

**PASTORAL CARE OF THE PEOPLE WHEN A PRIEST LEAVES OR IS
MOVED UNEXPECTEDLY**

- With Reference to the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn.

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In earlier days, Catholic priests were usually in the parish providing pastoral care to the people until they died. In those days, it was uncommon to hear of a priest who had left the priesthood and there was no such thing as retiring. It was widely assumed that the parish priest would be there to baptize, marry, bury his people and administer all the sacraments to the people. Hence, there was a real pious attachment to and love of the man who had shared so intimately his people's joy and sorrows.

Today however, we well know that priests still die and they can also retire, be transferred, suspended or leave the ministry. Whatever is the case, there is always some deep sense of loss with its subsequent grief, pain and sorrow. Naturally, people in the parish need some process or ritual to adapt to the loss of their priest and to begin their healing. Most often than not, death and retirement, because they are seen as common natural contingencies of life, allow people to gather and ritualize their emotions and bid farewell to their friend and pastor.

However, when a priest leaves the priesthood, suspended or is moved unexpectedly, congregants experience a similar gamut of emotions which are no less keenly felt but are unacknowledged and even denied by Church officials. Naturally, the parish goes into a "hiatus" as the people struggle to reconcile their human response to the apparent "official conspiracy of silence". It is my intention therefore to use this project to assist the people in this predicament. I intend to provide a pastoral care that offers the pertinent process which can help in bringing the people to a place of acceptance and healing. Perhaps, my project may succeed in making a good contribution in a wider context by drawing the attention of the church leaders to the

much neglected grieving emotions of the people suffering the loss of their pastor and if possible, to have those emotional responses validated by the church.

This project consists of five chapters. My chapter one is an attempt at offering some explications of terms. It is a brief description of the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, its geographical location, some data on the descriptions of the roles of the clergy, diocesan policies on the assignment and transfer of priests. I will also highlight some other ways a priest can leave viz: retirement, sickness, suspension, death and renunciation of vows. This chapter concludes by establishing that all these factors create a deep sense of loss and pain on the people.

Chapter two focuses on some religious and clinical principles that serve as background to the subject matter in question. I shall offer some definitions of the church as the people of God; as the family of God and as the ark of salvation. These definitions clearly delineate the church as the people rather than the hierarchical structure. Hence, the central focus of any ministry is the people and all that pertains to them. Attention shall be directed to some important clinical principles that underline my subject matter: the object relation theory, separation and interpersonal relationships, attachment and other related issues. These clinical principles highlight some significant psychological issues associated with sense of loss that are often ignored nor acknowledged by the church leaders.

Chapter three is more of the description of the materials and methodology I wish to use as working tools. These materials are practical interviews focusing on a number of priests who left the priesthood or were moved or suspended. The intention is to elicit the thoughts and

feelings of these priests who have shared or continue to share intimately spiritual experiences with the people in a pastoral setting. I shall also use Questionnaires to elicit the opinions and feelings of people who have or are experiencing the loss of a priest. A practical workshop scenario with a group grieving the loss of their priest will be of great help here. The workshop process is aimed at formulating a ritual of healing and acceptance as a human response to a loss of a priest.

Chapter four is the analysis of the data from the interviews, questionnaires and workshop. The data envisages and describes the removal of a priest as a huge loss that engenders a situation of grief and sorrow. There is therefore a palpable need to recognize and assist the people going through these emotions of loss. In trying to evolve a therapeutic process, Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' stages of death and dying seems to be a possible adaptable process in a pastoral context.

Chapter five deals with the evaluations of the entire project with particular attention to the outcome of the materials. This is an attempt to answer the question whether the process of healing and acceptance as proposed in the project succeeded in addressing the pastoral needs of people in a situation of loss and grief. My project will definitely make some contributions to the clinical principles by affirming the reality of the object relation theory and the subsequent patterns of attachments. Pastoral counseling suggests itself as the indispensable psychological support to people in such situations of loss and grief. In a wider context of ministry, my project will certainly succeed in calling the attention of church leaders to the "Theology of the people of God" as the foundation to good pastoral ministry. Holistic ministry takes cognizance of the

spiritual and emotional experiences of the people and tries to provide adequate pastoral process that will bring healing and comfort to the people.

I shall conclude by affirming that effective pastoral ministry must always address the spiritual and psychological concerns of the people in a much deeper level. In any situation of loss of a priest/pastor, pastoral care must recognize and validate the deep emotions of grieves and pains associated with such loss. The people should not be abandoned to deal with such painful emotions all alone. It is rather an integral part of our ministry to provide some enabling ritual or process that will take the people to a place of healing and acceptance.

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLICATIONS OF TERMS

The chapter one of this project deals with the explications of terms. This is more of a brief description of the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, its geographical location, some data on the descriptions and roles of the clergy. I shall also elaborate further on the diocesan policies on the assignment and transfer of priests in Brooklyn Diocese. In addition to this, I will highlight some other ways a priest can leave a parish viz: Retirement, Sickness, Suspension, Death and Renunciation of vows. This chapter concludes by establishing that all these factors create a deep sense of loss and pain on the people.

1.1 DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND PARISHES OF BROOKLYN DIOCESE

The Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn is popularly known as immigrants' Diocese and it is about 179 Square miles. It was established in the year 1853 as Irish immigrants were coming in large numbers to the present Long Island area of New York. The Diocese includes territory that was previously part of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York which was established as a separate diocese when Brooklyn was a separate city from New York City. At present, the diocese consists of all the Catholic parishes, institutions and faithful within the two counties of Kings and Queens. It once included all of Long island, but it gave up its territory in Nassau county and Suffolk County in 1957 to the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Brooklyn Catholic Diocese is one of the few dioceses in the USA that is made up of 100% urban territory with numerous multi – lingual, multi – cultural and multi – ethnic communities

of about 1.6 million Catholic faithful. The diocese provides special ministration or apostolate for all these nationalities and ethnic groups. It is under the leadership of the present Bishop – Most Rev. Nicholas Anthony DiMarzio and the Metropolitan Archbishop of New York – Most Rev. Timothy Dolan and four active auxiliary bishops and three retired bishops. The Seat of the Diocese is the Cathedral basilica of St. James in the Downtown Brooklyn, though many major ceremonies are held at the much larger Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the Sunset Park neighborhood in southern Brooklyn.

After many years of restructuring and reorganization, the Diocese is currently divided into four vicariates. The vicariates consist of Brooklyn North and South, Queens North and South. Each vicariate is headed by an Episcopal Vicar: Rev. Paul Sanchez for Queens North and South and Rev. Steven Ferrari for the Brooklyn North and South vicariates. The total number of parishes in the Queens vicariate is 96 and the total number of parishes in the Brooklyn vicariate is 102. Hence, the Diocese has total of 198 parishes. Due to the dearth of vocation to the priesthood and its consequent shortage of priests available for pastoral ministries in parishes, some parishes were forced by this circumstance to function for some time without a resident priest. For administrative and canonical reasons, these parishes without a resident priest could not be sustained as parishes because according to the Canon Law, a parish must be officially entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor (Can.515). Subsequently, some of the parishes were either *suppressed* (a technical term for closing) or going through a process of *reconfiguration* (a technical term for merging) with another parish.

The Diocese has to undertake this measure in order to conform to the provision of Canon laws which legislates and defines a parish as a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor (The Code of Canon Law, #515, p.92).

The Diocese has a number of human resources with which it renders numerous services to the people besides spiritual ministries. These agencies include Education, Catholic Charities, Catholic Cemeteries and Hospitals. The bishop is the true principal of the diocese's pre-seminary high school, Cathedral preparatory Seminary. As of March 2009, Cathedral Preparatory Seminary is the only full time high school in the nation. There are three Diocesan and/or parish high schools under the auspices of the Brooklyn Diocese. The following Catholic high schools lie within the geographical territory of the Diocese, most of them are run independently of it.

- *Archbishop Molloy High School (Queens)
- *Bishop Ford Central Catholic School (Brooklyn)
- *Bishop Kearney High School (New York City)
- *Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School (Brooklyn)
- *Cathedral Preparatory Seminary (Queens)
- *Catherine McAuley High School (Brooklyn)
- *Christ The King Regional High School (Queens)
- *Fontboone Hall Academy (Brooklyn)
- *Holy Cross High School (Queens)
- *Lourdes Academy High School (Brooklyn)
- *Monsignor McClancy Memorial High School (Queens)

- *Nazareth Regional High School (Brooklyn)
- *St. Agnes High School (Queens)
- *St. Edmund Preparatory High School (Brooklyn)
- *St. Francis Preparatory School (Queens)
- *St. John's Preparatory School (New York City)
- *St. Joseph High School (Brooklyn)
- *Saint Savior High School of Brooklyn
- *Stella Maris High School (Queens)
- *The Mary Louis Academy (Queens)
- *Xaverian High School (Brooklyn)

There are 116 Diocesan and parish elementary schools in the Diocese as of March 2009. The Diocese however, is undertaking a restructuring towards a new vision for education; some schools will eventually close and will bring the total number of schools to 111 in 2010.

Another significant agency in the diocese at the service of the people is the Catholic Charities. This is a worldwide network of charities whose objective is to reduce poverty, support families, and empower communities. This agency sees its mission as promoting unity among all persons by seeking to develop caring communities. In order to fulfill its commitment to providing humane social services to the people, Catholic Charities sponsors about 183 programs and services throughout the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens. The Diocese through this agency provides a wide array of services to support families and individuals in need of assistance. As a service agency, Catholic Charities uses its commitment to service as a vehicle for the promotion of participation and involvement of people in the service of others. By bringing people together to know, to experience and reflect upon the needs and issues of their

local communities, the agency seeks to raise consciousness, encourage input and involvement in addressing the needs of the people irrespective of their religious or faith affiliation. Hence, the agency generates responses that promotes the caring, unity and witness which characterizes the Catholic ministry of service. This agency is currently developing seven programs whose objective is to offer employment services to the people. It is therefore emerging as the beacon of hope for the unemployed workers. Catholic Charities works with targeted segments of the population: including displaced workers, youths, individuals recovering from alcohol and drug addiction, senior citizens, homeless on the rebound, refugees settling in New York and the mentally ill (Vaccari, P. 2004, p.211).

Another allied agency to this is the Hospital services of the Diocese. This agency is popularly known as The Catholic Medical Center. While providing the highest quality service, it exercises Christ's healing mission to the most needy, with a special compassion for the poor (Vaccari, P. 2004 p.166). The Diocese has been under constant restructuring and reorganization of Catholic Healthcare. In the early 1980's, under Bishop Francis Mugavero, the Catholic Medical Center of Brooklyn and Queens became the city's largest non-profit provider of health care to the poor. Though the diocese was forced to close some of its medical facilities in both counties, it continues to supply a wide range of medical services to the people of Brooklyn and Queens, including a new program in cancer research funded by the National Institute of Health.

There are about nine Roman Catholic cemeteries serving the Diocese of Brooklyn. Catholic Cemetery is an important feature of the pastoral care of the Diocese in its effort at

assisting people in moments of grief and sorrow. Thus the mission statement of this ministry says “We believe in Jesus’ promise that He has prepared a place for each of us. He welcomes our loved ones home while we await His final coming. At Catholic Cemeteries, we provide a sacred place of faith, hope and comfort. Here our beloved enter the resurrection to everlasting joy”. These cemeteries are:

- *Holy Cross Cemeteries
- *Most Holy Trinity Cemeteries
- *Saint John’s Cemeteries
- *Mount Monica Cemetery
- *St. Monica Cemetery
- *Our Lady Of Mount Camel Cemetery
- *St. Charles/Resurrection Cemeteries
- *Trinity Cemetery
- *St. Mary Star of the Sea Cemetery.

1.2 Statistical Description of Clergy and their Roles

At present, the total number of Diocesan priests in Brooklyn Diocese is 325; priests of religious orders 54. The total number of priests active in the diocese of Brooklyn is about 379.

Diocesan priests active in the Diocese = 294

Diocesan priests active outside the Diocese = 31

Priests, Retired, Sick or Absent = 223

Number of Diocesan priests = 548

Religious priests in the Diocese = 163

Retired, Sick or absent priests = 223

Total number of priests in the Diocese = 711

Non – incardinated priests = 106

Churches with resident priests = 162

Permanent Deacons in the Diocese = 180

Missions = 10

Stations = 11

Chapels = 13

Seminary = 1, with 60 students

The number of available, active priests in the Brooklyn Diocese has declined to 46% since 1979 (Roger, P. 2007I). The startling reality is that nearly a quarter of these priests will reach retirement age in the next five years, 42% within the next ten, and 81% within the next 20 years. Each year produces an average of 2 priestly ordinations. Hence, during this same period, if current trends holds, new ordinations will only serve to replace the active priests who die before reaching retirement. Of course, these data present a very dark and pessimistic outlook for the future of pastoral ministries in the Diocese.

A diocesan priest is any priest that is fixed within a diocese, and he is not part of a religious institute. A parish priest or pastor therefore is the priest (diocesan or religious) appointed by the diocesan bishop to a particular parish and has the duty to exercise the pastoral care of that community. Parochial Vicar acts as an assistant to the pastor. The office of a parochial vicar was created following the recommendation of the Canon Law: Whenever it is necessary or opportune for the due pastoral care of the parish, one or more assistant priests can be joined with the parish priest. As cooperators with the parish priest and sharers in his concern, they are, by common counsel and effort with the parish priest and under his authority, to labor in the pastoral ministry. An assistant priest may be appointed either to help in exercising the entire pastoral ministry, whether in the whole parish or in a part of it or for a particular group of the faithful within it, or even to help in carrying out a specific ministry in a number of parishes at the same time (The Code of Canon Law, #545). A religious priest is one who commits his life to sharing the life and apostolate of a particular community. A religious priest like the diocesan priest embraces the call to life of poverty, chastity and obedience. He responds and nurtures this call through a life of celibacy, faith, prayer and service. A religious priest can also serve in a parish setting depending on the demand and discretion of the diocesan bishop. Depending on a particular religious order, religious priest may dress in 'normal' clothes or in a habit as a distinctive mark of the order.

As we well know, priests primarily play ministerial roles in the parishes and in the lives of people. Ordinarily, a priest is one called by God and consecrated by a bishop and by the virtue of ordination he is sealed with a special character and configured to the person of Christ

in such a way that he is able to act in the person of Christ (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Vatican 11 Document, 1981, p.865). A priest thus mediates between God and his people by assisting in serving the church in the dispensing of sacrament, celebration of Holy mass, teaching the ways of God, offers pastoral counsel, performing the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy among the people God entrusts to his care. In a common parlance, he provides pastoral care to the people. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms the sacerdotal roles of priests in relation to the people thus: the priests are for all that associated with them by reason of their sacerdotal dignity; and in virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest, they are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1564, 1994, p.391). For the past 400 years, the priest's role was seen as mainly sacramental. That began to change with the Second Vatican Council. The orientation of this council gave a new and broader understanding of the roles of priests in relation to the people.

The spiritual gift they received at ordination prepares them not for a limited and restricted ministry but for the fullest and holistic ministry to the people of God (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p.391). This is to state that the office of the priesthood in the Catholic Church exists essentially for the salvation and other spiritual needs of the people. Though at the core of the priesthood is the Holy Eucharist and other sacraments but the new understanding of the meaning of sacrament defines it as more than just seven ritual acts that give grace. According to Sister Sandra Degidio, O. S. M., they are opportunities for people

already in God's grace to gather and celebrate that fact through symbolic action or ritual. Our understanding of sacraments today begins not with church rituals, but with the experience of God's presence and care in our daily lives (DeGidio, S; Sacraments Alive, p.102).

The emphasis here is on the experience of God's presence and care for the people. Perhaps, this new understanding follows the Second Vatican Council reaffirmation of the priesthood of the faithful. Thus the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world (Vatican II Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1981, P.388). Since the people of God have been incorporated into the pastoral ministries of priests, the role of the ordained priesthood is not limited to the celebration of the sacraments, it also includes helping all the baptized to bring the priesthood of their baptism into fruition. In this connection, the Code of the Canon Law notes that a priest can fulfill his priestly office diligently when he endeavors to know the people: So that he may fulfill his office of pastor diligently, the parish priest is to strive to know the faithful entrusted to his care. He is therefore to visit their families, sharing in their cares and anxieties and, in a special way, their sorrows, comforting them in the Lord. If in certain matters they are found wanting, he is prudently to correct them. He is to help the sick and especially the dying in great charity, solicitously restoring them with the sacraments and commending their souls to God. He is to be especially diligent in seeking out the poor, the suffering, the lonely, those who are exiled from their homeland, and those burdened with special difficulties. He is to ensure that spouses and parents are sustained in the

fulfillment of their proper duties, and to foster the growth of Christian life in the family (Can. 529, p.95). No doubt, the priest bonds with individuals, families and communities in the process of carrying out his duties. However, current experience of the shortage of priests makes the church especially Brooklyn Diocese encourages and involves the laity in various aspects of pastoral ministry. The intention is to make the experiences of God's presence and care alive in all parishes and communities. Hence, besides pastoral ministry, priests can equally bring God's presence and care to people in the areas of education, health care, youth ministry, aged care, social work etc. In order to effectively fulfill these roles, a priest must be familiar with the lives of those to whom he ministers and be ever more closely united with them and with Christ – the eternal high priest.

1.3 Diocesan Policies on the Assignment and Transfer of Priests

The Diocesan policies on the assignment and transfer of priests are the rules and processes governing the assignments and transfer of priests. Here in Brooklyn diocese and like other Catholic dioceses, the diocesan bishop has to approve and promulgate the policies in accordance with the provisions of the universal code of the Canon Law of the Church. The objective is to ensure that priest personnel who exercise the sacred ministry in the Diocese, do so with awareness of the rights and responsibilities that are theirs as a result of their

Ordination, and in particular because of their relationship to this particular church and its Diocesan Bishop(Diocese of Brooklyn, Clergy Personnel Manual, p. 1, 2007).

In formulating the Diocesan policies on the transfer and assignment of priests, the Manual specifically noted that “by Sacramental Ordination, priests are consecrated for the service of the people of God, and especially at this time of limited personnel, they are called to respond with trust, respect and generosity to the needs of this particular church, as identified by the Diocesan Bishop (Clergy Personnel Manual, 2007, p.1). The Manual made some pertinent observations about the nature and the demands of the diocese thus: Our totally urban Diocese includes numerous multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities whose needs are to be served by those consecrated by the Sacrament of Orders. The process of assigning sacred ministers must always consider the fulfillment of the mission of Christ in this challenging context, as well as the welfare of the entire community of the church. While it is a human process subject to the limitations of the individuals entrusted with this responsibility, it is prayerfully undertaken with faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and trust in the generous response of those assigned (Clergy personnel Manual, 2007, p.2).

Here, the Diocesan Bishop as the chief shepherd of the diocese has a pastoral responsibility to the entire Brooklyn Catholic Ecclesiastical local community – laity, those in consecrated life and the clergy. As the Rite for the Ordination of a Bishop exhorts: “With the charity of a father and brother, love all whom God places in your care, especially the priests, your co-workers in the ministry of Christ” (Roman Pontifical, Ordination of Bishops 26, Prayer of Consecration). This exhortation along with sensitivity to the needs of particular parishes and the specific

talents of the individual priest becomes the priority in the consideration given to assignments and transfer of priests in Brooklyn Diocese.

It is very clear that Catholic priests cannot exercise any sacred ministry independently or in isolation from the diocesan bishop. In their Ordination, with the church community as a witness, they commit themselves to a relationship with their diocesan bishop or legitimate ordinary based on respect and obedience, as well as to the exercise of the sacred ministry in fraternal communion with their brother-priests(Roman Pontifical, Ordination of Priests 22, prayer of Consecration) . All sacred ministers are ordained for the service of others, not of themselves. They will attain holiness if they exercise their sacred ministry sincerely and tirelessly in the Spirit of Christ. In view of this conviction, the diocesan needs as known and articulated by the diocesan bishop are of paramount importance in establishing a priority for the assignment and transfer processes.

As a general policy, the Diocesan Bishop determines all assignments of priests who are incardinated into the Diocese, after consultation with the members of the Personnel Assignment Board. Changes in the assignment may be initiated by the Diocesan Bishop, or by the individual priest, or by the pastor of a parish or agency head. While individual preferences of priests will be given serious consideration, the needs of the parish and Diocese supersede any other interest. Priests are expected to understand this and respond generously. A priest serves in a particular parish as a pastor for a term of six years and renewable for another term: In accord with the Decree issued by the USCCB – U. S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, which has been approved by the Holy See, and implemented by the Diocesan bishop of Brooklyn,

diocesan priests appointed as pastors in the Diocese of Brooklyn will be appointed for a six – year term. After the completion of one term, the pastor may be renewed, after undergoing a review process. However, after completing two terms (12 years), pastors should expect to be reassigned. If a priest is 67 years old, or older, upon completing his 12th year as pastor, he will be allowed to begin a third six- year term pending his retirement (Clergy Personnel Manual, p.13). This diocesan regulation allows pastors to serve in a particular parish for a fairly long time.

ON APPOINTMENT OF PASTORS: A priest, who after five years of ordination and is interested in serving as a pastor of a particular parish should submit a letter indicating his intention to the Secretary for Clergy Personnel. Such a letter must have the following information: Summary of past and present pastoral experiences; leadership skills, language ability, management and financial expertise, human relations, experiences in organization and planning, most recent educational up – dates etc. The same application should be sent to the Clergy Personnel for each pastorate that is available (Clergy Personnel Manual, p.3, 2007).

DUAL ASSIGNMENT: This is when a priest who has a full – time parish assignment accepts an additional assignment from the Bishop to a diocesan ministry. In this case, the Diocese in consultation with the office of Human Resources, will reimburse the parish for the priest's salary, health benefits, car insurances etc. in proportion to the time committed to the diocese on a monthly basis.

EMERGENCY REQUEST FOR REASSIGNMENT: An “emergency request for reassignment” is one initiated by the priest or pastor/agency head outside the established times for changes in assignment usually January or June each year. Here, the request must be presented in writing to the Secretary for Clergy Personnel, who will notify the appropriate Territorial Episcopal Vicar. The priest or pastor/agency head making the request will be contacted by the appropriate Territorial Episcopal Vicar to review the reasons for the requested reassignment. If it is the priest who is requesting the transfer, he informs the pastor/agency head regarding his action. In either case, the Territorial Episcopal vicar discusses the request with the Diocesan Bishop or in his absence, the Vicar General or Vicar for Clergy, and the Secretary for Clergy Personnel. The Personnel Assignment Board tries to identify and recommend to the Diocesan Bishop the most suitable assignment for the priest. If the request is approved, the Territorial Vicar informs the pastor/agency head involved that a replacement will be supplied pending the next established time for changes in assignment. The appropriate Territorial Vicar needs to explain the emergency nature of the situation to the receiving parish/agency. He also advises the parish/agency that it may have to accept a transfer of a priest on its staff during the next established time for assignment of priests. However, the proposed pastor/agency and the candidate must have an interview to discuss the assignment. The result of this discussion will be conveyed to the Territorial vicar who invariably sends this to the Diocesan Bishop, who in absence of any other obstacle, issues out a letter of appointment.

TRANSFER INITIATED BY THE DIOCESE: In the case of a transfer initiated by the Diocese, the appropriate Territorial Vicar receives permission from the Diocesan bishop to approach a

particular priest about a transfer. The Vicar also approaches the pastor/agency head to explain the needs of the Diocese and the reasons why this transfer is being sought. He then discusses the impact of this transfer on the parish/agency and the considerations for a replacement. The vicar calls the priest and explains the specific needs of the Diocese, and the reasons why he is being asked to respond to those needs. An interview between the priest and the receiving pastor/agency will take place and the results will subsequently be sent to the Diocesan Bishop. In the absence of any other obstacle, a letter of appointment will be issued by the bishop. In a case of serious obstacle which is rare, the bishop in consultation with the Vicar for Clergy will determine whether or not the particular assignment should be reconsidered.

TRANSFER INITIATED BY PRIEST: A priest requesting a change of assignment or ministry ordinarily will indicate this in a letter to the Secretary for Clergy Personnel at least six months prior to the desired reassignment, usually in January or June. The priest requesting for reassignment must inform his pastor or agency head regarding his action before writing to the Secretary for Clergy Personnel. As noted before, the letter must contain personal information regarding the reasons for the desired change, personal qualifications, skills, background, language, special talent and education. Should further information or clarifications be required, an interview with the Territorial Vicar will be arranged by the Secretary for Clergy Personnel. The Personnel Assignment Board which consists of all the territorial vicars, the Vicar for Clergy, the Secretary and the Priest Personnel will review all letters for transfer or reassignment.

ASSIGNMENT OF NEWLY ORDAINED PRIEST: Here, the seminary provides the Secretary for Clergy Personnel with a report on each candidate's background and abilities, as well as his

ministerial preferences. The Secretary for Clergy Personnel will arrange an individual interview with those to be ordained priests. The members of the Personnel Assignment Board will participate in this interview. The Board makes recommendations for assignment to the Diocesan Bishop who makes the final determination.

The appropriate Territorial Episcopal Vicar will ascertain the openness of the parishes under consideration to work with a newly ordained priest, particularly in view of the requirements of the Ministerial Internship Program. The newly ordained receives his assignment from the Diocesan Bishop at his Ordination. Together with his parish assignment, he is also assigned to the Ministerial Internship Program. Within six months after the assignment, the appropriate Territorial Episcopal Vicar schedules a follow – up interview with the pastor and the newly ordained to review the assignment.

Ministerial Internship Program is designed to provide supervision, support and the context to foster ongoing spiritual development and continuing education, during the four years following Ordination to the Priesthood. Each newly ordained priest is assigned to this program and to a parish in which his participation in the program is coordinated. The Vicar for Higher Education will coordinates this program, in collaboration with the Director of the Office for the Ministry and Life of Priests and the Special Assistant Clergy. The program consists of regular individual meetings with a priest mentor, to whom the newly ordained priest is assigned, as well as with the Coordinator of the Ministerial Internship Program. In addition to these meetings, there are formal sessions in a ‘day of recollection’ atmosphere, which are intended to afford the priests continuing academic and spiritual formation.

The emphasis of the program is to provide support for the newly ordained priest in his transition from the seminary to parish ministry, as well as to help him develop his personal spiritual life and theological reflection, and to integrate them into his ministry.

VACANCY IN A PARISH: When a pastorate or parish becomes vacant, consultations will take place before the appointment of a new pastor. The appropriate Territorial Episcopal Vicar will meet with the staff of the parish and with a representative group of parishioners to solicit data that will be helpful to the deliberation of the Personnel Assignment Board in making recommendations to the Diocesan Bishop for the selection of a new pastor.

The Secretary for Clergy Personnel officially communicates the vacancy to the presbyterate (priests' forum). After a vacancy is officially announced, any priest may write a letter to the Secretary for Clergy Personnel indicating his intention and interest in being considered for that pastorate. Any priest who applies will receive an abridged Parish Profile, which may include counsel from the outgoing pastor regarding qualifications he may consider necessary for his replacement. This information will enable each applicant to better determine his suitability for the vacant pastorate. If after reviewing the profile, an applicant determines that he is not suited for the pastorate, he may withdraw his name.

Sometimes, an interview with the Secretary for Clergy Personnel or Territorial Vicar of the region of the Diocese where the vacant parish is located may be required of candidates for the Personnel Assignment Board to gather more information or for the sake of clarification.

While offering recommendations to the Diocesan Bishop, members of the Personnel

Assignment Board will consider those who have expressed an interest in becoming pastors, as

well as those who have written about the vacant parish. However, it should be noted that, after the consideration of those applicants, the Board might find it necessary to go outside this group in order to find a more suitable candidates for the parish. In any case, the Diocesan Bishop reserves the right to make executive appointment as he may see fit.

1.4 SOME OTHER WAYS A PRIEST CAN LEAVE:

Having examined the Catholic Diocesan policies on the assignment and transfer of priests to different parish or ministry in Brooklyn Diocese, the same or similar policies apply to other Catholic Dioceses here in the U.S.A. However, this is one official way a priest can leave a parish. I wish also to highlight some other ways a priest can formally leave a parish.

1.4.1 RETIREMENT

Retirement is one of the ways a priest can leave a parish. This follows the natural process of aging and the subsequent loss of the natural abilities to function to optimal level and unable to provide effective pastoral care to the people. The church clearly recognizes the reality of aging and thus makes provision for this in its general Code of Canon Law: A parish priest who has completed his seventy fifth year of age is requested to offer his resignation from office to the diocesan Bishop who, after considering all the circumstances of person and place, is to decide whether to accept or defer it. Having taken account of the norms laid down by the Episcopal Conference, the diocesan Bishop must make provision for the appropriate maintenance and residence of the priest who has resigned (Canon 538, #3, p.97).

Though the Code of the Canon Law uses the term ‘Resignation’, the common parlance in the diocesan regulation, it means retirement. According to the particular Ecclesiastical Laws of Brooklyn diocese, the official age for retirement is seventy one: Upon completing 71 years of age, any diocesan priest serving in a diocesan assignment, or in an extra – diocesan assignment at the request of the Diocesan Bishop, may request from the Diocesan Bishop the status of ‘senior priest’, with all accompanying rights and benefits. After presenting the request, diocesan benefits will start the following January or June (Clergy personnel Manual, p.11). The status of ‘senior priest’ is the technical term for retired priest. A retired priest can equally be called ‘Pastor Emeritus’ if the priest retires as a pastor of a parish. Hence, according to the Clergy Personnel Manual, it is always at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop to confer the title ‘Pastor Emeritus’. A priest usually receives the title “Pastor Emeritus” if, at the time of his retirement, he holds the title “Pastor”. The pastor emeritus will vacate the pastor’s quarters, as soon as reasonably possible, to accommodate the new pastor. The Senior Priest Liaison will assist the retiring pastor with residence arrangements (Clergy Personnel Manual, P. 11). In the case of a religious priest for example, the law states that “The religious can be removed from the office at the discretion of the authority who made the appointment, with prior notice being given to the religious Superior; or by the religious Superior, with prior notice being given to the appointing authority. Neither requires the other’s consent (Canon Law, 682,p.124).

In view of the special circumstance as regards shortage of priests in the Brooklyn diocese in particular and American Catholic church in general, all the retired priests are expected and encouraged to make themselves available for pastoral ministries in various

parishes or agencies as needs be. Of course the necessary arrangements and remuneration will be made by the Secretary for Clergy Personnel according to the established diocesan policy. It is therefore normally expected that retiring pastors will leave the rectory (priest's residence) of the parish where they have been serving as pastors and take up a new residence in accord with established diocesan policy. However, depending on room availability and the result of a physical examination taken at the time of retirement, and if the retiring pastor requests for it, the Diocesan bishop may waive this requirement for one or more of the following reasons: a) at the request of the new pastor;

b) Because of long – term residence in that rectory

c) If, in the judgment of the Diocesan Bishop he deems it necessary.

1.4.2 SICKNESS

Illness we know is part of the reality of our humanness and can happen at any point in our lives as human being. Priests, even the grace of ordination did not and cannot guarantee them security or immunity from sickness. Some priests like any other person can be terminally ill, mentally retarded or disabled. Illness naturally incapacitates and prevents one from functioning, at least to some optimal level. The illness of any priest therefore affects the entire Christian community entrusted to his care. There have been cases of priests who experienced great difficulty discharging their priestly roles effectively due to some medical conditions and

this adversely affected the spiritual nourishment of the people. These medical conditions can be physical or psychological. Whatever the situation, the priest is never abandoned to deal with the situation alone. The diocese offers some help and supports.

Ordinarily, every priest is provided with health insurance and annual health workshop towards wellness. The diocesan Clergy Personnel Manual reiterates thus: Every diocesan priest will be provided with medical and dental insurance coverage. Premium payments will be the responsibility of the parish/agency of assignment or, in some cases, the Diocese. If several plans are available, the priest may have to pay a contribution towards his health benefit depending on the plan he chooses (Clergy Personnel Manual, p.16). In addition to this, all diocesan priests are encouraged to undergo a thorough medical examination every year. For diocesan priests serving in a diocesan assignment, or in an extra – diocesan assignment at the request of the Diocesan Bishop, the balance not covered by the Diocesan Medical Plan becomes the responsibility of the parish/agency of assignment or, in some cases, the Diocese.

In the case of psychological problem of addiction (alcohol or any other chemical substance), the diocese does all it can to assist the priest in all the cure and recovery processes. The diocese makes use of its own Catholic Counseling Center and other Substance Abuse Treatment Centers in New York and its environ to assist its priest towards recovery. In all, the diocese offers whatever therapeutic help available to any priest going through emotional, psychological or physical medical condition.

However, when it is obvious that a priest is incapacitated due to illness and cannot effectively fulfill his priestly duties, he is released from official assignment to enable him take

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care of his health. Some are admitted to a nursing home, or similar institutional setting. In such case, the priest is therefore expected to leave the parish especially in a case of long term medical care and rehabilitation.

1.4.3 SUSPENSION

Suspension denotes some sense of interruption or to debar temporarily from a privilege, office or function or to make temporarily inoperative, perhaps, for some specified time or conditions (cf. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975). In an ecclesiastical context, the word "administrative leave" is commonly used to describe or depict a restriction of the ministerial faculties of a priest for a definite or sometimes, indefinite period. The power to suspend or remove a priest by the bishop is derived from the Canon Law which states that: When the ministry of any parish priest has for some reason become harmful or at least ineffective, even though this occurs without any serious fault on his part, he can be removed from the parish by the diocesan Bishop (Canon Law, #1740, p.308).

In ecclesiastical language, the term "administrative leave" is often used to describe an action taken by the diocesan bishop to restrict the ministerial faculties of a priest who is acting in a manner detrimental to the priestly office. Thus, a priest can be suspended from the exercise of his duties by the official withdrawal of his faculties (power to carry out his priestly duties). A diocesan bishop can therefore forbid a priest to teach in a school, or to engage in counseling of young people, or to visit certain places, or even to celebrate public mass. Depending on the nature or gravity of the offence, a priest may be asked to vacate the parish.

The imposition of administrative leave on any priest is not done arbitrarily by the bishop. It often follows some ecclesia juridical process that involves thorough investigations. According to the Canon Law, “at any stage of the process, in order to prevent scandal, protect the freedom of the witnesses and safeguard the course of justice, the Ordinary (bishop) can, after consulting the promoter of justice and summoning the accused person to appear, prohibit the accused from the exercise of the sacred ministry or of some ecclesiastical office and position, or impose or forbid residence in a certain place (parish) or territory, or even prohibit public participation in the blessed Eucharist. If, however, the reason ceases, all these restrictions are to be revoked; they cease by virtue of the law itself as soon as the penal process ceases (Canon Law, 1722, p.304). The law itself implies that a priest can be asked to proceed on an administrative leave once a juridical process of investigation is initiated following the allegation of impropriety on the part of a priest. Once an administrative leave is imposed and all the faculties withdrawn, all other financial benefits will also be suspended. In some dioceses however, an administrative leave is not imposed upon a priest until he is proved guilty by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal.

In either case, the priest is asked to vacate the parish and consequently restricted from the exercise of his priestly ministries which is essentially providing pastoral care to the people. Though a priest on administrative leave is still a priest and of course will never cease being a priest, but lacks the sacred power to minister to people. Of course, when a priest leaves a parish in this manner, it brings great sadness and grief to the people and creates vacuum in the spiritual lives of the people entrusted to his spiritual care. The priest can afterward assume full

spiritual responsibilities to the people when he is restored back to his sacred ministry by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority – the bishop. Of course, nobody doubts the deep spiritual and psychological pain the so called ‘administrative leave’ inflicts both on the lives of the people and the individual priest in question. There have been some angry reactions from the people and of course deep indignation and resentment on the part of the priest. Whatever might have necessitated the imposition of the ‘administrative leave on a priest’, the situations, the needs and feelings of the people need to be taken into consideration.

4.1.1 DEATH AND RENUNCIATION OF VOWS

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Death is the end of earthly life. Our lives are measured by time, in the course of which we change, grow old and, as with all living beings on earth, death seems like the normal end of life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p.262). Though in the Catholic tradition, death is basically seen and accepted as a transformation. In his book, *Life Beyond Death*, John C. Tormey expresses the common belief that Life continues in a new form, with a new beginning and a new freedom (Tormey, J. 1981, p.15). The physical separation engenders by death often reinforces the vulnerability of our human nature and it is always described as an irreplaceable loss. The death of a priest therefore is another sad way a priest might leave a parish thus bringing grief and sorrows to the people.

The death of a priest is not only very devastating to his immediate family but also to the members of his parish community. Like any other bereaved family, the parish communities often come together to grief and mourn the death of their priest and pastor. No matter the nature of the cause of death, the parish experiences great loss and in no small way, creates some spiritual vacuum in the lives of the people. It is interesting to note the response of the diocese whenever a priest dies. The diocese merely expresses some sense of loss and condolence to the priest's immediate family and to the parish. It further assists the parish financially in the funeral arrangements thus: The Diocese will reimburse the appropriate parties for payment of funeral expenses incurred because of the death of a priest. A maximum of four thousand dollars (\$4,000.00) will be paid for funeral home expenses, exclusive of any memorial cards that may have been prepared. An additional reimbursement of a maximum of two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) is available to parishes/agency for memorial cards, newspaper death notices, liturgical expenses and the luncheon following the funeral. Appropriate receipts must accompany all claims for reimbursement (Clergy Personnel Manual, 2007, p. 15). Little or nothing is done to support and assist the people in their grief as a result of the death of their pastor besides the financial help as stipulated in the Clergy Personnel Manual.

Another sad way a priest may leave a parish is through simple renunciation of his vows. This has been a common experience for decades now especially here in the U. S. A. In the book, *Diocese of Immigrants: The Brooklyn Catholic Experience, 1853 – 2003*, Peter Vaccari et al; remarks "One of the great challenges facing the Church is the decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This shift has been particularly pronounced in the Western world,

which has experienced an unprecedented prosperity in the last half century. In the United States, between 1965 and 1984, some 7,000 priests left the active ministry” (Vaccari, P. et al, p.181, 2004). And of recent, a good number has equally left by simple renunciation of vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which they freely embraced at the moment of ordination.

Though it is not my intention to consider and explain the reasons why some priests abandon the priesthood, however, various explanations have been frequently offered. According to Peter Viccari , “ Some cite external factors, such as a growing secularist worldviews, the crisis in family life, and a widespread fear of commitment. The internal factors suggested include a crisis of theological identity regarding the role of the priest and religious, while issues pertaining to ecclesiastical discipline (such as celibacy) have also been cited as explanations” (Viccari, Peter et al; p.182, 2004). A priest can in some situations be dispensed from his ministerial duties as a priest but the seal of his priesthood still remains. Of course this belief has been a source of burning controversy in the Catholic Church. The Church however, continues to insist on the permanent character of the priesthood which they believe to be indelible once validly conferred. Thus, in their post Conciliar Documents of the Vatican Council II, the Synod of Bishops in 1967 reaffirmed this belief: This special participation in Christ’s priesthood does not disappear even if a priest for ecclesial or personal reasons is dispensed or removed from the exercise of his ministry (Flannery, A. p.680, 1990). This belief in the lifelong permanence of the priesthood is theologically informed by the fact that Christ associated himself with the church in an irrevocable way for the salvation of the world and the priesthood as the gift of God for the same purpose is equally irrevocable (Ibid).

Contrary to this belief and tradition, many priest still leave the priesthood and active ministry with or without due dispensation. Some will like to leave but do not want to run the risk of being censored or excommunicated. These are the ones that are most likely to be exercising the duties of the priesthood drudgingly. These priests feel 'trapped' and work like hiring's. In his book, *From Scandal to Hope*, Fr. Benedict Groeschel said that "It is one of the unhealthiest psychological situations that people can get themselves into" (Croeschel, B. 2002, p.147). Others who left are finding it extremely difficult dealing with the shame and being stigmatized as a betrayer, dissident and a failure from family members and friends.

The intention of this project however is to call attention to the deep emotions of pain, grief and sorrow the loss of a priest impacts on the people especially when the priest is intimately involved in the spiritual experiences of the people. Hence, these emotional feelings of loss must be acknowledged and considered by church officials while transferring, retiring, suspending a priest or when the priest leaves on his own volition.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Here, I wish to focus on some Religious and Clinical principles that support and reinforce the issues of concern in this project. On the religious principles, the definitions of the Church as the people of God; as the family of God; as the ark of salvation imply that pastoral ministry revolves around the people. On the clinical principles, the object relation theory; the issues of separation and interpersonal relationships; attachment patterns and other related issues are important psychological components of ministry we need to consider in order to offer effective and holistic pastoral care to the people.

2.1 THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The word 'Church' is the Latin derivative – ecclesia and Greek etymology – ekkalein, meaning to "call out of". It literally means convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose (Acts 19:39). Ekklesia is frequently used in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people (Ex.40). The first Christian community calls itself "Church" and considers itself as heir to that assembly. It is believed that the very concept of Church denotes the idea of God "calling together" his people from all the ends of the earth (CCC 751, 1994).

In the contemporary Christian usage, Church designates the liturgical assembly (1Cor 11:18), a local community or the whole universal community of believers (Phil 3:6, 1Cor 15:9). The Church therefore is the People that God gathers in the whole world; exists in various local communities and is made real as a liturgical (in the Catholic Church) Eucharistic assembly. Thus, in the scriptures, the image of the Church as the People of God is a very profound theme that expresses the great mystery of the God in relation to his people. This is foreshadowed in the Old Testament and made explicit in the N.T.

Theologically, the coming together of the People of God remotely began at the moment when sin destroyed the communion of humanity with God. The preparation for this gathering together of the People of God begins when God calls Abraham and promises that he will become the father of a great people (Gen 12:2, 15:5-6). By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of all nations and God subsequently enacted a covenant with them – You shall be my people and I will be your God (Deut 7:6; Ex 19:5-6). There was however an allusion to a new and lasting universal future covenant God intends to make with his people – *Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.... Then I shall be their God and they will be my people (Jer. 31:31-34).* This future covenant relationship was however not limited to Israel as a nation but was extended to all men and women of all races and tribes. Since it is the intention of God that all men and women will be saved, He therefore made a fuller revelation of himself to humankind through Christ and enacted a new covenant with them. According to the doctrines of the Vatican Council on the Church, “God called a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which

would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God” (Flannery, A. 1981, p.359).

The new people of God therefore are all those who are regarded as the adopted children of God by water and the Holy Spirit and are often described as messianic people. These are the people who *“are finally established as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... who in times past were not a people but now are the People of God - 1Pet 2:9-10”* (Flannery, A. 1981, p. 359). God called these people together because He wishes to sanctify and save them not just as individuals without bonds and links between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge and serve Him in holiness and in truth.

According to the Catholic tradition and teachings, all those who believe and look unto Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior constitute the church of Christ - the new people of God. The Church therefore is made up of people “who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church” (Flannery, 1981, 360). This is the church that exists and subsists in every community and is destined to extend to all regions of the earth and transcends all racial boundaries and time. It is established by Christ to be a certain seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race and to be a firm communion of life, love and truth. According to the catechism of the Catholic Church, God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the convocation of men (and women) in Christ, and this convocation is the Church (CCC. 1994, P.200).

Everyone is therefore called to belong to the new people of God. Though the people of God are to be gathered together as one, they are to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages so that the design of God's will may be fulfilled through his people. The ultimate design of God's will is the salvation of humankind and this is invariably the mission of the church. To fulfill this mission, the people of God are to be intimately united with Christ and thus constitute the "Body of Christ". This is the same as the "Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body....In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his passion and glorification (CCC. 1994, p.209).

It is also the intention of Christ to form the people of God into his Body. From the very beginning, He closely associated his disciples with his own life, revealing the mystery of God's kingdom to them and gave them a share in his mission, joy and sufferings. Jesus himself spoke of this intimate union with his people: Abide in me, and I in you.... I am the vine, you are the branches (Jn. 15:4-5); He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (Jn. 6:56). Thus, by communicating his life, spirit and mission to his followers, Christ mystically constitutes as his body all those brothers and sisters of his who are called together from every nation and race to be the church. The act of calling us together into his own people is God's own initiation and thus, it is a free gift to humankind. In her scholarly article "Domestic Church: Guiding Belief and Daily Practices," Joann Heaney-Hunter states "Calling the Church the people of God puts emphasis on God's action, God's initiative. It is God who has freely called us. It is God who has created us into God's people by breathing the Spirit upon us. To be God's people is pure gift; it is grace (Lawler, M. G. et al; 1996, p.80).

2.2 THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

The family of God is another pertinent image often used to qualify and describes the Church. This comes from the idea of our natural family. A family is ordinarily understood to be the household, or all those who live in one house as parents, children and servants. It equally depicts a group of people related to one another or otherwise connected (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1983 ed.). Family in this context refers to a group of people united by certain convictions (as of religion) and practices. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that God in his wisdom and goodness decided to convoke together men and women into a family in order to share in his own divine life: The Father decided to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ. This “family of God” is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father’s plan (CCC. 1994, p.199).

The image of the Church as the family of God fits adequately into the very nature, identity and mission of our natural family. The union of man and woman – groom and bride serves as a metaphor expressing the unity of Christ the Head, the groom and the Church, the body, the bride. Hence, in the Scriptures we see the theme of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church already anticipated by the prophets and announced specifically by John the Baptist - It is the bridegroom who has the bride, and yet the bridegroom’s friends, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom’s voice –Jn. 3:29. Jesus refers to himself as the “Bridegroom” – Mk.2: 19. The Scripture speaks of the whole Church and of each of the

faithful members of the church as a bride “betrothed” to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him. The book of the Revelation specifically describes the Church as the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb (Rev. 22:17). The union of the church and Christ is therefore seen as a marriage covenant between a man and a woman. This union is aptly described by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council thus: Christ loves the church as his bride, having been established as the model of a man loving his wife as his own body; the Church, in her turn, is subject to her head (Flannery, A. 1981, p.356). St. Paul further summed up this union when he said that Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her. He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body. “The two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church (Eph.5:31-32). As the union of man and woman is the foundation of the human family, so also the union of Christ with the Church is the springboard of all God’s children as one family.

The Church is also described as the Family of God because of the profound link between the Church and family. In his book, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II expresses this connection thus: The family should be seen as a Church in miniature – *Ecclesia domestica*, in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church (John Paul II, 1981, p.91). The church as Mother gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family and the family in turn by communicating Christ’s love to her members and other brethren, helps to build up the Church.

The human family is the nucleus and foundation of the Church whose goal is to build up the kingdom of God here on earth and comes to full realization at the end of time. The seed

and beginning of the kingdom are the “little flock” of those whom Jesus came to gather around him, the flock whose shepherd he is. They form Jesus’ true family (CCC. 1994, p.201). The church is therefore constituted by the entire gathering of the faithful into one household. By calling us into a family, God molds us together into a community. This is more than just having a number of individuals existing under the same roof. It rather “requires the ongoing willingness and effort to be present in a personal way to one another. It demands some intimate degree of sharing, caring, and communicating, and the acceptance of risks, difficulties, and sacrifices that this involves (Lawler, M. G. et al; 1996, p. 81). The Christian community is therefore a body of persons who consciously and explicitly believe in the Crucified and risen Christ and who strive to follow him. The Christian family becomes a domestic church to the degree that it grows in its faithfulness and of course in loving commitment to Christ. According to Pope John Paul II, the Church’s sanctuary is in the home. The Christian family is part of the priestly people which is the Church. By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and is called and engaged by Him in a dialogue with God. The Church therefore is the gathering of this family, a meeting in the name of Jesus Christ, wherever such a gathering takes place, Christ is there (Matt.18:20). According to Joann Heaney Hunter, “We express ourselves as Church in a most visible way when we come together in prayer and in union with Christ and by the power of the Spirit, ‘cry out, Abba, Father,’” (Lawler, M. G. et al; 1996, p.84).

The church as a family of God replicates the natural response to form a family through marriage which in itself is a divine vocation. God calls and empowers man and woman to enter into a marital relationship, create a family, and to become a people united with God through

their union with one another. Such a family transcends biological or racial ties. It is a family that sees itself as a people of God. It is a family “that shares a belief that all we have and all we are as human beings, and as family, come ultimately from a loving God who dwells in our midst. This belief expresses itself in ongoing gratitude to God who is the transcendent author of all blessings, and to family members who, through the gifts that they are and their generous giving, constitute in unique ways the personal channels through whom God’s life-giving blessings come” (Lawler, M. G. et al; 1996, p.80). In all, the image of the Church as the family of God reveals the depth of the intimacy that exists between the human family and God who is the center and foundation of all families drawing everyone to himself and empowering everyone to grow in union with each other.

2.3 THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AS THE ARK OF SALVATION

The Catholic tradition has always described the Church as the ark of salvation. This is a powerful image that is rooted in the very nature and mission of the Church. Etymologically, ark is a chest or coffer. In Jewish history, it refers to the wooden coffer in which the Tables of the Law were kept (Chambers, 20th Century Dictionary, 1983) and are expressive of the divine will and divine presence. It also refers to a large floating vessel as depicted in the incident of the Deluge when Noah and his family were preserved and saved from the destructive flood – Gen. 6:13-22. In this sense, it refers to something that affords protection and safety.

The Hebrew religious tradition teaches that by the ark, the God of the covenant manifested that He is present in the midst of His people, by His action, to guide and protect them; to make known His Word and hear their prayer (Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 1967).

The ark makes concrete the active presence of God especially during the exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land. From this historical and biblical perspective, the ark, sheltered under the tent, is like a mobile sanctuary, which accompanies Israel from the beginning, at the departure from Sinai, to the construction of the temple in which it was secured (DBT, 1967). The people identified the ark with God. It is the glory of Israel (1sam. 4:22), the presence of the Holy God among His people. The history of the biblical ark attained its height and termination when David, amidst the joy of the people, caused it to be borne solemnly into Jerusalem and was finally installed in a temple by Solomon (2 Sam 6: 12-19; 1kg 8). Thus, there was a transition from the ark to the temple but the significance remains the same.

The Christian tradition especially Catholic sees the Church as the new temple, the body of Christ. It is the place of divine presence and worship. The church which is also known as the new Israel is very much identified with the ark that speaks of divine presence. It symbolizes all that the ark stands for during the time of the people of Israel. As a sacred physical space, it is a place where the people of God come to seek divine protection and safety. However, the idea of the Church as ark goes beyond the physical to represent the concrete projection of the faith of the people in the indwelling presence of God. Of course, this is consistent with the theological idea of God as both immanent and transcendent *Being* who dwells with his people and at the same time cannot be confined to the physical boundaries of the Church.

Since it is widely assumed and strongly believed that God dwells in the Church among his people, the Church is therefore seen as the universal ark of salvation. By its very nature and mission, the Church exists for the salvation of souls. Salvation as a biblical language is related to

the ‘fundamental experience’ of being taken out of dangerous situation in which one risks perishing. The act of saving therefore manifests itself in protection, liberation, ransom, cure and health, victory, life, peace etc. It is the key word in the both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures expressing and explaining one of the most essential aspects of God’s action on earth (Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 1967). Though salvation was a recurrent theme in the Hebrew history and scriptures, it was seen essentially as the act of divine liberation, deliverance: When Israel found herself in a time of crisis from which God delivered her, whether by a providential conjunction of circumstances which might go far as to be a miracle, or by sending her a human leader to bring her to victory, she experienced “God’s salvation” (DBT, 9167). Hence, we understand why Israel always turns to Yahweh for salvation or liberation in every time of impending disaster.

The Christian tradition believes that the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the culmination of the saving action of God. For Jesus Christ, salvation of souls is His life’s mission. The teachings and ministries of Jesus Christ were all directed and intended for the salvation of men and women. This salvation in Jesus Christ is a free gift of God to his people who accept Him and live according to his divine will. In what can be regarded as a mission statement in Luke 4:18 – *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord (NT. Bible)*, Jesus proclaims that he intends salvation to be integral and holistic. In all his actions and teachings, Jesus invites all men and women into a loving and salvific relationship with God. According to Calvin Poulin, salvation is an invitation to belong to the kingdom of God as loving sons and daughters experiencing

fullness of life and love (Poulin, C. 1992, p.49). The fullness of life and love here implies the experiences of peace, joy, happiness, comfort, consolation, hope, forgiveness and healing. The Church therefore is “the visible and effective embodiment of the salvation of the whole world in every aspect of the church’s life: its inner communion, its worship, its mission, its governance” (Saroglou, 2001, p.56).

Jesus Christ established the church to carry on and extend his salvific mission on earth. He thus binds himself irrevocably with the church. By this covenant with Christ, the church becomes the sign and instrument of salvation to humankind. The Vatican Council Fathers noted that “the one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men” (Vatican Council 11,1981). Christ the founder of the Church endowed her with all the means necessary for salvation. This is to say that the Church has the full deposit of means of salvation. It is therefore in this sense that the Church can be seen as the ark of salvation. God calls all his Children into this ark and makes available to them all the essential means necessary for salvation. The primary mission of the church therefore is to create a milieu of living encounter with God (Knight, D.1985, p.17). It fosters and nourishes the sacred space where men and women encounter and experience the healing love of God amidst their pains and struggles of life. The church is true to its nature and mission only when it effectively calls people into a healing and loving relationship with God and with one another. The people believe to have found a guarantee of salvation by accepting the doctrines of the church, participating in its sacraments, especially that of the Holy Eucharist in the Catholic tradition, respecting its teachings and moral rules.

2.4 CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

From the religious principles above, we understand that the church is more of the people than any other consideration or any other factor that constitutes the church. Therefore the people are the center of all ministries in the church. I intend here to draw attention to some of the important clinical principles that might have significant psychological effects on the people in a pastoral context where a priest leaves or is moved unexpectedly.

2.4.1. THE OBJECT RELATION THEORY

The object relation theory is a psychodynamic theory within psychoanalytic psychology. It is based on the basic tenet that human being is naturally driven into relationships with one another. This relationship ranges from simple to complex interactions with the self and with one another. It explores the process whereby people come to experience themselves as separate and independent from others, while at the same time needing profound attachment to others (Berzoff, Flanagan, Hertz, 2002, p.127). It operates on the assumption that all mental processes, all anxiety situation, all instinctual urges involve some objects, either internal or external. This is to say that object relations are at the center of our emotional life.

In psychodynamic theory, an object relation is not synonymous with the commonly used term “relationships”. In a sense, object relations refers to the complexity of external relationships with others but it also includes the whole internal world of relations between self

and other, and the ways in which others have become part of the self. These internalized relations are often unconscious but in many ways more powerful and compelling than what is going on in the external world of interactions with other people. It involves the inner images of the self and others and how they manifest themselves in interpersonal situations (Object relations theory – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

It is pertinent here to point out the use and understanding of the word “object” with reference to this theory. Though object usually refers to a thing, but it is traditional in psychoanalytic language to depict a person. It is deliberately used to express an important aspect of human relations – “that people outside the self can be many things including object of desire and fear, rather than be just simply the people they are”. The word is also specifically used to differentiate object of desire or fear from the subject. Hence, the subject is the self and the object is anything outside of the self which the self desires, fears, perceives, experiences, rejects or takes in (Berzoff, Flanagan, Hertz, 2002, p.129). This is seen more in all drive theories. In this context, the object refers to persons as representing the target of the drives, and thus become the means or object by which a drive can be satisfied or frustrated.

Object relations theory makes distinction between need and impulse in human relationships. Impulse or drive can be gratified without or outside relationship. Need as a broader concept necessarily requires some kind of relationship as a condition for its satisfaction or fulfillment. Needs therefore places relationship at the center of human experiences. For optimum growth and development to take place, most of the important needs have to be met including the need to be seen and valued as a unique individual, to be accepted as a whole with

both good and bad aspects, to be held tight and to be let go, and to be cared for, protected and loved (Berzoff et al; 2002, p.130). All these experiences have some effects on the emotional life of the individual and his/her subsequent relationship and interactions with people and the external world.

In object relations theory, it is widely assumed that human beings have composite nature. That is to say that we have a corporative nature both physically and psychologically. As we feed the body physically and the body takes in and metabolizes food and drinks, so too does the psyche takes in whatever it experiences from others and with others and processes it; assimilates and integrates it to become part of the psychological self. The past experiences can influence and sometimes dominates the present inner world of a person to such a degree as to make one's life so vulnerable and insecure in many ways.

This is no less true in a pastoral setting or parish community where spiritual nourishment and supports are provided for the people by a priest. In this pastoral context, we encounter people who are emotionally, physically and spiritually vulnerable. This vulnerability can be described as "darkness" in people's lives. People experience darkness in their lives in many forms – the victims of warfare, of violence in the homes, of religious or racial prejudice and discrimination, the oppression of extreme poverty and justices; the burden of loneliness and a life without love, the pain of losing one's home, or health or spouse, the sense that God is distant or that life is meaningless or simple addiction. The priest as a pastoral counselor is challenged to take the responsibility of helping people to name and come to terms with these realities. Invariably, the priest as a pastoral counselor establishes a pastoral relationship with

individuals and/or the Christian community in the process of helping them work through their issues. Sometimes, procedures for the transfer or removal of priests in a parish or ministry do not take serious considerations of these psychological factors in a deeper level.

2.4.2 ATTACHMENT PATTERNS AND RELATED ISSUES

Every pastoral ministry presupposes some degree of attachments between the priest and client/parishioners. On some level, parish structure evolves into a family system. Like all family systems, there are some degrees of attachment amongst the members of the family. By attachment here, we mean the act of binding, connecting, associating or joining in action or function in a filial, civic or spiritual setting (20th Century, chambers Dictionary, 1983).

Attachment can also be as a result of some personal affection, sympathy or empathy. It is an emotional bond to another person. The psychologist, John Bowlby was the first attachment theorist who described attachment as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings (Holmes, J. 1993, p.62).

Though most of the attachment theories focus more on behavioral patterns that allow an infant to be bonded with his/her primary caretaker especially the mother, but this is not limited only to a child – mother relationship. Attachments patterns can be seen and experienced in various ways as people (adults) seeks and maintain proximity to whomever is their primary attachment figure (Harkness, Super, 1995 p.4). Attachment starts from early childhood. The earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout their lives. Such attachments give some sense of security and improve the person's chances of survival in the wider society. The central theme of attachment

theory is that mothers or caregivers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of security. The child knows that the caregiver is dependable and this helps to create a secure base for the child to explore the world (Van Wagner, An overview of attachment Theory, About.com).

Though there were some well known characteristics of attachments, it was a psychologist Mary Ainsworth who enunciated three major characteristics of attachment following her research in 1970. Based on the responses from her researches, Ainsworth described the following three features of attachment:

- *Secure attachment

- *Ambivalent – insecure attachment

- *Avoidance – insecure attachment

Elaborating further on these styles of attachment, Ainsworth observed that in secure attachment, a child exhibits minimal distress when separated from caregivers. The child feels secure and able to depend on the caregiver. When the caregiver leaves, the child feels assured that the parent or caregiver will certainly return. When frightened, securely attached person will readily seek comfort from caregivers. The child is confident that the caregiver will provide comfort and reassurance. He/she is comfortable relating and seeking them out in times of need.

In ambivalent - insecure attachment, the child becomes very distressed when a parent or caregiver leaves. This type of attachment style is considered to be relatively uncommon.

According to research, it affects an estimate of 7- 15% of U. S. children. Research further suggests that ambivalent attachment is as a result of poor maternal or caregiver availability. The child in this type of attachment pattern cannot depend on the mother or caregiver to be there when the child is in need.

Avoidant attachment, the child with this type of attachment relationship tends to avoid parents or caregivers. When offered a choice, the child will show no preference between a caregiver and a complete stranger. Most probably, this attachment style might be as a result of abusive or neglectful caregivers. Persons within this category learn to avoid seeking help in times of need. In all, failure to form a secure attachment early in life can have a negative impact on behavior in late childhood and also throughout one's life. Generally, attachment styles displayed in adulthood are not necessarily the same as those seen in early infancy; research however, suggests that early attachment styles can have serious impact on later relationships in the future. For example, those who enjoyed and experienced a secured attachment pattern in childhood tend to have good self – esteem, strong romantic relationships, and the social ability to self – disclose to others.

In most pastoral relationships, these attachment patterns replicate themselves. The priest or the pastor is seen as the spiritual caregiver who plays the roles of parent in a family setting especially in the Catholic tradition where the Christian community is seen as a family. The priest is there to provide what Mary Ainsworth calls 'safe Haven' and 'Secure Base' (Meins, E. 1997, p.22) for his congregants who in this context are understood to be his spiritual children. Just as in a family, the priest is expected to develop and establish some spiritual or

psychological bonds with his congregants over years of nurturing and nourishing their spiritual lives. Amidst the spiritual struggles of their lives, they constantly use their pastor as a reference point. Hence, there is always natural urge to stay close to the caregiver which in psychological term is called 'Proximity Maintenance'. This is a situation where the child strives to stay near the caregiver, in order for the child to feel safe and secure. In the case of separation, especially in an unexpected separation, the child experiences a 'separation Distress'. This is an emotional disorder where a child is upset and distressed because the bond between him/her and the caregiver is suddenly severed. These have always been the common experience of many congregants whenever their pastor is transferred or removed unexpectedly. In relation to our subject matter in this project, this particular psychological factor should always be considered whenever a priest or pastor is moved under whatever circumstance.

2.4.3 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND ISSUES OF SEPARATION

Interpersonal relationship can be regarded as consequent upon attachment theory already enunciated above. Ordinarily, it is a relationship between persons who share or have certain things in common. Interpersonal relationship falls within the Drive theory or relational theories that changed the focus from a one – person psychology to a two or more person's psychology. The key theme in this theory is 'relational' which deals with emotional qualities of interactions between individuals and how this impacts on individual's emotions and developments.

Psychologists have severally suggested that all human beings have a motivational drives to form and maintain caring interpersonal relationship. According to this view, people naturally

need both stable relationship and satisfying interaction with others. Stable relationship is a relatively long term association between two or more people. This association may be based on emotion like love and bonding. It could be some kind of regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment. Interpersonal relationships can take place in a great variety of contexts such as family, friends, marriages, acquaintances, work place, neighborhood and churches.

Like living organisms, interpersonal relationships are dynamic systems that change continuously with time. They tend to grow and improve gradually as people get to know each other and become closer emotionally or they can equally deteriorates as people drift apart or form new relationship with others, more still, a relationship can be terminated by death or separation. In every interpersonal relationship, stability and satisfying interaction are very fundamental. If either of the two ingredients is missing, people will begin to feel anxious, lonely, depressed, unhappy and frustrated.

In congregational or pastoral setting, the principal role of a priest in relation to his congregants is that of a “helper” or a facilitator for spiritual growth. In their book, *The Helping Relationship – Process and Skills*, Brammer and MacDonald describe and limit the roles of priests as facilitators in growth relationship to the traditional model. According to Brammer et al; “the priest model focuses on conducting ceremonials, interpreting sacred writings, and providing spiritual support” (Brammer L; et al, 2003, p.29). However, priest as a pastoral counselor goes beyond this traditional mode in his relationship with his parishioners or congregants. By the nature of their ministry and vocation, priests tend to have a multifaceted

relationship with their parishioners. This multifaceted relationship is modeled on the structure of relationship in the New Testament teachings and practices – Be all things to all men and women so that all might be saved 1Cor.9:22. Thomas W. Klink of the Menninger Foundation suggested the use of the word “encounter” to describe this relationship as the basic unit of all pastoral work. He used the term to refer to the distinctive moments of meetings and the acknowledgment of the meaningful existence of another that mark the life of pastoral ministry (American Association of pastoral Counselor, Handbook, 1994).

Pastoral relationship is always established, renewed or modified at each specific pastoral service. Most often, priests achieve success in their pastoral ministry by being a certain kind of person as well as doing certain things for the people. In her book, *Pastoral Counseling, its Theory and Practice*, Carroll Wise notes that priests seldom think of their relationship with parishioners as a good resources, they often think of something to say or do that might help. She rather observed that “ministers who exude attitudes of empathic understanding, reverence, genuineness, and concreteness in both formal and informal relationships are usually considered by parishioners to be very helpful” (Wise, C; 1951, p.39). Hence, pastoral ministry is sometimes called interpersonal vocation. This suggests that pastoral work in society is defined by what others expect of pastors in relation to themselves rather than how the pastors see themselves. In keeping with their call, pastors seek to enter into significant value oriented relationship with the people as a mediator and reconciling agents.

Throughout their ministries, priests experience people daily in different and various life situations. In all these situations, priests consciously or unconsciously establish ‘dynamic

communication' with the people. The use of the term communication suggests the give and take of interpersonal dialogue. While relating with the people, pastor speaks primarily in the language of the interpersonal encounter. The lines of ministry are drawn primarily but not exclusively along person-to-person contacts and person-with-group encounters. In all, the pastor seeks to establish relationships with parishioners through communication which is essentially through preaching, teaching, pastoral care and counseling, and in the various administrative functions of the pastoral office.

According to Carroll Wise, effective pastoral communication reaches its goal when people are enabled to know themselves to be in God's presence (Wise, C. 1951). This is only possible when the priest preaches to the people in and through their life situations. In his preaching, he is not concerned with 'what shall I preach but rather to whom will I be speaking and what are their needs?' This is to say that priest relates and bonds well with people when he constructively and imaginatively attempts to relate communion with God in worship to conversation with people in their concrete human situations.

Carroll Wise further describes some characteristics of this life – situation preaching or communication that is very fundamental and essential in building up pastoral relationship with congregants. The pastor should seek to interpret human experiences in the light of biblical truth rather than the exhortation of people to the observance of certain moral precepts. In relating with the people, the pastor should be able to develop personal insight into the motives of personal and group actions rather than the condemnation of that kind of behavior. In every pastoral relationship, the pastor tries to encourage his parishioners towards faith in God, in one

another and in themselves as a means of gaining control over behaviors that they themselves discover to be alien to the mind of Christ and the growth of a sense of comradeship with God – in – Christ and a change in personality through this transforming friendship (Puls, J. 1988, p.42).

Good pastoral relationship is very important in every pastoral ministry and preaching. To sustain and enhance such relationship, the pastor ought to develop and maintain close helpful contacts with his parishioners. Carroll Wise noted that these helpful contacts can be carried out through pastoral visits to homes and families. The visit is not merely to remind the family of the need to attend church but more importantly to nurture and nourish this pastoral relationship by physical presence. In situation where this is burdensome or less feasible, pastors establish routine calls to families. In routine calls, the church's messages and fellowship are carried out regularly to persons and families. Another call, is the crucial call in which Christian resources are offered to those in crises or distress. Besides these two contacts, the pastor can frequently make casual contacts. Here, the pastor encounters people in a less structured setting, yet seeks to make such contacts vital in his relationship with his congregants.

In all, the main concern of the pastor remains the depth of interpersonal relationship where we stand and live in a reciprocal relationship with one another. Indeed, good pastoral relationship is absolutely necessary for any meaningful ministry. This is because in pastoral works, "we do not think with our minds, but with our feelings, we are not moved by ideas but by our emotions; we do not reach decisions with our heads, but with our hearts" (Handbook of American Association of Pastoral Counselors, 1994).

There is no doubt that through many years of pastoral relationships with his parishioners, the priest develops strong and sometimes deep bond with the people. Of course, bonding is basically characterized by emotions, affections and trust. In a situation of separation either by death, retirement, transfers or otherwise, there is always normal response on the part of the people in the form of pain and grief associated with loss. For a healthy pastoral continuity, the people need to be helped in their grieving response to the loss of their pastor who was deeply, emotionally and spiritually involved in their lives. Grief we know is the process of accepting the loss and adjusting to the changed situation. This is therefore all the more important since the Church by its nature and structure is constantly in the process of change and adaptation. There is therefore the need to recognize these clinical factors as they play out in our pastoral ministry to the people.

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the descriptions of the materials and methodology I wish to use as working tools. These materials shall consist of practical interviews focusing on a number of priests who left the ministry or was moved or suspended. The interviews are designated EXHIBITS and are found in the Appendix. I also intend to make use of Questionnaires in this project. The direction of this questionnaire is more of the opinions and feelings of the people who have or are experiencing the loss of a priest in a parish. Within this chapter, I shall present a workshop scenario with two groups of people grieving the loss of a priest and assess their experiences.

3.3 QUESTIONNAIRES – THE PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES OF LOSS OF A PRIEST.

For academic purposes and thus strictly confidential

1. Should the people be consulted before their pastor is transferred?

About 50 respondents: 25% are of the view that the people need be consulted because the ministry is all about the people. They need to have their voice heard before a decision that will ultimately affect their spirituality is made. Transferring a priest should not be seen as a simple change of guards. It has to do with making a huge change in people’s life. Not consulting the people gives the impression that the people are not valued and undermines the traditional understanding of the Church as the people of God.

5% responded thus: Pastors and Priests come and go. Therefore, it is not necessary to consult the congregation before their pastor is transferred, but to be politically correct; the congregation should be notified that their pastor will be leaving. For many people, the church is their extended family and the pastor plays a very important role in their spiritual development and they see the pastor as a father - the head of the family. In fairness to them, they need to be informed well ahead of time and get them prepared for the natural pain of separation and to adjust to a major change in their lives.

70% disagrees. This group feels that consulting the people might appear nice as a matter of courtesy but as a policy, practically, it might give rise to a situation where the people may decide to keep a particular pastor forever. When a pastor ministered to people for a period of 5-6 years, the people bond with him and it is going to be very difficult letting go of him if they are given the power to decide.

2. When a priest is arbitrarily transferred, does it in any way affect people's faith and spiritual growth?

90% of the respondents: when a transfer is done in such manner, some people often take it very hard and personal. Some react by staying away from the church for a long time trying to adjust to the new person. Some follow the former pastor to the place of his new assignment. Definitely arbitrary transfer of priests affects the spiritual growth of the people. However, mature spiritual formation should focus on the Lord and not on individual pastors.

5% of the respondents: No, it should not in any diminish the people's faith because life in itself is in a state of flux. Changes take place in our lives in different manners. These changes create a situation where one realizes one's vulnerability and also we learn how fragile life is. Hence, we should always draw strength from God and be ready to accept his will in all things.

5% of the respondents: It all depends on the reason for the transfer. If a priest is transferred for some misconduct, it generates different reaction as when he is transferred because of other pressing needs. The church hierarchy has the responsibility of explaining to the people the reason for such transfer. The explanations will definitely sooth the people's anxiety and confusion.

3. Do you consider the transfer/retirement/death/suspension of a priest in your parish who served as your model of faith and discipleship a loss? If yes, how did you react to this?

80% of the respondents: Yes, removal of any positive influence on people's life is always considered a huge loss. People missed the loving relationship they have built with their pastor. They missed his homilies, his humor and his guidance. "I reacted to this situation of loss by going through the stages of grief which of course include prayer for strength to accept and cope with the situation. I tried to stay connected to fellow church members and it really helped make me feel better. In a case of a retiring priest, there is a mixed feeling. In a sense, I am happy that he has reached this point in his life and in another sense, I feel the pain of missing him especially in a situation in which he had already endeared himself to the people".

15% of the respondents: No, it is just a physical loss. Priests/pastors only help people grow in discipleship. Obviously, they impact positively on the lives of the people. When they are gone, the values, the discipleship they helped built are not lost. On the contrary, “I have grown in my faith and spiritual development whenever we experience a loss of a priest. It is a positive experience because it really challenges my own understanding of my faith tradition and spirituality”

4. Besides transfer, briefly describe your experience of loss of a priest through death, retirement, suspension or outright denunciation of priestly life.

85% of the respondents: Retirement is a well earned life change. Denunciation and suspension generate feelings of sadness and regret. “When our former pastor left the priesthood, I was completely numb for sometimes. There was a combination of emotions of betrayal, confusion, pain, anxiety and grief. It took a long time to sort out my feelings and get back to track spiritually”.

5% of respondents: Not quite a loss as such because in each case, I tried to understand more the nature of the priesthood and it consequently draws me closer to the church. Inversely, the situation is affirming that the church can survive without these individuals.

5. Did the church in any way assist people to understand and adjust to the situation of loss of a priest?

75% of the respondents: Not really. There were just few explanations offered by the new priest but the deep feelings of the people were not acknowledged nor validated.

25% of the respondents: Yes, the vicar of the diocese had meetings with some of us and offered some explanations to us. At least, those meetings were helpful. It is very reassuring that someone knew how we felt and that the church is at least listening to the feelings of the people.

6. What type of pastoral care do you feel will be helpful to the people whenever their pastor is removed or suspended?

95% of the respondents: Possibly, a prayer service or a mass of thanksgiving for the time we have known, shared with the priest might help ease the anxiety about the future. In addition to this, a group discussion in the parish will also help the people understand and deal with their emotions of grief. There should be some kind of outreach from the diocese to make the people fully aware of such major change in their parish. There should be some kind of on – going communication between the leadership of the church and the people on all aspect of parish life. Some priests who are professional counselors should be sent to the parish to help the people deal with the pain of loss because many congregants invested their spiritual, emotional lives on their pastor. These heavy investments should be protected and guarded by the church.

5% of the respondents: Feel that simple explanations offered by the new priest are sufficient for people to get adjusted to the situation.

3.4 WORKSHOP WITH THE PEOPLE

Within the Catholic diocese of Brooklyn and indeed, many other dioceses, there have been many situations which required a process to resolve pastoral crises. The reality is however, the diocese or the church still lacks a process for addressing the people's issues especially the issues of emotional confusions the people experience when a priest suddenly leaves his ministry or is forced out of a parish. For the purpose of this project, I intend to organize two sessions of workshop with two groups that have experienced the pain of sudden loss of a priest. The purpose for convening the workshops is to enable the people to ritualize their feelings of pain and grief and to provide the communities with voice so that they could begin to move toward a new beginning. The workshops shall consist of two sessions viz: the actual assembling and implementations of the program; and the evaluations of the outcome of the workshop. I invited participants from two parishes that have experienced some loss of a priest by sudden transfer and the other by suspension due to some alleged sexual misconduct.

The format for the workshop has to do with three focus questions:

- 1. How do you feel about the recent event in your parish?***
- 2. How do you see the parish moving forward?***
- 3. What do you suggest in a situation of loss will help people come to a place of healing and acceptance?***

The workshop consisted of about 80 people of seniors, youths, young adults, adults, males and females and religious nuns. The people were drawn from two parishes that recently suffered

the loss of a priest. The first parish lost their pastor through sudden transfer and the other through sudden denunciation of the priestly life and ministry. This is intended to get the people together in order to share their experiences in such a situation of loss. It was designed to provide a veritable forum for the communities to address the three focus questions and to encourage them to actively participate in their own grieving and recovery process.

FIRST SESSION:

The session of the workshop consists of allay of congregants who are going through the struggles and painful experiences of loss of their pastor through sudden transfer by the bishop. The workshop was carried out in the church hall. The administrator of the parish was invited to give a brief address of welcome to the participants. After this, the group was asked to say together the famous *Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr*:

Lord God, grant us the serenity to accept the things

We cannot change; Courage to change the things

We can change and the wisdom to know the difference.

As the convener of the workshop, I gave a general introduction to the work and stressed that the workshop is intended to help the people deal with their emotions of loss. This requires total present – awareness of those varied feelings (Richard, C. S. 2001). I further asked the people to center their discussions on the three focus questions as stated above. I already envisaged Dr. Elizabeth Kubler – Ross process that is widely used for bereavement counseling as a possible working model. I therefore gave the people a prepared handout with a brief outline of Kubler – Ross' stages of grief (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance). Her

ideas, notably the five stages of grief model are also adaptable to personal or communal changes and emotional upset resulting from factors other than death and dying. This will definitely help facilitate the discussion and ensure that the discussion remains on the focus points.

I suggested that the people be merged into smaller groups of 8 or ten and each group will be assigned to a table. Each group is to select a group leader and a secretary to record responses to the focus questions. Each table is to have ample supply of butchers' paper and textas. The group leader would report back to the general group at the end of the evening. A time had been set for the discussion of each focus question and I stressed the importance of adhering to the time frame. While each person had time to speak in the group, no one was compelled to speak. When the groups reconvene, there would be final opportunity for questions and clarifications of any issue or uncertainties about the focus questions.

Discussions were orderly and lively. It was very interesting to see the dynamics in each group as young and seniors, men and women, religious and lay were engaged in the discussions as a community. Each person was to speak and there was great respect and empathy within the group.

REPORTS OF GROUPS

Some within the groups strongly felt that since the diocese has the complete responsibility on the assignment and transfer of priest, the diocese need to improve more on its communication mechanism. They need to carry the congregation along with whatever decision

they make regarding the tenure of pastors/priests. First, the tenure of service of priests in parishes should be made known to parishioners.

There were emotions of anger towards the church leadership at the manner their pastor was transferred. Moreover, the diocese has never border to acknowledge the painful emotions people go through whenever their pastor with whom they bonded so deeply is removed. Even when another pastor is sent to the place, what the people get in response to their plight is unhelpful comment like “don’t take it too personal”, “just move on”, “the diocese has the best of intentions for transferring your pastor”; “Be grateful to God because you have had him (pastor) for a long time”. A middle aged lady narrated a story to illustrate the general response of the diocese to the people who grieve the loss of their pastor: *One of our friends was having a party. Her teenage daughter, Jane invited three of her best friends. As the party was starting, the three friends called to say that they had made other plans. Jane was very upset. She went to her mom and told her what happened. The response was “don’t feel bad, there are lots of nice people out there to enjoy with. Jane was still upset. She took her emotions to another family friend standing by. He listened and responded “ouch, you must be so disappointed”. Yes, She sobbed. He reached out to her and hugged her. She thanked him for listening, went and cleaned up her face, and then enjoyed the party, after her feelings were heard and acknowledged.*

People who suffer the loss of their pastor are like Jane in the story above. We do not need the usual intellectual rationalization of the situation. We need empathic listening from the diocese. This is exactly what we need from the diocese. We need to communicate our emotions, we need someone to hear us, and we need the consoling hugs from the diocese.

Grieving people want and need to be heard, not fixed. The general approach and response of the diocese in this situation is to fix the situation by sending another priest. You do not fix people's emotions. The emotions need to be communicated, heard and acknowledged. The groups highly appraised the workshop and unanimously believe that the workshop itself is a concrete way of hearing and validating their feelings. Some suggested that the workshop and its outcome should be put forward to the diocese as a formal therapeutic way of healing for congregants going through emotions of loss.

SECOND SESSION

The second workshop consists of about 70 congregants who are struggling with the painful emotions of loss of their priest whom they admired so much. The setting for this workshop is my own parish. The parishioners here have over the years experienced loss of their pastors through death, sudden transfer and recently by simple denunciation of priestly life and ministry. The public denunciation of priestly life and the response of the diocese to this situation were very devastating to the people. Hence, this workshop is aptly designed to help them work through their emotions.

The workshop was held in the church hall and followed the format of the first workshop. As the administrator of the parish and convener of the workshop, I welcomed the people and introduced the theme and objectives of the workshop. The people were encouraged to freely express their feelings and thoughts on the three focus questions as in the first workshop. Before the participants were divided into smaller groups, they were asked to say together the second part of the **Serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 – 1971):**

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time,

Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking as Jesus did,

This sinful world as it is, not as I would have it,

Trusting that You will make all things right, if I surrender to Your will,

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with you forever in the next – Amen.

REPORT OF THE GROUPS

There were clear expressions of emotions of anger, outrage, shock, sadness, regret, disappointment, betrayal, confusion as to what to believe, what to hold on to. Some digressed by describing the admirable qualities of their pastor that left. They have difficulty coming to terms with his decision to leave the priesthood and got married. Some raised issues of celibacy as a necessary condition for serving as a Catholic priest. Though this does not necessarily within the three focus questions, however, the group felt that this is part of the presenting problems of dearth of vocation to the priesthood. It is because of the obstinate issue of celibacy; they not only lost their pastor but also his compassion, kindness, humor, laughter and his humane pastoral style. In all, the people feel abandoned to deal with their pain, their confusion all alone. They vehemently expressed deep anger at the apparent insensitivity and complacency of the diocese to their plight. There were practically no sign of care and compassion from the diocese

On how can the parish move forward despite all these set backs: without any doubt, the people feel the loss of their pastor. There is always fear and anxiety as to the future of their

community. One of the participants in the group narrated her experience in her former parish where the pastor was assigned to another ministry in the diocese. For her, the loss of a priest can create an opportunity for growth”In my experience at St. Mary Magdalene parish, I found that the people missed the relationship they have built with their priest whom they regarded as father in a family. On the other hand, that sense of loss challenged the people to own the church and parish in a whole new way. They grew in their understanding of what it meant to be the church. The number of ministries grew as did the number of people who took responsibilities in the parish. They developed a clearer understanding of the call of all to ministry through baptism. They grew in their appreciation of the many gifts present in the parish community and the role of lay leadership in the Church. So even though they grieve and regret the loss of their priest, it equally created an opportunity to develop and acknowledge all the gifts of the Spirit present in the individuals and the community as a whole”. So this is one of the positive ways a parish can respond to the loss of their priest. It is not always about negative feelings of loss. It can equally be a challenging call to discipleship and mission. The people need someone who may not necessarily be a priest but a knowledgeable and experienced person capable of helping the people move forward by helping them respond to the call to discipleship and mission.

There were also some outrages to the response of the bishop in connection with the crisis and situation in the parish. The bishop seems to be insensitive to the feelings and plight of the people. He makes no effort to reach out to the people. They recalled a time when some delegations were sent to have meeting with the bishop, they came away from the meeting with

a sense of frustration. The bishop tended to speak at the people rather than speaking with them and seemed not to acknowledge their shock, grief and pain. Not later than a month, the bishop issued out a letter of excommunication of the former pastor. This is the least the people expected to hear and this aggravated their pains and grief. Even though excommunication is an obvious implication implicit in the very act of denunciation of priestly life within the Catholic tradition, the bishop should have shown more sensitivity to the pains of the people at the time.

Finally, the group appraised the workshop as “going to the borders and striking the rock, the waters of life is released”. The workshop for the group gave them a breathe of new life as individuals and as a community. They expressed their depth appreciation for the opportunity to come together as a people to explore, share their grieves and pains together. This is exactly what the people have been expecting from the leadership of the church whenever a major change is made or about to be made in a parish. At this point, I invited all the groups to a quiet moment of silent prayers. This was followed by the mass of reconciliation and thanksgiving. At the end of it all, the workshop helped in no small measure in leading the people to a place of acceptance of their situation and healing of the past grief. The outcome or result of the workshop, the questionnaires and the interviews will be elaborated in the following chapter of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

I shall attempt to evaluate the outcome of all the data emanating from the interviews, questionnaires and the workshops carried out in the preceding chapter. The data envisages and describes the sudden removal of a priest either through transfer, suspension, death or abdication of priestly life and ministries as a loss. This situation by its very nature engenders deep shock, pain, confusion, grief and sorrow in the emotional and spiritual lives of people. In a quest for a therapeutic and pastoral process that might help the people in such emotional turmoil, I intend to adapt Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' grief cycle as a possible pastoral process that will bring the people to a place of healing and acceptance.

4.1 Analysis of the data from the interviews

(The interviews are found in the Appendix)

EXHIBIT A is the interview with the priest who suddenly left the priesthood and the ministry. In assessing the data from the interview, there is an obvious impression that the priest was consciously apologetic (he was offering explanations as to why he left the priesthood). Since this is not necessarily the objective of this project, I specifically asked him to talk about the impact of his decision to leave the priesthood on the people. In responding thus: *Actually, I know that the decision is going to cause a lot of pain and grief to people, my family, friends and numerous people I have helped in their spiritual struggles and growth*, Fr. Mike was referring to the inevitable emotional pain and grief his decision to leave the priesthood would inflict on the

people. Of course the decision to leave the priesthood is completely contrary to the hope and expectations of the people. Fr. Mike was fully aware of this and thus it was very difficult for him to make the decision to leave. However painful this might be for the people, he simply had to do this because He wants to live his own life.

Again, the shock and pain is all the more insidious because of the spiritual and psychological bonds between the priest and the people. When asked to describe the reactions of the people, Fr. Mike stated: *You know that it was not easy communicating this to the people but I was compelled to do so because my life as a priest was intimately connected with the people. We encounter and interact with people in their every day struggles with life in general. So it was not easy separating or detaching from this people as a priest.* There is always some permeating sense of anxiety associated with separation or detachment from a person or thing. At least Fr. Mike was fully aware of this anxiety separation but the only supportive assistance available to the people was Fr. Mike's own explanations on why he was leaving the priesthood. The diocese merely asked him to hold on until someone is assigned to replace him. The emotional pain the people were going through was completely ignored or at best, played down. Sometimes it is presumed that individuals should find ways to sort out their feelings and pains. Of course, this is very unfair to the people.

In **EXHIBIT B**, Fr. Peter was suddenly transferred due to the urgent need of another parish. To the people of his former parish, it was a huge loss. They equally expressed some anxiety separation as described by Fr, Peter "so many people protested and even threatened to change church and even stop practicing the faith completely". Here the expressions of the

anxiety – separation indicate the depth of the people’s pain and grief. This situation really calls for serious attention from the diocese. According to Fr. Peter in the interview, the people felt that they were not fairly treated by the official silence of the diocese to their plight. In addition to this, the fear of the people as to the future of their parish should have been addressed by the diocese. Perhaps, this might be a way of making the people know that the diocese really cares and acknowledges their loss. The priest here clearly knows that the people really deserve some kind of pastoral attentions from the diocese which in most cases are not forthcoming. Hence, some of the priests intuitively provides whatever they feel might be of some help to the people. The much they could offer were explanations and rationalization of the decisions of the diocese. The core feelings of the people were not directly addressed, acknowledged and validated.

In **EXHIBIT C**, Fr. Charles was sent to replace a priest who was placed on an “administrative leave”. He was very apprehensive and reluctant accepting the assignment. His fears stem from the fact that the parish is already in a crisis situation and thus he is very uncertain as to where to start. According to Fr. Charles, “Sometimes one would like to start new program or to start from where the other pastor stopped”. One would have expected Fr. Charles to start and be with the people where they are. He clearly understood where the people were when he personally observed “There was a general feeling of loss and in a situation of loss, there is always pain and grief”. In addition to this, he was able to perceive some “feelings of despair and detachment from the parish programs”. In such situation of emotional pain and grief, one should not be thinking of starting any program or ministry except finding a pastoral respond that will help the people navigate through their pains and grief.

One wonders why Fr. Charles did not consider this aspect of pastoral care as a proper *terminus ab quem* (starting point) of his ministry. Perhaps this is an indication of the conceptual frame of thoughts of the diocese that ignores the emotions and feelings of the people or worse still, they do not consider this an important aspect of ministry as a whole. When asked what the diocese actually did for the people in this debilitating situation of loss, Fr. Charles affirmed that the diocese was gracious enough to send the Vicar to the people whose task was merely to explain the situation to the people. Of course this is a positive response but it is far from really addressing the problem and helping the people process their feelings. At the end of the interview, Fr. Charles concedes the fact that our responses to the emotional needs of people have not been effective and adequate. According to him “it is absolutely necessary (effective pastoral care) because some of us may not have access to resources that might effectively help people going through the emotions of loss”. He therefore advocates for a formulation of a ritual to help people cope with such emotions of loss and grief. Of course, when he talks of ritual, he is referring to a pastoral care which is the focus of this project.

In **EXHIBIT D**, Fr. Nicholas was asked to replace a retiring priest who had been in the parish for extensive long time. Fr. Nicholas was clearly aware of the obvious “long and deep attachments and bond” that exist between the retiring priest and the congregants. In whatever decision or action by the diocese, this long standing relationship and bond between the people and the retiring priest should be recognized and honored. Perhaps, the people instinctively preferred to honor this paternal bond by having their former pastor live in the rectory and the pastor in question was very comfortable with the arrangement. However, the diocese and the new priest have completely different understanding of the situation.

The new priest sees the idea of having the former priest live in the rectory in a very negative light. He interprets this as a way of forestalling his own ministry (which in truth should be a continuation/improvement of the existing ministry) in the parish. There might be some personal reasons Fr. Nicholas was not disclosing and perhaps some interests he was trying to project and protect. Otherwise, one wonders why Fr. Nicholas could not give in to the demand of the people when it was very obvious that the people needed to maintain some closeness with their pastor. As he rightly observed and asserted “I recognize the fact that they truly love their pastor and feared losing him”, he could have built upon this love the people treasured so much since all ministries especially in a parish setting is all about the people and not about our personal interest or ambitions. Since the people treasured having their retired pastor close to them is another way of affirming and validating the viability of his ministries with the people. The natural thing to do therefore is to build upon those visions and programs of the former pastor. His physical presence in the parish will invariably reinforce those ministries.

The manner and method with which the matter was resolved clearly demonstrates the bureaucratic frame of mind of the diocese. Fr. Nicholas himself summed it up: They (the people) felt that the diocese and I were not fair in the manner the case of the former pastor was resolved. There were visible signs of detachment and indifference to most of the parish programs. The people were deeply hurt, they felt ignored, their feelings do not count in whatever decision or changes the diocese is making, their emotions and desires were expendable and unacknowledged. Even when it was obvious that the decision of the diocese aggravated the emotional pains of the people, the diocese and the incumbent pastor offered little or nothing in terms of pastoral care to assist the people deal with their grief and loss. The

pastor merely offered the usual rational explanations to the situation and hoping that time will ultimately fix and heal the avoidable psychological wounds inflicted on the people. But this is mere bandaging of wounds and not healing in the real sense of it.

4.2 Analysis of data from the Questionnaires

The questionnaires are aimed at getting the feelings and thoughts, expectations of the people in a situation of loss of a priest either through sudden transfer, retirement, suspension or simple renunciation of priestly vows and ministry. The respondents were asked to be sincere and objective in their responses since it will be used for academic purposes. The intentions and goal of the questionnaires were clearly explained to them and were assured of strict confidentiality. Presumably, the feedbacks are therefore the honest thoughts and feelings of the people.

As part of the processes of alleviating the sense of loss felt by the people in a situation of sudden transfer, the emerging question therefore is ***whether it is necessary to consult the people before a priest is transferred.*** Only 25% of the respondents strongly felt that the people should be consulted because it is a pastoral way of giving voice to the people in matters that deeply affect their spiritual life and growth. In many respects, such sudden transfer of priests also affects their emotional life because of the emotional bonds that naturally exist between pastors and congregants and deepened over years of pastoral services to the people. For these respondents, the people should be actively involved in serious matters that affect them. This line of reasoning smacks of democratization of the church which in the Catholic tradition is incompatible with the hierarchical structure of the church. It has been a common practice and

desire to preserve the hierarchical structure and the church frowns at anything or anybody that detracts from this traditional practice.

It is very interesting to note that 5% of the respondents feel that the people need not be consulted but it will be very gracious for the diocese to get the people informed well ahead of time. This group also reiterated the close bonds between the pastor and the people. As one of the respondents rightly stated “for many people, the Church is their extended family and the pastor plays a very important role in their spiritual development and they see the pastor as a father – the head of the family”. The intention for informing them well ahead of time is not to seek their input or consent but rather to help prepare them for the natural pain of separation and to gradually anticipate major change/s in the parish which of course will definitely impact on their lives.

It is good to note that majority of the respondents – 70% suggests consultation with the people as a diocesan policy is not tenable because of the fear of abusing the process and can potentially and easily be counter productive. For this group, it is like empowering the people to decide who stays and who goes. However, the group equally noted the need to have a clear and open policy that determines the tenure of all pastor/priests serving in a parish. Perhaps, this may be a possible way of ameliorating the sense of loss engendered by the transfers of priests/pastors.

On my second question of interest: ***In a situation where priest is arbitrarily transferred, does it affect the faith and spiritual growth of the people?*** Overwhelming number of the respondents (about 90%) was very affirmative. Such situation often generates serious

emotional reactions which obviously impacts negatively on the faith and spiritual growth of the people. This group attempt to name and describe the many ways people had expressed anxiety and emotional pain as a result of the transfer of their pastor like staying away from church activities and detaching from ministries, some relocate to their pastor's new place of assignment.

The remaining minority (10%) of the respondents tries to rationalize the situation and assert that mature faith formation should focus and center on the person of Jesus Christ and not on individual priests. Moreover, for this group, people should be made to understand that life is always in a state of flux and as such change is an integral part of our experience and is inevitable. Hence, people should always anticipate change in any aspect of their lives. The above assertion merely describes an ideal human situation which is far removed from real life situation we experience and encounter everyday. We can always rationalize our human condition and try to make sense of whatever situation that confronts us. However, situations of loss affect the human person on deeper emotional levels that cannot simply be rationalized nor explained away. This has been the strategic orientation of the church in dealing with these pastoral situations.

This leads us to the 3rd question of interest: ***How do you react to the loss of a priest who served as model of faith and discipleship to you?*** Basically, 80% of the respondents consider this a huge loss, not just a mere physical loss of the individual but everything associated with the individual. The loving relationships built over time are lost. "They missed his homilies, his humor and guidance". No doubt, the people are plunged into grief whenever they

experience a loss of pastor/priest very dear to them. From the responses to the questionnaire, one observes that people are often abandoned to deal with this loss all alone. It is often presumed that individuals should be able to adopt means of coping with the emotional pains if they decide to make a loss of priest/pastor personal issues.

Besides retirement, every other means through which people experience a loss of a priest is always very devastating to individuals and community as a whole. Consequently, such losses should not be relegated to personal issues that evoke personal responses. Ordinarily, many people have very limited coping mechanism or abilities. Even as they cope on individual levels and capacities, they still seek communal supports and assistance – “I tried to stay connected to fellow church members and it really helped make me feel better”.

When asked to describe their ***experiences of loss of a priest through death, suspension or outright denunciation of priesthood***, 85% of the respondents expressed strong sentiment of regrets, sadness and pain. The emotional pains are usually very devastating. In a situation where a priest abdicates the priesthood, a respondent summarizes the emotional feelings thus: When our former pastor left the priesthood, I was completely numb for sometimes. There was a combination of emotions of betrayal, confusion, pain, anxiety and grief. It took a long time to sort out my feelings and get back to track spiritually. Individuals in such overwhelming emotional confusion and pain should not be abandoned to deal with such grief all alone. Emotions of such magnitude are often beyond individual coping ability. It is easy to gloss over grief but it is not always easy to move on because according to Kenneth J. McFayden, losses that are not appropriately named and grieved remained buried,... also do the intense feelings

associated with them(McFayden, k. J. 2009). Such individuals with such unattended grieves may remain stuck in the emotional processes of loss and consequently may not be able to ‘reinvest’ themselves into the life and ministry of the parish.

As to the nature and extent of assistance offered to the people by the church in a situation of loss, 75% responded that there was little or nothing coming from the church as a means of supports, adjustment and healing. The little support could be gleaned from the responses of the 25% of the respondents who affirmed that in some circumstances of loss, the diocese offered some explanations to the people. Individual priests out of their own personal initiatives, offer more explanations to the people. The explanations do not address the emotional needs of the people. On the other hand, they are more or less, attempt at rationalization of the situation which for all intents and purposes cannot bring the people to a place of comfort, adjustment, acceptance and healing.

On the last question of interest: ***What type of pastoral care do people expect from the church in situation of loss?*** 95% of the respondents (overwhelming number) univocally affirmed that any congregation going through emotional pain of loss of their pastor/priest will be looking for leadership, not a typical leader to fix things but rather one who deeply understands them and their deep sense of loss. They need emotional care and this may be provided in a manner that reassures the people that “someone knew how we felt and that the church is at least listening to the feelings of the people”.

In enumerating some communal supportive programs that might help the people go through losses, the feedback clearly suggests that the people are earnestly looking for a leader

who truly and deeply understands the relationship between attachments, loss and grief. The more attached we are to people, places or even things that are meaningful to us or shape us, the more their loss will evoke grief for us. Moreover, individuals have varying degrees of attachments and will subsequently have differing levels of grieves in a situation of loss. Hence, the people need someone who is fully aware of the complex dynamics of loss and grief in a congregational setting. Thus, in their response, some of the respondents specifically mentioned the importance of sending priests who are professional counselors to a parish going through the pains of loss. In addition to improving communication and transparency between the people and diocese, the respondents strongly believe that the pastoral services of a professional pastoral counselor will immensely benefit the people in their adjustment processes and grief.

4.3 Developments Not Anticipated in the Original Proposal

Following the outcome of the Questionnaires and the practical workshop carried out with the people, we have clearly identified the urgent need for a pastoral care that adequately addresses the emotional needs of congregations in situations of loss. This is not a facile task to be accomplished by any clergy. Rather, it demands that members of the clergy and all persons in a position of leadership in the church should be able to recognize the need for such a ministry and also to be able to really understand the nature and dynamics of loss in a congregational setting. Holistic ministry and care naturally require the clergy persons to truly grasp and come to terms with the intensity of feelings caused by loss in relation to individuals and also the uniqueness of attachment relationships in a parish setting.

Rev. Kenneth J. McFayden has done a considerable work in changes in a congregational setting for The Alban Institute, Virginia, U.S.A. In his book, Strategic Leadership For A Change – Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future, 2009, he clearly demonstrated the pastoral ways of responding to the challenges presented by the reality of loss in a parish setting. I wish therefore to highlight some of his inputs in the light of Dr. Elizabeth Kubler – Ross’ stages of grief in bereavement counseling. This can be adapted and woven together as a formal ritual of healing for any congregation going through process of loss and grief.

Few people may know how to cope with grief or how to talk to a grieving person. Each person grieves in his/her own way. However, grief cannot be avoided in a situation of loss. We can try to ignore it, but eventually we must feel and work through our grief. Experiencing grief includes experiencing a myriad of other emotions such as anger, loneliness, depression, guilt, sorrow, fear etc. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross pioneered methods in the support and counseling of personal trauma, grief and grieving, associated with death and dying. Her five stages of grief model are also adaptable to personal or communal changes and emotional upset resulting from factors other than death and dying.

The ‘grief cycle’ is not a “rigid series of sequential or uniformly timed steps”. The process of grieving often moves fluidly back and forth between the stages rather than progressing in a linear fashion. Some people cycle from anger to acceptance to depression and back again. As people work through their grief, the general pattern is to experience the loss and accept its reality, to adjust to the loss, and reinvest emotionally in life or hopes. Here is a summary presentation of Kubler-Ross’ five stages:

4. DEPRESSION	Also referred to as preparatory grieving. In a way it is the dress rehearsal or the practice run for the 'aftermath' although this stage means different things depending on whom it involves. It is natural to feel sadness and regret, fear, uncertainty etc. It shows that the person has at least begun to accept the reality.
5. ACCEPTANCE	Again this stage definitely varies according to the person's situation, although broadly it is an indication that there is some emotional detachment and objectivity. People dying can enter this stage a long time before the people they leave behind, who must necessarily pass through their own individual stages of dealing with the grief.

(This is based on the Grief Cycle model first published in ***On Death & Dying***, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, 1969, Interpretation by Alan Chapman, 2006-2009). In working with this model, it must be noted that few people experience the process in the linear way presented here. As a model, it is more of a guide. People do not always experience all of the five 'grief cycle' stages. Some stages can be revisited. Some stages might not be experienced at all. According to Tim Clinton, Many people have reported living one or more stages at the same time or rolling through parts of the process again and again (Clinton T, et al; 2005). Tim Clinton urges all

counselors working with grieving persons or group to always visualize the grieving process not as linear stages to grow through, but rather as layers of an onion unfolding, or as a spiral or roller – coaster (Clinton, T; et al; 2005).

In dealing with congregational changes, sense of loss is inevitable and sure to cause pain and disruptions in individual and community programs. We observed from the workshop that most of those in the positions of leadership in the church are often very insensitive to the psychological impacts of these losses on the people. It is also very disheartening the way Church officials respond to these situations in a dismissal manner. It is not always easy to simply acknowledge our losses and move on. Some church leaders have shown some levity of mind when they expressed such sentiment believing that attending to grief is a misdirection of energy, a misplacement of priorities, and a poor use of time (McFayden, K, 2009). When we rationalize the situation and urge the congregation to move on, they may appear to be moving on while the emotions of the past remain buried in the psyche. While they seem to be moving forward, the truth is that they are still stuck in the emotional processes of loss which apparently vitiates the vitality for meaningful participation in ministries and programs.

Naturally, grieving takes time, energy, efforts and group supports. Pastors who are willing to assist people invest themselves in the grieving process need to take cognizance of these realities and components of grief. It therefore demands that priests/pastors should not in any way try to hurry the people over the grieving processes or to facilitate the grieving process in a haphazard manner. One of the outcomes of my workshop with the people is that when losses are properly processed and acknowledged deeply and sincerely by the church officials, it

enables the people to be more disposed to engage in meaningful ministry. As Verena Tschudin rightly stated: Each time, a loss is not properly concluded, there is cumulative restriction on our aliveness. Life becomes something to endure; the world seems like a hostile place in which to live. Because of misinformation and lack of support, we never had a fair chance to deal effectively with the loss events in our lives (Tschudin, V. 1997). In a congregational setting, it adds up to a loss of trust in the leadership of the church. On the other hand, loss that was properly grieved revitalizes and invigorates. This corroborates the observation and findings of Rev. Kenneth McFayden in his works in the Alban Institute: For those willing to invest themselves in grieving, the healing experienced thereby revitalizes their quality of life and their capacity to engage in meaningful relationships and purposeful ministry. Indeed, these people are most able to move forward in a healthy and more balanced manner (McFayden, K. p.46, 2009).

To really help individuals and group to process their loss and move forward, the pastor/priest must be able to help the people to name and understand their grief. Even though individuals grieve differently, yet each person's grief is not so different that he/she cannot find fellowship with others in suffering. Individual therefore should not be abandoned to deal with their loss all alone. This is one of the outcomes of my workshop with the people. When isolations were part of the problems compounding the process of grieving, then participation or fellowship should therefore be part of the solutions.

Pastors/priests need to possess valuable insights into loss and grief. They need to understand that grief is often shaped by varied multiples like the unique character of the

relationship with the other person (the lost priest) including the depth and length of the relationships he had with individuals and groups in the parish. This suggests that the church leaders helping people in a situation of loss need also to understand the intensity of the attachment the people had with their former pastor because their grief is shaped by the complexity of this attachment. In this connection, McFayden offers us a veritable framework with which congregational leaders can incorporate in providing pastoral assistance to parishioners in a situation of loss.

In a parish setting, responding to members' diverse expressions of separation anxiety is a complex challenge for pastors/priests. This is because individual members have different levels of attachments to their former pastor or even to congregational life. Hence, individuals and groups may be dealing with different emotions of loss at the same time. Moreover, while some members are protesting a specific loss, other members are responding with despair to the same loss and still others may become detached or emotionally disengaged, in relation not only to the particular loss but often to other dimensions of congregational life as well (McFayden, 2009).

To effectively respond to the complex challenges of grief and loss in a parish, McFayden delineated a number of key concepts or disposition of a pastor/priest in relation to grief. First, pastor/priest needs to be very sensitive to the source and expressions of grief that will surface in his faith community. As I noted earlier in this project, there is always the possibility of change, loss and grief in congregational life and in the life of individuals. As leaders, pastors need to be more sensitive to the relationships of attachment to loss; they need to understand

the reason for the varying degrees of grieving in the emotional lives of their congregants. Secondly, the Kubler – Ross’ process of grief suggests that grief is neither “clean” nor “linear”. In this connection, pastors/priests must always remember that grieving is messy, illogical process whose expression is marked by an array of intense feelings and whose complexity is based on the nature of attachment to persons or things lost and the circumstances surrounding the loss. According to McFayden, “there is no map for how people will grieve, no predictable timeline to indicate when the movements of grieving will be completed”(McFayden, K, p.50, 2009). According to Tim Clinton, we often have unrealistic expectations of the speed and completeness with which someone is expected to get over a major loss. Healing and reorganization of one’s life takes time. For many people, it is about one – three years or more (Clinton, T; et al, 2005).

Thirdly, leaders need to be mindful of the psychological fact that people grieve in different ways and at different paces. To effectively carry this out, pastors/priests need to move beyond the expressions of mere sympathy and focus more intently on the nature of attachment, the experience of loss etc. To accompany individuals in the process of grief is to really understand the whole emotional lives of the persons. It also demands an understanding that people who have suffered previous losses in their lives often bring their experiences of loss and grief into the present grief. They need also to understand that some people grieve openly and outwardly, while others work through their loss and their feelings internally. Different personalities experience and express grief differently.

Fourth, pastors/priests must recognize that grieving people are “where they need to be”. Pastors depreciate the grieving of people who are numb or in shock when we suggest that they need to ‘get over it’ or when we attempt to spiritualize the loss so that they will feel better. When the intensity of loss is felt so deeply, the grieving person’s response or defense is to experience numbness – physically, emotionally and spiritually. We should not attempt to lead them out of numbness or shock. It is very disrespectful to attempt to hurry them over their shock and also it speaks to our own discomfort with the situation. Such impulse is not helpful. People need time and space to express their variety of feelings, whether intense anger, deep sadness, regret, disappointment, confusion, etc.

Fifth, pastoral leaders must be aware that grief can be chaotic. This follows from the premise that what has been normal is now lost, thus resulting to some degree of disorientation and disorganization in people’s lives and in the parish. Feeling disoriented, “some people often express intense anger not only because of the loss of the person or object to which they have been attached but also because of the erosion of normality in their lives”(McFayden, 2009). In an effort to reorient and reorganize their lives, some will long for someone or something to replace what was lost. This indeed is very challenging to pastor/priest in providing pastoral care to people in a situation of loss. It requires the ability to guide and lead the people through their grief to a process of ‘attaching anew’ to their new pastor and perhaps, new programs and ministries.

Finally, pastoral leaders must be able to provide spiritual resources to grieving people. Pastors/priests should be able to explore resources from the faith community to serve as

effective supportive system to the people. Through communal prayers and concrete expressions of care by standing by; standing with the people, listening to them and showing real empathic understanding of their situation, grieving people may be able to draw significant strength and comfort to work through their loss. The gift of time, of listening and sharing experiences of loss are perhaps the most precious thing we can offer to people in a grieving mood. To a certain degree, effective grief recovery is about being heard. In all, pastors/priests should do all they can to lead the people to the full awareness of the spiritual strength, comfort and hope available to them through the presence of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATIONS AND RESULTS

In this final chapter, I shall attempt to evaluate the significant and focal points in the preceding chapters, how they resonate with the existing traditional pastoral care. I shall try to show the validity of this project in the light of overall ministry in Catholic diocese of Brooklyn and the universal church in general. Hence, I intend to highlight the contributions of my project to religious principles; to the clinical principles and to ministry in a wider context.

5.1 Contributions to Religious principles

The major contribution of my project to the religious principles is the attempt to highlight and reinforce the religious principles viz: the church as the people of God; the church as the family of God and the ark of salvation. These principles are part of the theological foundations of our pastoral ministries in the church. There is therefore the need to refocus our minds and efforts to really addressing the concerns of the people since the church we are serving is the people. According to Kenneth J. McFayden, our vision and commitment should always aim at strengthening the ministry of the people, by the people and for the people (McFayden, 2009).

Our commitment and mission is to clearly understand the full implications of the church as the people of God, as a family of God and as the ark of salvation. This is very important because it will really guide and direct the way we do ministry and indeed what ministry is all about. It is a biblical truth that the church comprises the people who live and embody the values and ideals of Jesus Christ. The scriptural description of the true kinsmen of Jesus in

Mark's gospel narrative clearly brings out the sense of the church as a family – Jesus enquires “who are my mother and my sisters? And looking at those sitting in a circle round him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and my mother” Mk.3: 31-35. Throughout the Christian Scriptures, believers were simply referred to as brothers and sisters, not according to natural ties but born anew in the Lord with God as their Father – “yet to all who received Him (Jesus), he gave the right to become children of God – those born not of natural descent but born of God” Jn1:12-13.

The *lait motif* of the church as the people and family relationships became particularly very prominent in the pastoral letters of St. Paul. He repeatedly invokes the analogy of a family in order to enable Timothy better understand the appropriate order and responsibilities within the Church. Paul calls Timothy his ‘son’, expressing both his affection and the discipling relationship between them. He further advises Timothy to treat an older man “as if he were your father”. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters (1Tim 5:1-2). If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should look after her. If the immediate family is lacking, the larger Christian family should care of her (1Tim 5: 4-5,16). We can see here that with Timothy as the pastor, the order of the church is analogous to the order of a human household. Members of the church are to treat one another as they would members of their own biological family with their pastor/priest as an idealized father.

Everywhere in the life of the early Christians, the church is seen as the extended families of God's children. However, the church should not be seen as mere extended families of God in theory but to actually function and behave as such in practice. The early church evolved and

structured itself around the theme of the family of God, people of God models. They actually behaved and functioned as such. They frequently met in someone's home, sometimes in the temple in order to talk and fellowship together, to encourage and support one another. They prayed together, sang song of praise, worship the Lord; they built each other up spiritually by teaching and encouraging one another from the word of God. The Christian community of Jerusalem was of one mind and heart; there was no needy person among them (Freund, W. 1984).

Even though this project is not intended to explore the structural evolution of the Church and its influences over the centuries, I wish however to observe that the pattern and the *modus operandis* of the early church was both deliberately and carefully instituted by Christ the Lord through the apostolic ministries of the disciples. It was designated to function in such a manner that it produces and fosters personal relationships and mutual interaction, the very thing family, friendship is all about. We all know from the human biological family unit that if one changes its original shape and form as designed by God, what one gets is something completely different from what God intended it to be. We either have families with parents who neither love nor serve each other, or their children as they should, or parents who divorce, or families with 'two daddies or two mummies'. All these are dysfunctional families. They are still families according to the broadest allowable definition but they carry the wrong shape and form. They therefore function differently from the way they should naturally operate (The church as family of God –www.churchfamily.org). The children in such families suffer most. Rather than the security and safety of loving relationship, insecurity with its corresponding

indiscipline prevails. Conversely, anarchy, divisiveness and broken relationships pervade and obscure the true image and purposes of family.

The analogy of family model above can be applied to our image of the church. From the apostolic time, the church was shaped to conform to a family model that is people oriented. Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that our church now is seen more of a hierarchical institution with lots of obstructive bureaucracies with strong emphasis on the hierarchical structure. The way our church functions is a clear indication that it has shifted from its original shape and form. It is a logical truth that form follows function, and design must correlate directly with the practical purpose of a thing (Chigwell Christian Fellowship, 2008). Once the form is changed, the shape altered, what one gets is signs of dysfunctional institution. This is very evident in the bureaucratic fashion with which the church carries on its ministries. Some of the dioceses as local church function simply as a corporate institution with the needs and concerns of the people compromised or sometimes outrightly dismissed as of no importance.

In contrast to the apostolic times, the hierarchy was seen as one of the charisma of the Holy Spirit given to the entire church for the sole purpose of service to the people. At this time, the gift of the hierarchy was subordinated and subsumed under the function of ministry to the people. The charisma of hierarchy was not understood in terms of position but was purely functional, to coordinate; harness all the other gifts to building up the body of Christ. Reflecting on the theme of the body of Christ, everyone is aware of the argument advanced by St. Paul that Christ's body is the people in 1Cor 12:12-30 and also in Gal.3:28-29. The second Vatican Council also clearly developed this theology in its *Constitution on the Nature of the Church*: God

endows the church with the hierarchic organ and other charismatic gifts for the building up of the community and preparing it for service (Lumen Gentium, nos. 12-14) to the people. The Council further reiterates: In order to shepherd the people of God....Christ the Lord set up in his church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body. The holders of office who are invested with a sacred power, are, in fact, dedicated to promoting the interest of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God, and are consequently endowed with true Christian dignity ...and attain the salvation of their souls (Lumen G. 18).

The *terminus ad quem* (end point) of our entire endeavor as a Church is to help and lead the people unto salvation. In essence, our various ministries should revolve around the people and effectively address their spiritual, emotional and social needs in a much deeper level. The immediate implication of this is that the needs and concerns of the people should take precedence over and above every other consideration. In delineating the duties of a pastor, the Code of the Canon Law exhorts the parish priest thus: So that he may fulfill his office of pastor *diligently*, the parish priest is to strive to know the faithful entrusted to his care. He is therefore to visit their families, *sharing in their cares and anxieties* and, in a special way, their *sorrows, comforting* them in the Lord (Code of the Canon Law, 9183).

All these point to the urgent need for us as pastors and priests to rediscover and develop the theology of the people. The understanding of the metaphor of family as applied to the church will indeed shape the pattern of our ministry. The theology of the people of God should really serve as a good model from which every other pastoral ministries flow. This goes a long way to affirming the religious principle of my project. If we understood the church as

people oriented, then our ministry should essentially be that of journeying with the people in all their pains and struggles of life.

5.2 Contributions to Clinical Principles

The common experiences of the groups, the outcome of the interviews and the feed back from the questionnaires about loss in a pastoral setting can be described as the disruption of the significant bonds of attachment that exist between congregants and their pastors/priests. This disruption often generates a whole gamut of emotional reactions (anger, shock, sorrow, pain, disappointment, confusion, reactive depression etc.) from congregants. In Attachment theory, John Bowlby identifies these emotional reactions as “separation anxiety” (McFayden, 2009). Separation anxiety runs through three phases viz: *protest, despair and detachment*.

In the first phase – despair, there is a feeling of anger as the individual/s attempts to restore the affectional bonds that are disrupted. Young children yell and scream when they realize that their parent is about to go leaving them to a babysitter or day care. They yell and cry hoping that it will cause the parent to come back. In a similar way, members of congregation facing the loss of important attachment (pastor/priest) protest quietly or loudly hoping that the valued relationships will somehow be restored. As leaders of the people, how do we respond to this expression of protest? Do we just ignore it and allow the feeling to shift to the second phase?

When we do not effectively respond to the emotional protest, it will naturally move to the second phase which is despair. Here, people tend to cope with the situation on their own. However, when they realize that they cannot restore or remedy the situation, they vacillate between feelings of hope and hopelessness. It creates an ambivalence situation and invariably, aggravates the feelings of anxiety and pain. Again, the people still yearn for the therapeutic intervention of the church officials. If this were not forthcoming, the feeling may shift to the third stage – detachment.

In a detachment phase, a child or congregation no longer protest or expresses feelings of despair. Rather, there is the negative attitude of resignation and loss of interest. Usually, children lose interest in those who do not respond to their cries and needs. They are emotionally detached and in a congregational setting, they become disengaged from spiritual programs and ministries. Perhaps, they are merely taking on psychological defensive posture, seeking self – protection to avoid being vulnerable or hurt again (McFayden, 2009). When anger and anxiety are suppressed in this unhealthy manner, it not only gnaws the person psychologically but also affects the congregation as a system.

One of the outcomes of the group workshop and the questionnaires is the need for church leaders to be deeply and empathetically sensitive to the emotional situations of their congregants. The emotional pains of loss will be ameliorated and will not be allowed to degenerate and progressed to the third phase of detachment if church leaders were deeply sensitive to the feelings of the people. In responding to the question “*what does it mean to be sensitive?*”, Dr. Tim Clinton et al believe that sensitivity is more than awareness. In a

congregational setting, we become very sensitive when the people we serve are cared for responsively and tenderly, when they know that their emotional needs are important and can always rely on us in times of emotional turmoil and confusion (Clinton, T, et al; 2006).

When the people were describing the way the church has been responding to their emotional needs, they unequivocally pointed out that the pastoral care they experienced in situations of loss and ruptured attachments were not helpful. Their emotional needs were not properly addressed and validated. In a psychological parlance, this is another form of dismissive parenting. Clinton et al, describe this manner of care giving as insensitive. It primarily involves dismissing a child's emotions, especially the negative ones. The example in the book is very apt: *A child comes home from school in a grumpy mood; she's gruff with her younger brother and complains to her mom about having to empty the dishwasher. A sensitive mom might ask, "What's wrong? You seem awfully grouchy today". She invites the child to figure out why she's so irritable* (Clinton, T. et al 2006). This is a good example of good and sensitive parent. A dismissive parent may ignore the emotion or label it a bad attitude. The response the child may get is "I don't know what your problem is, but you'd better change that attitude right now". Here, the dismissive parent acts as if the feelings of the child are not important (Clinton, T; et al, 2006).

The example above clearly illustrates and replicates the responses of church leaders to the various expressions of painful emotions of loss experienced by congregants. Some congregants react by withdrawing and detaching from the church just like a child who avoids and distrusts a parent who is unresponsive and uncaring to his/her emotions and needs. This

may explain the reason why some congregants simply refuse to be actively involved in parish activities. When this happens or continues, it will negatively impact the vitality and viability of the parish. In the Catholic tradition, parish is structured and function like a family system. Whatever happens to one affects the entire system.

From the perspective of Systems theory, we understand how the withdrawal attitude of some members of a parish can affect and impact the vitality of a parish as a system. In his book, Caring For People God's Way, Tim Clinton explains the interactional patterns between members of the family or system. As with attachment theory, Systems theory does not view causality as linear but rather as a more circular, repetitive, and shared experience between members of the system (Clinton, T; et al, 2005). In other words, what affect one, affects the other members of the system. The withdrawal attitude of some members can reduce the vigor and enthusiasm of the entire system, thus retarding the optimal function of the group or community. This is especially the case in Catholic parishes which are more or less, community/family oriented. If effective and timely intervention is not provided, the risk of pastoral difficulties and dissolution greatly increases.

Perhaps, the current non – committal faith of most people in most of our parishes is not unconnected with some underlying psychological resignation and defensive detachment. Pastors like counselors ought to be fully aware of this reality as they search for ways and means of helping their congregants and parishes in their spiritual struggles. In order to function as a community of restoration and renewal, pastors/priest should be able to identify the real problem of the community. This is particularly important because what appears to be the

problem may be symptomatic of the unresponsive and uncaring attitude of the church leaders to the emotional needs of its members.

Finally, it is very pertinent to note that since a congregation or parish functions as a system it should always be encouraged to experience and respond to changes, loss, adjustments etc. in a healthy manner. Any unresolved emotional issue interferes with and interrupts the community's homeostasis – normal functioning level. The community (the system), individuals and subgroups are all affected, they all feel anxious and perhaps unconsciously seek unhealthy ways to regain and restore the homeostasis. This is really where the community needs the support and assistance of a professional pastoral counselor (clinician). Pastoral counseling therefore ought to be an integral part of our ministry and theology.

5.3 Contributions to Ministry in a wider context

The church exists just to minister to the general needs of the people and ultimately lead them to salvation. This is clearly echoed in the universal mission of the church thus: The apostolate of the church, therefore and each of its members aims primarily at announcing to the world, by word and action, the message of Christ and communicating to it the grace of Christ. The principal means of bringing this about is the ministry of the word and of the sacraments (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity; 6). The word and the sacraments are intended to lead people into a life-changing encounter with the living God.

As we noted earlier, form correlates with functions. Whatever structure we uphold goes a long way to determining the direction our services to the people will take. Our ministry must solidly be rooted in what we believe the church to be, what the church stands for. The church is usually perceived as a sacred place of hope and comfort. The church is constituted to bring the Good News of Jesus into every human situation. Among other things, the Good news includes binding up and comforting the broken hearted liberty to the oppressed and of course to bring a holistic healing to the people (Lk.4:18). Our ministry therefore should be that of caring and healing in the real and concrete sense of the word. This is exactly what the groups I worked with were desperately looking forward to from the pastors and the church hierarchy.

Our call to ministry is essentially a call to care. As pastors, we are called by God who wishes to use us to help others enter into a unique healing encounter with Jesus. Sometimes, we are called ministers, by this word, we are agents, and an ambassador of God's healing love. According to St. Paul, we are called to a ministry of care and comfort – we are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1Cor4:1). The God we serve and worship is the “God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those in any trouble, with the same consolation with which we are comforted by God (2Cor 1:3-5). Our ministry ought to embody this healing love in all ramifications and in a more concrete manner that will allow the people to feel and experience this caring and healing love. In this connection, Clinton Tim observed that as pastors, we are God's agent, his regent, his care – giving disciples given to a call to “bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), (Clinton, T; et al, 2005). My experience with the group shows that the expectation of

the people from their pastors is a ministry of love, compassion and empathy. Therefore we as pastors/priests are called to a helping and enabling ministry.

The end goal of our ministry is to lead and help our congregants to experience a 'healing encounter with the living Christ'. In other words, Christ comes alive in the lives of our congregants through our ministries. Hence, in the language of Tim Clinton, pastors/priests are like Christian counselors (Clinton; et al, 2005). Priests as Christian counselors are to facilitate a supernatural encounter between the human spirit that seeks liberation and the Holy Spirit. Sad and painful emotions of loss are among the existential experiences that burden and encumber the human spirit. Thus while providing pastoral services; priests should be willing to do all that it takes to lead the weary human spirit to the healing encounter with the Holy Spirit. According to St. Paul, It is the Holy Spirit that really comforts (Acts 9:31) and renews the human spirit (Titus 3:5), also it is this Spirit that helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26).

Further implications for ministry in a wider context demand some integration of theology and psychosocial sciences as an important component in the formation and training of priests. Effective pastoral care takes into cognizance the psychological perspectives and clinical conditions that affect our congregants in their daily lives. Not only this, pastors need to be encouraged to evolve some creative ways of providing pastoral services that will really liberate and heal the hurting and grieving human spirit. With this awareness, I hope to make strong advocacy for the integration of clinical counseling into the theological formation of seminarians and priests especially in Africa.

CONCLUSION

I started my project by highlighting and exploring the organizational structures of Brooklyn diocese (which is not different from other Catholic dioceses around the globe). The structures are creatively designed to enhance the bureaucratic administration of the diocese. The religious and clinical principles we considered bring out the fact that the people who constituted the church have some deep emotional issues conflicting and stunting their spiritual growth. Every pastoral ministry should center on the people and respond to their emotional concerns. However, this is not always the case. The common experiences of the people from the questionnaires and the workshops with the groups showed that more energy and efforts are directed to maintaining the bureaucratic structure than to responding to the emotional and spiritual needs of the people.

The structures and the personnel ought to be directed towards discerning the true needs of the people which from psychological perspectives goes beyond adherence to liturgical rubrics. As we accompany the people in their spiritual journey, our pastoral services ought to give the people voice which should always resound in the empathic ears of all Church leaders. Hence, pastoral ministry ought to shift from the present bureaucratic complacency to really addressing and responding to the spiritual and psychological concerns of the people in a much deeper level. Thus, in a loss of a priest, pastoral care must clearly recognize and validate all the emotions of grieves and pains associated with such loss. We do not expect the people to deal with such emotions all alone. It behooves on us to creatively assist the people by providing

them with some enabling process that will take them to a place of healing, balance, acceptance and liberation. This, in fact is the goal of every pastoral ministry.

APPENDIX

3.1 INTERVIEWS WITH PRIESTS WHO MOVED OUT

EXHIBIT A

In all interviews, pseudonym or initials are used to protect confidentiality.

Rev. Mike is an Irish American priest. He is aged 51. He went into the seminary for priestly formation at the age of 18. He had the full support of his parents, family and friends. He had about 8 years of formation during which he studied philosophy and theology as major components of the training to the priesthood. He received his priestly ordination at the age of 28. He served as a parochial vicar in a number of parishes and as a pastor for quite some years. Coincidentally, Rev. Mike served as a pastor of my parish from where he took the decision and left the priesthood and the Catholic Church. Ever since then, he is involved in building up his own personal ministry. Here are his thoughts and feelings on my subject matter.

F. I understand you took the decision to leave the priesthood couple of years ago, what actually informed your decision?

M. Yes, I took the decision after many years of prayers and discernment. It actually took me about ten years of reflection and prayers. You see, it has not been easy.

F. What do you mean by it is not easy, is it the ministry or the process of arriving at the decision to quit?

M. Both. Of course, we all know that the ministry itself is not an easy one but I am specifically referring to the process of arriving at the decision I took.

F. What precisely did you find difficult about it?

M. Actually, I know that the decision is going to cause a lot pain and grief to many people, my family, friends and numerous people I have helped in their spiritual struggles and growth.

F. But, basically, what was the real issue or problem that led to the decision to quit?

M. There are a number of doctrinal issues I was trying to understand and come to terms with. Especially, the issue of hierarchical structure, the interpretation and application of this in the church is completely off limit and does not reflect the mind and teachings of Jesus on services and ministry. You and I know that there are many instances of abuse of this structure. Many people in the position of leadership in the Church often misuse this principle and often use it to reinforce their authority. Of course, it is no longer a secret that hierarchical structure in the church is now seen as an instrument of domination and control in the Church. This does no longer reflect the true image of the Church founded by Jesus Christ. With all these doubts creeping into my mind, I began to think of the possibility of leaving the priesthood and leaving the Church.

F. How did reconcile your decision to leave the priesthood and the teaching or belief in the indelible character of the priesthood – a priest for ever?

M. That is part of the problem of hierarchical domination and control. Who and what defines the character of the priesthood? Is it Christ Jesus or some group of Bishops that constitute themselves into a council who came up with all these teachings? Personally, I don't quite accept that teaching. Individuals should have absolute freedom to respond to the call to serve God in the sacred priesthood and also the freedom to serve God in another capacity. I strongly believe that serving God as a priest and the time frame one wishes to serve should be completely personal decision.

F. Did you discuss this decision with people; I mean lay people not just priest friends?

M. Of course I did?

F. What were their reactions?

M. Well, you know that it was never easy communicating this to the people but I was compelled to do so because my life as a priest was intimately connected with the people. We encounter and interact with people in their every day struggles with life in general. So it was not easy separating or detaching from this people as a priest. My decision to leave really caused great pain and sadness. Some felt betrayed, disappointed, confused and disillusioned. My family in particular felt very devastated and was close to disowning me. But, this is my life and life is all about fulfillment and peace. However, I was particularly worried about the impact my decision would make on the faith and spiritual life of the people.

F. Did you or anybody do anything to help the people in their pain and grief as a result of your decision?

M. There was nothing in terms of a formal pastoral program for the people in this peculiar situation but I, as an individual priest tried to build the faith of the people independently and allow them to develop their own spirituality. My priestly ministry has been all about spiritual empowerment of the people. I endeavored to encourage the people to build their faith around Jesus and the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and not on any human institution. Moreover, I used about six months explaining my decisions to the entire Christian community before I left. I was not aware of any pastoral care the Church offered to the people except asking me to hold on until they got replacement and made the excommunication pronouncement on me.

F. Did you think your explanation was of any pastoral help to the people?

M. Yes, to some extent, though some insisted on going along with me on my new found faith. There was nothing I could have done about it than to absorb them into my own new faith.

F. Thanks for your time and for sharing your thoughts with me.

EXHIBIT B:

Fr. Peter is a priest of the diocese of Brooklyn, aged 61 and has served the diocese for over 32 years in about 5 parishes. Fr. was transferred to another parish unexpectedly to hold brief for a diocesan priest accused of molestation (still on the level of allegation and ongoing investigation) until a suitable replacement is assigned to the parish.

F. How does it feel being transferred to another parish without prior information?

P. Well, it is part of the dynamism of change in our ministry and of course part of life.

F. How did the people react at your transfer?

P. It was not a pleasant experience for the people. The news came too sudden, without prior information. In fact, leaving the parish that way really disrupted the whole pastoral activities and created some kind of vacuum. My transfer really caused serious anger, frustration, disappointment and anxiety as to the future of the parish. As you well know, many parishes are closing, some are being merged. So there was some palpable fear that the parish might be reconfigured in the near future. This is a huge challenge for them. I mean the challenge of adjusting to whatever direction the parish may go in the future and of course adjusting to the style and programs of the new person.

F. Did they see your transfer as a loss?

P. Obviously, they see it as a loss of my unique pastoral leadership. We know that in the course of our ministry, people consciously or unconsciously get attached to their pastor or leaders that have served as models of faith and discipleship or have expressed deep interest in members' well being at critical times in their lives. So many people protested and even threatened to change church and even stop practicing the faith completely.

F. Did you or anybody in the position of leadership do anything to help the people go through the process of change and adjustment?

P. Personally, I tried to explain the situation to the people, even though we work to stabilize our parish, the situation is always fluid. No pastor is expected to remain in a parish permanently and forever no matter how indispensable his services and leadership were. Moreover, I also tried to make the people understand the import of the universal mission of the Church. Whatever affects one imparts the whole. Whatever we do in one parish goes a long way to helping build up the universal Church. Therefore my sudden transfer is a kind of panic measure by the diocese to help hold the other parish together.

F. Besides these explanations, did the diocese offer any official explanation on why you should be transferred?

P. No. It is usually presumed that the people will understand and accept the decisions of the hierarchy in good faith. In other words, the people often defer to the diocese in whatever decision they make.

F. Can you in few words summarize the general feelings of the people?

P. There was deep sense of loss, pain and grief; the people felt that they were not fairly treated by the diocese. There were some sense of anxiety and fear as to the future of the parish.

3.2 THE PRIESTS WHO MOVED IN

EXHIBIT C

Fr. Charles is a priest of Brooklyn Catholic diocese and has served the church for over 28 years.

Within these years, Fr. Charles has moved from one parish to another, a total of 5 parishes.

Recently he is sent to replace a priest who was placed on “administrative leave” for some clerical misconduct. The parish could be described as going through a kind of crisis situation with news of the suspension of their pastor.

F. What does it feel like being sent to a parish with such crisis situation?

C. Honestly, I was very apprehensive and reluctant accepting to go there.

F. Why were you apprehensive?

C. Ordinarily changes and transfers are not easy more still, going to a parish with this type of crisis is very challenging. The task there is very enormous and in such a situation, one does not know just where to start. Sometimes one would like to start new programs or to start from where the other pastor stopped.

F. Were you easily accepted by the people?

C. That is another issue altogether. It is really very difficult to be easily accepted by the people because they are still going through what can be called anxiety separation from their pastor with whom they have bonded deeply over the years. Moreover, this situation is also very unique given the nature of the problem and the devastating news about their pastor.

F. Could you briefly describe the general experience and attitude of the people as a result of the suspension of their pastor?

C. There was a general feeling of loss and in a situation of loss, there is always pain and grief. And in this case of clerical misconduct, there is an additional feeling of betrayal and disappointment. Also I was able to perceive some feelings of despair and detachment from the parish programs.

F. How did you or the diocese responds to help the people with their loss and subsequent grieves?

C. Actually, the Episcopal vicar visited the parish shortly after the pastor was suspended and I believe he explained the situation to the people and of course the measures the diocese was undertaking to ensure the continuity of the parish life and ministries. Personally, I have been trying in many ways to reassure the people and strengthen their faith in God and faith in the Church as the sacrament of God's presence among us.

F. How do you assess the outcome of the visit of the Episcopal vicar and your won efforts towards assisting the people go through the crisis?

C. Yes, the diocese obviously was very much concerned about the spiritual plight of the people. Consequently, the vicar had to personally visit and helped the people understand what really happened. As a people of hope, we are always challenged to rise from our forlornness and hope for a greater tomorrow. So I believe that our efforts really helped the people to some extend. Of course recovery from the shock is going to take awhile.

F. In terms of the pastoral ministry, how involved were the people after the suspension of their former pastor?

C. There were some kind of detachment and reduced vitality, lack of interest, reduced energy and generally so indifferent to most of the parish programs. Sometimes, there were some resistances to some of the programs especially when the program is completely new and different from what they were accustomed to doing. It was really very difficult to get them back to track again.

F. Given your experiences with people grieving the loss of their pastor, do you feel that the diocese should have a formal pastoral care to people in such situation?

C. Yes, it is absolutely necessary because some of us may not have access to resources that might effectively help the people going through the emotions of loss. Up until now, some of us who recognize the enormity of the situation only do what we think that might be of some help. So I strongly believe that the diocese has to come up with a kind of ritual to help people deal with such emotions of loss.

EXHIBIT D

Fr. Nicholas is a priest of the diocese of Brooklyn, aged 59. He has served the diocese for over 30 years and now he is asked to replace a senior priest who is retiring from active ministry. The senior priest has served this particular parish for close to 17 years. As a personal choice, he wishes to take up residence in the parish and the entire community supported the idea because

of the love they had for him. But Fr. Nicholas and the diocese would rather have him live in the Center for retired priests.

F. How did you feel replacing Fr. Dillon who has served this particular parish for close to 18 years?

N. To be sincere with you, even though I was willing to serve wherever my service is needed, it was really very challenging replacing someone who's been in a parish for a long time. One faces the problem of acceptability by the people because of the long and deep attachments and bond they have with the other pastor. Moreover, the parish in itself has a unique situation in the sense that the former pastor insists on not leaving the parish but would like to take up residence in the parish.

F. Do you have problem having him live in the rectory?

N. Of course, no priest will be comfortable with that type of arrangement. Moreover, the people also insist on having him live in the parish and strongly protested when he was directed by the diocese to move to the Center for retired priests. I know that their reactions were all manifestations of resistance to change and also a way of expressing their "separation anxieties". I recognize the fact that they truly love their pastor and feared losing him but he cannot be there for ever and he specifically requested for retirement. What I don't quite like is the idea of retiring and living in the rectory as way of maintaining closeness with the people.

F. How would his living in the rectory impact your ministries in the parish?

N. In this type of situation, it's going to be very difficult to develop any new vision or program that will truly guide and inspire the people. Generally, one experiences a kind of reduced energy for ministry. Even though his continued presence in the parish can be of some help, but it may hinder or limit the development of new and fresh ideas and programs. Many people by nature like to hold on to the past but the past is not always good and relevant to the present, hence the need for change.

F. When the diocese ordered the former pastor to move out of the rectory, what was the reaction of the people?

N. It was awful. There was serious protest from the people, some even threatened to stop coming to church, some changed to the neighboring parish for worship. In fact, the people directed their grievances towards me and I became the enemy. There were visible signs of detachment and indifference to most of our parish programs. They felt that the diocese and I were not fair in the manner the case of the former pastor was resolved.

F. Did you or the diocese do anything to help the people go through these emotions of loss and pain?

N. Within the circumstance, what else would one have done except to continue to offer some explanations to the people on why the former pastor had to leave. Besides this, there was nothing except to continue rendering the pastoral services we are called to do and hoping that with time, the people will really accept the situation as it is. As the saying goes, time is a great healer.

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