

# Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministers: Taking the Next Steps

Clarifying the role of the professional lay ecclesial youth minister is a challenging but necessary process in the development of this emergent church ministry. This research, conducted in December 2000, responded to that challenge by studying the following questions:

- Who is the lay ecclesial youth minister and what is entailed in their ministerial role?
- How has the lay ecclesial youth minister been formed and educated for professional ministry?
- How has the current relationship between the minister and the institution (church) been defined, qualified, and structured?

This picture of this emerging field of professional ministry can assist the field in defining itself, as well as provide opportunities for lay ecclesial youth ministers to take the next step toward increased professionalization and effectiveness.

## Research Methodology

### Research Sample

The target population for the study was professional lay ecclesial ministers serving in the field of Catholic youth ministry, which included diocesan, parish, and school personnel. The accessible population was registered participants of the National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM), held November 30 to December 3, 2000 in Birmingham, AL. The primary audience of the conference, sponsored by the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), is Catholic youth ministry personnel, serving in parish, campus ministry, and diocesan settings. The purpose of the conference was to provide for the continuing education and training needs of these individuals.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The survey instrument, consisting of five sections and 94 questions, was distributed to the accessible population during the registration process at the NCCYM. A total of 869 surveys were collected from the 1,717 conference participants, resulting in a response rate of 51%. The first step in the data analysis was to eliminate from the data set those responding as either priest or deacon to the question regarding vocational status because they are not lay ecclesial ministers. Additionally, all surveys that did not provide the name and diocese of the respondent were eliminated, because they could not be confirmed as a conference attendee,

which was *a priori* criteria for inclusion in the study. These actions resulted in a useable sample of 770 lay youth ministers.

## Research Findings

### Who Is the Lay Ecclesial Youth Minister?

- Lay ecclesial ministers are primarily female (77%) and primarily Caucasian (90%), with Hispanic being the next largest ethnic group (5%).
- The average age is 40 years old, with a range of 20 to 73 years old.
- The highest education level completed by the majority is a bachelor's degree (41%) with completion of a master's degree being the next highest (20%).
- Fifty-six percent reported being an elementary Catholic school student, and 52% participated in youth ministry activities as a teenager.
- Eleven percent are converts to Catholicism.
- The most common parish youth ministry position titles are coordinator of youth ministry (25%), director of youth ministry (20%), and parish youth minister (17%).
- There is little consensus on the titles of all youth ministry personnel. Eighteen different titles were identified by the research, with 10% of the position titles being so diverse that they could not be placed into a meaningful grouping.

### A View of the Lay Ecclesial Youth Minister, in Light of the Characteristics of Lay Ecclesial Ministers

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Subcommittee on Lay Ministry identified several questions regarding the field of lay ecclesial ministry; the findings of this research take a step toward answering those questions and identifying strategies for positive action. In *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (NCCB, 2000), several characteristics were identified as defining lay ecclesial ministers. These characteristics are used to structure the following survey results.

*Characteristic One: One who responds to a call or invitation to participate in ministry.*

When asked to rate the influence of reasons for entering ministry, 88% responded that "a personal call to ministry" was either very much (66%) or moderately (22%) influential in their decision to enter ministry.

*Characteristic Two: One who intentionally brings personal competence and gifts to serve the church's mission through a specific ministry of ecclesial leadership.*

"The needs of youth" rated by 92% of the respondents, as either very much (65%) or moderately (27%) influential in their decision to enter ministry.

**Self-Assessed Areas of Ministerial Competence (Table 1)**

"Understanding Ministerial Calling" and "Understanding the Goals of Youth Ministry" were among the top three highest levels of self-assessed competence.

Highest Reported Competence	Lowest Reported Competence
Understanding ministerial calling/identity	Responding to needs of youth from different cultures
Understanding of gifts/limitations for ministry	Understanding the importance of cultural heritage in ministry with youth
Understanding the goals of youth ministry	Utilizing computer technology

*Characteristic Three: One who has received the necessary formation, education, and training to function competently within the given area of ministry.*

- Thirty-five percent of lay youth ministers reported having completed some type of ministry formation program. Table 2 delineates the courses most and least included in the formation received.
- Eleven percent of youth ministers have a bachelor's degree in religious studies, religious education, theology, or pastoral ministry; and 12% have a master's degree in the same subjects.
- Nineteen percent reported they have received a national certificate in youth ministry; and, 26% have completed a diocesan ministry formation program.

**Program Elements Most Included in Ministry Formation Programs Completed by Youth Ministers (Table 2)**

Most Included	Least Included
Leadership skill development (95%)	Courses in cultural backgrounds (52%)
Scripture Courses (92%)	Supervised practice of ministry (47%)
Theology Courses (88%)	Mentoring (45%)

*Characteristic Four: One to whom a formal and public role in ministry has been entrusted; and, one who has been installed in ministry through the authority of the bishop or his representative, perhaps using a public ritual.*

- Almost two-thirds (61%) lay youth ministers reported that their primary supervisor is the pastor or a priest.
- One-fifth (21%) have received some type of diocesan certification.
- One-third (35%) reported participating in a commissioning or graduation ceremony upon completion of their ministry formation.

*Characteristic Five: One who commits to performing the duties of ministry in a stable manner and with a sense of permanence.*

- Sixty-nine percent of lay ecclesial youth ministers intend to continue working in youth ministry for at least five years, and 36% for ten years or more.
- They average ten years of youth ministry experience, with 50% of the youth ministers having at least seven years or more of youth ministry experience.
- The most likely reason lay youth ministers gave for leaving youth ministry service was to "engage in another form of ministry."

*Characteristic Six: A paid staff person (full-or part-time) or a volunteer who has responsibility and the necessary authority for institutional leadership in a particular area of ministry.*

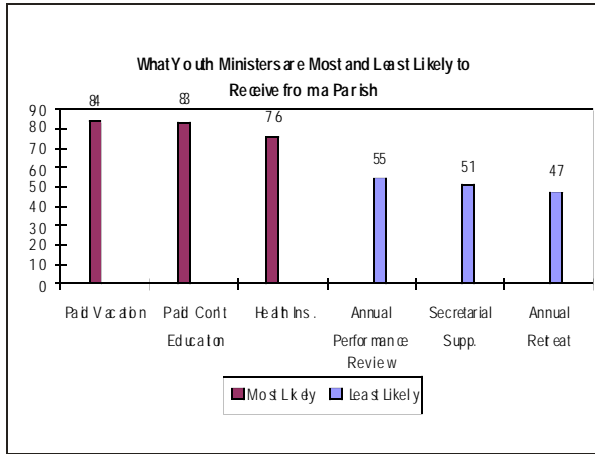
- The majority of professional lay youth ministers are full-time parish ministers (49%), 15% are part-time parish ministers, and 22% are volunteer parish ministers.
- The other primary roles lay ecclesial youth ministers serve include diocesan staff (9%), campus ministers (1%) and some other ministry setting (3%).

**Characteristics of Parish Youth Ministry**

The average number of families in parishes with lay ecclesial youth ministers was 1,621. The potential number of youth who could be served by the parish youth ministry programs was 461 youth, 50% of study participants reported the potential number as 302 youth or less. The average number of participating youth was 114, while 50% reported 60 youth or less participate in youth ministry programs. The average operating budget for parish youth ministry was \$15,368; 50% reported an operating budget being \$9,000 or less. The structure of the formal relationship between the parish and the full-time parish youth minister (n=360) most commonly includes participation in parish staff meetings (92%).

**Table 3**

Table 3 details the benefits and support youth ministers are most and least likely to receive from the parish.



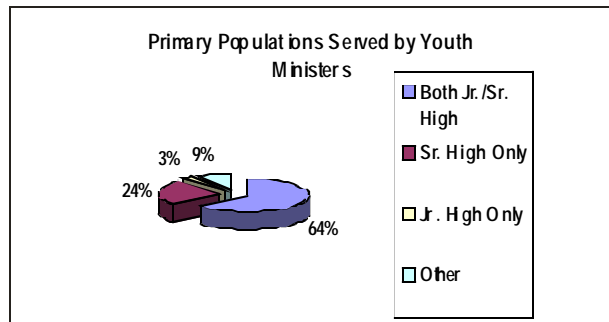
**Table 4**

Youth and Adult Leadership Programs are more likely to occur on an annual basis in parish youth programs while "Parent Education" and "Parent Teen" programs are most likely not to occur at all.

Weekly	Monthly	Annually	Not at All
Youth group meetings	Youth-focused Eucharistic liturgies	Mission trips	One on one counseling with youth
Religious education classes	Local service programs	Overnight retreats	Bible study
Confirmation classes	Youth Prayer Meetings	Participation in diocesan programs	Parent/teen programs
		Out of town social trips	Parent education programs
		Daylong retreats	Eucharistic adoration
		Youth leadership programs	
		Adult leadership programs	

**Table 5**

The primary population of youth served by youth ministers in both junior and senior high.



Youth ministers reported they have primary responsibility in the following additional areas of ministry:

- Confirmation: 53%
- Young adult ministry: 27%
- Parish-wide religious education: 18%
- Ministry to elementary school age children: 18%

### Salaries of Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministers

The average salary of all youth ministry personnel was \$22,777 in all roles, including diocesan, parish, and school settings, with a range of \$67,950 (minimum salary reported was \$50 and maximum salary reported was \$68,000). However, 50% of youth ministers reported a salary of \$24,000 or more. A salary breakdown of youth ministers by position can be seen in Table 6.

**Table 6**

Salaries by Position	
Position	Mean Salary
Parish staff paid full-time	\$25,683 <sup>1</sup>
Parish staff part-time	\$9,715 <sup>2</sup>
Diocesan staff	\$30,110 <sup>3</sup>
Campus minister	\$28,375

<sup>1</sup>Salary range of parish full-time staff was \$2,000 to \$55,000

<sup>2</sup>Salary range of parish part-time staff was \$75 to \$25,000.

<sup>3</sup>The diocesan staff mean salary includes both diocesan directors and other diocesan staff positions. The recent *CARA Study of Diocesan Youth Ministry Directors* reported a mean salary of \$34,337 with a range of \$9,200 to \$60,000 (Frohele & Gautier, 2000)

### What Are the Issues, Beliefs, and Concerns that Impact Lay Youth Ministers?

Seventy-eight percent of youth ministers believe their ministry to be very fulfilling; 86% believe that their pastor is either very much or moderately supportive of youth ministry. The areas considered "very important" by lay youth ministers to their ministry in the next three years include:

- Helping young people better understand the beliefs of the church (81%).
- Helping young people share faith with their peers (76%).
- Helping young people to better understand Scripture (75%).

The most significant issues (by a rating of either "very significant" or "significant") in lay youth ministers' current ministry position included:

- The time commitment required to work in youth ministry (73%).
- Parental involvement in youth ministry (77%).
- The lack of understanding of youth ministry at the parish level (62%).
- Lack of training for my duties (40%).

### What Are the Professional Needs of the Lay Ecclesial Youth Minister?

Youth ministers in the study were asked to rate their belief regarding the importance of various professional activities in the development of the field of Catholic youth ministry (see Table 7).

**The Importance of Activities for the Professional Development of the Field (Table 7)**

Professional Activities for Field of Catholic Youth Ministry	% Rated Very Important	% Rated Important	Cumulative Important Rating
Spiritual Programs for Parish Youth Ministers	70%	27%	97%
Web site for Youth Ministry Leaders	67%	30%	97%
National Certification for Diocesan Leaders	53%	33%	86%
Local Professional Organization for Parish Leaders	46%	38%	84%
Transferable Credential for Lay Ministers	42%	42%	84%
Professional Journal for Field	40%	43%	83%
National Professional Organization for Parish Leaders	35%	47%	82%
National Certification for Parish Leaders	45%	35%	80%
Annual Conference for Youth Ministry Leaders	40%	37%	77%

Note: The cumulative important rating is the total respondents who either rated the professional activity as important or very important.

## Conclusion

The current issues and questions that face the field of lay ecclesial youth ministry have been adequately identified by those both in and outside of the field (NCCB, 2000). The findings of this study demonstrate that professional lay ecclesial youth ministers are similar to other lay ecclesial ministers, based upon the characteristics set forth by the bishop's subcommittee on lay ministry. One notable exception is the lack of completion of formal education and ministry formation programs. Only thirty-five percent of youth ministers in this study reported completion of a ministry formation program while sixty percent of the broader field of lay ecclesial ministers have received some type of certification related to their ministry (Fox, 1998). Additionally, lay ecclesial youth ministers as a group have completed less formal education than the broader population of lay ecclesial ministers. Eighty percent of all lay ecclesial ministers (Fox, 1998) have at least a college education, while 62% of youth ministers have at least a college education. Developing strategies to engage youth ministers in the completion of formal education and ministry formation programs is important not only for their current ministry effectiveness but their future ministry as well; since the most likely reason given by lay youth ministers for leaving youth ministry work would be to "engage in another form of ministry."

Although similarities exist between lay ecclesial youth ministers and the broader group of lay ecclesial ministers, diversity not similarity seems to be the norm within the profession of lay ecclesial youth ministry. This diversity can be identified in many areas such as position titles, salaries, areas of ministerial responsibility, and the structure of the relationship between the minister and the parish. Agreement on such notable parameters of the profession by both church leadership and youth ministers is crucial for the church's ministry to youth. The future growth and stability of the field could be hampered, if agreement on and utilization of such parameters is not established. According to this research, the areas in most need of standardization include:

- A common set of position titles, especially for parish ministry personnel;
- Minimum employment and education standards for all types of lay ecclesial youth ministers;
- Recommended and rendered guidelines regarding the salaries and benefits of lay ecclesial youth ministers;
- A transferable credential for lay ecclesial youth ministers.

While diversity is the norm in most areas of the field, the conspicuous lack of diversity in the ethnic

makeup of those in the profession, with only 10% of youth ministers representing minority ethnic groups, is of concern as we minister with a diverse population of youth. This reality presents both the field and church leadership with the challenge of inviting a more diverse group of lay ecclesial ministers in the profession. Additionally, the self-assessed competence reported by lay youth ministers regarding their "ability to respond to the needs of youth from different cultures" is noticeably low, with 68% reporting limited or no competency in this area.

The issues of ministry formation, standardization of polices and practices related to the profession, and ministry to a diverse population of youth are not new issues for the field of Catholic youth ministry. Over fifteen years ago at the 1985 Catholic Youth Ministry Symposium, *Faith Maturing: A Personal and Communal Task*, some of the same issues were identified as important to the future of Catholic youth ministry. These included the need for ministry formation and training of adult leaders, the need for continued role initiation of the coordinator of youth ministry, (which includes establishing guidelines regarding the role and relationship between the minister and the parish), and the need to develop strategies for outreach to minority youth (Roberto, 1985). Additionally, a 1986 study of professional salaried youth ministers found that among the top three identified areas regarding how their work situations could be improved was the desire "that people thought more highly of their role and that the role or function be clarified" (Fox, 1994 a & b).

The findings of this study demonstrate that while progress has been made in the past fifteen years, some issues remain as challenges for the field. The need for church leaders at the national, diocesan, and parish level to develop a cohesive, comprehensive plan to address the issues identified in this research, as well as earlier studies and symposiums is a necessary action, if the profession of lay ecclesial youth ministry to take the next step towards professionalism, effectiveness, and credibility. If such action is not taken, then it is likely that, fifteen years from now, the next generation of lay ecclesial youth ministers will be dealing with these same issues.

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## About the Author and Researcher

Dr. Charlotte McCorquodale has a B.A. from McNeese State University in psychology, an M.R.E. from the University of St. Thomas and a Ph.D. in Human Resource Education and Workforce Development from Louisiana State University. Her dissertation is entitled, *The Emergence of the Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministry as a Profession in the Roman Catholic Church*. She also has a national certificate in youth ministry studies from the Center for Ministry Development and the Diocese of Galveston-Houston.

Her professional career in Catholic youth ministry began in 1981. For the past twenty years, she has worked in parish, school, and diocesan ministry settings in the dioceses of Los Angeles, Lake Charles, Galveston-Houston, Lafayette, and Mobile. She has presented workshops for youth and youth ministers at diocesan, regional and national youth ministry events for the past ten years. Her national work has focused on the development of competency-based standards for youth ministry leaders which can be seen in her service as a past chair of the Certification and Accreditation Committee for the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), a past member of the board of directors for the United States Catholic Conference Commission on Certification and Accreditation and a current member of the national Common Competency Project Writing Committee, which is developing common competency-based standards for lay ecclesial ministers serving as youth ministers, religious educators, and pastoral ministers. She is both a past board member and chair of the board of directors for the NFCYM. She recently authored a resource manual published by the NFCYM, to assist church parishes in hiring youth ministers, entitled *Hiring a Parish Youth Minister: Fifteen Steps to Success*.

Presently, Charlotte serves as president of the board of directors for Ministry Training Source, a non-profit organization committed to the education and formation of lay ecclesial ministers. As co-founder of Ministry Training Source, she serves as a national trainer and consultant for the field of lay ecclesial ministry. More information about her current work and ministry training source can be found at [www.ministrytrainingsource.org](http://www.ministrytrainingsource.org).

**Executive Summary**

An Executive Summary of the findings of the Research Study on Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministers will be published in the fall of 2001. It will contain a more detailed explanation of the parish youth ministry characteristics and cross-tabulation salary information on lay ecclesial youth ministers. To order a copy of this report contact the NFCYM.

**Monograph**

The complete report of the Research Study on Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministers will be published in the Fall of 2001. This monograph will contain raw data reports; a comparison of the salary, benefits, education level, and parish demographics of paid versus volunteer youth ministers and recommendations for future research in this area. To order this monograph report, please contact Ministry Training Source at [www.ministrytrainingsource.org](http://www.ministrytrainingsource.org).



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A Brief Summary of a Research Study on  
Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministers in the  
Roman Catholic Church in the United States

