

# The Continuing Need for Ministry Leadership Development

BY MARY KATHRYN GRANT, PhD

**S**ome issues are so critical to the health care ministry that they require ongoing discussion and reflection to keep attention focused on them. Recently, however, the questions arose: Why are we *still* talking about the need for ministry leadership development after almost three decades of effort? Why do we continually talk about how much we need ministry leadership development? After decades of effort, what results have we achieved? Where are we headed? How well are we doing?

Ministry leadership development seems to be a topic that never quite goes away, yet is never quite answered satisfactorily. For some the effort is woefully stalled, lagging behind other industries and professions; for others, the effort has met with resistance, or at least some reluctance. One often hears the questions: Why don't the sponsors require ministry leadership development? Why don't our leaders welcome development experiences?

## Is leadership development perceived as remedial, no matter how it is packaged?

Unfortunately this misperception is widespread. Early on, many lay persons invited to serve in ministry leadership development roles expressed feelings of being saddled with "formation" requirements and consciously or unconsciously resisted this effort.

Characterizing ministry leadership development as remedial could not be further from the goal of the initiative. The complexity of health care today (clinically, ministerially, and administratively), the magnitude and rapidity of change, the far-reaching implications of our decisions, and today's financial and regulatory demands have nullified most of our previous development and experience. Today's health care environment demands continuous reflection and discernment about issues not even dreamed of when many of us entered the field.

## By the time we enter leadership positions, do we believe we are already "formed"?

By the time we have reached senior positions, we hope that we have and display the qualities needed for ministry leadership. But is this belief really that



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simple? Can we be so fully formed that little or no room for growth exists? Few would make such an assertion.

Yet what accounts for the hesitancy, and at times indifference, in embracing ministry leadership development? We do reach out for knowledge on new e-commerce opportunities, compliance requirements, and even retirement investment options—what makes interest in leadership development so lukewarm?

## Has the leadership paradigm shifted and not been recognized or incorporated into our efforts?

How do you answer the question: Who are you? The administrator who is a woman or man religious most likely would respond: A religious whose ministry is administration. If you were to ask a lay administrator his or her primary identity, the response would most likely be a man or woman (or wife, mother, husband, or father) who serves an administrative role in a faith-based organization.

The first rule of education and development is *teach the student, not the subject*. When those who create ministry leadership development programs truly recognize this fact and ground language, resources, tools, and techniques in the reality of the "student"—someone deeply dedicated to both work (ministry) and primary relationships (as a wife, husband, mother, or father)—we will, I believe, make more discernible progress.

Revising ministry leadership development as a vital continuing development, retooling programs to respect and revere a new generation of ministry leaders, and working to do so together as a united ministry will enable us to answer the question of why are we still talking about the great need for ministry leadership development. □

*This is the first column in a series that will address issues related to ministry leadership development for sponsors, executives, trustees, and physicians. Reaction to this column—positive and negative—is welcomed and invited, as are topics for further consideration. Please address all correspondence to the editor at [hpeditor@chausa.org](mailto:hpeditor@chausa.org).*

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