

Higher education gets a wake-up call

Of the 222 Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States, 116 now have lay presidents. The number with women presidents has decreased from 64 percent (all of them women religious) in 1967 to only one-third.

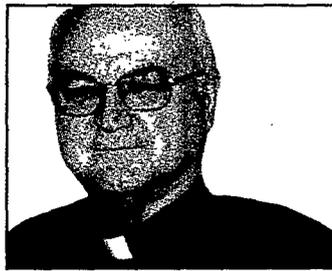
Forty percent of the presidents have indicated that there is something lacking in the preparation and development of lay leadership in the matter of the Catholic identity and mission of these institutions.

One religious president observed that there is a "limited pool of potential lay leaders who are familiar with the Catholic religious and educational heritage."

However, only 9 percent of the lay presidents surveyed expressed any concern about their own lack of preparation in this area, even though 55 percent have had no religious training beyond high school, 30 percent report no religious or theological education of any kind, and 77 percent claim to be essentially "self-taught" in the areas of Catholic heritage and mission.

These are among the findings contained in an important study by Dr. Melanie Morey and Father Dennis Holtschneider, executive vice president of Niagara University.

Although 91 percent of lay presidents feel themselves up to the task of articulating and promoting the Catholic identity and mission of their institutions, according to the Morey-Holtschneider study



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

"the data clearly indicate that lay presidents lack significant preparation for leadership in the areas of mission and identity and, at least in general terms, identify this gap as a serious problem for the future of Catholic higher education, but not for themselves individually."

The study points out that "there is little concerted effort [being] made by institutions to educate presidents in a systematic way." While boards of trustees, themselves increasingly lay in character, "have become more proficient in terms of assessing the capacity and fit of candidates in traditional areas of executive leadership," the authors note, "their expectations regarding mission and identity leadership have remained vague, unfocused, and largely unarticulated. ... If this lack of clarity among trustees continues, the chances for mission drift only compound."

Many lay presidents "genuinely struggle with their own lack of clarity about the Catholic intellectual tradition. They lack clarity about

the degree to which they can assert moral and religious leadership over other lay professionals at their institutions. They are unsure about how much explicit focus on religion the market will bear, now that the true market for Catholic higher education is broader than just Catholics."

At the same time, they do "care deeply about maintaining the Catholic identity of the institutions." The problem is that their views about Catholicism "cover a broad spectrum of attitudes and assumptions, and they vary greatly in the ways in which they promote the Catholic faith in their own institutions."

The situation reflects the failure of the post-Vatican II church to provide its lay adult members with a level of religious education commensurate with their intelligence, background and experience. For all practical purposes, religious education still ends for most Catholics at confirmation.

In principle, this increase in lay leadership is a very positive development, given the council's insistence that the church is the whole people of God — laity, clergy, and religious alike.

But it cannot happen automatically. The Morey-Holtschneider study provides a wake-up call that Catholic universities and colleges dare not ignore.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Christ's body builds home for disciples

To the editor:

I have been saddened during the past year thinking of the Church, the Body of Christ, torn and bleeding, weeping, vilified, shamed, abandoned — sometimes even by its own members. But recently I have had the opportunity to see a different picture. In several parishes without a resident priest-pastor I've seen a living, vibrant, loving, beautiful Body of Christ selflessly, devotedly caring for its members. One example is the combined parishes of St. Felix, Clifton Springs, and St. Francis, Phelps.

I saw people helping to carry the demanding responsibilities of their parishes, giving of their expertise, time, energy, personal gifts. The Body of Christ was very evident there: young and old, male and female, rich or poor, well or not so well or worn by life's battles, of various origins. I saw the very well-dressed and those in shorts and T-shirts, athletic apparel or camp wear, babes in the arms of their parents, toddlers, small children wearing emblems of their favorite sports heroes and/or their numbers, youths with what I suppose to be the latest — shall I call it "fads"? — the very Church of the family, all together learning to live the "Good News." There were smiles and handshakes, hugs and even kisses all around. Priests and Sisters

were there tirelessly coordinating the efforts of all.

Yes, the Body of Christ is alive and well today, worshipping together with Him in their midst; praying with Jesus, listening to His Good News, learning how to care for each other, to be the salt of the earth, the leaven working together to raise this beautiful world to be the home Jesus wants it to be for His beloved disciples.

Sr. Francis Cecilia
English, SSJ

French Road, Rochester

We're called to carry Jesus to the world

To the editor:

Recently, to draw attention to the poverty in our midst, Catholic Charities sponsored a bicycle trek from Brockport at the western border of our diocese to Auburn in the east.

Along the way bicyclists heard moving stories of hardworking farmworkers striving to live with dignity and ate handmade tamales prepared by farmworker women. We learned how community organizing empowers people in Rochester's 19th Ward to improve their own neighborhoods and how parish ministries like Saints' Place at St. Louis Church in Pittsford help people in more affluent neighborhoods share their bounty with those who do not have the necessities of life. We visited those who have traditionally served the poor — Catholic Charities offices, religious sisters, and Catholic Workers — hearing of efforts to provide shelter, job training, and medical care. We finished the ride tired, moved by the poverty we saw, but inspired by the number of people we met who are committed to making this a more hospitable world for all God's children.

In their recent document, *A Place at the Table*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops call Catholics to be united in our determination to overcome the realities of poverty. As

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