



# Summary Report

Serving Dioceses, Parishes and Religious Communities Since 1964

Summer 2002

## **Getting the Word Out: Lay Preaching in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Montana**

For additional information on Evaluation of the Lay Preaching Ministry: Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and Partners in Preaching, June 2002, contact Patricia Hughes Baumer, executive director of Partners in Preaching, 7136 Arbor Glen Drive, Eden Prairie, MN 55346 (phone 952-975-9470, Fax 952-294-0204, e-mail [info@PartnersinPreaching.org](mailto:info@PartnersinPreaching.org)).

A copy of the full CARA project report, Evaluation of the Lay Preaching Ministry: Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and Partners in Preaching, June 2002, can be downloaded from the Partners in Preaching website, [www.PartnersinPreaching.org](http://www.PartnersinPreaching.org), or purchased for \$20.00 from CARA.

Getting the Word of God to Catholics has become a major problem in areas where the number of priests has become too few to staff all parish and mission churches. Such is the case in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings in eastern Montana, with 54 parishes and 72 missions serving more than 60,000 Catholics spread over almost 100,000 square miles—but with only 53 priests active in the diocese.

To help meet this challenge, in the late 1990s Bishop Anthony Milone engaged Partners in Preaching of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, for specialized training in lay preaching. A total of 80 lay persons completed a two-year course called “Empowering a New Voice” and were commissioned in 1999. Of these, 81 percent are presently involved in the ministry of preaching within the diocese.

CARA recently evaluated this lay preaching ministry for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and Partners in Preaching. The study had three components: a survey of certified lay preachers, a survey of priests and other pastoral ministers, and a survey of parishioners from parishes that have experienced lay preaching. The study’s major findings are discussed here with tables and graphs illustrating overall results.

### **Study Design**

In January 2002, surveys were distributed to lay preachers, other pastoral ministers and parishioners of select parishes in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings.

The survey of lay preachers asked lay preachers in the diocese their perceptions about the level of acceptance of lay preaching both in parishes and by other pastoral leaders. It also asked them to evaluate the training they received. A total of 76 questionnaires were completed for a 93 percent return rate.

The survey of other pastoral ministers—priests, pastoral administrators, deacons, lay and religious pastoral ministers—asked their perceptions about implementation and acceptance of lay preaching among parishioners and pastoral leaders. They were also asked to evaluate lay preachers’ preaching. Questionnaires were mailed to all clergy of the diocese, active and retired, as well as to all pastoral administrators, pastoral associates, and lay preacher mentors. Eighty-five percent of these ministers returned their questionnaires.

The survey of parishioners was distributed at all Masses over the course of a weekend in selected parishes and associated mission churches that had experienced lay preaching. It examined awareness and support of lay preaching among parishioners. All parishioners over the age of 12 attending Mass at these churches that weekend were invited to participate. CARA received 1,277 usable surveys.

# Major Findings

- f** Lay preachers are similar to the other pastoral ministers in this study in age and education. Nearly one in five is a religious sister. Two in three lay preachers serve as volunteer lay ecclesial ministers in a parish. About two-thirds of responding pastoral ministers have ministered with a lay preacher and one in four has mentored a lay preacher.
- f** The most common setting in which lay preachers exercise their lay preaching ministry is at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Nearly a quarter have also preached “many times” at weekday Word and Communion services. Parishioners are most likely to have experienced lay preaching “many times” at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.
- f** Most lay preachers report feeling accepted as a lay preacher by parishioners, by other lay ministers, and by their pastor or pastoral administrator. Nearly eight in ten other pastoral ministers “strongly agree” that they support the ministry of lay preaching. In return, two in three other pastoral ministers “strongly agree” that they are supported in their ministry by lay preachers. More than eight in ten surveyed parishioners agree at least somewhat that they support the ministry of lay preaching.
- f** Lay preachers positively evaluate the help they received from the “Empowering a New Voice” training program. While they believe that lay preachers are sufficiently prepared, most lay preachers would like more training in preaching. Nine in ten agree that every lay preacher could benefit from mentoring after initial training. Only about three in ten responding parishioners agree that lay preachers are not sufficiently prepared to exercise their ministry effectively.

- f** Four in ten responding parishioners say they would be interested in learning more about the ministry of lay preaching. However, more than half of the young parishioners responding (ages 13-20) express interest in learning more about this ministry.
- f** All three groups surveyed affirm the benefits of lay preaching. Three in four lay preachers and six in ten responding parishioners “strongly agree” that lay preaching is a good alternative to closing parishes because of a shortage of ordained priests. Seven in ten other pastoral ministers agree at least “somewhat” with this statement. Eight in ten parishioners as well as eight in ten other pastoral ministers agree that lay preaching offers the parish a welcome diversity of perspectives. Lay preachers are unanimous in their agreement on this point.

## Benefits of Lay Preaching

At least eight in ten lay preachers, pastoral ministers, and parishioners agree that lay preaching offers the parish a welcome diversity of perspectives. Pastoral ministers who have ministered with a lay preacher are more likely than those who have not to agree with the statement.

Almost five in six parishioners agree at least somewhat that lay preaching is a good alternative to closing parishes because of a shortage of ordained priests. On average parishioners have attended the parish in which they were surveyed for 22 years. One-third of the responding parishioners, 34 percent, are age 60 or older. Attending another parish is a more difficult option for parishioners in rural areas or small towns.

### BENEFITS OF LAY PREACHING

*Percentage responding “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree”*

	Lay Preachers	Pastoral Ministers	Parishioners
Lay preaching offers the parish a welcome diversity of perspectives	100%	82%	80%
Lay preaching is a good alternative to closing parishes because of a shortage of ordained priests	95	70	85

## Lay Preachers

Lay preachers are similar in age and education to other pastoral ministers in the study. Their ages range from the late 30s to the mid-70s with the median age being 59. Thirty-four percent have graduate or professional degrees and 88 percent are college graduates.

*"It helped me grow spiritually and taught me ways to share this growth with others—by opening up the Word, first to myself and then to others."*

More than six in ten, 62 percent, of lay preachers are married. Eighteen percent are women religious. One-fifth of the lay preachers are single, some never married, others divorced, separated or widowed. All of the responding lay preachers who began their ministry of lay preaching before 1984 are women religious. Two-thirds of the lay preachers are currently serving as volunteer lay ecclesial ministers at the parish level and one in six is a paid lay ecclesial minister in a parish.

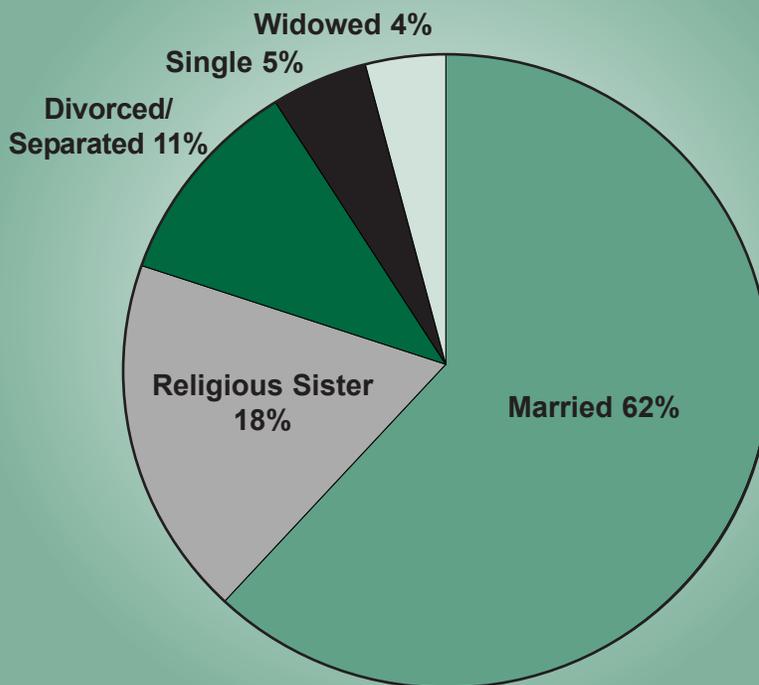
For lay preachers some of the best things about the ministry of lay preaching are the opportunities for personal spiritual growth and service to their faith community. Many lay preachers feel called to their ministry of preaching. They are aware that they bring their lay perspective as a particular gift.

## Other Pastoral Ministers

Approximately one half of the pastoral ministers responding to the survey are lay ecclesial ministers, one-third are clergy (23 percent diocesan priests, 6 percent religious priests, and 3 percent deacons), and one-fifth are women religious. Seventy-six percent of the lay ministers are married.

Almost seven in ten responding pastoral ministers, 68 percent, have ministered with a lay preacher. Three-fourths of the responding clergy have ministered with a lay preacher. A quarter

### STATUS OF LAY PREACHERS



of the pastoral ministers have mentored a lay preacher and 15 percent currently do. Of those who are currently mentoring a lay preacher, 59 percent are priests.

Some of the best things about the ministry of lay preaching for these pastoral ministers is that lay preachers are able to use their gifts and that the lay perspective is incorporated into preaching that an assembly hears. Many of the pastoral ministers note what a service lay preaching is for them and the Church given the demographics of the Diocese.

*"It allows the Church to be further enriched by using more talents of more people. Some of the best preaching I've heard has come from lay preachers."*

## Acceptance and Support of Lay Preachers

In general lay preachers feel accepted as lay preachers by various groups in the Diocese. Approximately eight in ten lay preachers “strongly agree” that they are accepted as a lay preacher by other lay preachers, other lay ministers, other lay persons, parishioners, and the pastor/pastoral administrator.

### OTHER PASTORAL MINISTERS: SUPPORT OF AND BY LAY PREACHERS

*Percentage responding*

	"Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	"Strongly Agree" Only
<b>I support the lay preachers with whom I minister (if applicable)</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>I support the ministry of lay preachers</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>I am/would be comfortable ministering with a lay preacher</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>I am supported in my ministry by the lay preachers who minister in the Diocese</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>66</b>

Lay preachers report that those most closely connected to the ministry of lay preaching—the lay preachers themselves, their mentors, and the bishop—most strongly support the ministry of lay preaching. The experience of other pastoral ministers is similar. They also report that other lay preachers, lay preaching mentors, and the bishop are most likely to “very much” support the ministry of lay preaching. In fact, 94 percent of the responding pastoral ministers say that the bishop “somewhat” or “very much” supports the ministry of lay preaching.

Pastoral ministers were asked about their support of lay preachers with whom they minister. Eight in ten pastoral minis-

A higher percentage of pastoral ministers than parishioners agree that they personally support the ministry of lay preachers, but agreement is high for both groups.

### PARISHIONERS: SUPPORT OF LAY PREACHERS

*Percentage responding*

	"Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	"Strongly Agree" Only
<b>Our parish accepts lay preachers</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>I support the ministry of lay preachers</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>I am comfortable at a liturgy preached by a lay preacher</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>I would rather attend another parish farther away from my home than attend worship with a lay preacher</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>

ters “strongly agree” that they support the lay preachers with whom they minister. Three-fourths “strongly agree” that they are (or would be) comfortable ministering with a lay preacher. In turn, two-thirds of the pastoral ministers “strongly agree” that they are supported in their ministry by lay preachers.

A higher percentage of pastoral ministers than parishioners agree that they personally support the ministry of lay preachers, but agreement is high for both groups. More than nine in ten pastoral ministers and more than eight in ten responding parishioners agree that they personally support the ministry of lay preachers. It is possible to look at sub-groups of pastoral ministers. Pastors and pastoral administrators are slightly less likely to agree, at least somewhat, that they support the ministry of lay preachers. Paid lay ecclesial ministers, on the other hand, are unanimous in agreeing that they support the ministry of lay preaching.

Nearly nine in ten parishioners agree that their parish accepts lay preachers. Less than a quarter of the parishioners agree at least somewhat that they would rather attend another parish farther away from home than attend worship with a lay preacher.

### I SUPPORT THE MINISTRY OF LAY PREACHERS

*Percentage responding*

	"Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	"Strongly Agree" Only
<b>Pastoral ministers</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>Pastors/Pastoral administrators</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Paid lay ecclesial ministers</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Parishioners</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>53</b>

## Lay Preaching Settings

The most common setting in which lay preachers exercise their lay preaching ministry is at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Nearly a quarter of the lay preachers have also preached “many times” at weekday Word and Communion services.

Correspondingly, Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a

Priest is the setting in which lay preaching is most frequently experienced by both parishioners and other pastoral ministers. Seven in ten parishioners and 45 percent of the pastoral ministers have experienced lay preaching in this setting “a few times” or “many times.” Parishioners in the study had heard, on average, four lay preachers

### HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU EXERCISED YOUR LAY PREACHING MINISTRY IN THESE SETTINGS?

*Percentage responding*

*“A Few Times” or  
“Many Times”*

<b>Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Weekday Word and Communion</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>At a Mass when particular circumstances recommend preaching by lay persons with special expertise</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Meetings of lay groups (CCW, Knights of Columbus, etc.)</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Funeral vigils (wakes)</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Morning, Evening, or Night Prayer</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Popular devotions (rosary, stations, etc.)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>At a Mass when the ordained minister is unable to preach because of illness or lack of familiarity with the language</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Hospital/nursing home/care center services</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Children’s liturgical celebrations at school or religious education</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Jail/Prison services</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Communal Penance services</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Parish days of prayer</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Parish retreats</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Funeral liturgy outside of Mass</b>	<b>10</b>

## Diocesan Need for Lay Preachers

Both pastoral ministers and parishioners experience a need for the ministry of lay preachers in the Diocese. They disagreed with the statement, “We do not need the ministry of lay preachers in this Diocese,” with pastoral ministers being more likely than parishioners to strongly disagree. Within the group of pastoral ministers there is more variation. All lay ministers disagree at least somewhat with the statement that the ministry of lay preachers is not needed in the Diocese, whereas, three-fourths of the clergy disagree at least somewhat.

Pastoral ministers were asked if they thought lay preachers did a disservice to the Diocese by masking the reality of too few priests. Three-fourths, 76 percent, “strongly disagreed” with the statement.

### DIOCESAN NEED FOR THE MINISTRY OF LAY PREACHERS

*“We do not need the ministry of lay preachers in this Diocese.”*

*Percentage responding*

	<b>Pastoral Ministers</b>	<b>Parishioners</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>61</b>

## Training and Mentoring

In general, lay preachers positively evaluate the help they received from the “Empowering a New Voice” training program. They are unanimous in their agreement that the training program helped them integrate personal witness and experience in their preaching, prepared them well for lay preaching, and helped them be creative in their preaching. Although they report that lay preachers are sufficiently prepared to exercise their ministry effectively, most would like more training in preaching. Nine in ten agree that lay preachers could benefit from mentoring after initial training.

Pastoral ministers’ evaluation of lay preachers’ preaching is on the whole positive. They see lay preachers as most successful in integrating personal witness and experience in their preaching and somewhat less successful in being creative in their preaching

style. However, at least eight in ten pastoral ministers say that “most” or “all” lay preachers integrate personal witness and experience, communicate effectively, integrate Scripture and theology, and are creative in their preaching style.

The majority of parishioners surveyed agree that lay preachers are sufficiently prepared to exercise their ministry effectively. Only three in ten parishioners agree with the statement, “Lay preachers are not sufficiently prepared to exercise their ministry effectively.” Four in ten parishioners indicate they would be interested in learning more about the ministry of lay preaching. Interestingly, more than half of the young parishioners (ages 13-20) expressed interest in learning more about this ministry.

### LAY PREACHERS: PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE “EMPOWERING A NEW VOICE” TRAINING PROGRAM

*Percentage responding*

	“Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree”	“Strongly Agree” Only
It helped me integrate personal witness and experience in my preaching	100%	81%
It prepared me well for lay preaching	100	78
It helped me be creative in my preaching	100	73
It helped me integrate Scripture and theology in my preaching	99	75
It helped me communicate more effectively	97	71
I would like more training in preaching	95	52
Every lay preacher could benefit from mentoring after initial training	90	50
Lay preachers are not sufficiently prepared to exercise their ministry effectively	14	4

## Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate



CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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# What is the Best Thing About the Ministry of Lay Preaching?

## Voices of the Lay Preachers:

*“Lay preachers have the advantage of living the life of their community. This is reflected in their preaching and helps them connect people to the Word.”*

*“Preaching requires continual study and preparations; so, personally, it adds to my own growth and knowledge.”*

*“Responding to the call of baptismal ministry in a way not previously affirmed. Ability and giftedness of individuals affirmed.”*

*“The training and opportunities given us be lay preaching and its acceptance has given our priests the opportunity to do more with (hopefully) less stress.”*

*“I convert myself and grow spiritually in ways I did not expect.”*

*“I feel that we have been called just like Jesus called the first apostles.”*

*“It makes me appreciate the work of priests.”*

*“The privilege of offering reflection on the Scriptures to an eager congregation.”*

*“The humility, the wonder, the awe, the Word of God, and all its possibilities.”*

*“It allows for a variety of voices belonging to the ‘People of God’ or ‘Body of Christ’ to be heard. Priests, religious, laity each bring a unique perspective, as do men and women. The full Gospel can be heard more easily in this way.”*

*“People must be nourished at least weekly as a faith-filled community. Otherwise, in small towns they will seek to join other churches...”*

## Voices of the Other Pastoral Ministers of the Diocese:

*“The call and gift of the baptized being affirmed.”*

*“Allowing the grace of the Holy Spirit to work through a lay person who has the gift of preaching.”*

*“Now the Word of God can be told again with the new voices—voices that are married, parented, female, old and young, even hurt by the church, yet love to tell her stories also.”*

*“Mine was a great help to me when I was sick and could not minister.”*

*“I serve in a rural area with a home parish (approximately 300 members) plus 5 small communities (with 15 members). I use lay leaders or preachers in all smaller places every other week [and] occasionally when I am gone on vacation or meeting in a home parish. I dare say these Church communities would close down very soon if the lay leaders/preachers ceased to exist.”*

*“They have the dreams and heart and words to speak and to be Good News.”*

*“The bishops and priests are so worried about losing their job—or are jealous—whatever! For the church to survive in rural areas we need to have this ministry. That’s what bishops and priests should be thinking, and I’m a priest.”*

*“It allows the Church to be further enriched by using more talents of more people.”*

*“Lay witness and proclamation brings a whole new perspective to preaching—people hear it in a new way.”*

*“It enriches the parish and gives diversity to our liturgies and other prayer services.”*

*“In rural small towns we need to have trained preachers available in case of emergency or illness of the ‘only’ priest around.”*

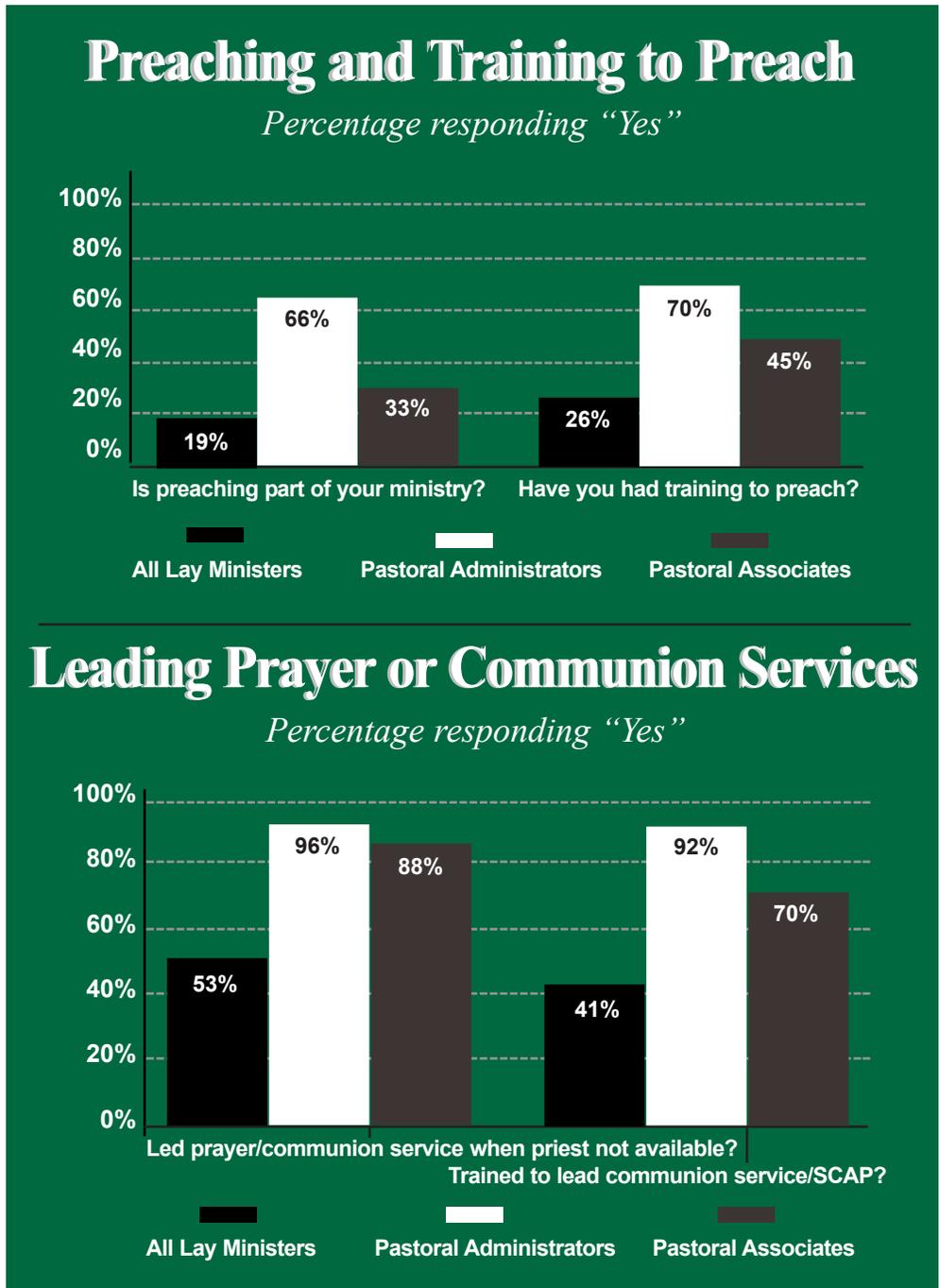
# Lay Preaching in Catholic Parishes in the United States: CARA's Lay Ministry Poll

The CARA Lay Minister Poll is a telephone poll conducted in Spring 2002 of lay ministers in Catholic parishes in the United States. Among the questions asked of the lay ministers were several regarding whether preaching or leading prayer or communion services were part of their ministry and whether they were trained for these aspects of their ministry.

For purposes of the study, a lay minister was defined as any parish staff member besides a priest, deacon, or seminarian working or volunteering for a parish for at least 20 hours in a typical week, excluding secretaries and other clerical workers, maintenance workers, and school employees. For certain specific ministry areas, including pastoral administrators and pastoral associates, CARA conducted over-samples enabling a more in depth exploration of these lay ministers. Because certain ministries are over-sampled, the data for all lay ministers is weighted to reflect the whole population of lay ecclesial ministers.

Although preaching is part of the ministry for one-fifth of lay ministers in Catholic parishes in the United States, two-thirds of pastoral administrators and one-third of pastoral associates claim preaching as part of their ministry. More lay ministers are trained to preach than are preaching as part of their current ministry. This is true for lay ministers as a whole as well as for pastoral administrators and pastoral associates specifically.

Leading weekday prayer or communion services when a priest is not available for Mass or a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP) is a ministry of many lay ministers, particularly pastoral administrators and pastoral associates. Over



half of all lay ministers reported they had led a prayer service or a communion service when a priest was not available for Mass. Almost nine in ten pastoral associates and 96 percent of pastoral administrators have led such a service. A slightly lower percentage of lay ministers are trained for this ministry than are doing it.

Overall four in ten lay ministers are trained to lead communion services or Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Sixty-nine percent of all lay ministers who say they are leading prayer or communion services when a priest is unavailable report that they have been trained to do so.