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# The Parish Council Of St. Bernadette's: An Exercise In Communication Competency

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**THE PARISH COUNCIL OF ST. BERNADETTE'S:**

**AN EXERCISE IN COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY**

Submitted to the  
Center for Public Service  
Master of Public Administration Program  
Seton Hall University


By

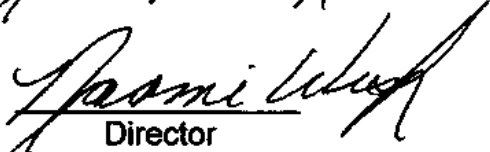
Reverend Alfred J. Vito

A Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Public Administration

Date: 6/03/03

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
(I)	INTRODUCTION	4
(II)	LITERATURE REVIEW	5
(III)	METHODOLOGY	14
(IV)	DATA & DISCUSSION	20
(V)	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	29
(VI)	APPENDIX A	31
(VII)	APPENDIX B	35
(VIII)	APPENDIX C	37
	TABLE I	37
	TABLE II	38
	TABLE III	39
(IX)	BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	40

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

**The completion of this capstone project is a two-fold personal triumph. In addition to its significance in respect to my educational growth, this research has indicated the perceived success of the parish of St. Bernadette.**

**As an educator, I believe in the value of education as imperative to the personal and social growth of all individuals. As a pastor, I believe in the value of spiritual growth as reflected by the reception of parishioners to the word of God. I understand the importance of a welcoming environment conducive to open communication and respect. In cooperation with the work of our parish council, it is apparent the parish community has found the spiritual growth key to their education in the catholic faith. I find this reaffirmation in the strength of God rewarding.**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The sense of community towards which human beings have a natural tendency to strive (Bausch, 1994, p. 127) is accomplished in a broad variety of contexts. Community can be accomplished in small groups or large groups, in work environments, team environments, educational environments and religious environments. For the purposes of this research, attention will be directed towards a microcosmic community of the Catholic church; i.e., an individual parish.

The parish is characterized as a community of faith and action through which the life of the church is reaffirmed via local influence (Bausch, p. 7). Therefore, the strength and vitality of the individual parish is essential to the survival of the composite church community.

Effective communication is key to the accomplishment of this ever-present goal of the parish community. Verderber & Verderber (2000) define communication as a systemic process through which individuals exercise mutual responsibility in the creation of meaning. Information shared through the communication process serves to define relationships, assert or command influences, assist in the development of both a sense of self and community, and respond to social/individual needs. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate how an effective leadership council (i.e., the parish council) can improve communication satisfaction among the members of a parish.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The parish council serves a leadership role in the parish community as the ambassador of communication competency. Leadership is defined as “the behavior responsible for the guidance and influence of any given group” (Beebe & Masterson, 2000; 11). The parish council addresses the task and process needs of the parish community.

The parish council was initiated at the parish of St. Bernadette in Canadensis, Pennsylvania during the liturgical year of 1996 in response to a self-study personally conducted upon my appointment as pastor of this church community. It was indicated through the work of focus groups in the solicitation and analysis of data from parishioners that the church was in need of a unified body of leadership to enhance the sense of community within this parish. *St. Bernadette Parish: A Self-Study Report (1996)* examines the necessity of a parish council characterized by impeccable standards and structured leadership to satisfy the needs of the parish community.

Effective leadership is dependent on competent communication skills. As previously established, communicator competence is unachievable without an acute sense of accountability. Mary Jo McGrath asserts in *School Administrator* (2000 October) “the demand for accountability is an explosive dynamic involving individual behavior

and organizational systems." The parish council, as a model of communicator competence, must therefore meet the demands of accountability. It is the intention of this research to illustrate the parish council as demonstrative of communicative competence within the organizational structure of the catholic church by virtue of its leadership role. This is accomplished through a review of literature pertinent to the original case study conducted at the parish of St. Bernadette meriting the establishment of a parish council and the literature examining the concepts of communication competency and leadership.

Dennis O'Leary (Deegan, 1995) describes the parish council as an "instrument of visioning and planning" (p. 19) responsible for the strengthening of faith communities despite the social challenges faced daily by the Catholic church. O'Leary suggests religious tradition is hindered through social modernity, necessitating the provision of positive leadership by a parish council.

Deegan argues that the changes experienced within the catholic church via the Second Vatican Council and revision of the Code of Canon Law challenge individual perspectives in relation to church governance. Prior to the adjustments made by Vatican II placing the responsibility for the mission of the church into the hands of the entire church body, the model for understanding the catholic church was hierarchical. The documents resulting from Vatican II

established the increased role of the laity in church governance. In response, the procedures of pastoral planning had to become inclusive of the laity in an effort to remain effective; hence, the development of a parish council with individual communities of the catholic church.

The parish council is a collaborative body designed to allow parishioners the opportunity to actively participate in the life of the parish (Deegan, p. 53). The parish council is responsible not only for fielding and addressing the concerns of the parish community, but for the establishment of a bridge between that community and the pastor. Bausch argues it is important to recognize the pastor and the parish leadership styles do not always coincide (p. 167).

Fischer claims the main reason for having a parish council, otherwise referred to in literature as a pastoral council, is pastoral planning (Deegan, p. 43). Pastoral planning typically assumes one of two forms, directional and/or strategic. Directional planning is characterized by a statement of mission and is requisite of extensive knowledge of church teaching. Strategic planning is generally more focused on specific issues/concerns and results in the designation of ministerial and financial resources towards goal achievement.

Mary Kay Bailey explores the role of the parish council in her contribution of "A Call to Ministry" in Deegan's 1995 text, Developing a Vibrant Parish Council. Bailey defines the parish pastoral council as



“a consultative body to the pastor, composed of members of the parish staff and members of the parish, which promotes pastoral action through reflection and planning” (p. 66). The parish council is responsible for the articulation and communication of the vision and mission of the parish.

A typical, active parish council is comprised of two factions, likened to concentric circles by Bausch in his 1994 publication, The Total Parish Manual. Bausch describes these two factions as the parish council proper and the parish assembly. Asserting the influence of the parish council as dependent upon the consolidation of parishioner input, the suggested size of the parish council proper is a total of nine members. The parish community is responsible for the election of five members to the council. The remaining four members are appointed by diocesan law (n.b., in the case of this study those members appointed ex officio to the parish council would be there via the decision of the Diocese of Scranton (PA)). All members serve on a rotation basis, retiring from their duties every two to three years. The president elect of the parish council is voted yearly by the nine council members.

The second faction of the parish council is known as the parish assembly. The assembly is led by the parish council proper president. Its membership is limited to the leaders of parish organizations and ministries (e.g., RCIA, CCD, Women's Guilds, Knights of Columbus,

etc.). Bausch (p. 158) defines the two main tasks of the parish assembly as 1) the active reporting of ministries to provide an overall parish perspective for the council, and 2) the lobbying for ideas and needs viewed with importance by parish membership.

The frequency of parish council meetings is determined by the needs and preferences of individual parishes. Likewise, the determination of whether meetings are held open to the public is unique to each parish. Bausch asserts that the typical parish council, whether or not made public to the parish community at large, does have an obligation to share its minutes with parishioners. Hence, many parish councils publish the minutes from their meetings in Sunday bulletins.

Membership in the parish council is contingent upon the ability of registered church participants to be demonstrative of specific skills and attitudes conducive to the goals of the council. Bailey claims effective council membership will be characterized by the ability to articulate the vision of the parish towards collective spiritual growth, and eagerness to move the parish in this direction through the inspiration of its membership. The membership elect of the parish assembly should demonstrate an ability to listen, to inspire and lead others, to make decisions and to work with ease in group settings.

The parish council assumes a major leadership role in the parish. Leadership is defined as "the behavior responsible for the

influence and guidance of any given group" (Beebe & Masterson, 2000; 11). Leadership is characterized as being both task and process oriented. Task leadership involves the coordination and facilitation of group activity. Process leadership involves the encouragement and mediation of task accomplishment. Effective leadership is reflective of a symbiotic relationship exercised between task and process goals. This balance can only be achieved through proper assessment of group needs through feedback acknowledgement and interpretation (Verderber & Verderber, 1:1).

Many expectations are inherent in any leadership role. Similar to the leadership role of the pastor for the parish, the parish council, in its leadership role for the parish community, must be responsive and respectful of both points of view in any given conflict. In order to accomplish this responsiveness, it is necessary for the parish council, as well as the pastor, to recognize these expectations. More importantly, it must be acknowledged that fulfilling such expectations is not always going to be possible. In fact, based upon the extent of certain expectations, fulfillment may not even be realistic.

In the article, "The Myth of Authority," published by Father Joe Giallanza in the Fall 1991 issue of *Human Development*, seven unreal expectations of leadership are identified as follows: (1) the pick-up expectation, (2) transmitter expectation, (3) encyclopedia expectation, (4) maintenance expectation, (5) dart board expectation, (6) low

affirmation expectation, and (7) the self-destructive expectation.

These expectations are described in further detail, with examples pertinent to the case study at hand.

(1) Pick-up expectations are those placing all responsibility on the shoulders of the leader or leadership body. For example, when there are not enough songbooks present in a given pew at church on Sunday because someone in a prior mass has passed several to the row behind them, the parish council is faulted for the lack of proper distribution.

(2) The transmitter expectation holds the leader responsible for disseminating all information to all individuals regardless of propriety or involvement. For example, the pastor should be sure children are aware of all information regarding activities geared toward the elderly and vice versa.

(3) The encyclopedia expectation demands that leadership entail all-encompassing knowledge and not allow for mistakes or uncertainty. That is, the leader should have all the answers, all the time, to everything, without question.

(4) The maintenance expectation is similar to the pick-up expectation, holding that the leader shoulders superintendent responsibilities. Therefore, by default of its leadership role, the parish council is held accountable by the parish community for plumbing and electrical problems suffered by the church.

(5) The dart board expectation presumes the leader is responsible for serving as the target for all anger, frustration and dissatisfaction encountered by the parish community. In other words, the pastor should shoulder the marriage problems, employment difficulties, and all additional stressors suffered by parish members.

(6) The low affirmation expectation holds that the leader does not merit "thank you's" or other signs of acknowledgement for jobs well done. The parish council is expected to make everyone else's life easier on a regular basis.

(7) The self-destructive expectation holds that the leader of any given community should shoulder the responsibility of all individuals within that community for self-preservation. The parish council is thus held accountable for the actions of all members of the church community.

The previous discussion of leadership expectations speaks to the potential for pressures to arise for the parish council in its leadership role in the parish community. Successful leadership is dependent upon competent communication. Therefore, despite the unrealistic expectations many parishioners may have of their leadership elect, it is the inherent responsibility of the parish council to respond with communication both effective and appropriate to every given situation. When communication is both effective and appropriate, it merits the characteristic quality of competence.

The communication climate necessary for competency to be achieved is reliant upon the cooperative relationship between feedback provision, goal-setting and motivational efficacy. Feedback is an attitudinal response to a given set of circumstances or state of affairs; goal-setting is the process of clearly identifying needs and defining the steps necessary to respond to those needs; and motivational efficacy is the success of a body of leadership in supplying the encouragement necessary for accomplishing goals and being receptive to feedback which may assist in the process thereof. Each factor can operate as either an impetus or impediment to the achievement of communicative competence. Through effective leadership, the parish council communicates effectively and appropriately with the parish community.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The parish of St. Bernadette participated in a self-study during the fall of the 1996 liturgical year for the purpose of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the parish community. Post-Vatican II church structure dictates that the Catholic church become more inclusive of its laity (Deegan, 1995). The appointment of new pastoral leadership by the bishop of the Diocese of Scranton provided the opportunity for parish assessment.

The parish community was invited to orchestrate a self-study of the structural and functional condition of the parish using the focus group method. The focus groups were composed of active, registered parishioners sincerely focused on the growth and development of their parish community. Preliminary discussion by the volunteer self-study committee identified seven overlapping issues warranting investigation. These issues were (1) demographic composition, (2) social concerns, (3) stewardship, (4) sacraments, (5) worship, (6) evangelization and (7) leadership. The self-study committee divided itself into seven focus groups of four to six members to devote attention to the investigation of these issues.

In cooperation with focus groups, specifically organized for the purpose of guiding the study, the parishioners were asked to complete questionnaires pertinent to the parish community. The focus groups, comprised of volunteer, registered parishioners, designed the

questionnaire following extensive discussions ranging from finances and registration numbers to liturgical theatrics and parish-sponsored activities. The questionnaires were distributed via mail to registered parishioners only. The primary reasoning for not distributing the questionnaires following typical a mass schedule was to avoid duplicate responses per household as well as the avoidance of input from visiting attendees. Recipients were granted a period of three weeks for the completion of survey questionnaires. Surveys were collected in the parish lobby following all masses during the course of the study period. Personal collection was intended to avoid receiving the input of registered, non-participating parishioners. In an attempt to obtain credible data from those most directly affected by, and involved in parish activities, the survey was conducted in mid-October. The survey was not conducted during either the Advent or Lenten seasons when church attendance is higher than normal. The response rate for this initial mail survey was 81%, having 305 of 375 surveys being returned.

The analysis of data collected via survey response allowed for the publication of a detailed report indicative of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the parish. Overall, the challenges identified by the research committee outweighed the strengths of the parish. This publication included suggestions for improving the parish.



The primary recommendation of the self-study committee was the need for establishing a parish council “with clearly identified roles and responsibilities” (“Self-Study;” Long Term Issues 1:a). The parish council would shoulder the responsibility of identifying and cultivating effective leadership to promote a continued dedication to the growth and development of the parish as a unified community in light of the mission of the Catholic church at large.

The secondary long-term issues meriting attention in accordance with the research of the self-study committee included family, volunteerism and youth activities. The committee determined the need for support to be provided to families in states of transition or crisis, and for the encouragement of the integration of generations for spiritual growth. The need to provide avenues for volunteerism to maximize the outreach efforts of the parish was stressed as meriting future attention, along with the fostering of activities directed towards the youth of the parish beyond religious education courses (Long Term Issues 2:4). The effective leadership of a parish council would enable these issues to be addressed as well, providing the necessary guidance of parishioners to establish programs dedicated to these goals.

Thus the parish council was established in response to the concerns laid forth by the study committee. The committee detailed specific leadership goals for the parish council in its 1996 report.

Five years later, the successful achievement of these goals by the parish council is evidenced through the follow-up survey conducted at the parish of St. Bernadette during the fall of the 2001 liturgical calendar. Again, the research was conducted as a mail survey to avoid one family returning more than one questionnaire. Questionnaires were collected in the church following all masses during a time period of three weeks. The response rate for this survey was 82%, having 415 of 500 surveys returned. The data were compared to the initial survey, yielding numbers indicative of significant improvement.

The questionnaire via which these results were ascertained was identical to that distributed to registered parishioners in 1996 with additional targeted questions used to ascertain attitudes regarding the ability of the parish council to establish its leadership through communicator competence. These additional questions were derived from two instruments specifically designed for the measurement of communication competence and satisfaction.

The first of the two measures is the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Com.-Sat.), which is based on Hecht's 1978 conception of communication satisfaction as positive reinforcement provided in respect to a communication event. The Com-Sat Inventory is a self-report instrument designed to assess personal satisfaction with conversational interactions. This

instrument views satisfaction as a behavioral outcome of communication. This instrument has been utilized across the fields of health and psychology, but most extensively in contexts pertinent to communication effectiveness. The analysis of parishioner response to these measures is indicative of the success of the parish council in its leadership role.

The second measure is the Communicator Competence Questionnaire (CCQ). The Communicator Competence Questionnaire was developed by Monge, Backman, Dillard and Eisenberg in 1982. The CCQ was initially directed toward interactions between people in specific roles in organizational settings. The CCQ is other-focused, asking superiors and subordinates to evaluate each other as opposed to themselves. It is composed of twelve questions, addressing the two factors of communication -- encoding and decoding. Encoding questions evaluate the behaviors of clear expression, command of the language and understandability. Decoding questions evaluate listening skills, responsiveness and attentiveness. The CCQ allows for the analysis of the communication exchange between the parish council and the parish community at large. It enables the effectiveness and appropriateness of the council's communication endeavors to be understood in terms of expectation and outcome. This evaluation of communicator competence is related to the perception of the parish council in an effective leadership role. The

failure to communicate competently would serve to hinder effective pastoral planning, creating a negative impact on the communication climate in the parish. The competent execution of the leadership role facilitates relational competence, which in turn leads to a competent communication relationship. Competent communication allows for the legitimacy of the parish council as an effective body of leadership to be realized.

The intention of this research is to explore the communicative competence of the parish council in its leadership role in the parish community. It is assumed that the communicative competence of the parish council is in large part responsible for its success in addressing the challenges laid forth by the initial self-study committee. The following discussion provides an in-depth analysis of the responses to the survey in respect to their indication of the communicative competence of the parish council.

#### IV. DATA & DISCUSSION

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate how an effective leadership council (i.e., the parish council) can improve communication satisfaction among the members of a parish and improve the services provided by the parish. As supported by McGrath's contribution of organizational accountability, effective leadership has been established to be dependent upon the exercise of competent communication skills in a hierarchical forum.

Communication is deemed competent when it is both effective (i.e., the communication accomplishes its intended goals) and appropriate (i.e., the communication is suitable to a given situation or event).

Communication satisfaction is based upon the acknowledgement of communication competence. The greater the perception is of communication competency, the greater the satisfaction with the communication. Therefore, the parish council can be judged an effective leadership council, responsible for improving communication satisfaction among the members of the parish.

The St. Bernadette parish community did a self study of the structural and functional condition of the parish using the focus group method. In cooperation with focus groups specifically designed for the purpose of guiding the study, the participants were asked to complete questionnaires pertinent to the parish community. Survey responses (Table I) from the initial 1996 questionnaires (Appendix A) yielded an

attitude of nonchalance (i.e., an apathetic response) from parishioners in respect to their satisfaction with the parish of St. Bernadette. The results demonstrated a greater number of weaknesses than strengths from the parishioners' perspective. Focus group committees used this information to determine the need for a parish council responsible for providing effective leadership and thereby fostering a better sense of community and satisfaction among the parishioners. According to O'Leary, the parish council is responsible for the "vision and planning" necessary to lead the parish towards an enhanced sense of community which could be furthered through the establishment of avenues for volunteerism and youth involvement with the parish.

When the identical survey (Appendix B) was administered again in 2001, the results were indicative of a dramatic shift towards the positive in the satisfaction of parishioners with the parish. In contrast to 1996, these surveys illustrated that the parishioners perceived greater strengths than weaknesses in the parish. Keeping in mind the key functions of pastoral planning were defined as a sense of inclusion in parish life, involvement of laity, and the addressing of social concerns through discourse and outreach, a comparison of the 1996 (Table I) and 2001 (Table II) data is therefore indicative that the parish council has been successful in accomplishing its intended goal of providing direction through pastoral planning.

The fifteen items in the questionnaire that was distributed in 1996 and again in 2001 can best be understood when analyzed in terms of the four following categories: 1) climate, 2) opportunity, 3) societal, and 4) administrative. The fifteen items composing this questionnaire can be divided relatively equally for analysis.

Parish climate refers to the atmosphere of the parish. Is the parish welcoming to visitors? Are the facilitating members of the parish (i.e., lectors, readers, altar servers, etc.) hospitable? Are parishioners comfortable in the parish and therefore involved in parish life? Items 1, 3 and 13 of Appendix A are pertinent to parish climate. A comparison of the responses from 1996 (Table I) to 2001 (Table II) indicates a significant improvement in parishioners' perception of the parish climate at St. Bernadette's. The most significant shift in numbers can be seen in terms of hospitality (item 3). The majority (57%) of respondents in 1996 rated the level of hospitality in the parish as average, with a mere 15% rating it better than average while 28% rated it lower. In 2001, however, 94% rated the parish as "above average" or "excellent" in terms of hospitality, with no respondents indicating anything lower than average.

Perhaps the perception of the parish as being more welcoming further accounts for the significant improvement in parishioners' sense of inclusion in the parish (item 1) and hence increased involvement (item 13). 73% of parishioners indicated an above average sense of

inclusion in the parish in 2001 with no one indicating anything below average (item 11). This is indicative of a dramatic change from 1996, when there was a near even split between those rating their sense of inclusion as either average (52%) or below (48%), with none higher. Consequently it would follow that nearly 2/3 (64%) of the parishioners in 2001 found themselves to be actively involved in the parish as opposed to only 1/3 (32%) actively involved in 1996.

The second category for analysis focuses on the social and educational programs actively sponsored by the parish (e.g., C.C.D., Knights of Columbus, Ladies' Guild, etc.). Items 2, 6, 8 and 15 address whether the parish is successful in affording its members such opportunities for religious involvement and growth. Again, the data reflects a marked improvement from 1996 to 2001. Most significantly, attitudes towards parish-sponsored youth activities (item 2) rose from a 17% level of satisfaction in 1996 to a level of 62% in 2001. An even 1/3 of parishioners' responses remained indicative of "no opinion," as is probably attributable to not having children of age to participate in such activities.

A comparison of the data from 1996 to 2001 indicates the success of the parish in equalizing the number of volunteer opportunities afforded all its members (item 8). 63% of the parishioners in 2001 saw the parish as offering equal volunteer opportunities to all members, regardless of age or gender. In 1996,



however, only 12% saw members as being offered equal opportunities. Instead, 29% saw men as having more opportunities to volunteer, followed by the 24% who saw younger adults as having a similar advantage.

There is one change that seems to have occurred between 1996 and 2001 that merits concern (item 6). A greater number of respondents in 2001 (56% vs. 28%) said that young single adults were seen as least likely to be included in parish life compared to 1996, when they were apparently viewed as having volunteer advantages based on age. The declined inclusion of the young single adults from 1996 to 2001 is a potential cause for concern, meriting the future attention of the parish council in their continued efforts.

Parishioner awareness of, and satisfaction with, educational opportunities (item 15) afforded by the parish was also indicative of significant change. Once again, as in respect to volunteer opportunities, there is a positive shift in parishioner satisfaction with educational opportunities from 1996 to 2001. That is, in 2001, 86% of the respondents said they saw educational opportunities for all members to be both adequate and effective; whereas in 1996, a mere 6% responded as such. Rather, the overwhelming majority of responses in 1996 indicated a lack of awareness in educational opportunities (57%), with those being aware suggesting that these opportunities were biased in terms of age, and generally ineffective.

**Societal concerns, the next category, pertains to those involving the world beyond the parish doors. Does the parish adequately establish and maintain a strong, healthy relationship to the ideals of the universal church? How does the parish address social concerns through pastoral discourse and outreach programs? Items 4, 5, 9 and 14 address these concerns.**

**The results of the responses to item 14 should also be of some concern. In 1996, 59% felt the parish made only an average attempt to express the relationship to the universal church while only 15% felt the attempt was above average. Similarly in 2001, 49% felt the attempt to be average, with a slightly increased 29% seeing it as above average.**

**However, significant improvements were realized in terms of the parish's attempts to address social concerns. An overwhelming 70% of the 2001 parishioners indicated their satisfaction with the attempt of the parish to address social concerns through pastoral discourse (item 4) as opposed to 0% in 1996. In that year, 1996, 77% indicated they had no opinion to offer. Similarly, the majority of the parishioners in 2001 (81%) indicated their satisfaction with the attempt of the parish to address social concerns through outreach programs (item 5), as opposed to only 15% rating this activity as positive in the 1996 survey. Although the efforts of the parish to reach out to alienated Catholics (item 9) is indicated by the data to have improved**

from 13% in 1996 to 40% in 2001, a consistent majority of parishioners indicated they had no opinion on both surveys (60% and 56%, respectively). Again, this apathetic response would suggest another area on which the parish council needs to focus future attention.

The final category of questions (Appendix A), including items 7, 10, 11 and 12, is administrative in nature. Administrative concerns are inclusive of satisfaction and comfort with the pastor, and church "business" (i.e., the bulletin and the scheduling of masses). The approachability (item 10) and sincerity (item 11) of the pastor are very important to the success of a parish. Accordingly, the data indicate remarkably improved parishioner perception in both regards from 1996 to 2001. The overwhelming majority of parishioners in 2001 found the pastor to be approachable (88%) and receptive to their concerns (94%). There was no negative feedback reflected in either regard. In 1996, however, 47% of parishioners felt they could not approach the pastor and 41% felt the pastor was not receptive to the voicing of their concerns. This indicates a dramatic improvement in parishioner satisfaction with pastoral administration.

In terms of church business, the data indicate a more positive attitude of parishioners toward the mass schedules in 2001 (item 12). Eighty-five percent (85%) thought them convenient in 2001 while only 45% thought them convenient in 1996. In respect to the bulletin (item

7), the 2001 data suggest that parishioners found that the information in the bulletin encouraged greater participation in the parish, reinforced the message of God as delivered in the mass, and fostered a sense of awareness in respect to the mission of the parish more so than those in 1996. In 1996, according to the data, the bulletin was not seen to offer any significantly useful information, nor to further the message of the church to any significant degree.

The questions in Appendix B were included as an addendum only to the 2001 survey. They were designed to ascertain the perception of the communicator competence of the parish council. Several sets of these questions (a/b; c/d; g/i; r/t; v/w) test the internal validity of the questionnaire. The responses to the questions (Table III) demonstrate similar attitudes, attesting to the validity of survey responses. For example, 75% of the parishioners disagreed with the statement (a) "Nothing is accomplished through communication with the parish council," and 72% agreed with the test statement that (b) "The parish council is responsive to the concerns of the parish." Similarly, 62% agreed that (r) "The parish council does not shy away from addressing issues with the potential for inducing conflict," and 58% disagreed that (t) "The parish council fails to respond to the social concerns of the parish."

In terms of feedback, 60% of the respondents agree that the members of the parish council are easy to talk to, with 81% agreeing

that they respond to parishioner concerns in a timely fashion. Seventy-eight percent (78%) believe the parish council expresses sincere interest in their concerns, with 70% believing the council is readily approachable with such concerns. Eighty-four percent (84%) of the respondents believe the council communicates the goals of the parish clearly, engaging in pointed written and oral communication. Sixty-eight percent (68%) agree that the parish council says the right thing at the right time. Ninety-two percent (92%) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the communication efforts of the parish council. Establishing such a climate lends credence to the competency of the parish council as an effective body of leadership and communication competence.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Fischer's claims suggest that the pastoral planning for which the parish council is responsible facilitates lay involvement and thereby increases the sense of ministerial inclusion of parishioners. Accordingly, it is the opinion of this researcher that this trend is accounted for by the leadership efforts of the parish council. As previously established, effective leadership is reflective of a symbiotic relationship exercised between task and process goals (i.e., goals defining what needs to be accomplished and how it needs to be accomplished). This is a balance achieved through a communication climate characterized by a cooperative relationship between feedback provision, goal-setting and motivational efficacy. The analysis of the data returned from the questions appended to the original questionnaire indicated the accomplishment of this communication climate by the parish council. With 64% of the 2001 responses indicating an active or very active role in parish life, the furthering of laity involvement as prescribed by Deegan's model for council governance provides support for this success claim.

Conclusively, the data analysis is indicative of an overwhelming sense of communication satisfaction by parishioners. The parish council, as an effective leadership council, has therefore improved communication among the members of the parish through communication competence. The comparison of the data from the

1996 and 2001 surveys also demonstrates that the improved communication has led parishioners to perceive the parish services themselves in a much more positive light.

## VI. APPENDIX A

The following is a replication of the original questionnaire distributed as a mail survey to registered parishioners of St. Bernadette's parish in 1996. The identical questionnaire appended with the measures printed in Appendix B of this thesis was distributed as a follow-up survey to parishioners in 2001.

1. Please indicate your sense of inclusion in parish life:
  - Excellent
  - Above Average
  - Average
  - Below Average
  - Poor
  
2. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with parish-sponsored youth activities:
  - Very Satisfied
  - Satisfied
  - No Opinion
  - Dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied
  
3. Please indicate how you would describe the level of hospitality in the parish (i.e. how welcoming do you find St. Bernadette's as a parishioner):
  - Excellent
  - Above Average
  - Average
  - Below Average
  - Poor
  
4. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the attempt of the parish to address social concerns as they arise through pastoral discourse (i.e. homilies/commentary following the mass):
  - Very Satisfied
  - Satisfied
  - No Opinion
  - Dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied



5. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the attempt of the parish to address social concerns through outreach programs (i.e. Christian Awareness Ministries Ecumenical (CAME), pro-life committees, Knights of Columbus):

Very Satisfied  
 Satisfied  
 No Opinion  
 Dissatisfied  
 Very dissatisfied

6. Do you find any of the following groups to be less included in parish activities? If yes, please indicate which one(s).

Youth  
 Young Adults (Single)  
 Young Adults (Married)  
 Families with young children  
 Elderly

7. Please choose the statement(s) which best describes your feeling about the parish bulletin:

The bulletin is a reinforcement of the message of God as delivered in the mass.  
 The bulletin provides information encouraging participation in the parish.  
 The bulletin fosters a sense of awareness of the direction and mission of the parish.  
 The bulletin fails to provide any useful information beyond mass times.  
 The bulletin does not serve to further the Catholic mission of the church.

8. Please choose the statement which best indicates your feeling about volunteer opportunities afforded by the parish:

The parish offers equal opportunity for all members.  
 The parish offers more opportunities for younger adults.  
 The parish offers more opportunities for elderly adults.  
 The parish offers more opportunities for women.  
 The parish offers more opportunities for men.

9. Please indicate how you would rate the effort of the parish to reach out to alienated Catholics (i.e., those who are unable to attend services due to illness or transportation, those who have lost direction from the call of the church):

- Good, Obvious Effort
- Average Effort
- No Opinion
- Poor Effort
- No Apparent Effort

10. Do you find the pastor to be approachable?

- Always
- Often (a majority of the time)
- No Opinion
- Sometimes (on occasion, but rarely)
- Never

11. Do you find the pastor to be receptive to suggestions and/or concerns as they are voiced?

- Always
- Often (a majority of the time)
- No Opinion
- Sometimes (on occasion, but rarely)
- Never

12. Please indicate the statement(s) which best address your feelings regarding the weekly mass schedule:

- The scheduling of weekend masses is convenient.
- I would be more likely to attend mass every Sunday if it were earlier.
- I would be more likely to attend mass every Sunday if it were later.
- The mass schedule is inconvenient for Holy Days & Holidays.
- I would be more likely to attend weekday mass if it were earlier.
- The mass schedule does not affect my attendance.

**13. Please mark the category which best describes your involvement in the parish:**

- Very Active (regular participation in Mass, sacraments, other activities)**
- Active (regular participation in Mass, sometimes in other activities)**
- Marginally Active (regular participation in Mass, no other involvement)**
- Minimally Active (infrequent participation in Mass or other activities)**
- Inactive**

**14. Please indicate your impression of the parish's attempt to express its relationship to the universal church (i.e. communication of papal teaching, support of missions, learning about the church in other parts of the world):**

- Excellent**
- Above Average**
- Average**
- Below Average**
- Poor**

**15. Please choose the statement(s) which best describe your feeling about the parish's efforts to educate members in the Catholic faith:**

- Educational opportunities for all members are both adequate and effective.**
- Educational opportunities are adequate but are ineffective.**
- Excluding RCIA and CCD classes, educational opportunities are inadequate.**
- Educational opportunities exclude the elderly.**
- Educational opportunities exclude young adults.**
- I am unaware of opportunities for faith development educational programs offered by the parish.**

**Please feel free to offer any other comments or suggestions you would like to share with the research committee. Thank you.**

## **VII. APPENDIX B**

Following is a reproduction of the 2001 appendix to the initial 1996 questionnaire utilized in the mail survey. These questions were intended to assess the attitude of the parishioners in respect to the leadership skills and communicative competency of the parish council.

Each question was answered based on a five point scale with the following value attributions (5=strong agreement, 4=agreement, 3= neutral feelings, 2=disagreement, 1=strong disagreement).

- a. Nothing is accomplished through communication with the parish council.
- b. The parish council is receptive to the concerns of the parish.
- c. Generally, I am dissatisfied with the level of communication exhibited by the parish council.
- d. The parish council communicates its goals clearly.
- e. I am able to present my opinions and concerns to the parish council without concern over ridicule/judgment.
- f. The parish council illustrates a sincere understanding of issues communicated through the parish community.
- g. I am generally satisfied by communication efforts with the parish council.
- h. The parish council expresses sincere interest in what parishioners have to say.
- i. I do not enjoy communicating with the parish council.
- j. The parish council does not provide support for the information it communicates to the parish.
- k. The parish council is readily approachable with all concerns.
- l. The parish council avoids communication regarding sensitive social issues.

- m. The parish council has a good command of the English language.
- n. The parish council is sensitive to the needs of the parish.
- o. The parish council engages in pointed communication.
- p. The parish council pays acute attention to what parishioners say.
- q. The parish council deals with parishioners effectively.
- r. The parish council does not shy away from addressing issues with the potential for inducing conflict.
- s. The parish council is composed of good listeners.
- t. The parish council fails to respond to social concerns of the parish.
- u. Written communication from the parish council is difficult to understand.
- v. Information presented orally by the parish council is expressed clearly.
- w. Information presented by the parish council is difficult to understand when delivered orally.
- x. The parish council generally says the right thing at the right time.
- y. Members of the parish council are easy to talk to.
- z. The parish council responds to messages (phone calls/memos) in a timely fashion.

VIII. APPENDIX C

The following charts reflect the percentages calculated to reflect data compiled from the surveys appended on the previous pages.

TABLE I

<b>1996 Questionnaire Data (Percentages)</b>						
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>	<i>Column C</i>	<i>Column D</i>	<i>Column E</i>	<i>Column F</i>
1	0	0	52	12	36	—
2	0	17	40	24	20	--
3	1	14	57	18	10	--
4	0	0	77	12	11	--
5	3	12	63	15	6	--
6	64	28	41	28	68	--
7	6	31	29	15	34	--
8	12	24	14	21	29	--
9	2	11	60	19	7	--
10	1	17	35	40	7	--
11	3	22	34	16	25	—
12	45	25	39	15	32	61
13	9	23	45	12	11	—
14	1	14	59	14	12	—
15	6	32	39	20	12	57

*N* = 305

**TABLE II**

<b>2001 Questionnaire Data (Percentages)</b>						
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>	<i>Column C</i>	<i>Column D</i>	<i>Column E</i>	<i>Column F</i>
1	32	41	27	0	0	--
2	30	32	35	3	0	--
3	30	64	6	0	0	--
4	32	38	21	9	0	--
5	46	35	14	4	1	--
6	4	56	14	10	18	--
7	86	90	83	4	9	--
8	63	2	5	16	14	--
9	11	29	56	4	0	--
10	84	4	12	0	0	--
11	84	10	6	0	0	--
12	85	25	34	5	12	41
13	31	33	21	12	3	--
14	13	16	49	18	4	--
15	86	2	3	0	2	7

*N* = 415

**TABLE III**

<b>2001 Expanded Questionnaire Data (Percentages)</b>						
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>	<i>Column C</i>	<i>Column D</i>	<i>Column E</i>	<i>Column F</i>
A	0	4	26	49	21	--
B	34	41	19	5	1	--
C	3	9	16	41	31	--
D	37	47	12	4	0	--
E	10	46	34	9	1	--
F	21	45	27	6	1	--
G	34	39	19	5	3	--
H	29	49	12	7	3	--
I	4	6	29	51	10	--
J	2	7	41	39	11	--
K	36	34	20	7	3	--
L	2	9	49	32	8	--
M	71	21	8	0	0	--
N	29	49	13	7	2	--
O	32	47	17	4	0	--
P	21	42	28	5	4	--
Q	8	32	49	8	3	--
R	31	30	29	9	1	--
S	19	45	25	9	2	--
T	4	6	32	46	12	--
U	0	0	26	66	8	--
V	21	41	35	3	0	--
W	1	6	35	39	19	--
X	25	43	32	0	0	--
Y	17	43	31	7	2	--
Z	42	39	17	1	1	--

**N = 415**



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