotypically masculine approaches because they feel inauthentic or rejecting stereotypically feminine ones for fear that they convey incompetence – female leaders can focus on behaving in ways that advance the purposes for which they stand (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 66).

The experiences of bias and double bind contained in this chapter suggests purpose plays an important role in the leadership of women, as do other stories of mission told in this dissertation. For most of these LEMs, they connect their decision to cast their leadership gifts into parish ministry to their understanding of mission, and mission gives meaning to their leadership. In my interviews and observations, I came to understand that these women interpret mission through a complex reflexive process that did not isolate or compartmentalize their identity as leader and minister from their understanding of self as woman, wife, mother, worker, colleague, friend, etc. They sought to make sense of leadership as women through integrating their experiences, good and bad, into a fuller understanding of self.

For some women this reflexive process allowed them to create a narrative empowering their leadership practice. Sandy consistently brought her joys and challenges as a woman leading to intentional reflection. This intentionality did not eliminate challenges, but it allowed her to shape leadership reflective of her perceptions of divine mission and a practice of leadership responsive to the value she places on authenticity and integrity. Pam’s commitment to relational leadership as central to mission, as well as previous experiences of bias in banking, allowed her to overcome wounds inflicted by a co-worker. A broader view of her life and her

leadership, informed by relationships with priests and parishioners led her to a narrative that strengthened rather than weakened her commitment to lead in the mission. “Parishioners need to see women who share leadership, not those who control it.”

Reflexive practice, for other women LEMs, did not initially consider gender in the process. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence, Chris looked at everything except gender to explain Richard’s behavior. Failure to incorporate what her retreat colleagues and I saw as clear gender bias contributed to Chris’s hesitancy to claim her leadership identity. The convergence of new expectations of her leadership in the absence of a pastor with exposure to new points of view through participation in this research shifted the meaning she gave her leadership, as well as began to change her practices as a leader. Although she has yet to directly address Richard regarding his behavior, Chris no longer lets his opinions influence her decisions and claims her “place at the table” as a leader co-responsible with the pastor.

Kelly and Ruth used participation in the research as part of a reflexive process discerning their futures in professional ministry. Ruth, approaching an age common for retirement, weighed the benefits of employed leadership, with the freedoms of parishioner leadership. I suspect she finds it easier to frame her choice around the choice to retire rather than uncover, for a second time in her life, the issues of gender and value in the Church. Although Kelly identified a number of very challenging circumstances in ministry, including overt and subtle bias, she always shifted her attention back to protection and advocacy of the vulnerable. She pushes through anger and hurt by claiming with pride the labels used by others to limit and demean her leadership. Kelly looks for and finds affirmation of her struggle through professional connections beyond the Church. Media portrayal of Kelly as a valuable and credible advocate,



as well as support of colleague's in other parishes, confirmed Kelly's convictions even when leaders at the parish disappointed her.

These examples provide evidence of mission expressed in story, metaphor, and symbol, suggesting not only a commitment to a divine mission expressed in human action, but to a practice of leadership reflective of John Paul II's *feminine genius*. This relatively new theological term, feminine genius, begins with an understanding of the human person as a reflection of the *Imago Dei*, with all individuals and community of persons created equal in dignity and grace. A person lives out their genius through integration of the self as an individual, as one called to discover and live a vocation, and as a person in communion with others and God. The term genius, in this case does not denote the presence of gifts beyond the norm, but rather recognition of each person and community of persons as possessing a "distinctive character or spirit" (in Merriam Webster online, 2016).

The term feminine genius, in its broadest sense, seeks to acknowledge that through their embodied experiences of life "women occupy a place in thought and action, which is unique and decisive" (John Paul II, 1995, para. 99). In this theological approach, reflective of a personalist humanist philosophy, each woman brings both personal and communal experiences of being a person and of being a woman to the whole of life (Allen, 2003). This particular theological anthropology makes God the measure of humanity and the genius of persons and of community are seen as "a participation in the *communication of Love* whose goal is— for the self and the beloved 'other' — a participation in the *communion of Love*" (Schumacher, 2003, p. xii). This theological approach views authentic personhood as "concerned with the interior dignity of one's own person and at the same time dedicated to the common good of the freedom and the expansion of the other person" (Allen, 2003, p. 281). In this view, women exercise their

personal and common genius, reflective of the *Imago Dei*, in order to contribute to the mission of Christ. Application of feminine genius to the experiences of women in this study does not serve as preferred theological anthropology for women's leadership, but only as a lens to explore the significance being women had on the meaning they gave their leadership.

My observations of these women, as well as my analysis of their experiences, suggests their genius, exercised as Catholic women leading in parishes, is both personal and communal. They certainly give of themselves, but they know they give into a community where self-sacrifice redounds and becomes a gift then also received. Although not sought or welcomed, challenges as women and as leaders, become opportunities for grace and for change. For each of the 12, success and challenge, joy and pain coexist with faith and hope allowing each to see her leadership as contributing to a greater good.

Elizabeth's successful transition occurred not because she consciously chose to balance agentic and communal leadership strategies, but because she committed herself to do what she needed to "in order to help people find a way to God" through liturgy. Anne resigned her role at the clinic, not out of fear, but out of trust. She believed other like-minded people would attend to the clinic while she continued to foster the mission in her parish leadership "connecting people as a nurse to resources or connecting people to each other" and in doing so connecting them to the love of Jesus. Sandy told her story of moral weakness not out of guilt or shame, but because she believes a redeemed leader is a more authentic leader.

Ruth's passion to care for those without shelter arose not out of the need to challenge the pastor's priorities, but out of a "feeling that I had to put action to my beliefs. I couldn't just say we are concerned about people who are in need. I had to do something about it." This

compelled her to move beyond taking care of small needs at the parish and to venture into a less comfortable public leadership role.

I am a strange person to have be a leader because I'm such an introvert. I think it's the inner drive that carried me forward... I found myself actually going out to churches doing presentations, and inviting them to be a part of it... We now host homeless families with children 10 to 12 weeks during the year.

The homeless ministry initiative provided a leadership environment where Ruth integrated her personal convictions with her public ministry. From this experience, she gained a deeper understanding of her own visionary leadership capacity.

I learned vision is so very important... We need something that's succinct and puts us all in a common mission, because a common mission drives us to action... I have brought both an ability and an inability to get other people to catch the vision. My failure was a welcoming initiative, but then I came to see that it was part of the whole lack of vision... At [the parish] that is where my biggest passion as leader is right now. The whole discipleship movement in the parish – I'm the person carrying it forward.

For these LEMs, the decision to be a woman who leads in a Catholic parish required them to not only perform specific tasks, but to “give voice to the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful” (Brennan, 2007, p. 18) so human action gives witness to the faith. Leadership, like all other calls, reflects the *Imago Dei*, the image of God understood as Trinity. The Trinity– Father, Son, and Spirit– is a union of co-equal expressions of God into the world. Each works in communion with the others for the good of God and of all of God’s creation. That is the power of God. The genius of persons, personal and communal, works towards the same goal. For these LEMs, faithful leadership as women is an expression God’s power lived into the world for good of all.

Leadership, reflective of Trinity, makes demands on the person of the leader different from that of the culture. It demands integrity of spirit and action, as well as openness to mercy. To act rightly in accord with the Gospel, but in a spirit of mercy requires a great deal of prayerful

reflection on the part of a leader. As evidenced in this dissertation, these women LEMs made authenticity a principle value of leadership, but like all people, they struggle in the face of imperfection and sin. Some women LEMs struggled to see where their own failure to lead in spirit prevented the full exercise of leadership in the parish. Chris's unwillingness to address Richard's behavior perpetuates a disregard for women's leadership in the parish, and Kelly's unchecked assumptions about the motivations of men in positional authority, limits her openness to seeing mercy as a legitimate leadership response in the face of moral failure. For others, wisdom came from confronting a lack of integrity in their own choices or in the choices of others. Anne's reflections on her resignation from the clinic provided her with perspective on both her own leadership and that of the diocese.

As a researcher and a Church leader, I saw evidence of their genius as women leaders. They embraced the complexity of their call to ministerial leadership. They exercised their genius as baptized persons called and sent, capable and gifted, leading towards a truth that cannot be fully explained in a culture uncomfortable with divine mystery. These women LEMs experienced their leadership as women of faith, and understood their experience as different from celibate ordained men, but only cautiously described those differences. However, they do not feel alone in leadership. In addition to the 39,000 others in the U.S. who share the joy and struggle of lay ecclesial leadership, these 12 women trust that God is also present working with and through them. Ruth spoke with assurance about the presence of God in the leadership of women in the Church. "We are not alone. It is not all on us. It is the power of God working in us, and the Church, and it is greater than we can even ask or imagine."

## CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings of the study, a consideration of its strengths and limitations, and recommendations for the fields of ministry and leadership, as well as suggestions for future research. I approached this research with three goals. First, I sought to hear the lived experiences of leadership from women LEMs in order to contribute scholarship deepening an understanding of the ministerial leadership of women in the Catholic Church. Second, I desired to know how they gave meaning to their leadership, and to identify themes common to their meaning making. Finally, I hoped to provide the women LEMs in my study with an opportunity to give voice to their experiences and in doing so enrich their understanding of themselves as leaders.

Phenomenological research methodologies, including focus group interviews in a retreat environment and individual interviews after the retreat, provided rich descriptions and valuable insights into the experiences and meaning making of their leadership. Tempering this methodology with grounded theory, I created space for each participant's experiences, beliefs, and perspectives to be reflected in both data collection and in the communication of results. Further incorporation of a feminist methodological approach allowed me to acknowledge the dynamic relationship between researcher and participant. In this relationship, their shared wisdom becomes not only part of my dissertation, but also becomes part of me and shapes my own ministerial leadership.

### **Summary of Findings**

My intent in selecting feminist phenomenology informed by grounded theory was not to provide a new theory on women in leadership. Instead, I intended to create an opportunity for women LEMs, an underrepresented population in research, to have their experiences as women

and as leaders be included in scholarship on leadership. This approach allowed me to follow the data and discover shared meaning making activities among these 12 women LEMs who differ in age, experience, education, and fields of expertise. The meaning they ascribed to their own leadership was intensely personal, but all twelve women sought to make sense of their leadership through the filters of mission, story, and gender.

### **Mission**

Through the lens of mission, three general conclusions can be drawn regarding the meaning of leadership for these 12 women LEMs. First, a unique and personal interpretation of divine mission, developed through their particular experiences of call, discernment, and transformation contributed to the meaning they gave leadership, as well as how they exercised meaningful leadership in parish ministry. All of these LEMs identified a relationship with God, which shaped their purpose for being in and staying in ministerial leadership. Faith gives meaning to the leadership of these women.

Second, relationship as a characteristic essential to mission shaped both the practice and purpose of their ministerial leadership. Ten of the 12 LEMs commonly used the word relational to describe one of the central characteristics of their approach to ministerial leadership. Relational leadership theory provided a frame to explore their challenges identifying as leaders and navigating the accompanying tensions associated with power and authority. A few of the LEMs struggled with using leadership as a descriptor, not because it did not fit, but because they thought it created an unnecessary barrier between them and the lay faithful they served. Others saw identifying as leader as witnessing to the appropriate and legitimate role of leadership among all the laity. For a number of these women relationship served as a strategy for empowerment and engagement of other parish leaders resulting in greater focus on the divine

mission. Relational leadership, for most of the women in this study, also raised awareness about the boundaries between the personal and professional self. They recognized inspiring and leading others in the divine mission required blurring the lines between the professional and personal to some degree. As Anne said, “It’s all relational. My call and my work start with a relationship with Jesus who is love, and moves to the people I serve in that love.”

An additional finding on the role of mission in meaning making resulted from analysis of these women LEMs’ experiences applying authentic leadership theory. In particular, the characteristics of self-awareness, consistency, and ethical practice provided a means to see how their interpretation of the mission manifested itself in the practice of leadership. Often using the descriptors of authentic or integrity, nine of the women LEMs in this study expected these attributes to be present not only in their own leadership practice, but in the organizational structure of the parish as well. They not only expressed concern and frustration when the parish or its other parish leaders lacked authenticity, but these LEMs also provided examples of times their own actions to address an injustice meant taking personal and professional risks. A view of meaningfulness through the lens of authenticity illuminated the commitment these women have to using the divine mission to establish the priorities of their leadership practice.

Even though the nature and practice of leadership manifested itself differently for each woman, each derived essential elements of the meaning and purpose of their leadership from a concept of mission. They held in common experiences of call, discernment, and ongoing transformation as ministerial leaders, but each had unique experiences of God and Church, as well as differing gifts resulting in a personal praxis of leadership. Experiencing leadership within the context of personal and professional relationships, as well as a vast array of authentic

leadership events, further formed and transformed the meaning of their leadership. Regardless of the particular differences in assigned meaning of mission, the mission mattered to each LEM.

### **Storied Leaders**

Feminist phenomenology using focus groups, individual interviews, and observation on retreat not only provided dense data, it also provided rich stories and complex metaphors revealing another common element in the meaning making of these 12 women. The study showed these women used experiences of life, ministry, and leadership transformed into story not only to convey meaning, but also to make meaning of their leadership. They weaved together soul-making stories gathered from all corners of their life and leadership to explain why the mission mattered and why they chose ministerial leadership. Each woman told a unique set of stories and through the telling shared not only factual accounts of events, but also shared how her experience became part of the meaning she gave to her ministerial leadership. Kelly knowingly tied her leadership to her mother's struggles and rejection. Chris beautifully described how her losses and struggles as a young adult gave birth to a ministerial leadership where she equates pastoral care with family intimacy. Sandy told stories about challenge early in her career to create a leadership praxis steeped in integrity and authenticity.

Stories of success and transformation, along with stories of childhood pain and failure gave birth to rich metaphors used by them and those hearing them to explain their understanding of their leadership. They also used them to explain their relationships with those they lead and those who lead with them. Metaphors from these stories like "place at the table," "heat kills the yeast," and "the glue holding it together" spoke to not only a particular event, but to reveal tightly held values about inclusion, empowerment, and responsibility central to meaning making. The symbols of leadership they brought on retreat became avenues to explain in image and story



how a particular person or event shaped their leadership or how the traditions and theology of the Church found their way into the meaning of leadership for particular women.

Some LEMs chose to share a crucible story of leadership on retreat. These deeply personal stories of struggle or crisis not only transformed their leadership, but also required an intentional decision to embrace pain rather than walk away from ministerial leadership. These stories, including the resolution of the crisis pointed to deeply held beliefs about the role of the divine in their leadership. The choice to share these stories on retreat and to allow their use in this dissertation speaks to the importance these women placed on story as a means of communicating meaning.

Story, with accompanying symbols and metaphors, was the primary avenue for expressing the meaning of their leadership and the tool they used to integrate new experiences, ideas, beliefs, and perceptions into their leadership practice. Through storied leadership, these 12 women LEMs expressed the values at the heart of their leadership and service. Not all of the stories told contained neat and tidy endings, but rather many served as dynamic accounts of their ongoing leadership narrative ready to be told and retold in light of new experiences and understanding.

### **Women Leading**

The decision to limit this dissertation to the experiences of women LEMs grew out of my own experience that somehow being a woman informed my leadership in the Church. The inclusion of a grounded theory approach cautioned me not to draw conclusions or assign theological understanding to the experiences of these 12 women LEMs based upon my own experience and to avoid focusing on particular theological points of view. My findings, although not free from my interpretation, do not reflect bias based upon my experience or preferred

theological frame. Before I began my research, I considered I might categorize these women as feminist or traditionalists. As indicated in Chapter 6, application of scholarship on women and leadership forced me to step beyond simple binary categories. Complex analysis engaging scriptural story, social research, and grounded theory to explore how 12 women give meaning to their leadership led to three conclusions.

First, experiences of bias overt and subtle informed both the practice of leadership and the value they gave their leadership. Those with prior awareness of an experience as biased pointed out the presence of bias in the telling of the story and articulated how it affected their leadership. For example, Laurie and Chris both knew about overt bias related to wages and preferential options for male LEMs and explained how and why they dismissed it. Those aware of overt bias were not necessarily aware of subtler biases like micro-invalidation and micro-aggression, but the experiences still informed their meaning making. Ruth for example, although critical of women's exclusion from leadership in the larger Church, did not recognize a pattern of behavior on the part of the pastor and deacon reinforcing her sense of exclusion.

In some cases, this study served as an opportunity for reflexive practice for those previously unaware of bias present in their leadership environment. For the first time, some of these women recognized and questioned their experience through a new lens because of their participation in the study. When others on retreat made them aware of bias, they were able to reflect on the experience differently in the interview and in follow-up communication. The recognition of gender bias as a factor in Chris's relationship with Richard, for example, freed her from self-doubt around her leadership and allowed her to take "her place at the table." Sandy said she no longer assumes any negative behavior is "simply personal." Now she "thinks to ask if this could about being a woman."

Analysis using women's leadership theory also suggests these 12 LEMs experienced a complex gender double bind effect, and perceive the double bind as creating both challenge and opportunity for them in their leadership. The tension between agentic and communal leadership responsibilities contributed to challenges related to work life balance, role of personal witness in leadership, and courage to advocate for themselves and others.

Many of these women identified circumstances where two or more sets of expectations coexisted and they needed to choose their response. Diane's pastor, whom she saw as supportive and unbiased, unknowingly contributed to her guilt in trying to balance the demands of parenting and leadership. On the other hand, some of these women saw opportunity in the tension. Stepping out in leadership in unexpected ways brought rewards to the individual and the parish. Elizabeth's pride in how well she transitioned into primary leadership using a balance of communal and agentic strategies spoke to the value many placed on being both Mary and Martha in leadership.

Finally, although these women intentionally worked to avoid stereotypes or generalizing any attributes of leadership as belonging to men or belonging to women, they did recognize their experience as women leading in a male-dominated hierarchy shaped how they viewed and exercised their leadership in the parish. Some spoke with enthusiasm and pride about how motherhood and family increased their sensitivity and contributed to a different kind of credibility than celibate priests possess. Laurie and Jean in particular drew attention to the ways their lives were similar to those they led. Others, including Sandy, Kelly, and Ruth, identified with how their experiences as women in the Church and culture made them more aware of oppression and the exclusion of others in society. They saw themselves as more attuned to leadership that protects and defends, as well as empowers and engages the faithful. None of the

women in this study took an essentialist approach to gender, but they did provide evidence suggesting the experience of being a woman created meaning for their leadership in the Church.

### **Strengths and Limits**

Through the articulated goals of this study, I intended to contribute meaningful scholarship on women's leadership in the Church. In this section, I will first identify the strengths of the study, which generally lie in its methodology and its contribution to understanding of elements contributing to meaning making. I will then identify the limitations of the study with particular emphasis on the limits to its generalizability.

#### **Strengths**

**Design.** The design of this study contributed not only to the richness of data collection, but also holds potential for future research as well. A retreat setting for the focus groups preceding individual interviews, as described in Chapter 3, assisted in strengthening the study in three specific ways. First, the quality and depth of sharing by the participants in the focus groups benefitted from being in a retreat environment. LEMs generally see retreats as valuable opportunities that place importance on growth and expect confidentiality. I observed this to be true at both retreats. Second, in the group experiences the women on retreat assisted in deepening the conversation asking questions not on my list and soliciting examples to better understand someone's point. The women built upon each other's ideas and respectfully challenged each other's assumptions enriching the data and contributing to an overall sense of ownership in my research. Since concluding the data collection phase of my research, I have had opportunity to be in professional gatherings with eight of the woman from my cohort. All initiated conversation about my research. All 12 responded to requests for additional information in a thorough and timely manner. Finally, the retreat provided an opportunity for

them to know and trust me as both a LEM and as a researcher, which laid the groundwork for fruitful individual interviews.

An additional strength includes an already acknowledged role of grounded theory to both design and analysis of data gathered. The principles of the approach, particularly letting the data drive the theoretical analysis and recognition of the researcher as part of the study, challenged me to trust where the data led and prompted me to be intentional about my role in the study. Grounded theory as approach provided me a “route to see beyond the obvious and a path to reach imaginative interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181). Without following the data, the story of Mary and Martha would not have led me to see the leadership experiences of these women through the lens of a complex double bind.

A final strength of the design lies in its reproducibility. Use of this design to explore the meaning LEMs from other parts of the country, male LEMs, or LEMs leading ministries outside of parishes ascribe to leadership could bring benefit to the field. Comparative studies of women from other faith traditions could use this research design to consider differences in meaning making. It could also be adapted to explore how women in secular leadership environments ascribe meaning to their leadership.

**Contributions.** Beyond design, this study of how 12 women ascribe meaning to their leadership in the Catholic Church contributes to knowledge on two fronts. First, this qualitative study contributes to Pope Francis’ call to investigate further the role of women in Church leadership. As identified in Chapter 2’s review of literature, little qualitative research exists on women who lead in parishes or parish clusters with pastors present, and none of the reviewed research explored the meaning women LEMs gave their leadership. This study contributes solid

findings about a small but representative body of women LEMs that begins by acknowledging the abundance of leadership they provide.

Although not specifically written as practical theological scholarship, this dissertation provides new insight into how women LEMs interpret and integrate scripture and church tradition into their meaning making process. Not only do the findings suggest these women LEMs integrate their Catholic faith into their understanding of mission and story, but they also integrate their experiences as women who lead into their understanding resulting in a complex vocational commitment to leadership in the Church.

Second, this qualitative study directly addresses the value women LEMs place on their leadership. It assists in moving beyond a brief description of the field as having a feminine dimension to intentional consideration of how the experience of being a woman LEM informs leadership practice. The findings suggest these LEMs believe women have a genius to contribute to the leadership of the Church, and this leadership reflects their embodied experiences as women. This study also intentionally places the *Imago Dei* rather than ordination at the center of understanding how women envision and give meaning to their leadership. My findings suggest that the work of the USCCB, and scholars associated with the field, who have begun to consider how lay ecclesial leadership has changed since the promulgation of *Co-Workers* could draw wisdom from scholarship that gives voice to how women LEMs understand their leadership in light of the mission they embrace. This study contributes such scholarship.

Finally, the findings of this research offer new perspectives about the complex nature of leadership for women LEMs in Catholic parishes. Literature previously reviewed considered the leadership of LEMs from either a theological lens or a sociological lens. The analysis of the leadership experiences of these women LEMs allowing theology to inform social theory allowed

for a richer and more complex story of leadership to be revealed. The findings suggest these women LEMs experienced leadership as both a divine call and a human response. Limiting analysis to a single frame of analysis would have been a disservice to the women who participated in this study. Only through an incorporation of both fields of study was I able to make sense of how they make sense of leading in the Catholic Church.

### **Limitations**

Although this study makes contributions both in design and scholarship, it also contains certain limitations. Among those limits is the sample size used in the research. A cohort of 12 women, although sufficient for a phenomenological dissertation, did not produce enough data to draw generalizable conclusions regarding some themes initially identified. For example, initial coding suggested educational differences might have implications for the value they place on their leadership, but the small sample size prevented substantiation of this theme.

Another factor limiting the generalizability of the study was the geographic make-up of the group. Resources and time limited participant selection to a single state. I did diversify the state population by selecting woman from multiple dioceses with a variety of parish structures, and balanced the selection of participants to reflect urban, rural, and suburban locations. Even with this diversification, the findings fail to reflect the diversity of thought and experience present among women LEMs in the field nationally. Midwest culture, experiences of Catholicism, and leadership cannot fairly represent the experiences of women LEMs working in the rural south or among impoverished populations in large urban cities on either coast. In addition, although four of these women worked in parishes with ethnically diverse populations and one indicated marriage to non-White man, the inclusion of only White women limited the findings of the study. Replicated studies, including a more diverse population of women LEMs

from additional areas of the country, might lead to generalizable conclusions useful in dialogue on both women's leadership and parish life. As it stands, the conclusions of this study apply only to this particular population of 12 LEMs who practice their leadership in MN.

### **Recommendations**

This phenomenological study provided rich data revealing how the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of 12 women LEMs inform their ministerial practice. It further identified mission, story, and their experiences as women as significant to their meaning-making process. Future research could enrich and broaden the findings of this study. In addition, the research process, along with the findings, suggests avenues for application for the Church's leaders and for those who support and supervise women LEMs. I conclude this chapter and my dissertation with a heartfelt suggestion for women who lead both in and out of the Church.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

As mentioned earlier, the strengths and limitations of this study suggest paths for future research. Replicated studies with larger and more diverse representation of women LEMs would be necessary to contribute to generalizable knowledge about the leadership of women LEMs in parishes nationally. Diversity in geography would allow for comparison across diocesan structures, Catholic culture, and economic disparity. Future research would also benefit from the inclusion of non-White women LEMs particularly those who identify as Latina, Asian, and Black. These populations in the United States contribute substantially to the Catholic Church's growth in recent years. The inclusion of findings from a larger and more inclusive sample of LEMs would benefit future church documents on lay ecclesial ministry.

Future studies could also broaden the scope of research to include women LEMs employed outside of parish ministry. Burgeoning church ministries and apostolates providing



direct ministry to the poor, to immigrants, and youth employ women LEMs whose experiences of leadership deserve to be included in dialogue on women's leadership in the Church. Studies involving male LEMs would be beneficial in order to understand the unique challenges they face in ministerial settings. Capturing their experiences in research may provide indications on how to attract and retain non-ordained men in parish leadership.

A number of themes arose in analysis I consider beyond the scope of this study, but suggest beneficial avenues of study in the future. The first among these is the relationship between pastors and women LEMs. Surprisingly, the LEMs in this study did not generally identify the pastor as the source of overt gender bias, but the data did suggest the nature of the relationship substantially influenced the value women LEMs gave their leadership. Initial analysis suggested women LEMs lead either with or in spite of a pastor. Further research involving pastors or women LEMs and their pastors might contribute to scholarship beneficial to the formation of priests and LEMs or to human resource personnel providing assistance at the parish level.

An additional theme beyond the scope of this study, needing further investigation, involves the challenge of establishing a balance between work, life, and faith in the public eye. Although some have conducted research involving protestant pastors (Knight Johnson, 2012; Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003), I found no studies to address the implications of navigating these tensions as lay ecclesial ministers in the Catholic Church. A final area of future research beyond the scope of this study would be comparative research including women who left the field of lay ecclesial service. More than one of my participants left the field for a time and returned. In each case, it was associated with a decision to parent, but it made me wonder about the thousands of

women LEMs who left for other reasons. Qualitative research on the meaning making of this population might provide a glimpse into additional leadership challenges women LEMs face.

Finally, this study intentionally limited itself to women whose leadership focused on a particular field, and where the leadership environment was hierarchical by design. As I began to share the purpose and scope of my research in conversation with women outside of ministry, their interest in my study surprised me. Just after I completed collection of the data and was in the midst of analysis, I attended my high school class reunion. I found myself explaining my research to four women— the vice president of a financial firm, a lead engineer for a state department of transportation, a small business owner, and a LEM in a protestant congregation. Within minutes, the conversation shifted from my study of 12 women to a passionate 30-minute discussion on what they thought made their leadership meaningful to them and to others. This conversation suggests research with women in other professions on the meaning making of leadership could be beneficial to women and to their organizations. In my research, I identified a local opportunity for women to participate in programs exploring “authenticity, meaning, and purpose” (Women’s leadership community, 2017) in leadership, but no qualitative research that specifically addresses meaning making for women in leadership.

### **Application in the Field**

The conversation at my class reunion was one of about 10 casual conversations with groups of women inspiring me to consider how practical application of both my study design and findings could benefit the field of lay ecclesial ministry and women in leadership. In most of my conversations with women, who exercise leadership in either secular or religious settings, they wanted to know where they could join a conversation about meaning and leadership. In addition to these conversations, eight of the women involved in this study sought me out after their

interview to discuss how engagement in the study shifted their thinking about leadership. Two of the women asked me to have coffee with young women considering a career shift into lay ecclesial leadership. Both retreat groups, independent of me, initiated conversation about a reunion following my completion of this dissertation. The two groups want to meet each other and discuss how their leadership changed. All of this suggests women who lead need more opportunities to explore their leadership. Three recommendations come to mind – one directed to bishops and diocesan offices, two for those who supervise and support women LEMs. I conclude this dissertation with a fourth recommendation for women.

Bishops in the USA, both as a leadership body and as individual pastors of dioceses, have a responsibility to provide opportunities for the baptized to be heard on important matters. Code 213.3 in Canon Law says the faithful “have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church” (Canon Law Society of America, 2012). As the need for more diverse structuring of parishes grows and women LEMs provide more leadership in those structures, the importance for bishops to create opportunities for these women to be heard increases. If the Church, through its leaders, continues to articulate the need for the genius of women to be valued in decision-making, they will need to change the process of discernment to incorporate not only women with academic achievement, but also women whose genius has been informed by the experience of parish leadership. The genius of bishop, both as a decision-making body and as a pastor, needs to be informed by the real stories of women LEMs whose leadership places them in positions of engaging and accompanying the faithful in ways the ordained do not. I would recommend the USCCB consider incorporating an opportunity to hear and engage in conversation women LEMs who lead in parishes, as part of the discernment for

future documents on lay ecclesial ministry in hopes the next document might address the particular genius women LEMs bring to parish leadership.

On a local level, I have two suggestions for those who support and supervise women LEMs. First, I would recommend parishes allow LEMs to pursue regular opportunities for reflection and prayer independent of parish ministry. Policies in the diocese where I reside require priests and deacons to make an annual retreat and participate in ongoing spiritual formation. The requirement indicates the diocese values these activities as necessary for healthy pastoral leadership. None of the parish LEMs indicated their parish or diocese require them to do the same.

Freedom and resources to pursue these activities for LEMs in my study varied greatly. Only three LEMs in this study expressed certainty they could use work hours to attend a retreat. The others indicated they needed to use personal time or take vacation to go on retreat or attend a non-diocesan sponsored program for spiritual growth. Six carved out personal time on occasion, but four had not taken intentional time for these endeavors for more than five years. Less than half could count on parish financial resources for continuing formation and many sited low wages as a barrier to paying for their own spiritual formation.

Parishioners and other ministers count on women LEMs to be as spiritually fit as priests and deacons, and as this study shows the demands of ministry, although different from priests still create challenge and stress for the LEM. The women in this research cohort expressed the importance of taking time to pray about and discuss their ministerial leadership in a supportive and faithful environment. Parishes would benefit from having leaders, both ordained and lay, who regularly attended to their spiritual growth.

Freedom to attend to their spiritual growth as leaders is one need; the other need is to have opportunities accessible and affordable. In Minnesota, local Catholic universities offer some opportunities for both current students and alumni, and a number of independent Catholic apostolates make retreat and formation opportunities available to LEMs. Professional associations also provide limited opportunities for support and professional growth. Even with multiple offerings, access and affordability create barriers, at least for my research participants.

LEMes from outstate areas expressed difficulty arranging schedules to commute to urban centers or more distant retreat centers. For women LEMes with children, the fee for the retreat or spiritual formation opportunity is not their only expense. Childcare, transportation, and used vacation time all count in the cost. Two programs for ministerial support identified as “excellent” and “superb” by a couple of the LEMes in my cohort, require multiple gatherings over multiple years. Most of the women, however, found this degree of commitment intimidating and outside the scope of possibility given the challenges of work-life balance. Three women in my research cohort privately expressed concern about narrow ideologies present in some offerings. As one woman said, “I am not Catholic enough for them.”

I would encourage those who support LEMes through diocesan offices, professional associations, programs of higher education, and independent apostolates to enter into creative collaboration. I see value in working together to imagine new ways of providing opportunities for growth in ministerial leadership to more LEMes. Collaborations and partnerships, particularly ones that involve women LEMes in the planning, might create avenues to solve problems related to accessibility and affordability. Collaborative efforts focused on mission leadership might create new avenues for dialogue that transcend differing ideologies. As my findings suggest, women LEMes and their leadership practice reflect a complexity not explainable through

assessments of women along theological divides. Therefore, collaborative efforts to provide resources to support their growth will require some collaborators to set aside unsubstantiated assumptions about each other to provide opportunities to meet the needs of women leading in parishes.

### **Conclusion**

This study and the report of findings contained in this dissertation sufficiently addressed the questions at the center of the research. Women LEMs engaged in ministerial leadership ascribe meaning to their leadership through a complex process weaving together their experiences as leaders, as women, and as persons of faith. In doing so, they integrate their beliefs, attitudes, and actions as leaders into the mission they lead and the faith they hold. The 12 women in this study portrayed leadership as an intimate relationship between the divine, themselves, and the community.

Each one of the women in this study expressed gratitude for an opportunity to talk about her leadership. Some of the women in this research cohort established ongoing connections with each other, and still others shared the fruit of the experience with colleagues and family. Every group of women with whom I casually discussed my research entered into a dialogue on the meaning women give their leadership and how the culture either supports or diminishes them as leaders. In almost every group, someone asked where she could find a safe place to discuss her leadership.

If my findings are true—the integration of mission, story, and experience creates and sustains meaningful leadership—then my recommendation for women who lead is simple. Tell your leadership story and listen to the leadership story of others. In the telling and listening, you will discover new truths about your mission, and uncover new understandings of old truths

shaping your practice. You will inspire and be inspired by the leadership of others. Through the privilege, and it was a privilege, of hearing the storied leadership of these 12 women, the meaning of my own leadership was enriched and transformed.

I recommend being brave. Be brave enough to invite women you mentor or those who mentored you to hear your story. Encourage women with less and more experience to tell their stories. Engage your mother, your sister, and your friends in the storytelling. Begin as I did. Ask them to bring a symbol of their leadership and tell you the story behind it. In doing so, you will experience feminine genius at its best. The genius of woman is not a particular set of capacities ascribed to women, but rather the faith, gifts, and experiences of women shared into the world for the sake of Gospel. I ask you to do what these 12 women did. Tell your story and unleash the genius.

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Appendix A  
Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research on Women

Dear (Name)

My name is Mary K. Bungert and I am a student at the University of St. Thomas pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. You might also know that I am the Director of Faith Formation at large suburban parish in the Archdiocese. In partial fulfillment of the requirements of my degree I am engaging in qualitative research involving women who engage in ministerial leadership in Catholic Parishes. I am hoping that as a member of the leadership of (*professional association/institution*) you might recommend qualified women to participate in my study.

In 2013 Pope Francis confirmed that opportunities for women to contribute to decision making in the Roman Catholic Church had not sufficiently emerged. He called for an investigation into "what can be done to make their role more visible today," as well as to explore women's roles in church leadership because "feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions"(America Magazine, October 2013). As the USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary it is time to explore how the genius of more than 37,000 women lay ecclesial ministers in the U.S. have shaped Catholic leadership. I want to begin with some local research with women in Minnesota.

Central to my dissertation is the exploration of questions like: How do women explain their ministry and leadership in the church? How do women employed in ministry navigate professional and personal tensions that arise in ministry? What motivates and inspires women to lead in faith? These questions are regularly explored in professional support environments and over coffee after a tough day. By making them a part of qualitative research we create a platform for lay women who minister locally in the Catholic Church to contribute to new more global discussions of leadership in the Church. It is my contention that the investigations Pope Francis is calling for need to include the voices and experiences of women who already offer their gifts and service to the church through professional employment as religious educators, pastoral ministers, liturgists, and others whose ministry places them in the position of leading in collaboration with a pastor.

This two part qualitative research project would involve participation of 12 women in a one day retreat and personal interview a few weeks after the retreat. I intend to hold two retreats on (dates). Using the USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* as a backdrop, the retreat will focus its attention on the experience of being a co-worker and providing leadership on parish teams. The interview will provide the individual with an opportunity to discuss the essential characteristics of their leadership, as well as the joys and challenges they encounter in their life as a parish minister.

Enclosed you will find a document that will further assist you in making recommendations. You may e-mail me the names and contact information of potential participants at [mkbungert@gmail.com](mailto:mkbungert@gmail.com). I would appreciate a response and any recommendations by (date). If you would like to send this information directly to individuals or to your membership, please feel free to do so. They can contact me directly using the above contact information. I will follow-up on my request in a few weeks. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Yours in Christ,

Mary K. Bungert  
Doctoral Student- University of St. Thomas

Appendix A (page 2)  
 Women in Catholic Lay Ecclesial Leadership Recommendation

**Who:** 12 women representing a variety of education, ministry, and parish backgrounds. Each meets the following parameters.

- Has worked at least five years as a parish lay ecclesial minister in Minnesota
- Currently employed in a parish position that includes leadership responsibilities (catechetical, liturgical, sacramental, pastoral, administrative) that place them in direct cooperation with the pastor
- Has a desire to participate in research that will contribute to the dialogue on the role of women in Church leadership.
- Able to commit to a one to one interview and attend one of two retreats.

**Time Commitment:**

- **Part 1:** 24 hour retreat involving six women. This will be held twice (November 2015 and February 2016) for a total of 12 women.
- **Part 2:** 60-90 minute one to one semi structured interview in the weeks immediately following the retreat.

**Purpose of Research:**

- To affirm and make visible the ministry of women whose leadership in Catholic parishes shapes what it means to be Catholic today.
- To explore why women choose to cast their professional gifts into church leadership at the parish level.
- To contribute to scholarship that will provide a deeper understanding of how women understand and exercise leadership.
- To provide an opportunity for self-reflections for women who may want to take time to consider the meaning of their own leadership choices.

**Benefits:**

- Attend a 24 hour retreat (no cost) designed to allow women lay ecclesial ministers time to reflect on the meaning of their ministry and leadership.
- Connect and reconnect with other women in ministry.
- Contribute to research that will further the dialogue on how women can and do exercise leadership within the Church.

**Information Needed:**

Name	e-mail address	Phone #	Ministry Area
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

## Appendix B

# CONSENT FORM UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

### *Catholic Women in Lay Ecclesial Leadership-[749683-1]*

I am conducting a study about how women in professional Catholic Church ministries understand and explain leadership in the Church. I invite you to participate in this research. You were chosen as participant because of your commitment and experience in lay ecclesial ministry. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before formally agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Mary K. Bungert in partial completion of the requirements for a doctorate in educational leadership through the College of Education, Leadership, and Counseling at University of St. Thomas under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Boyle.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of my study is to explore how women employed in lay (non-ordained) ministries in Catholic parishes ascribe meaning to their leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. Through the study, I hope to identify some key themes that will contribute to emerging conversations regarding new avenues of leadership for women in the Church. I also hope the study will provide a meaningful opportunity for women lay ecclesial ministers to reflect upon the value of their leadership in ministry.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a 24 hour retreat, which will begin at 9:30 am on November 9, 2015 and conclude at 11:30 am on November 10. During the retreat, three of the group sessions will serve as group interviews for my study. Two of the sessions will be audio recorded and later transcribed to print. A schedule of the retreat, along with indications of methods of data collection is attached.
- A few weeks after the retreat meet with me in person to answer question through individual interview for 60-90 minutes. This interview will also be audiotaped, and later transcribed into print.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Risks in this study are minimal, but two deserve attention. First, it is possible that you will share stories about other people you have encountered, share details about specific events, or personal opinions. To maintain confidentiality for you and others I will use pseudonyms in all publications for all people and places. Additionally, participants on retreat with you will hear what you choose to share. This raises the need to address confidentiality among participants. Each participant will be asked to abide by a retreat code of conduct (attached) that articulates the importance of confidentiality. In addition, a review of the importance of confidentiality among participants will be included at the retreat, and communication following the retreat will include reminders to maintain that confidentiality.

#### **Compensation**

There will be no compensation for the participants.

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**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In publication, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Data in all its forms- audio recording, and transcripts of group and individual interviews, as well as field notes and memos related to your retreat and interview - will be stored on my password protected home computer and backed up on an external hard drive in a locked office in my home. The only other person to have access to the audio recordings will be a professional transcriptionist who has signed the necessary confidentiality agreement. I will destroy the audio recordings and raw transcripts of your group and individual interviews by January 1, 2018. Refined data protected by pseudonyms (transcripts, field notes, and memos) will be retained indefinitely for reference for additional articles and academic presentations.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity without explanation. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time up to and until the dissertation publication and defense. Should you decide to withdraw from the study data collected about you will not be used.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Mary K. Bungert. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-965-1652. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Kathleen Boyle, at 651-962-4393. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board can be reached at (651) 962-6035 with any questions or concerns you may have.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

<b>Statement of Consent:</b>	
<p>I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I consent to participation in three group interviews, two of which will be audio recorded and transcribed into print, as well as an individual interview that will be audio recorded and transcribed into print.</p>	
<p><b>Signature of Study Participant</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
<p><b>Print Name of Study Participant</b></p>	
<p><b>Signature of Researcher</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>

*Attachments: Retreat Code of Conduct*

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**Catholic Women in Lay Ecclesial Leadership**  
**Retreat Code of Conduct/Confidentiality**

A retreat (even a research retreat) is a unique opportunity to encounter Christ. This retreat invites participants to engage in personal and spiritual growth through prayer, reflection, conversation, and group activities. To promote personal and spiritual growth individually and communally I ask the following of retreat participants:

1. **Prepare** for the retreat.
  - Bring to the retreat an item that symbolically represents how you see your ministerial leadership. This could be a song, art work, book, craft, photo, etc....anything that for speaks to some facet of your ministerial leadership.
  - Read (or re-read) the U.S. Bishops document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (<http://www.usccb.org/upload/co-workers-vineyard-lay-ecclesial-ministry-2005.pdf>) with particular care given to Part 1.
2. **Respect:** Recognize the dignity of each participant through respectful exchange of ideas and thoughtful listening. Treat each other with respect during and after the retreat. Consistently choose behavior that creates a supportive environment for discussion. Please limit outside communication (digital and otherwise) to unstructured time during the retreat.
3. **Confidentiality.** Do not share what others have shared with you, unless they have given explicit permission to do so. The decision about what is public and what is not belongs to the sharer not the hearer. Example: A woman may choose share her conversion story with you during free time. She may tell you that she does not want it communicated to others, but she may tell you that she would be glad to be a resource to others who face the same struggle.
4. **Consent:** Retreat participants will sign a UST Research Consent form giving the researcher/retreat leader (Mary K. Bungert) permission to audio record group sessions of the retreat for her research, and to have an assistant take written notes throughout the retreat. Each participant will receive in advance a copy of the consent form for their records that outlines the ethical obligations of this consent. The researcher/retreat leader will review with the retreat participants the process she will employ to protect the identity of the participant or person referred to on retreat.

I understand the expectations laid out above. I agree to abide by the principles outlined.

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Signature

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Date



### Appendix C

#### Catholic Women in Lay Ecclesial Leadership Retreat Plan

The structure, content, and schedule of the retreat will include three group interviews and a final group conversation. The first will be observed, but not audio recorded. The remaining two will be both observed and recorded. A final conversation, which serves to provide closure to the retreat will not be audio recorded or but will have observations recorded. Scheduled opportunities for personal prayer, reflection, and journaling will only become data if the participant chooses to share that experiencing in the group interview, at the personal interview or through participant initiated personal correspondence.

Day/Time	Description	Notes
<b>Day 1:</b> 9:00-9:30am	Participant Arrival	Personal welcome Room locations, unpack Beverage/ snack
10:00-10:50am	Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief introductions (Name, role, parish, as well as research team)</li> <li>• Facility, housekeeping information</li> <li>• Overview of Research</li> <li>• Retreat Schedule</li> <li>• Review of Consent</li> <li>• Review Risk and Confidentiality</li> <li>• Retreat Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Prayer of Welcome</li> </ul>	Need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer Aide</li> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• Description of Research</li> <li>• Schedules</li> <li>• Consent Forms</li> <li>• Code of Conduct</li> </ul>
10:50 am	Break	
11:00am – 12:30 pm	<b>GI 1: Imagining our Leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief presentation on Wonder and Imagination (St. John Paul and Maxine Greene). (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Ask them to take a few moments to think about (and journal about) the object they brought (15 minutes)</li> <li>• In the group have them share their object, the meaning it represents, what they think others think. Allow others to ask questions. (5 minutes each- 30 minutes) – I go last.</li> <li>• Group conversation following sharing. (10-30 minutes- their energy drives this)</li> </ul>	Participants Bring Symbol of leadership  3 reflection questions: 1) What object did I bring? 2) What does this object say about my leadership? 3) Does this match what others say about my leadership? Why or why not?  Group conversation starters (if needed). 1) What do we hold in common? 2) What challenges surfaced 3) What joys surfaced?
12:30 pm	Lunch	Opportunity for participants to know more about each other

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1:15pm	Prayer- <i>Lectio Divina</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matthew 20:1-16</li> </ul>	1st read- What Image, 2 <sup>nd</sup> read- Why that image, 3 <sup>rd</sup> read- meaning of image
1:30-2:45pm	<b>GI 2: Being a Co-Workers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share images came up in prayer (not meaning yet, just the image)? (5 minutes)</li> <li>Review of the history of Document – update on the document. (15 minutes)</li> <li><b>Questions for discussion (Record) (60 minutes)</b></li> </ul>	<b>GI 2 Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you describe your ministry/leadership to others?</li> <li>What have been the rewards in being a co-worker in the vineyard for you personally?</li> <li>What challenges have LEMs faced? How have you experienced these challenges?</li> <li>Do women LEMs experience the joys and challenges differently? How so?</li> <li>Is there a connection between your image, the meaning, and this conversation? If so, please share.</li> </ul>
2:45pm	Break	
3:00-4:15 pm	Exercise: Co-Working in the Field <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation on “Co-worker” relationships (20 minutes) in the life of an LEM as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal, professional, spirit.</li> <li>life giving, draining</li> <li>supportive, demanding</li> </ul> </li> <li>Private reflection/journaling</li> <li>Built in break</li> </ul>	Participant reflect/journal questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are your “co-workers”?</li> <li>Who or what sustains/nourishes you?</li> <li>Who or what challenges you?</li> </ul>
4:15-5:30pm	<b>GI 3: Relationships in Leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion on Women and Leading Relationships (Record) (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	<b>GI 3 Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does leadership work in parish?</li> <li>Describe your experiences of leader relationship between pastor and LEMs?</li> <li>What characterizes a successful leadership team in parish ministry?</li> <li>What is changing in parish leadership? What works today? What does not work?</li> <li>What role do LEMs play in change?</li> </ul>
6:00 +	<b>Dinner &amp; evening social time</b>	
<b>Day 2</b>		
8:30 am	<b>Morning Prayer</b>	
8:50 am	<b>Breakfast</b>	
9:30-11:30am	<b>Closing Conversation (Not for use as data)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant feedback</li> <li>Reminders (Interview, confidentiality, follow-up)</li> <li>Closing Prayer includes a new reflection on the leadership object</li> </ul>	Feedback conversation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants’ reflections on the experience.</li> <li>Thoughts, feelings, they would like to share with the group.</li> </ul>

## Appendix D

### Women LEMS: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The questions below serve only as a guide. The questions for these interviews will be loosely based upon the *Marks of Pastoral Excellence* (Jewell & Ramey, 2005), but will be primarily driven by the individual woman's experiences in ministry and on the retreat.

#### Re-establishing Connection

1. How have you been since the retreat?
2. Have you shared what you experienced with anyone? What did you talk about with them?
3. Have any questions or concerns come up that you want me know about?

#### Review Consent

4. What am I researching?
5. Do you remember that you signed consent for this interview?
6. Can you state what you consented to? (Clarify misconceptions and state clearly intent of study)
7. Review risks and steps taken to protect confidentiality.

In this interview, I will be asking questions specific to your own experience as an LEM. I will begin with some demographic questions, and then move into questions about how you view your ministry and leadership. We will not exceed 90 minutes. Are you ready?

#### Demographics

8. Tell me about yourself: age, cultural background, marital status
9. What is your educational background?
10. How long have you been employed as an LEM
11. What is your ministerial role in the parish? Title.
12. What other ministerial leadership roles have you held?

#### Personal Faith and Ministry Story

13. How did you come to being a Lay ecclesial ministry? What events or experiences brought you to this decision?
14. What experiences or relationships shaped your faith development?
15. Describe your relationship to the Catholic Church...you can use a metaphor or an example if you wish

#### Characteristics of Ministerial leadership:

16. In general, what characterizes an effective Catholic Church leader? Follow up on these.
  - Ask for examples of that character in their own ministry?
  - Ask them to identify barriers to that leadership character in their ministry
17. If I were to speculate that an effective was also (*use only what they don't mention*):
  - **Collaborative:** Would you agree? Why? Can you give an example?
  - **Ethical:** What does it mean to you that a leader be ethical? What ethical challenges have you encountered in ministerial practice?
  - **Prophetic:** What does it mean for someone to be prophetic in his or her ministerial leadership? What issues of faith or leadership has or could compel you to act prophetically?
  - **Inclusive:** What characterizes a LEM who is an inclusive leaders? What issues can impede attempts to be an inclusive leader in the Church? How has this played out in your own or someone you knows ministerial practice?

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**Your Own Leadership**

18. Given our conversation on effective Catholic leadership can you identify events or experiences in your own ministry where the exercise of these attributes contributed to the development of the parish's mission? Was that leadership recognized? Did it need to be?
19. Describe your leadership relationship to your pastor/priest.
  - Can you give me an example of how that works?
  - Do you like it that way? What would you change?
20. What have been some of the gifts and graces of being a woman in ministry?
21. What have been some of the challenges or obstacles to your leadership? Why do you think the barrier exists or existed?
22. What issues do think effect women's participation in church leadership?
  - What do you think should be the next avenue of change or growth for women leadership in the church?
  - How would that effect you and your leadership?
23. As I discuss and interview other women, what other question should I ask? How would you answer it?