

Quintessentials

Top 5 insights for ministry from our team in the field



Catholic Leadership
INSTITUTE

5 Marks of an Effective, Spiritually Centered Parish Staff

The primary responsibility of a pastor is leading his congregation to a deep, personal, loving relationship with Jesus Christ. At the same time, he needs to manage the day-to-day operations of his parish. Both of these significant responsibilities become more achievable with the help of an effective, spiritually focused team of staff members.

A cohesive, effective staff radiates purpose and joy in their work, rooted in a growing faith life. They work together to help realize the vision of the pastor, meet the needs of parishioners, operate efficiently, support evangelization efforts, and ultimately create the space and environment for more people to encounter the Lord.

We hear often from pastors that a strong culture among parish staff seems elusive. To help pastors cultivate and maximize the effectiveness of their staffs, Catholic Leadership Institute has collected key recommendations, bringing the best in Catholic parish experience and proven business principles together. The following are five guidelines for building a parish staff ready for mission.

1. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

A parish functions best when staff have a solid understanding of their roles and where they fit within the team. This enables everyone to perform to the best of their abilities in collaboration with their colleagues to fulfill the mission of the parish. Successful pastors consider these important actions:

☐ Create formal job descriptions

- Include a clear outline of the role, expectations, and qualifications required.
 - When possible, pastors should give existing team members input into creating their job description, if one does not exist already, to ensure it accurately reflects what they do.
 - Make sure the descriptions differentiate the expectations of staffers at different levels within the parish team.
 - Revisit role descriptions at least annually to make sure they remain accurate over time.



APPENDIX I
Job Description
Components

☐ Clarify decision-making practices

- Be specific about each staffer's role on a particular project or ongoing effort. For example, define who is responsible for providing input, who will implement each task, who has the final decision on the major action items, who needs to be kept informed of progress or barriers, and who has responsibility for helping to overcome roadblocks.
 - Using this type of formal process for decision-making helps avoid misunderstandings and ensures that everyone working for the parish understands their level of responsibility and accountability.
 - The benefits of a formal approach include:
 - Confidence by the pastor and other leaders that they will be included in decisions when necessary while also delegating responsibilities as appropriate.
 - Greater buy-in by team members as they understand their scope of authority and aren't worried about being second-guessed.
- Take time to be sure everyone understands their role and their scope of responsibility when beginning a new project or long-term initiative. Ask team members to reflect back their understanding to improve clarity across the team.



2. Invest in Building Community Among the Staff

Parish staff will function better when they work as a team, with shared goals, a strong organizational culture, and genuine respect and goodwill toward one another. Pastors can support their staff culture through the following actions:

☐ Commit to a regular time of shared prayer

- Incorporate a regularly scheduled prayer time for the team. It doesn't need to be long; a short time together in prayer will help build cohesion.
- Include reflections on the weekday, or Sunday, readings; share personal spiritual experiences and/or prayer intentions by team members; pray a decade of the rosary; or perform other spiritual devotions.
- Encourage team members to take turns leading a prayer experience.

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord..."

1 Corinthians 12:4-5



APPENDIX II Individualized Annual Plan

☐ **Grow individuals' self-awareness**

- Anticipate high-stress situations and seasons, and proactively invite team members to offer their fears or concerns before and during the time period.
- Create designated times for general check-ins that create a “safe space” where people are encouraged to share their perspectives openly.
- Conduct or engage a group to provide human formation workshops on identifying instinctive behaviors that can be helpful or challenging and encourage a more virtue-driven culture.

☐ **Have fun together**

- In an increasingly digital world, there is no replacement for the relationship building that happens in person. Consider hosting team meals, a happy hour or other fun event to help break down barriers and increase comfort within the team, which leads to better interpersonal communication in the workplace.



DID YOU KNOW?

Assessment tools like DiSC®, CliftonStrengths (formerly StrengthsFinder), or Many Parts Ministries can help individuals better understand their own strengths and motivations and those of other team members.

3. Foster a Culture of Communication and Regular Feedback

Both formal and informal communications help team members connect to the “why” of their ministry, clarify their role in support of the mission, and understand how well they’re meeting expectations. High-performing parishes incorporate the following elements:

☐ **Set and communicate annual goals**

- Set annual goals for each department/ministry area and for each individual staff member that are aligned to the goals of the parish. These provide clear expectations about what they should aim to accomplish over that period of time, in addition to performing well in their day-to-day activities as defined in their job description.
- Ensure all goals are SMART: Specific and Measurable, Motivating, Attainable, Relevant, and Trackable/Time-bound.

☐ **Provide ongoing feedback**

- Regular feedback and conversations between staff members and the pastor, or other office leader, provide opportunities to offer updates, ask clarifying questions, and create shared understanding about progress on goals.
- Weekly or monthly check-ins become opportunities to discuss progress, build accountability, and talk about barriers and how to overcome them.

☐ **Cultivate openness and consistency**

- Encourage “Yes, and...” thinking to grow team members’ comfort with sharing ideas and asking questions. For example, “That’s an interesting idea, and I’d like you to explore how we might be able to do that, or something similar, within the limitations of our budget.”
- Develop advanced skills in active listening and responding with empathy. Make space to connect with colleagues about their families and spiritual lives in addition to the work at hand.



☐ **Conduct excellent team meetings**

- Avoid the meeting-that-could-have-been-an-email by ensuring that:
 - meetings have a timely and relevant purpose
 - the right people are at the table
 - agendas and materials are sent in advance
 - meetings stick to the topic and start and end on time

☐ **Formally evaluate job performance**

- A formal annual performance evaluation, grounded in the job description and the individualized annual plan, can complement ongoing communication and feedback. Through this process, team members reflect on achievements, discuss issues that need attention, and establish new goals and expectations for the year ahead.
 - Annual performance reviews are a good opportunity to take a step back and take stock of the bigger picture – where the team member and organization have come from and where they’re headed.
 - Incorporate a self-assessment by the team member as a key input to the performance review.
- Documenting formal performance reviews can help avoid misunderstandings later and provide accountability for progress and growth.

4. Recognize and Celebrate Excellence

Research consistently shows that, in addition to fair pay and benefits, staff most want to be recognized by their immediate supervisor. Such recognition can take many forms, and not every approach is best for every team member. The best parishes incorporate some or all of the following.

☐ **Include a mix of informal and formal recognition and affirmation**

- Be specific about what is appreciated about the person’s work and avoid general statements like “great job!”
- Consider the person’s preference when deciding how best to provide the affirmation: in a staff meeting, privately in person or with a thank-you note, in the bulletin or on the parish website, from the pulpit, etc.
- Encourage team members to celebrate the contributions of their co-workers to build a culture of peer recognition.
- Create opportunities to recognize the whole parish team.
 - Incorporate formal affirmation into team-building activities and staff meetings.
 - Remember also to thank the team publicly in the bulletin, on the parish website, from the pulpit, etc.





APPENDIX III A Conflict Resolution Process

5. Tackle Conflict Resolution Head-On

Any activity involving human beings has the potential for conflict. Disagreements in the workplace can be opportunities for growth if they're handled appropriately. Conflict resolution is a key skill for anyone who leads a team, and pastors have a responsibility to their teams and their parishioners to handle conflicts with love and respect for all involved. These pastors incorporate the following.

☐ **Model a culture of care and respect**

- Ensure that there is clarity around different roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and authority to help mitigate conflicts.
- Begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help you honor the dignity of each individual in the discussion.
- Start with yourself, reflecting on your own instinctive behavior, preferences, triggers and communication style. Then consider how you might adjust your message or delivery to be more easily heard by others.
- Model integrity in all your interactions.

☐ **Deal with issues immediately**

- Address problems early to help clear the air, getting everyone back on track and supporting each other to avoid hard feelings and grudges.

☐ **Utilize a specific conflict resolution process**

- By adhering to a shared process, conflict resolution becomes a normal, constructive process that strengthens relationships and maintains workplace harmony.

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.
For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.
Now the body is not a single part, but many.
If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 26



Next Steps

These five core elements of cultivating an effective staff can help a pastor better support his team in their parish work. When team members understand their roles and responsibilities, they're better able to perform to the best of their abilities as part of a cohesive team. Regular feedback helps keep everyone on track and aligned to the mission. Formal and informal recognition instills a culture of mutual respect and love. And knowing that conflicts will be dealt with in a fair and consistent manner helps everyone stay focused on what's best for the parish and the community.

As a practical matter, a parish leadership team should create a schedule and processes to implement these steps. For example:

- Write or update job descriptions within 90 days,
- Create or review annual goals within 120 days.
- Outline a formal recognition program within 150 days.
- Ask for a staff volunteer to coordinate prayer times and team-building exercises, ensuring everyone has an opportunity to lead or participate.
- Schedule in-service time within six months for parish leaders for formal conflict resolution training.

These investments in the culture and cohesiveness of the parish team will benefit not only individual team members, but also the pastor and parishioners they serve.

Appendix I - Job Description Components

A job description should clearly define the responsibilities of a role so the expectations of the team member and employer are aligned. Following are key elements of a thorough job description.

Job Title

- Clearly identifies the position.
- Should reflect the level (e.g., manager, associate) and the nature of the role.

Job Summary

- A brief overview of the role, typically 2-4 sentences.
- Highlights the primary purpose of the job, key responsibilities, and how the role contributes to the parish.

Key Responsibilities or Duties

- A detailed list of the specific tasks, duties, and responsibilities associated with the role.
- Should prioritize the most important and frequent duties.
- Explains any budget authority the position entails.

Qualifications and Skills

- Required Qualifications: Specifies the minimum qualifications, including education (e.g., degree level), certifications, and relevant experience.
- Preferred Qualifications: Additional qualifications or skills that would be ideal but are not required.
- Skills and Competencies: Includes both technical skills (e.g., proficiency in certain software) and soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership).

Reporting Structure

- Clarifies to whom the role reports.
- May also include any supervisory responsibilities (e.g., "Manages a team of three").

Interdependencies and Collaboration

- Specifies where the role fits within the parish structure, outlining connections to others both within and outside the parish team and why they are important.
- Details any connections of the position with parish committees and advisory groups.

Work Environment

- Describes the working conditions (e.g., office-based, remote; working hours, including any needs outside the normal workday).
- May also mention physical requirements (e.g., lifting, standing) or the pace of the work environment (e.g., "fast-paced environment").

Salary Range and Benefits

- Some job descriptions include the salary range to manage candidate expectations.
- May also list benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off.

Employment Type

- Specifies if the job is full-time, part-time, temporary, contract, or internship.

Appendix II - Individualized Annual Plan

Following are suggested elements of an individualized annual plan for each team member. This plan should be designed to support the parish's annual goals, or those of the specific team member's supervisor.

To develop the plan:

1. The supervisor shares his/her annual goals, and/or relevant parish goals, with the team member.
2. The team member drafts his/her individualized annual plan, then shares it with the supervisor.
3. Together, they review and refine the plan so both of them understand and agree with expectations for the year.
4. The plan should be reviewed, and revised as necessary, at least quarterly.

Plan elements:

- **Team member's name, title, supervisor**
- **Purpose Statement**
 - Use this template to help craft a clear purpose statement:
 - For this year, my role-related purpose is to use my [specific personal traits, strengths, abilities] to [ways I will effectively work with my team and my role] to [achieve the best overarching objective for my role].
- **Values**
 - List three values the team member would like to live into in the coming year
 - Define each one.
 - Share 2-3 example behaviors of how to operationalize each value.
- **Key Responsibilities and Goals**
 - For each key area of responsibility, include a brief statement of what it entails and 2-3 outcome-oriented goals in support of annual parish goals.
 - Make each goal SMART: specific and measurable, motivating, attainable, relevant, and trackable.
- **Training and Development**
 - Describe any training or development needed in the coming year and any support or assistance needed to achieve those training or development plans.
- **Spiritual Formation**
 - Describe any initiatives in the coming year to support spiritual growth as well as any support or assistance needed to achieve those spiritual formation plans.

Appendix III - A Conflict Resolution Process

When facing a conflict within your team or between a team member and the pastor, it's best to apply a formal process to help you work through your own emotions and handle the situation from a place of love and reverence.

- **Before trying to resolve a conflict, take a few moments to pray for wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**
- **Begin by taking time to understand the issue, the people involved, and the dynamics – especially if you're new and have inherited a difficult situation.**
 - Often, a disagreement is based on a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of an action or comment. Getting things out in the open can lead to a swift resolution.
- **Think about how you can apply skills in emotional intelligence that you've developed in your role as pastor and priest.**
 - Help the individuals identify and manage their own emotions.
 - Ask them to practice empathy by considering the other's point of view, background and experiences.
 - Guide them to understand that differences of opinion or approach do not necessarily mean one is better than the other.
 - Help them explore how best to work together to achieve shared goals of the parish.
 - Make sure good relationships are the first priority; keep people and problems separate.
 - Watch for examples of the sin of pride – not to call someone out for their sin, but to help them understand what's at the core of their concern. Invite everyone together to lean into humility instead.
 - Remind them that Jesus didn't agree with everyone, and that's OK. Questioning and challenging, in a positive way, should be encouraged across the team.
- **Apply these basic tenets of conflict resolution.**
 - Focus on the issue, not the person.
 - Separate the individual from the problem to avoid personal attacks or blame.
 - Keep the discussion centered on specific behaviors, actions or outcomes, rather than making it personal.
 - Encourage open communication.
 - Create a safe space for all parties to express their views, concerns and feelings.
 - Ensure that everyone listens first, talks second, and uses the concepts of active listening – listening to understand, not to respond.
 - Encourage open discussion to get at the root of the conflict. Most conflicts have fear at their core. If you can identify the fears of those involved, you can begin to address them together.
- **Stay neutral and objective.**
 - Approach the conflict impartially, especially if you are mediating between two parties.
 - Avoid taking sides and focus on finding a fair solution for all involved.
- **Identify common goals.**
 - Find shared interests or objectives to shift the focus from differences to collaboration.
 - Emphasizing mutual goals can help both parties work together toward a resolution.
 - Use a collaborative approach where everyone involved works together to find a mutually acceptable solution.
 - Encourage creativity and compromise rather than dictating a solution.

- **Focus on solutions, not problems.**
 - Shift the conversation from rehashing the conflict to brainstorming solutions.
 - Problem-solving is forward-looking and keeps discussions productive.
- **Establish clear next steps.**
 - Once a resolution is reached, define actionable steps to ensure the solution is implemented.
 - Ensure there's clarity on who is responsible for what actions to prevent future misunderstandings.
- **Follow up.**
 - Revisit the resolution after some time to ensure the solution is working and that no residual tensions remain. Continuous follow-up fosters a positive work environment and ensures the issue is fully resolved.

Below is a basic outline of a conflict resolution process to consider based on the concepts above.

1. **Pray**
 - a. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and patience as you prepare to effectively resolve this conflict.
2. **Who**
 - a. Identify who is involved in the conflict. What is their role and the nature of their relationship with you and others involved?
3. **Conflict**
 - a. Describe the conflict you wish to solve along with a brief explanation of the event/issue, the main points of disagreement, and how it makes you feel.
4. **Objective**
 - a. State the objective for resolving this conflict for all involved parties.
5. **Perspectives**
 - a. Describe the two opposing viewpoints. What are their perceived motivations? What assumptions does each side make about the other?
6. **Resolution**
 - a. Describe the ideal resolution for this conflict.
7. **Action Plan**
 - a. Outline the steps needed to achieve this resolution, taking into account the potential limitations of those involved. For each step, include:
 - i. What the step entails
 - ii. People involved
 - iii. Solutions to challenges
 - iv. Target date