A Vision for Lay Pastoral Ministry in the Archdiocese of Toronto
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**Office of Formation for Discipleship**

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Current Situation

The purpose of this document is to lay out the vision of the role that a Lay Pastoral Associate (LPA) undertakes when employed by a parish (see Appendices for sample job descriptions). By attracting qualified and competent lay people to serve in the Church in collaboration with our pastors, priests and deacons, the two-fold mission of nurturing and strengthening Catholics in their faith life and reaching out to those outside of the Church can flourish.

Relying on the pastoral expertise of bishops in both Canada and the United States, the guidelines put forward in this document have relied heavily on the following resources:


This document also builds on the original Guidelines for the Employment of Lay Pastoral Ministers from the Office of Lay Ministry and Chaplaincy at the Archdiocese of Toronto (reprinted in 2000), updated in response to the ever changing needs of the 21st century archdiocesan parishes.

Ministry Rationale

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”
(1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

The gifts and charisms that are specific to each expression of ministry are designed to work collaboratively for the good of community and the enrichment of ministry. The roles and responsibilities of the ordained are quite distinct from those of the laity. When all levels of ministry are engaged and life-giving, the parish community reaps the benefits of collaborative leadership.

The bishop, as primary teacher of the faith, seeks the assistance of various ministers, both ordained and lay to fulfill his mandate to provide faith education, pastoral care and the celebration of Sacraments for the Church. “The bishop creates structures and venues for fostering communication with priests, deacons, religious, those in lay ecclesial ministry, and people of the diocese. In his ministry of communion and by his ministry as the first preacher of the Gospel, the bishop keeps priests and people aware of and grounded in a unity of one faith and one sacramental life.”

Those ordained to the priesthood, particularly pastors, are delegated by the bishop to share in these responsibilities, especially due to the size, diversity and geography that parishes within the archdiocese inhabit. The celebration of Sacraments, especially daily and weekly Masses, are unique to the ministerial roles of priests and bishops. “Those who are ordained to the priesthood continue to live out their Baptism; moreover, they receive in the Sacrament of Orders a participation in the priesthood of Christ that is different – not simply in degree but in essence – from the participation given to all the faithful through Baptism and Confirmation.”

The deacons are delegated by the bishop to be servants to the community. While their duties also include serving at the altar, preaching, and presiding at baptisms, weddings and funerals, their primary responsibility is a distinct call to ordination that is lived out in service to the bishop and the wider community. A deacon is not meant to replace the work being done by a Lay Pastoral Associate. In the Archdiocese of Toronto, deacons are asked to provide a total of 40 hours per month of ministry services to the community and the parish. The 40 hours includes the time needed for homily preparation and preaching, celebration of any Sacraments as delegated by the pastor and the deacon’s regular outreach commitment (hospital/nursing home visits, ministry with prisoners, out of the cold programs, etc.). The exercise of his ministry is in addition to maintaining strong marital/family relationships and employment outside of the church. “Even when functions may be exercised that are the same as those exercised by lay persons or by priests, the deacon’s ministry nonetheless has a distinct sacramental basis that flows from the Sacrament of Orders. This sacramental basis is marked by the deacon’s permanent and public vocation to ministry and his unique participation in the apostolic ministry of the bishop.”

The LPA is delegated by the pastor to carry out specific, non-sacramental duties for the education and spiritual support of the parish. The family life experiences and educational formation of the LPA offer a skill set that will differ from those of ordained ministers. Some community members may initially find it easier to approach a lay person, depending on the circumstances that have brought them to the Church seeking assistance or counsel. The LPA reports directly to the pastor and may sit on a variety of committees as an ex officio member, such as a parish pastoral council. LPAs “must be persons who are known for genuine love of the whole Catholic Church, who exist in full communion of heart and mind with the pope as successor of Peter, and whose ecclesial identity is shaped by obedience to the bishop of the diocese and to the universal magisterium and is expressed by generous collaboration with ordained and other lay ecclesial ministers alike.”

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3 Ibid. 24.
4 Ibid. 25.
5 Ibid.
Who is a Lay Pastoral Associate?

The LPA is a professionally-trained lay person, employed by a parish to work alongside the pastor for the overall care of the parish. He or she is usually a full-time member of the pastoral team. The ministry of LPA is wide-ranging, relating to all aspects of parish life, but with designated responsibilities, such as sacramental preparation, faith formation and evangelization, liturgy, pastoral care or social outreach. The LPA’s job description and responsibilities will vary according to parish needs and the particular expertise brought forward by the LPA and other members of the pastoral team. Lay Pastoral Associates report directly to the pastor, after receiving approval to serve in this ministry by the archbishop.

LPAs respond to a vocation that requires a deep faith, appropriate theological training and personal discernment. This discernment will be carried out both in private and with assistance from family, friends, spiritual mentors and the community of faith. The discernment process for such a response is many-faceted:

- a lived experience of the Sacraments and Word of God as an expression of one’s relationship with Christ
- maturity in prayer, both personal and communal
- the capacity to formally study theology, catechesis, scripture, pastoral care and Church history and to engage in life-long formation
• a love for the people of God and a call to serve those who arrive in a variety of ways, with a profound appreciation for the diversity of God’s children

• respect for creation, the dignity of life and a profound understanding and lived experience of Catholic social teaching

• a loving relationship and volunteer involvement with one’s own local Catholic Church, as well as being seen as an instrument of communion for ecumenical relations

• passion for the New Evangelization

• belief and understanding of Church teachings and the ability to impart these teachings without filtering through one’s personal biases or spirituality.

In support of this ministry, the call needs to be sanctioned by the following sources:

• the pastor of a parish seeking the employment of a LPA

• the local bishop in the form of a mandating service, which may be delegated to the pastor

• an employment agreement between the parish and the individual who is being employed.

According to canon 231:

“§1. Lay persons who permanently or temporarily devote themselves to special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation required to fulfill their function properly and to carry out this function conscientiously, eagerly, and diligently.

§2. Without prejudice to the prescript of canon 230, §1 and with the prescripts of civil law having been observed, lay persons have the right to decent remuneration appropriate to their condition so that they are able to provide decently for their own needs and those of their family. They also have a right for their social provision, social security, and health benefits to be duly provided.”

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In *Co-Workers for the Vineyard of the Lord*, the following parameters are laid out:

“The four areas of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—that provide a framework for the formation of deacons and priests provide a framework for lay ecclesial ministers as well. Lay ecclesial ministers need:

1. **human qualities** critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God’s love and compassion
2. a **spirituality** and practice of prayer that root them in God’s Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry
3. adequate **knowledge** in theological and pastoral studies, along with the **intellectual skill** to use it among the people and cultures of our country
4. the practical **pastoral abilities** called for in their particular ministry.”

**Human Qualities**

With an awareness that a ministry position is more than just fulfilling a job function, the individual seeking employment must be willing to have their aptitude for ministry discerned under the following categories:

- psychological maturity and well-being
- a well-developed adult faith, lived out as a practicing Catholic
- a life-style that reflects a personal commitment to Gospel values and Church teachings
- a history of involvement in the life of a Catholic community
- support of one’s spouse or close family members, recognizing that the demands of ministry will have an impact on the individual’s personal and family life
- recognition of one’s gifts, as well as the abilities that one lacks, leading to the goal of collaborating with others who can help fulfill the pastoral needs of the community
- willingness to submit to a Criminal Background Check as a requirement for ministry with vulnerable groups (children, seniors, vulnerable persons)

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7 In place of the title Lay Pastoral Associate, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* uses lay ecclesial ministers.
8 *Co-Workers*, 34.
Spirituality
A rich spirituality involves a deepening of prayer life, occasions to share faith, strengthening of liturgical and sacramental involvement and continued growth in discernment. Candidates should be open to retreats, spiritual direction, psychological evaluation and team work as a basis for collaborative ministry. In addition, one should exhibit the following elements:

- a love for the Word of God which is nurtured through the daily reading of Scripture
- love for the Church and the people of God
- devotion to the Eucharist
- formation through participation and understanding of the Liturgy and especially the Sacraments
- a spirituality of presence and loving service for those in need
- a spirituality of suffering – being able to accompany those who suffer and to have an informed theological view of suffering, faith and hope.
**Adequate Knowledge**
LPAs must know not only the *why* but also the *how* of pastoral work: how to lead groups, how to prepare a workshop, how to sustain volunteers, how to succeed in team collaboration. Courses in the following areas will be of great benefit to the demands of the ministry position:

- Scripture and its interpretation
- Pastoral theology – guiding principles for the practice of ministry
- Dogmatic theology – knowledge of the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, Christian anthropology and eschatology
- Moral theology and Catholic social teaching
- Church history
- Liturgical and sacramental theology
- Spirituality
- Canon law (particularly concerning diocesan and parish structures).

**Pastoral Abilities**
In order to function effectively as a LPA, the following skills will provide an effective platform for working with a wide variety of groups, individuals and ministry opportunities:

- Applied psychology and sociology (including group dynamics and facilitation, andragogy, personality theory, conflict resolution, management)
- ability to catechize both adults and children
- effective interpersonal and communication skills
- skills for collaboration and team ministry
- ability to discern the gifts of volunteers and to call upon these gifts as a way of broadening the effectiveness of parish ministry
- change management and conflict resolution skills, being able to guide others through periods of change, conflict or uncertainty
- basic counseling skills – while not a trained counselor, the LPA may need to respond to others with active and compassionate listening, to be able to offer spiritual companionship and to know when and where to refer individuals who are in need of professional counseling.
Education and Training

In 2011 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Commission on Certification and Accreditation approved the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*. This document provides an excellent reference for the Archdiocese of Toronto to begin developing its own standardization of training to meet the needs of Toronto’s ministry composition. While many requirements are similar in nature, the Archdiocese of Toronto does have the unique contribution of the publicly funded Catholic school system and a comprehensive blend of multiculturalism within its faith communities.

The Toronto Archdiocese is blessed to have the Toronto School of Theology (TST) located within the campus of the University of Toronto. Its website can be found at [www.tst.edu](http://www.tst.edu). The Catholic theological schools include the Institute of Theology at St. Augustine’s Seminary, University of St. Michael’s College and Regis College. As part of the University of Toronto, TST provides opportunities for students to take courses from other Christian theological colleges, while still earning the appropriate academic credits for graduation. Of course, each college has required core courses to be taken from their own institute, in order to grant the degree. It is highly recommended that a ministry field placement course be taken as an essential preparation for ministry. Academic advisors play a key role in assisting students to pick courses that will meet their career or formation goals. It is highly recommended that theology students participate in regular one-on-one sessions with a spiritual director as part of their discernment process.

For those who do not have a bachelor’s degree, some exceptions are made by the various theology schools for students with some university background and ministerial experience. Discussion with an academic advisor will be instrumental in determining whether a candidate meets the requirements to enter one of the Basic degree programs as a special student. The Institute of Theology at St. Augustine’s Seminary also offers Diploma programs in theological studies or lay ministry.

The Archdiocese of Toronto covers an immense geographical area and consideration must be made for those individuals living outside of the GTA. For some, on-line courses with accredited universities can be recognized as practical alternatives for earning a degree in theology. For many students, the opportunity to study full-time is not financially feasible and they may choose to attend courses on a part-time basis.

The TST colleges are beginning to offer on-line courses, summer courses and more evening courses for those students who are unable to attend during the day. This adaption by the colleges is filling the need of mature students who are currently employed in other careers or do not have the opportunity to study full-time.
Some parish ministry candidates will have a rich background of hands-on experience but limited educational training. Other candidates will have exceptional educational background but little practical experience. The optimal candidates will have a measure of both. However, in the event that one side or the other needs “building-up”, encouragement from the parish to allow the candidate to grow into the fullness of their ministerial potential can be a positive experience. There needs, however, to be a commitment on the part of the candidate to seek out the necessary training, progressing at the pace that enhances their learning potential without undue stress. Flexibility within the parish schedule to accommodate access to some daytime or evening courses will be of benefit to all concerned. The goal of this education plan is to enhance the ministerial effectiveness of the candidate for ministry.

In addition to formal education, opportunities for supplemental formation can include:

- In-service training offered by the Archdiocese of Toronto, such as training in RCIA, liturgy of the Word with children, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, liturgical ministry training, and days of formation.
- The Archdiocese of Toronto’s on-line faith formation program, in partnership with the University of Dayton, is currently focusing on the faith formation of catechists. These courses are offered without charge for those endorsed by their pastor.
- Additional ministry opportunities for E-learning are available through the University of Dayton. The cost per course is subsidized by the Archdiocese of Toronto. The certification programs include: catechesis, adult formation leadership, social justice, foundations for leadership in ministry, youth ministry, and special needs. More information about the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF) can be found on their web site: vlcff.udayton.edu/certificates
- Networking with experienced LPAs to establish mentoring relationships, exchange of best-practices, sharing of resource information and opportunities to explore new and creative solutions to pastoral challenges.
- Participation in retreats and seminars as offered by Catholic centres and institutes, such as Manresa Jesuit Retreat Centre in Pickering and Windows on Theology (six to eight session non-credit courses) at Regis College.
Collaborative ministry is the key to a successful working arrangement between the pastor, priests, permanent deacons and the LPA. A clear understanding of the responsibilities to be carried out and an openness to clear communication will be of benefit to all team members.

1. The pastor retains responsibility for the governance and pastoral care of the parish. He is the one who calls out the gifts and charisms of others and commissions them for service, affirming and nurturing their ministry, sharing his own faith, love and hope with them. He leads the team in elaborating and implementing various types of decision-making processes that respect the varying nature of the decisions to be taken.

2. The LPA is assigned responsibility for one or more specific areas, which may include: liturgical formation and animation, sacramental preparation, social justice, ministry with maturing adults, family ministry, catechesis and adult faith development. It is important that the LPA not replace the many volunteers involved in parish life, but rather assist them through formation, accompaniment and support in the exercise of their own charisms. Volunteerism in the parish should be strengthened rather than diminished by the presence of a LPA.

3. Areas of shared responsibility should be formally agreed upon by priests, deacons, Lay Pastoral Associates and the various councils that make up the governance structure of a parish. A leadership training program, such as *Tending the Talents* from the Catholic Leadership Institute or *Called and Gifted* from the Catherine of Siena Institute, may be an invaluable resource for developing a shared understanding of responsibility, accepting mutual accountability and building consensus.

4. An employment agreement needs to be signed between the parish and the LPA. The agreement will address financial compensation and outline fundamental issues such as work hours, job duties, evaluation process, continuing education support, and termination. The agreement should be reviewed by Human Resources before being presented to the employee. To secure committed LPAs it is recommended that individuals are hired on a full time permanent basis with pension and benefit coverage being provided after three months of employment.

5. In order for parishioners to be aware of the ministry of the LPA, some form of public recognition is necessary. A commissioning service to publicly mandate a candidate to ministry within the parish can be found in the book *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition* published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Parishioners need to be informed of the hours and responsibilities delegated to the LPA, in order to respect personal boundaries and facilitate realistic expectations. It is critical to the pastoral identity of the LPA that the parishioners are aware that, as collaborators with the pastor, he/she has a level of authority that is consistent with his/her role.

6. Pastoral team meetings need to be held on a monthly basis so that faith and prayer can be shared, information given, conflicts resolved and decisions taken.⁹

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