

NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

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Report No. 7

THE PEOPLE, THEIR PASTORS, AND THE CHURCH: VIEWPOINTS ON CHURCH POLICIES AND POSITIONS

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Social Research on Attitudes of Catholics

In late 1985 Pope John Paul II convened an extraordinary synod in Rome to assess the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Church. Some saw the occasion as the opportunity to advance ideas for further reform. Others saw it as an attempt to pull in the reins on national churches presumably straying from the intent of the Council. Many American observers — scholars, journalists, church leaders — referred to sociological

research on Catholics to inform their judgments, to bolster their arguments, or perhaps to set up straw men.

There is little question that social research on the Catholic Church is a growth enterprise in the United States. American Catholics have never had a strong in-house research tradition. Many Protestant bodies established offices for research and planning early in this century. These churches were mainly American based, although some had far-flung worldwide missions. American business, government, and universities had long traditions of research, and American Protestant churches operated within that research and planning environment. American Catholics, however, were a minority part of a church body not headquartered in the United States. The Vatican's research and planning efforts derived from theological and humanistic scholarly traditions very different from empirical social inquiry. The Catholic Church within the United States was internationally centralized but nationally decentralized; its dioceses reported not to a national office but to the Vatican. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) became a major point of orientation for the U.S. Church rather recently; only in the 1980's have the Bishop's pastoral letters received attention from the press. Finally, the *national* offices that deal with research and planning for the Catholic Church in the U.S. remain skeletal, outside of Catholic education, and only about one-fourth of the dioceses have research staffs. The latter struggle to gain appreciation for their contribution to the Church's ministries.

Into that official vacuum, however, stepped a number of social scientists and pollsters. Important small-scale studies pioneered by Jesuit Fr. Joseph Fichter, dating to the 1940's, were followed by large-scale national surveys initiated by Fr. Andrew Greeley at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago in the 1960's and 1970's. The National Election Studies series from the University of Michigan, like NORC studies, now offer nearly three decades of data for comparing the characteristics of American Catholics with the rest of the populace. As interest in the Catholic Church as a significant American social institution has grown in the post-Vatican II period, so the organizations that feel the public pulse — e.g., the Gallup Poll, the Roper Organization, the New York Times-CBS News Poll — have isolated Catholic samples from their regular surveys.

Neither Church nor public now lacks information about the attitudes and behaviors of American Catholics. This is particularly true regarding *controversial* issues, i.e., those issues where the Church has taken an official position but a sizable proportion of its members do not accept that position. And so on the eve of the 1985 Synod, public attention was focused on the differences between rank-and-file Catholics and their Church's leadership.

Much of the public discussion, however, did not offer ways of separating out the attitudes of Catholics by their degree of involvement with the Church. It was as though only two things mattered — a well-defined Church position articulated by the hierarchy, on the one hand, and the current attitudes of anyone who had been baptized Catholic, on the other.

Further, the public discussion treated American Catholics as an amorphous aggregate, a kind of mass society (with no pun intended). Yet none of us exists in the aggregate. We typically learn and live our religious values in a family, and that family's values are in turn shaped by and help to shape the religious practices of a local parish. We are all products of the particular, not the universal. Thus we understand less about American Catholics by lumping them together as *Catholics* than we do by examining them within St. Mary's or Christ the King or whatever the local parish. One of the founders of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, argued that smaller communities — families, churches, etc. — develop their own "moral consensus" and much of what we tell about the past, interpret in the present, or hope for in the future is instilled in these communities. The contemporary sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah, points to parishes as "communities of memory" that nurture our identification with larger community purposes and standards well beyond the utilitarian or expressive demands of American individualism.

These twin concerns — (1) the attitudes of Americans who participate at different levels within the Catholic Church and (2) the attitudes of different parish communities — are the subjects of Report 7. We will examine attitudes both on *position* issues, i.e., ecclesiological and moral issues on which popes and councils have offered teachings, and on *policy* directions, i.e., variations in direction or emphasis that the Church might take in implementing its Second Vatican Council objectives.

While we will find differences in the aggregate that may depend on church involvement or social location, we will sometimes find strong differences by parish community. While each Catholic parish is no doubt Catholic, it has its own way of responding to the Church's positions and policies. These locally-shared differences may transcend aggregate differences in age, sex, region, locale or whatever. We will argue that it is important to think of the Church not only as an international hierarchical system or as a congeries of people in similar social classifications, but especially as a large collectivity formed of smaller parish communities. Each parish owns its own story.

Our findings will sometimes differ from other studies because we are using, in the words of Catholic sociologist William McCready, "different lenses" to observe Catholics. What one makes of such findings, either for public discourse or for Church policy, depends not only on their scientific integrity but also on one's sense of where the heart of the Church is to be found. For fundamentalists, whether Protestant or Catholic, the latter is easily answered — the Bible or the pronouncements of major Church leaders are the only arbiters of where the Church is. For Catholics, historically, the matter is more complex: Biblical statements, creeds and Church teachings, theological research and discourse, and cultural evolution — all interact to gauge where the Church is. And cultures differ greatly by locale. Thus, social research through different lenses becomes a modest ingredient in "reading the signs of the times" in the language of the Second Vatican Council.

The Data

The data are well tailored to the twin purposes of Report 7. From 1,100 parishes that differed by region, urban-rural locale, ethnicity, size, organizational complexity, and dynamism of programs we chose 36 representative parishes and collected questionnaire data on: (1) 35 of the 36 pastors, (2) a scientific sample of 2,667 parishioners, randomly chosen in a manner that permits generalizations to each parish, (3) 212 volunteers who are identified as the most influential unpaid leaders in the parishes, and (4) 89 staff members who, beyond the pastor, are identified as the most influential paid staff in the parishes. Sampling processes and response rates are described in our earlier reports and methodological working papers, available upon request.

Our data permit the comparisons of attitudes among registered parishioners, volunteer leaders, paid staff, and pastors. Their unique strength is in the latter part of this report where we make comparisons within each parish. Where the sample is large, as with the registered parishioners, the design permits trustworthy generalizations for them. However, readers must remember that registered parishioners will be "more active" Catholics — i.e., attend Mass more frequently, identify more closely with the institutional church — than those who simply call themselves "Catholic" on a national random sample survey. Our samples were derived from parish records. Further, responding took considerable effort and some facility with prevailing English usage; our questionnaires were long, requiring both thought and written expression. The 59% of our sample who responded are likely to have stronger parish or Church loyalties than the nonrespondents. Finally, we purposely excluded Hispanic parishes and Hispanic-surnamed people from this phase of the Study, because of their language and cultural differences.

Among our three leadership groups — volunteers, staff, and pastors — the findings are instructive primarily for our parish analyses. The sample sizes are small and would not yield national generalizations as accurate as studies addressed to each of these groups alone. Thus, for example, if one wanted precise national findings about priests' attitudes, recent work of Dean Hoge and associates at the Catholic University of America is more suitable. There are many studies of religious orders or of specific church professions, such as directors of religious education or principals of parish schools. We know of no similar large-sample national studies of volunteer parish leadership. In the instances where other studies have been done, we have compared our findings to theirs and, fortunately, they are similar. Thus, we feel confident in addressing both sections of this report with our data base.

Attitudes of Differentially Involved Catholics toward Church Positions and Policies

Based on previous studies and our own research interests, we developed a battery of statements designed to tap Catholics' feelings on Church positions and policy directions. For each statement, we asked whether the respondent disagreed strongly, disagreed, agreed, or agreed strongly. The same battery was used for all four samples. Furthermore, we also asked the non-pastor samples how they thought their pastor felt about each issue, and we asked pastors to estimate their parishioners' views on each issue. Their responses constitute the primary basis for this report.

We considered presenting our findings as percentages of people who supported the statement and percentages who opposed it. We decided instead to use an *index of support* in Table 1. This index runs from 1.00 to 4.00, with the lowest figure indicating strongest disagreement and the highest figure indicating strongest support. A score of 2.50 is the break-even point where opposition turns to support.

There are several reasons for using this index. First, we have collected data with greater precision than is yielded by statements limited to support or opposition; we have *degrees* of support or opposition, ranging from 1 (*strongly* disagree) to 2 (disagree) to 3 (agree) to 4 (*strongly* agree). Secondly, the distances between parishioners and pastors, for example, might appear farther apart or closer together than they actually are if only the percentages supporting or opposing were presented. Certainly "agree" and "disagree" are closer together than "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" Yet without using the index, conclusions about distances from each other might have been quite deceptive. Finally, decision-making based on majority selection among "either-or" choices fails to come to grips with the problem of intense minorities opposing lukewarm majorities. An organization would be ill-advised to say the majority of its people support a position when 52% of them offer lukewarm support and 48% are intensely opposed. The index adjusts for such situations by weighting the intensity with which one holds a viewpoint. Interestingly enough, it happens that on all 13 issues presented in Table 1 the score of 2.50 is the actual break-even point in percentages; any score below that has majority percentage opposition, and any score above that has majority support. Yet both the quantity and intensity of support or opposition is reflected in the index score.

The index in Table 1 is an arithmetic *mean*. For example, one pastor may have a "4" another a "3," another a "2" on a particular issue. The mean score would be "3" calculated by adding the actual scores and dividing by the total number of people. Statisticians use the mean as the most common form of an average. Table 1 also shows a *standard deviation* for parishioners. The standard deviation measures the extent to which there is either diversity or consensus in viewpoints within that group. The lower the standard deviation, the more people share the same viewpoint. The higher the standard deviation, the more they have different viewpoints.

Issues *a-g* are grouped together as policy directions that the Church might take in implementing its Vatican II objectives. Issues *h-m* ask for reactions to specific positions that the Church has taken; *h-j* concern moral teachings and *k-l* concern "ecclesiology" or the institutional structure of the Church. Since statement *f* is worded negatively, we have

included its reciprocal in parentheses so that its index score will be comparable to the other items *a-g*.

One final reminder about interpreting Table 1. It would be a misquotation, for example, to say that "the mean score for all Catholic pastors in the U.S. on ordaining married men to the priesthood (1) is 2.36" We offer the mean scores only for the Catholic pastors who serve, and serve with, the particular parishioners, volunteers, and staff shown in the other three columns. The data are based on the 36 carefully-selected parishes.

The Laity

We can summarize the table first by focusing on the rank given each issue by the laity. Clearly such matters as encouraging a personal relationship to Christ (b) and evangelization (d) receive the strongest support. We would be surprised if it were different; these are the items most likely to evoke socially desirable responses or "lip service" to long-term Church goals; when we examine the *behavior* of the laity, however, we find that less than 2% of them have recently participated in efforts at evangelization. Thus, the "true" value for these questions is probably more modest but still quite positive. Two social issues rank high: understanding the family (e) and opposition to abortion (i). While both deal with life and the quality of life, both also involve sexuality; the Catholic Church has long sensitized the faithful to these areas of concern, and their rank can be seen at least partly as a *Church* issue. A people-oriented, participatory, lay-centered, post-Vatican II Church (a, c, f, g) receives substantial support, as does further ecumenism (m). A married male clergy (1) has become acceptable to Catholic parishioners but the idea of a female clergy (k) still lags behind. Liberalization of the Church's position on divorce (j) is felt desirable. Finally, active parishioners do not generally accept the Church's teaching on contraception (h). It is important to note that on many of these issues, particularly the ones involving position changes, active American Catholic lay persons are willing to move farther than the Vatican has felt desirable.

(See Table on next page)

TABLE 1

**ATTITUDES ON POLICY AND POSITION ISSUES,
BY LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN 36 PARISHES**

	<u>Parishioners</u>			<u>Volunteers</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>Pastors</u>
	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<u>A. Policy Directions</u>						
(a) The Church should become more people-oriented, less concerned about its organizational structure and rules	6	2.97	.81	2.99	3.22	3.18
(b) The Church should stress a personal, spiritual relationship to Christ	1	3.42	.58	3.48	3.55	3.40
(c) The Church should listen more to the voice of ordinary lay Catholics	5	3.03	.77	3.09	3.10	2.94
(d) The Church should put more emphasis on spreading the faith	4	3.07	.62	3.20	3.28	3.25
(e) The Church should make more effort to understand family life	3	3.34	.57	3.39	3.38	3.25
(f) The Church should put less emphasis on lay participation in the Mass or liturgy (reverse)	7	2.08 (2.92)	.85	1.65 (3.35)	1.56 (3.44)	1.44 (3.56)
(g) The Church should follow through more on changes and guidelines that resulted from Vatican II	9	2.81	.66	3.05	3.18	3.06
<u>B. Church Positions</u>						
(h) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to the use of contraceptives	12	2.23	.98	2.40	2.35	2.71
(i) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to abortion	2	3.35	.85	3.67	3.56	3.50
(j) The Church should liberalize its position on divorce	10	2.72	.86	2.42	2.61	2.03
(k) The Church should allow women to become priests	13	2.13	1.03	2.15	2.37	2.00
(l) The Church should allow married men to become priests	11	2.65	1.02	2.74	2.83	2.36
(m) The Church should encourage communion between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians	8	2.82	.89	2.82	2.96	2.22

(The possible range of scores is 1.00 to 4.00 with the highest score indicating strongest agreement. Any score of 2.50 or higher indicates agreement.)

There are many ways to analyze these findings. Let us continue to focus on the laity. While both position issues (h-m) and policy directions (a-g) are shown, the degree of agreement with the statement depends on the substance of the issue, not on whether the Church's leadership has spoken clearly on it. For example, the second *highest* level of support is registered on the Church's opposition to abortion (i) while the second *lowest* level of support is registered on the Church's teaching on birth control (h). Not only the non-practicing Catholics included in other surveys but also the active registered parishioners in our Study feel comfortable with selecting which of the Church's teachings they will espouse and which they will reject. In this respect, American Catholics act very much like the increasingly well-educated, middle-class Americans that they are: they accept human authority less because of its traditional nature and more because of its appropriate positions. Yet they remain loyal to the underlying institution, practice its rites, and continue to work for it. These are, after all, *active* parishioners.

Secondly, many of the scores can be interpreted as reflections of prevailing American cultural values or social problems. For example, although Catholic theologians from the Reformation on have cautioned against those emphases in Protestantism that stress the will, religious individualism, and unmediated salvation, American Catholics are very comfortable with a language about personal relationships to Christ that verges on similar language in evangelical Protestant bodies as in item (b). Ours is a culture of religious individualism. Or, the high scores given to the need for the Church to understand contemporary family life (e) also betray the crises of family conflict, divorce, and remarriage. At least one-fourth of ever-married Catholics have personally experienced divorce or separation, and many more have been close to the problem in their extended families. Catholics are not immune to the difficulties of the American family, but Catholic parishioners are not yet satisfied that the Church understands these difficulties and fashions appropriate policies, skills, and ministries around them. That parishioners do not want the Church to yield *completely* to American social pressures is seen by the difference between the strong support for understanding the family and the more modest level of support for liberalizing the Church's position on divorce; yet still, a majority favors liberalization. Finally, the reinforcing evidence regarding the move toward a lay — rather than clerical — Church (c), (a) and (f), reflects the extent to which American Catholics have assimilated to the participatory values found in the American democratic society.

Thirdly, parishioners make judgments about ecclesiological positions based in large part on American experience. Americans are pragmatic. The decline in the number of priests along with the increase in the number of parishes is viewed by many observers as an opportunity rather than a crisis. To the majority of faithful parishioners, allowing married men to become priests is seen as an appropriate position change. While the ordination of women as priests is reported to be close to majority support among all Catholics, it is still shy of that among parishioners. Finally, although the Catholic Church now engages in widespread ecumenical discussions leading to consensus statements with, e.g., Lutherans and Episcopalians, and joint services of the Word are now being celebrated by Catholics and Lutherans, the Church's official position still presents barriers to inter-communion with non-Catholic Christians. Yet, our parishioners seem quite willing to

encourage communion among Christians (m). Perhaps some respondents interpreted communion to mean "contact with other Christians" but its usual meaning is "Eucharistic sharing" These data point to social forces that have moved Catholics out of the isolation of the immigrant church to the mainstream of American life, with profound implications for the way active parishioners deal with ecclesiology, the Church's institutional structure.

One final point needs to be remembered in analyzing the lay data. Young Catholics (ages 18-29) are less likely to have parish connections than older Catholics, in large part due to their stage in the life cycle. Comparisons of young people who do have parish connections with those who do not show the former to be somewhat more "conservative" on Church issues. Thus, even though our sample of active parishioners is older, more conservative, and more likely to be female than is found among a general population of baptized Catholics, they still are quite accepting of the movement for lay renewal and participation promoted by Vatican II; further, they support position changes that could deeply affect ecclesiology as well as pastoral and social ministry.

The Laity and their Parish Leadership

Comparisons between the laity and the three leadership samples can also be made from Table 1. On some issues (b, c, e) the difference among means is negligible, i.e., less than .20; on (e), for example, leaders and laity share the significance of the family and the perception that the Church really needs to understand it better.

On some issues having to do with lay participation and responsibility, the professional leadership of the Church — pastors and staff — are well ahead of the laity. For example, pastors and staff, by a wide margin, emphatically do not want to revert to passive liturgies-(f). (Some of the difference on this question can be attributed to its negative phrasing and the educational backgrounds of different respondents, but much of the difference remains.) Pastors and staff are more likely to perceive organizational barriers to sharing responsibilities with the people (a) and would like to have them removed. Pastors and staff want greater evangelization (c). And pastors and staff want to proceed further with implementing changes and objectives of Vatican II (g). Sometimes the argument is made that pastors and paid staff are unable to change their ways, but on these Vatican II objectives they appear to be well ahead of the parishioners.

Concerning ecclesiological and moral positions defined by Church authorities, the patterns are rather different. Pastors generally are the least desirous of a position change; depending on the issue, sometimes staff or volunteer leadership most desire a change; sometimes the general laity want it more. On contraception, for example, parishioners are most likely to reject the teaching in *Humanae Vitae*, but volunteers and paid leaders (mostly lay and religious) also reject it; only the pastors as a group support Church teaching on contraception and, even then, a large number of them are dissenters. Pastors are quite far from other leaders and the people on the divorce issue; interestingly, paid staff are closer to the parishioners than are volunteers on this issue. The most ecumenically minded are the paid staff, followed closely by volunteer leaders and parishioners; their

attitudes, however, are quite far from their pastors on this issue. Again we do not know whether a higher proportion of pastors than others had in mind Eucharistic sharing.

On the ordination questions, the paid staff and the volunteer leaders are the groups most interested in priestly ordination for married men and for women. The parishioners' scores are not far behind. Some have argued that staff and volunteer leaders are already performing in many pastoral roles and do not see the essential differences in the charisma they have and the charisma of priests. Many express a sense of vocation to their ministries. The gap between the pastors' and staffs' scores on the ordination of women is directly attributable to the presence of women religious among the staff sample; several of them are already performing as pastoral associates. Simply put, many women staff and volunteers do not feel that "serving in the image of Jesus" requires being male.

A "standard deviation" score has been included on the table for the laity. This is an important measure for social scientists, for it tells the extent to which there is consensus on an issue. The higher the standard deviation score, the more conflict and polarization on the issue. The lower the score, the more people see things basically the same way. Most of the statements that concern Vatican II policy directions or enduring Church objectives have a low standard deviation, i.e., high consensus. So does the family life statement. The standard deviation rises much higher on the Church positions and is greatest on issues of ordination and contraception. This high level of dissensus suggests that different kinds of active Catholics are likely to be polarized on these issues. There may be a variety of factors that predispose some active Catholics to advocate position changes while others do not.

The Correlates of Different Attitudes

In an attempt to untangle the correlates of different attitudes we examined responses to the statements by several characteristics of parishioners: the region where they live, the urban-rural locale of their parish, their sex, race, marital status, age, level of education, proportion of education completed in Catholic schools, frequency of Mass attendance, the kind of devotional and religious practices they engage in, and the program priorities they set for their parish. Statistical tests were used to determine when differences mattered. For example, one might expect divorced and remarried Catholics to have substantially different scores than single or married Catholics regarding the liberalization of divorce rules. Or one might expect younger people to be more willing to accept women priests than older people. We will profile each issue by pointing out which kinds of parishioners are especially likely to support it or oppose it. When we say nothing about a dimension e.g.—, male-female — there are no differences along it. The shifting coalitions of enthusiasts and detractors offer a complex mosaic of Church priorities.

- (a) The Church should become more people-oriented, less concerned about its organizational structure and rules.

Disproportionate support for a people-oriented, rather than rules-oriented, Church is found among the educated suburbanites in their 30's through 50's who have had some Catholic education, among those who have been divorced and remarried, those who are a little less likely to attend Mass every Sunday, and those who place a higher priority on social justice and helping the poor, ecumenism, improved liturgy, and adult education, while being less likely to stress evangelism.

Considerably weaker than average support for a people-oriented rather than rules-oriented Church is found among Southern Catholics, the elderly, and both those who especially like a pre-Vatican II devotional life or those who attend Mass regularly as a weekly obligation.

(b) The Church should stress a personal, spiritual relationship to Christ.

There are very few differences in the high level of support for this statement although women stress it a bit more, especially those who engage in individual or group Bible study and prayer.

(c) The Church should listen more to the voice of ordinary lay Catholics.

The profile on this issue is similar to statement (a), but there are some additional features. Women are considerably more likely to support this policy direction than men. Finally, the more highly educated a Catholic parishioner is, the more likely he or she will advocate attention to the voice of lay Catholics.

(d) The Church should put more emphasis on spreading the faith.

The profile of those who emphasize evangelization is almost the direct opposite of those who are especially supportive of (a) and (c). It includes Southerners, those whose parishes are in small towns and cities, the elderly and widows, those who prefer a pre-Vatican II style of devotional life as well as those who approach Sunday Mass as an obligation. There is a direct relationship to age and an inverse relationship to education, so much so that this Church priority can be identified very closely with generational differences. The only deviation from the reversal of (a) and (c) is that Catholics who practice a devotional life of Bible study and prayer (b) also stress evangelization.

(e) The Church should make more effort to understand family life.

The level of support for this priority is so high among all types of Catholic parishioners that it is difficult to single out those who offer exceptional support or lag behind others. As might be expected, the divorced and remarried are slightly higher than others. The other group that stands out are those whose entire education has been in Catholic institutions.

- (f) The Church should put *less* emphasis on lay participation in Mass or liturgy. (See our Reports 5 and 6 on liturgy findings of the Study.)

Of the Vatican II policy directions, this issue seems to generate less consensus than the others. There are pronounced differences among the laity in the extent to which they value participatory liturgies or in their willingness to retrench to more passive liturgies. (These differences exist well beyond the effects of a negatively-worded question. In a different section of the questionnaire we asked parishioners to describe the most notable changes in their parish life in the last 15 years; people mentioned the expectation that they participate in the liturgy more than any other change.)

Those most willing to de-emphasize lay liturgical involvement are found in the Catholic concentrations of the Northeast and Midwest, especially in the ethnic parishes. Where Catholics are fewest, as in the Mountain states, the people especially want to keep lay liturgical participation. Beyond the regional differences, a cluster of social characteristics separate the detractors and supporters. The relationship to education is very pronounced, but it is also strong for age and family ties. Those who like lay involvement in the liturgy are educated suburbanites in their 30's to 50's and who are currently in intact families. Those who dislike it are the elderly, the widows, and those who have never married.

But there are also sharp cleavages in religious backgrounds and practices that sometimes coincide with generational differences, sometimes overlay them. For example, those who want to hold on to the Vatican II participatory emphasis are products of Catholic schooling, regularly attend Mass, like to share their faith with Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and are especially interested in adult religious education, ecumenism, and social justice. Those who would like to revert to a more passive liturgy often have had no Catholic education, attend Mass irregularly, and *much* prefer the pre-Vatican II emphases on rosaries, novenas, devotions to saints, etc.

- (g) The Church should follow through more on changes and guidelines that resulted from Vatican II.

This statement seems to have discriminated less well among different types of parishioners. Women, the more highly educated, and those who attach priority to improving liturgy, social justice, and ecumenism are more likely to seek further Vatican II implementation. Those who seek a deeper spiritual relationship with God through Bible study and prayer (often women) also join the group.

- (h) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to the use of contraceptives.

Among the issues in Table 1, those on which the Church has taken a specific position are the ones that generate the greatest cleavage among American parishioners. Among the least consensual are the reactions to Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. Our data

show clearly that parishioners' attitudes on birth control are an overlay of generational differences and one's feelings about authority in the Church.

Support for the papal position is stronger in the South and in the Catholic centers of the Northeast and Midwest, but only in the South does it (barely) reach majority proportions among parishioners. In other regions, opposition is very strong.

Only the ordination of women matches this as a position issue that magnifies age and educational differences. Among those under 50 we find support for *Humanae Vitae* pretty much limited to those who liked the devotional life and authority structure of the pre-Conciliar Church; otherwise opposition is strong in the younger and middle-aged cohorts. For the most part elderly women — widows and singles — are found opposing contraceptives, while those who are married, divorced, separated, or remarried generally accept contraceptives. Support for the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* is seldom found among highly educated parishioners, regardless of whether their education has been completed in Catholic or public institutions.

The opponents of *Humanae Vitae* are not less faithful in their Mass and communion practices. Supporters, however, have a vision of the Church involving pre-Conciliar devotional practices and the weekly Mass obligation; they want the parish to devote more attention to the education of the young and to evangelization, but attach little priority to adult education, and show little interest in social justice and ecumenism.

Greeley and others who have written about reactions to *Humanae Vitae* are probably correct in identifying it as a watershed issue in the American Church. For a time it may have contributed to the disillusionment one generation of Catholics is having with their Church, although it was probably not the major contributor to the decline in Mass attendance. Among younger parishioners nowadays, this teaching is often seen as irrelevant to their lives. Among middle-aged parishioners, many have again come to identify closely with the Church and are very active in their parish — despite the teaching. Its long-term effect may have been to develop a loyal opposition within the American Church — an educated and active laity who feel it is appropriate for the Church to offer moral teaching and who will weigh it, but who in the end will consult their conscience and experience in deciding whether to accept or reject it. We find that pattern attested in other sections of the questionnaire that deal with the teaching authority of the Church.

(i) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to abortion.

The human life issue embedded in the Church's teaching on abortion has won widespread support among parishioners. There simply is no recognizable segment among our parishioners who express strong disagreement with the Church's opposition to abortion. Rather the only differences are in the strictness of the position. Here again the overlays of generation and teaching authority account for the strength of agreement. Beyond age, education, and devotional-style differences, there is a slight tendency for urban black parishioners to be less vociferous in their agreement.

If we stopped with this profile, however, many would be led to false conclusions about what it is in the Church's abortion stance that parishioners support. There are many nuances in the abortion issue; we *cannot* conclude that Catholics parishioners will support public policy that uniformly outlaws abortion. Elsewhere in the four questionnaires we asked respondents: "Which of the following statements comes closest to your views about abortion" The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION,
36 PARISH SAMPLE

Issue	<u>Parishioners</u>	<u>Volunteers</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>Pastors</u>
(1) Abortion is always acceptable.	1%	1%	—%	—%
(2) Abortion is acceptable under most circumstances.	5%	1%	3%	—%
(3) Abortion is acceptable under certain extreme circumstances, like a threat to the mother's life, rape or incest,	69%	53%	45%	23%
(4) Abortion is never acceptable.	26%	46%	52%	77%
(Number of cases)	101* (2605)	101* (197)	100 (89)	100 (35)

* *Error due to rounding.*

Several conclusions relevant to public policy can be drawn from this table. First, the present situation of abortion-by-demand, permitted under *Roe v. Wade*, is unacceptable to American Catholics with parish connections; only 6% of the parishioners accept that view, and even fewer of the leadership embrace it. At the other end, the view that abortion is never acceptable is held by only about 1/4 of Catholic parishioners, half of their parish leadership, and 3/4 of their pastors. The overwhelming majority of parishioners and half of their parish-level leadership hold the view that abortion is sometimes acceptable, but only under extreme circumstances such as threat to the mother's life, rape, or incest. Just as there is not support for abortion on demand, so there is not support for the total outlawing of abortion. In this respect Catholic parishioners and their parish-level leaders are not unlike those with religious identifications among the general public: abortion is not a matter of free choice or a method of birth control, but abortion is a medical option circumscribed to extreme situations.

(j) The Church should liberalize its position on divorce.

Yet another combination of parishioners clusters around the divorce issue. While the preponderance of opinion calls for change, parishioners in all regions of the country support or oppose liberalization in similar proportions. There is slightly more sentiment for liberalization in the Mid-Atlantic states and the Northeast and less, once again, in the South. But the Church's position on divorce does not separate the suburbs from other locales, the educated from the uneducated, the younger from the older, the products of Catholic schools from the products of public schools, the irregular attenders from the regular attenders.

Divorce, it seems, has touched every Catholic family or circle of friends. The effort to find oneself again—with a new spouse, in the neighborhood, in the Church — is a story widely known in the Catholic parishes of America. Predictably, those who have experienced serious marital discord — the remarried, the separated, the currently divorced and single, in that order — are the parishioners most interested in the Church's liberalizing its position on divorce. They are joined disproportionately by those who feel greater priority should be devoted to improving the social life and sense of community in the parish, to ecumenical sharing, and to the work of social justice. While opposition to liberalization is only slightly less widespread than is support, it is strongest among those who approach Mass as a weekly obligation and who feel the top parish priority should be evangelization.

Usually, it is the educated, middle-class, younger Catholic who advocates change in Church positions. But on this issue, the attitudes of young and old, educated and less educated are quite similar. Perhaps educated younger Catholics do not stand at the forefront of this issue because they have sufficient skills and savvy to work within the current annulment system. The less educated working-class parishioners — sometimes ethnics, and their elderly "traditionalist" relatives — are beginning to experience much divorce in their circles but do not know how to cope with the Church's complex processes for reestablishing oneself sacramentally in the event of remarriage. Thus, the middle-class Catholics' normal propensity for liberalization and the working-class Catholics' frustration with a Church that "doesn't work" in the face of a new reality leads both, in about equal proportions, to be concerned about the Church's handling of divorce.

(k) The Church should allow women to become priests.

Since many of the same types of people who support ordination for women, married or unmarried, also support priesthood for married men, it is tempting to look at both issues together. There are enough differences, however, to treat them separately. The most obvious difference is that sentiment for ordination of women has not yet reached majority proportions among Catholic parishioners.

While opposition to this type of position change is again strongest among Southern parishioners, it is weakest in the Mid-Atlantic and Mountain states. Generally, suburbanites are more accepting of women's ordination than are small-town or rural

parishioners. And as usual there is a *very* strong relationship with education and age: the young and educated are far more likely to advocate this position change than the older or less educated. While men and women are close to each other on this issue, the educated women in their 20's to 40's are considerably more likely than others to support women's ordination. Support is stronger among those with some Catholic education than among those who have not attended a Catholic school. And once again in the ranks of the supporters are disproportionate numbers of those who give higher priority to social justice and ecumenism, while the ranks of the detractors are more heavily populated with those who prefer pre-Vatican devotional practices, approach Mass as a weekly obligation, and feel that their parish should spend more of its time on evangelization.

(1) The Church should allow married men to become priests.

Parishioners are much more comfortable with the idea of a married male clergy. The presence of married men as deacons is widespread in the American parishes. In large and small parishes alike deacons are deeply involved in administering the Eucharist with hosts previously consecrated by a priest. They perform many of the home and hospital visits and lead many of the parish's programs. And parishioners are increasingly aware of the shortage of priests. To pragmatic Americans, there is little chasm to be leaped in ordaining married men to the priesthood. And the more heavily involved parishioners are with the responsibilities of their parish, the more they are willing to accept this idea.

Only among the Southern parishioners does support fall short of a majority. Support is heaviest in those regions of the Mountain, Mid-Atlantic, and Pacific states where Catholics are more sparse. Yet the majority of parishioners in the traditional Catholic enclaves of the Northeast and Midwest also support ordination for married men. Women are even more supportive of the idea than men. Again the age and educational differences are very pronounced: the younger and the more educated support it very strongly while the older or less educated tend toward opposition. This issue does not separate people according to their parish priorities: regardless of whether the priority is evangelization and education of the young, or adult education and social justice, there is considerable support for the ordination of married men as priests. As might be expected, the elderly, the widows, and those who prefer pre-Vatican II devotions are far less supportive than those who like to share their religious feelings with Catholics and non-Catholics alike and who welcome participatory liturgies.

(m) The Church should encourage communion between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians.

The ecumenical thrust of Catholic parishioners in the United States is quite widespread. The differences among various types of parishioners are not so pronounced as they were on the ordination and contraception issues. There are modest regional differences, with the Mountain, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeastern parishioners leading the way, but the Pacific, Midwestern, and Southern parishioners are not far behind them in their ecumenical interests. There is the usual relationship with age, education, and

suburban locale. And those who like the pre-Vatican II devotional life, treat Mass as an obligation, and want more emphasis on evangelizing the Catholic faith are predictably more opposed to ecumenism.

The question, as written, would refer to Eucharistic sharing. Whether all respondents took it as that, or whether they saw it as a general gesture toward greater cross-denominational cooperation is difficult to determine. But there is no question that those more deeply involved in parish leadership, the volunteers and staff, who are also more attuned to nuances in wording, were equally strong or stronger in their acceptance of inter-communion.

Reflecting across all the issue profiles, we can see rather different types of Catholics in the parishes. Generational and educational differences often coincide to shape Catholics who want an even more participatory, involved, and outreaching Church, on the one hand, and Catholics who wish the Church would pull back to a style of worship and authority that they knew in an earlier age, on the other hand. Yet there are often curiosities that make some of the adherents and detractors shift from issue to issue. Perhaps some of the nuances in this mosaic come from an even more particular source — the nature of Catholic life in one's own parish, the way people there historically have felt, their shifting viewpoints, and the viewpoint of the pastor who now shepherds them. And so we turn to the examination of issue consensus *within* the parishes.

Parish Consensus on the Issues

We have used a wide range of techniques to analyze the data for this section. Most are based on examination of parish means, to get the direction of attitudes, and standard deviations, to ascertain the degree of consensus. Some of the measures sort out whether "parish effects" are larger than "demographic effects" That is, they tell us whether a specific parish's score differs significantly from the average scores of similar kinds of parishes—i.e., those in the same region, urban-rural locale, parish size, etc. These are complex tests and will be discussed in scholarly journals. For the most part, we will interpret findings in prose, without tables. Generally, our purpose is to find out whether parishes are *unique* "moral communities" i.e., communities embracing people with similar attitudes that distinguish them from other parishes, or whether these attitudes are simply the characteristic attitudes for, say, small rural parishes, or large suburban parishes, or whatever. We are also trying to find out whether parishioners and pastors have much in common or can even perceive each other's viewpoints correctly.

The Extent of Differences Between Parishes and Agreement Within a Parish

Parishioners' attitudes on Church positions and policies differ considerably from parish to parish. For example, the parishioners in a small-town Texas parish barely favored a less rules-oriented Church, while parishioners at a suburban Colorado parish strongly favored a less rules-oriented Church. Parishioners in a Mississippi urban parish opposed priestly ordination for married men, while the Colorado suburbanites strongly favored priestly ordination for married men. In the Texas parish, consensus was not very high, while in the Mississippi and Colorado parishes it was quite high. These differences illustrate the uniqueness of Catholic parishes.

Across the thirteen issues we found the index of support, based on parishioners' mean scores, ranged from a high of 3.67 to a low of 1.63. But the range separating the high and low scores was much shorter on each issue. The widest range, i.e., difference between parishes, was on the ordination of married men as priests: one parish had a 3.05 and another had a 1.95 for a difference of 1.10. The shortest range was on stressing a personal, spiritual relationship to Christ, with a high of 3.74 and a low of 3.30, for a difference of only .44 between the most unlike parishes. When the differences in these ranges are averaged, we find that the parishes have more similar attitudes from one parish to the next on issues of policy direction (mean of .59 for issues *a-g* in Table 1) but differ a lot more on the position issues (mean of .92 for issues *h-m* in Table 1).

Parishes also differ from each other in their degree of internal consensus. The highest degree of consensus was found with a standard deviation of .20; the lowest degree of consensus is witnessed by a standard deviation of 1.16. The shortest range of consensus is found on the Church's need to understand family life (.67 to .47 for a difference of only .20). This means that each parish had a lot of internal agreement on this issue. The widest range of dissensus is found on the desirability of the Church's implementing Vatican II changes and guidelines (.80 to .31 for a difference of .49). This means that the degree of internal consensus from parish to parish differed more on this issue than on others. Unlike the support index described in the previous paragraph, differences in the degree of consensus from one parish to another differed little between policy issues (mean difference of .36) and Church positions (mean difference of .38).

This does not mean, however, that policy and position issues generated the same amount of consensus within parishes. Quite the opposite. The mean level of consensus for the policy issues was .69 and for the position issues .94. These findings are potentially confusing, and their meaning needs to be untangled.

The following can be claimed: (1) Parishes differ from each other in their degree of internal consensus on issues. (2) There is more internal conflict within parishes on Church positions than on policy directions. Yet, (3) the amount of conflict one parish experiences on position issues *compared* to the amount another parish experiences is no larger than the difference between those two parishes on policy issues. Let us illustrate. An urban Mid-Atlantic parish had a moderately high level of internal disagreement on policy issues and a very high level of internal disagreement on Church positions. A rural Mid-Atlantic parish had a low level of disagreement on policy questions and a moderately high level of

disagreement on Church positions. Relative to each other, the two maintained the same *pattern* of consensus. It is simply that Church positions generate more disagreement. This finding suggests that parishes who are more consensual than others on the easy issues will experience more conflict on the hard issues, but will still be more consensual than the others on the hard issues. Relative to other parishes, some parishes fight about very little, while other parishes make an issue out of everything.

Do parishes that take a more extreme position than the other parishes—whether they favor change or the status quo — suffer more dissensus? Our data suggest that there is no relationship between taking extreme positions and experiencing a lot of disagreement within the parish. And being consistent middle-of-the-roaders on Church issues yields no higher than average consensus. Relative to the life of the rest of the Church, parishes seem to have a life of their own. They pull together or tear apart on Church issues about the same way they do on much of their internal life.

When there are certain concentrations of people—more elderly, more women, bigger parishes, etc.— are there likely to be more change-oriented or more status quo-oriented views in the parish, and more consensus or conflict? The data here are fascinating. Social scientists have grown so accustomed to analyzing human populations in the aggregate — by race, sex, age, region, locale — and noting differences, that we forget that people live *together* in various social institutions; their viewpoints may be conditioned as much by these *institutional contexts* as by membership in a putative classification. It may be more important that I am from St. Agnes parish than that I am a 64 year-old woman; and I may think more like a 40 year-old man from St. Agnes than a 64 year-old woman from Sacred Heart.

Thus, we examined whether the viewpoints that characterize a parish differ by whether that parish is located in a certain region of the country, by its urban/rural locale, by its size, by the race of its parishioners, by their average age, by the proportion of its members who are women, by the length of time its pastor has served there, by the range of staff and programs it offers, and by the identification and involvement of its people with these programs. We did not compare educational differences between parishes because these are confounded with age and sex. And we did not compare ethnic backgrounds because, even with 2,667 parishioners, the numbers from specific ethnic backgrounds get too small for meaningful comparisons across 36 parishes. Of the dimensions we examined, however, we found very few differences attributable to these dimensions that were stronger than differences attributable to the parish itself.

We do find differences in parish viewpoints on *policy* issues along the urban-rural dimension; on *position* issues we find difference along the regional dimension. The age distribution in the parish comes close to interpreting differences in attitudes but not as close as one would expect. No other dimension isolates parish groupings. Even *within* the same region, we find great differences e.g., one Southern parish has attitudes about the same as the Mountain state parishes, although the Mountain parishes as a group are far more change-oriented than the Southern parishes. The greatest homogeneity in viewpoint

is among the parishes in the Mountain states; the greatest heterogeneity is among the parishes in the Midwestern states.

Furthermore, we find that differences in the level of *consensus* within each parish cannot be related predictably to any of these factors on the policy issues; it can be predicted fairly reliably on the position issues only by region and racial composition. Parishioners in the Mid-Atlantic parishes are more consensual, while parishioners in the Pacific parishes are least consensual on position issues. Predominantly black parishes are more consensual on position issues, while white and mixed parishes are considerably less consensual on position matters. Parish size, the nemesis of so many Catholic leaders who worry about developing a sense of parish community, has only a modest impact, at most, on the degree of consensus parishioners achieve on Church issues.

What are the practical implications of these findings? First, the differences from parish to parish, often within the same region, suggest that "the Catholic viewpoint" is not well tapped by descriptions that rely on national survey data alone. Instead of "the Catholic viewpoint" there are many Catholic viewpoints, and these differ often by the parish one calls home.

Secondly, sophisticated analyses that compare Catholics within demographic categories — e.g., age, sex, education—still miss the embeddedness of Catholics in their local parish. Parishioners soak up the ideas they hear around them. They are not automatons calibrated to make attitude changes with each unit change in age or education. Admittedly, variables like education successfully predict attitudes, but that is because they are a shorthand way of saying that a person with a high school education is exposed to a different range of ideas than a person who went away to college; the person who attended a Catholic college lived in a different social environment than a person who went to a state university; and finally a person who graduated from Fordham in New York had different teachers and classmates than a person who graduated from Santa Clara in California. All this is to emphasize that parishioners who spend a goodly share of their religious and social life in a particular parish are more likely to be exposed to the ideas of different but fellow parishioners, than they are to be exposed to the ideas of Catholic parishioners from elsewhere in their own age group or occupation. While there is a certain amount of parochialism in any parish, the parish is also a crossroads for transcending generational, educational, age, and income differences.

At the same time, we do not want to make *too* much of parish differences. We are not saying that some are "more Catholic" than others. We are saying, however, that a visitor might find that an attitude shared by only a small portion of the people in his home parish may be in the mainstream at another parish. The full panoply of attitudes is present in most parishes, but the concentration of support may differ, one to another.

Finally, in an era of high mobility from one parish to another, we should expect that parishes with higher turnover will show greater dissensus on Church issues. There is less time to assimilate newcomers to the way local people think about Church matters. Yet

in time, people begin to feel comfortable with the way a local parish prays and thinks. Parishioners are often more malleable to their social context than we realize. We will examine this issue more closely in a later report devoted to the parish as a community.

TABLE 3
PARISHIONERS' AND PASTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EACH OTHERS' VIEWPOINTS WITHIN 35 PARISHES*

<u>A. Policy Directions</u>	Pastor's Est. of People				People's Est. of Pastor			
	<u>Accurate</u>	<u>Over</u>	<u>Under</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Accurate</u>	<u>Over</u>	<u>Under</u>	<u>Total</u>
(a) The Church should become more people-oriented, less concerned about its organizational structure and rules	21	11	2	13	18	2	13	15
(b) The Church should stress a personal, spiritual relationship to Christ	29	2	2	4	22	6	7	13
(c) The Church should listen more to the voice of ordinary lay Catholics	18	11	3	14	26	3	4	7
(d) The Church should put more emphasis on spreading the faith	21	10	2	12	23	1	10	11
(e) The Church should make more effort to understand family life	12	20	0	20	22	1	9	10
(f) The Church should put <i>less</i> emphasis on lay participation in the Mass or liturgy (reverse)	22	7	4	11	16	2	16	18
(g) The Church should follow through more on changes and guidelines that resulted from Vatican II	27	2	4	6	21	4	8	12
<u>B. Church Positions</u>								
(h) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to the use of contraceptives	22	6	4	10	18	13	3	16
(i) The Church should remain strong in its opposition to abortion	28	0	6	6	27	6	1	7
(j) The Church should liberalize its position on divorce (reverse)	25	7	1	8	23	2	9	11
(k) The Church should allow women to become priests (reverse)	27	4	1	5	18	9	6	15
(l) The Church should allow married men to become priests (reverse)	28	2	3	5	20	9	4	13
(m) The Church should encourage communion between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians (reverse)	27	4	2	6	21	2	9	11

Misperceptions-Policy (a-g)	150	63	17	80	148	19	67	86
Misperceptions-Position (h-m)	157	23	17	40	127	41	32	73

**One pastor completed none of these questions. On some individual items other pastors refrained from expressing their preferences, thus reducing the count in the "accurate" columns. "Accurate" indicates the number of accurate estimates (Est.) by each group.*

Yet is the consensus that exists among parishioners the result of a closely knit community of viewpoints among people and pastor? Do they know how each other stands on Church issues? When do they misperceive viewpoints? To shed light on some of these issues we need to look at the reciprocal perceptions of pastors and parishioners on these Church issues.

Perceptions of Pastors and People

We asked pastors and parishioners not only for their own viewpoints but to estimate the viewpoints of each other. Since there is only one pastor but there are many parishioners in each parish, we can expect considerable variation in parishioners' views. Therefore we again used an arithmetic mean to describe parishioners but we added to it the standard deviation; one standard deviation on either side of the mean is like a range that embraces the views of about two-thirds of the parishioners. The odds are quite high that the views of a majority of parishioners are within this range. If the pastor's estimate lands outside this range, he has probably misjudged the viewpoints of his parishioners on this issue.

Table 3 shows the number of parishes where the pastor's perception on each issue is accurate, whether he has over-estimated parishioner's support for the issue or underestimated it. Over- and underestimates are outside the range on either side of the mean. In like manner, the people's estimate of their pastor's position is constructed with a range of one standard deviation on each side of the people's mean. If the pastor's actual value falls in that range, we have called it an accurate estimate. If his actual value is outside this range, we list it as an over- or underestimate, accordingly. The total columns tell how often a misestimate is made.

As in Table 1 we have reversed the score for issue (f) because of its negative wording. For this section of the Report, we have also reversed the scores for issues (j-m). On those issues a "disagree" or "disagree strongly" response would have indicated support for the Church's current position; on (h) and (i), however, the "agree" and "agree strongly" responses are most consistent with Church teaching. When we add the position scores together, it becomes important to have support for the Church scored all in the same direction.

The first thing to note is that pastors and parishioners generally know each other's views, but there is some misperception. In 28% of the possible cases, pastors misperceived

where the people stood on an issue; in 37% of the cases parishioners misperceived where their pastor stood on an issue. Pastors are more likely to misperceive where parishioners stand on policy directions (a-g) (average rate = 35% of parishes per issue), and are less likely to misperceive their views on Church positions (h-m) (average rate = 25% of parishes per issue). Parishioners are as likely to misperceive their pastor's policy views as they are to misperceive his views on Church positions (average rate = 37% each).

When misperception exists, (1) pastors are likely to overestimate the strength of parishioners' commitment to the Vatican II-inspired policy directions and to underestimate parishioners' desire for further changes on Church positions; (2) parishioners greatly underestimate their pastor's commitment to the policy directions and overestimate his commitment to current Church positions. Because the misperceptions differ greatly from issue to issue, it is important to examine precisely where pastors and their parishioners misunderstand each other.

Among the *policy* directions, the greatest combined misperceptions come on interest in understanding family life (30, derived by adding the two totals 20 and 10 for issue (e)), lay participation in the liturgy (29), and a less rules-oriented Church (28). Parishioners are indeed very concerned about the Church's lack of understanding of family life but it is not their sole obsession, as many pastors seem to think it is. At the same time, parishioners do not realize how much their pastor worries that the Church does not seem to understand well the nature of family life. Secondly, some pastors overestimate their parishioners' desire to participate actively in liturgies while others underestimate it; the parishioners in almost half the parishes, on the other hand, fail to realize how deeply committed their pastor is to their participation in liturgies. Perhaps those figures reflect the uneven and unsuccessful efforts of parishes to develop liturgical practices that meet their people's needs and conform to Church standards, as discussed in Reports 5 and 6. Thirdly, pastors tend to overestimate their parishioners' interest in a more people-centered, less institutional-centered Church, and the parishioners, in turn, do not realize how strongly their pastor is committed to a people-centered, rather than rules-oriented Church.

Each of the *position* issues is instructive in its own right. The least misperception concerns the Church's abortion stance. In about one-sixth of the parishes, pastors are underestimating the support of the people for the Church's opposition to abortion. But also in about one-sixth of the parishes, the parishioners do not realize their pastor feels that stance is too rigid.

Contraception is quite another matter. The majority of the active parishioners overall, and the majority in 33 of the 36 parishes have rejected the Church's teaching against the use of artificial contraceptives. Yet, in 10 parishes the pastor misperceives his people; in 6 he overestimates their degree of acceptance of *Humanae Vitae* and in 4 he underestimates their acceptance. The misperception parishioners have of pastors, however, is even more striking. There are 20 pastors who support the Church's teaching on contraception, 14 who oppose it, and 2 who did not want to register their opinions. In

13 of the parishes, however, parishioners overestimated their pastor's support of Church teaching on contraception, while in 3 of them they underestimated his support.

These figures suggest that there is a quiet opposition among the clergy in these parishes on the contraception issue. Their people think the pastor supports the official teaching but in reality he does not. In a sense, higher Church authority has bound the behavior of these pastors but not their consciences. They are loyal to the Church's hierarchy in that they do not voice their opposition; many seem also to have hidden it from their flocks. Such pastors form another level of loyal opposition, side by side with their people.

Liberalization of the Church's position on divorce has its own nuances. While the majority of the parishioners overall and a majority in 32 of the 36 parishes advocates liberalization, only 11 of the 34 pastors who expressed their opinion on the issue advocated liberalization. The result is quite a bit of misperception. In 7 of the parishes, pastors underestimate the interest in liberalization, and in 9 of the parishes, parishioners do not realize how strongly their pastor is opposed to liberalization. Liberalization of divorce rules opens up the widest gap between parishioners and pastors of any of the position issues. In one-fourth of the parishes the people and the pastors occupy positions at opposite extremes. Frustration over the matter is probably heightened by the people's and pastors' deep concern that the Church understand better the nature of family life.

Parishioners are in for some real surprises on the two issues of priestly ordination. While pastors do reasonably well in estimating their parishioners' level of commitment on these matters, parishioners in over 40% of the parishes do not grasp where their pastor stands. The principal reason for this misperception is that a lot more pastors (than parishioners realize) are supportive of priestly ordination for married men and for women. Of those who expressed an opinion, 16 of 33 pastors support priestly ordination for married men, and 11 of 33 support priestly ordination for women. While in general, pastors trail their parishioners in willingness to accept these changes, *in only two* of the parishes did parishioners realize that their pastor supported ordination of married men, and *in no parish* did the people realize that the pastor supported ordination for women. These patterns are similar to the ones observed on the contraception issue. For the most part, pastors are showing their parishioners little reason to believe that they do not support the Church's historic positions on ordination; privately, according to our data, many feel it is time for a change.

Finally, the inter-communion issue seems to have evoked more misperceptions of pastors than of parishioners. When pastors did misperceive parishioners they typically failed to realize their people's ecumenical interests. When parishioners misperceived pastors, on the other hand, they did not understand the pastors' (and the Church's) reservations about inter-communion. In the American cultural climate, it is easy for people to minimize religious differences, and to be surprised that religious leaders would retain sharp distinctions. In the post-Vatican II symbol of the Church as "the People of God" it seems difficult for many of the laity to accept that Christians active in other churches

should be excluded from the Catholic communion table. Indeed even 13 of 32 pastors who responded on this issue would "encourage communion between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians" but the majority of pastors are still closer to the Church's official position on intercommunion than they are to extensions of the Church's other positions on ecumenism.

Patterns of Misperception

When pastors and parishioners misperceive each others' viewpoints, is that something unique to each parish, or are there some general conditions that lead to misperception? To explore this issue we have analyzed the data in Table 3 by the region of the parish, its urban-rural locale, its size, its racial composition, the length of time its current pastor has served there, and the degree of mismatch between the policies and positions advocated by the people and those advocated by the pastor. While the sample of 35 parishes used for this analysis is small, its results are suggestive.

Generally, misperceptions result from a cluster of characteristics unique to the parish. However, one significant pattern stands out and a number of isolated findings appear. The general pattern is that the more urban the parish the less accurate the pastor's perceptions of where parishioners stand on *policy* directions for the Church; ironically, though, pastors in the urban and suburban parishes do a better job of perceiving their people's views accurately on Church *positions* than do pastors in rural parishes. There seem to be a couple of forces at play. The more urban the location of the parish, the more likely the pastor is to think that his people are strongly committed to the policy directions deriving from Vatican II; he overestimates their commitment. And in like manner, the more rural the parish, the more likely the pastor is to think his parishioners are very conservative and don't want the Vatican II-inspired changes; he underestimates their commitment. But the rural pastor also underestimates his flock's commitment to change in the Church's moral and ecclesiological positions. Simply put, rural Catholics are not so conservative on Church issues as many think, and urban Catholics do not uniformly march in a progressive phalanx.

Some might argue that misperception is the result of size. If the parishes were only smaller, pastors and people would understand each other better. But the data partially contradict this argument. In fact, in the smallest parishes, the pastor is most likely to misperceive his people's support for change in Church *positions*. And in the largest parishes, often in suburbs or small cities, the pastor is most likely to understand where his people are on Church positions.

Pastors of large suburban parishes do misperceive where the people are on *policy* directions, but that seems to be the result of a factor different than size: the pastors of these parishes are themselves very strongly committed to a people-centered, lay-run, participatory church and they are not always aware that their people lag behind them. That also seems to be a reason why rural and small-town pastors underestimate their parishioners' interest in the Church's changing its *positions*: as a group they are far less interested than their people in changing ordination rules, divorce regulations, etc. Perhaps

because they are so committed to the status quo they imagine that is where their people are. So, there is sometimes a curious mismatch between pastor and people; they do not grasp the attitudes of the other because those attitudes are so different from their own.

To some extent this same pattern is apparent in the parishioners' perception of their pastor's view. The suburbanites in the large parishes grossly underestimate the strength of their pastor's commitment to a participatory, lay-run, people-centered church. The rural parishioners in small parishes, however, accurately perceive (almost 100% of the time) where their pastor stands on Church positions. Parish size and strength of pastor's commitment do seem to interact in these cases.

Some modest regional differences appear in the data concerning congruence of viewpoints. The views of pastors in the Pacific parishes are closest to the mainstream of their people's views, especially in advocating change in Church positions. The Southern pastors are farthest from their people, either far more committed to change or far more committed to the status quo. Pastors of black parishes are far more committed to change than their people are; on most church issues black parishioners are oriented toward preservation of the status quo. But again caution is in order because the sample sizes that sustain each of these generalizations are very small.

Curiously enough, the length of time a pastor has served a parish has very little power in predicting whether he will accurately perceive the people's views, they will accurately perceive his views, and whether their views will coincide. Some pastors are well yoked to their people at the time of assignment; others are not. Some have been deliberately assigned there to change the people's views. Some follow a convergent path with their people throughout their ministry; others diverge further and further as time goes on.

Some would ask: how can the pastor effectively lead his flock when he fails to grasp their views or when he differs so much from them? Parish leadership and "moral consensus" are complex matters. They are understood not only by focusing on the pastor. Parish leadership nowadays is widely shared. In many parishes, "pastor" is a corporate term for a team. Priests, sisters, deacons, and laity are often on that team. Their duties range from the sacramental to the social service, from christening to counseling. And a much larger entourage devotes countless hours of volunteer work to the parish's programs and ministries. In an effort to understand parish leadership better, we will focus the next two reports on organizational development and leadership, staffing, councils and committees, and parish needs.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF OTHER PUBLICATIONS FROM THE PARISH STUDY

Books or Journal Issues

The Parish in Transition, David Byers (Ed.), Proceedings of a Conference on the American Catholic Parish, May 1985, Chicago; sponsored by Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, Inc. (FADICA), in association with National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry; Notre Dame Institute for Pastoral and Social Ministry; Lilly Endowment; and National Pastoral Life Center. (U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1986, publication no. 967; pages 111).

J. P. Dolan (Ed.), *The American Catholic Parish: A History from 1850 to the Present*, 2 volumes (Chicago: Paulist Press, December 1986).

"The American Parish: Reflections on the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life" *New Catholic World*, No. 228 (Nov-Dec 1985) (entire issue devoted to Study).

Articles

David C. Leege, "Catholic Parishes in the 1980s" *Church I* (Summer 1985), 17-29.

Mark Searle, "A Report to the Academy on the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life" *Worship* (July 1986).

Mark Searle, "Perspective on Liturgical Music" *Pastoral Music* (Aug.-Sept. 1986).

Working Papers

David C. Leege and Michael R. Welch, "Social Context and Individual Measurement in the Study of Religiosity: Some Innovations from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life" Methodological Series, Report 1 (August 1985, 54 pages plus six appendices).

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PREVIOUS REPORTS

Report #1

The U.S. Parish Twenty Years After Vatican II:

An Introduction To The Study

Report #2

A Profile of American Catholic Parishes and Parishioners:
1820s to the 1980s

Report #3

Participation in Catholic Parish Life:
Religious Rites and Parish Activities in the 1980s

Report #4

Religious Values and Parish Participation:

Report #5

The Paradox of Individual Needs in a Communitarian Church

Report #6

Of Piety and Planning:
Liturgy, the Parishioners, and the Professionals