# A Utilization Focused Evaluation of a Lay Ministry Education Program: Issues and Critiques

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**Abstract**
*This article is the result of a comprehensive evaluation study of a 3-year lay ministry education program in a Roman Catholic diocese. The authors take the position that evaluation research is an integral part of the program planning cycle and that evaluation data can be used to build more effective adult education programs for laity. Using a utilization-focused framework (Patton, 1997), the three-member research team colleted data through document analysis, open-ended interviews, and a group interview. Data from this study confirm that this adult education program fosters learning and faith formation, and should be continued, albeit with some changes. This paper discusses the study and the usefulness of evaluation research in lay ministry programs.*

Lay ministry education programs are perhaps the most significant and organized adult religious education activity in North American Christian and Jewish communities today. Referred to as lay ministry education, lay formation, and adult education, [ii] these programs have a common goal of educating the laity for fuller participation in the life of the faith community and for full participation and service to the world. Although some attention has been paid to the design and implementation phases of such programs (e.g., Zeph, 2000), little attention, if any, has been paid to effective evaluation of them (a review of the academic literature on lay education programs revealed only those sources cited in this article and none of these, except Warren & Associates, 1998, were systematic evaluation studies). This evaluation research study is an attempt to address this lacuna and to contribute to that portion of adult education that focuses on evaluation research. As with most qualitative work, the focus is on the depth and quality of investigation in a particular time and place with a particular group of people (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

This article reports on the study of a 3-year lay ministry education program in a Roman Catholic diocese in Canada. This article is concerned with lay education that is typically offered in a part time program format, to adults who come from a variety of educational backgrounds. This lay education falls within the realm of non-formal adult education programs, that is programs offered outside traditional degree-grant ing or credentialing institutions (formal education), and which are intended to be a form of continuing professional development (CPD or CPE) (see Selman, Cooke, Selman, & Dampier, 1998).

Program providers include various combinations of universities, continuing education departments, dioceses, seminaries and schools of theology. Anglicans offer these programs (see EFM, 2005), as do Roman Catholics (see Murnion et al., 1992; Zeph, 2000), and Jews (Grant, Schuster, Woocher, & Cohen 2004), in response to a need for practicing religious faithful to learn more about their particular tradition, engage with others of similar interest, and connect

more directly to the ministry of their faith communities.[iii] In some cases, the programs are ecumenical but mostly they are offered by single denominations or faith traditions, and they typically culminate in a diploma or certificate from the sponsoring institution (see for example St. Francis Xavier University, 2004).

Using a utilization focused evaluation framework (Patton, 1997; 2002), the three-member research team collected data in 3 ways: (a) document analysis of the foundational document establishing the program, of the summary reports on the surveys that had been done by the program director prior to this evaluation, and curriculum materials for the program[iv], (b) open-ended interviews with 15 students, 5 facilitators, 5 board members, and 8 priests involved in the program; and (c) a group interview with 8 board members. The three evaluators had varying degrees of interest in the program. One (Leona English) had taught in a number of lay ministry education programs, though not this one. Another (Charles MacDonald), did occasional lectures in this particular program but had no long term or continued involvement with it. The third (Owen Connolly) had no connection with this program though he has been involved in a similar program in another diocese. All researchers claimed an interest and commitment to lay ministry, program evaluation, and education of the Catholic laity. These commitments strengthened the research and informed our findings and analysis, as is often the case in qualitative research (see Christians, 2000). We are committed to all parts of the effective program planning for adults (needs assessment, design, implementation, evaluation) and believe that effective adult education evaluation is an integral part of program planning, albeit a neglected one (see Caffarella, 2003).

## Theoretical Framework

There is little published and accessible research on lay ministry programs. For this review, we consulted organizational reports, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, and the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) religion database. We consulted leaders and students of lay ministry programs and drew on conversations and information-sharing at the 2003 lay ministry-focused Task Force on Adult Religious Education of the Association of Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education. The review and claims below are based on the particular sources identified. No attempt was made to do a full theology literature review. The focus here is on a Canadian education program and whether it is useful or not.

Although there is some adult religious education (ARE) literature (e.g., Elias, 1993; English & Gillen, 2000; Foltz, 1986; Gillen & Taylor, 1995; Regan, 2003; Vogel, 1991) by and large, ARE research is neglected, and that dimension of it that deals specifically with lay education is especially neglected. The branch of adult religious education that addresses continuing education for ministry is represented in an edited edition by Reber and Roberts (2000), which provides various historical and theoretical discussions on CPE for those in professional and paid ministry. In contrast, the program under review here is generally focused on those in volunteer and usually part time ministry such as religious education, music ministry, adult education, and chaplaincy. Lay ministry itself has received some attention in adult education (e.g., Fox, 1997), yet there is little refereed research on lay ministry education and programs (exceptions include Zeph, 2000).

As well, there is no refereed journal that addresses in a particular way non-degree education for lay ministry.

Some reports on lay ministry programs were available to us. In the United States, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) (Murnion, 1992; Murnion & DeLambo, 1999) has initiated research into lay ministry, in part because the number of lay parish ministers has increased significantly in recent years (Murnion & DeLambo). Yet, these publications are by-and-large reports and not systematic research studies. And, they are primarily theologically based, as opposed to strong educational research studies with systematic data collection. There may indeed be more reports and church documents that relate to lay ministry but none that are in accessible, refereed formats.

There are at least 35 lay ministry education programs in Canada, which is evidence that considerable resources have been allocated for offering programs and diplomas in continuing education for lay ministry (see English, 2000). In 2000, there were 3293 graduates of these diploma in ministry programs and 974 students then enrolled (English). Data collected from the 35 leaders of these programs indicated that most did not feel supported by the laity in the parishes nor by local clergy. Some 70% of directors within a Canadian context had little or no hope for meaningful inclusion of the laity in parishes. A further 82% said the church had a long way to go in accepting lay people as full and active participation in the life of the church. Some 32% felt that they received little or no support from local congregations. This is significant since the premise of lay ministry is working at the local level to build up the church. Also, support from clergy was not strong. While 91% felt little or no risk of being fired for holding non-conformist views, a full 17% have been attacked by clergy since beginning their positions. These results are important since they come from the only major study, published in a refereed journal, done on lay ministry programs in Canada.

The National Association of Lay Ministries (NALM) in the United States is the approximate counterpart of the Canadian Association of Ministry programs (CAMP), though NALM has a much larger mandate than providing ministerial education. The section of NALM that serves as a "forum" for directors of ministry formation programs would be roughly equivalent to CAMP (personal communication with the Amy M. Hoey, Lay Ministry Project Coordinator, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). Challenges to lay involvement in parishes, frustration over the outcomes of diploma programs, and conflicting visions of church are also found among NALM members. Yet, the movement to provide education for laity in nonformal and accessible ways seems to be gaining momentum in both Canada and the United States (Task Force for Adult Religious Education, Association of Professors, Practitioners, Researchers in Religious Education, 2003).

The American National Conference of Catholic Bishops' (1999) Committee on the Laity has focused directly on lay ministry education programs, noting discrepancies between education for laity and clergy; whereas there are standards for clergy there are none for laity. This Committee is concerned about the emergence of such education diploma programs (in 1998, there were 183 programs, p. 29) and urges the bishops to take leadership on this (p. 26). They query whether the

growth of these lay ministry programs "may be helpful for meeting the needs of the Church, or [if] it may unnecessarily duplicate or overextend existing resources" (p. 26) such as those used in schools of theology or seminaries. So, questions about lay ministry programs are seemingly common, regardless of jurisdiction.

One of the issues that has arisen frequently within CAMP is the purpose and intended outcomes of lay ministry education. This confusion or lack of cohesion is reflected in the variety of names ascribed to programs and the corresponding expectations that attend such names. Names of Canadian programs vary from faith formation, to lay ministry formation, adult faith, diocesan ministry formation, pastoral formation, lay formation, Christian training program, parish ministry formation, diploma in theology and ministry, diocesan lay formation program, pastoral leadership certificate program, preparation program for cross-cultural mission, compassionate leadership program, diploma in ministry, and leadership training for aboriginal leaders (in the English, 2000, study only 2 of the 35 programs had the same title). Of the CAMP members surveyed in 2000 most (77%) expressed confidence in their program and what it had to offer. Yet, only 9% felt that the purpose of their program was clear.

Given the multiplicity of names that exist, it is not clear if the intention of the programs was to address the needs of laity for faith formation, to provide ministerial preparation, or to provide leadership training. This raises questions about the purpose, intent and outcome of these programs. An evaluation study (Warren & Associates, 1998) in another Canadian diocese shows that there was similar confusion among program participants about the purpose and intended outcomes of their program. Whereas the program documentation (see *DMFP*, 1998) was clear on the matter, this was not communicated successfully to candidates.

## Evaluation Methodology and Data Collection Techniques

### Evaluation Research
Patton (1997) defines program evaluation as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. We concur with this definition because it allows us to go beyond determining worth, merit, or value, to increasing knowledge and understanding of the program, and to contributing to its improvement. Evaluation research, often in the form of reports on specific evaluation cases, such as the one in this article, are an established form of educational research. Journals such as *Evaluation Research*, *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, and *Evaluation and Practice* are refereed venues for this research. Unfortunately, evaluation research is not an established form of research in religious education, though the social sciences have fully embraced it.[v]

Within the literature there are various or predominant theories of evaluation research. These include, but are not limited to, fourth generation (naturalistic and negotiated evaluation–Guba & Lincoln, 1989), responsive (observing and reacting to what you see —Stake, 1995), empowerment (encouraging improvement and self-determination--Fetterman et al., 1996);

participatory[vi] (full and active involvement of participants in every stage; Park, 2001) and utilization focused evaluation (UFE, Patton, 1997). We chose the latter for a variety of reasons, but mainly because it is oriented from the beginning on providing practical and useful information to all those involved in the program (the stakeholders), all the while being aware of the ethical and political dimensions of evaluation. UFE highlights the potential benefits of evaluation processes--individual or organizational changes that occur among those involved in an evaluation process as a result of the learning that occurs.

UFE, as described by Patton (2002), the originator and main proponent of this accepted evaluation method, is not only an evaluation process but also a "strategy and framework for making decisions about the content, focus and methods of an evaluation" (p. 173). The first step in this evaluation is the identification of the "relevant decision makers and information users" (p. 173) who will actually utilize the information provided by the evaluation research. It is this identification of key people (sometimes called stakeholders) that guides the research—all decisions and data collection are informed by this. As evaluators we worked with these users to focus questions. Our research methods and data analysis techniques also came from a consultative process. One key decision we made was whether to collect qualitative or quantitative data. Our choice was dependent on the end users: What do they want and what will they do with the information if they get it? In UFE evaluation the users' needs and wants determine the most appropriate data collection methods and techniques. The actual research process out to be a creative to-and-fro between the evaluator and the client. Above all, a UFE is personal and interactive. Notions of objectivity or attempts to stand back from the data are avoided; this UFE evaluation is very much a human-interactive process with the interests and concerns of participants in mind see (Kuhsner, 2000). The methods and data collection techniques ought to reflect the values of the institution, in this case a diocesan Roman Catholic church community. In our entire evaluation process, we tried to honor these principles of utilization-focused evaluation, by meeting with all the stakeholders formally and informally, checking and re-checking questions, and consulting with participants as we went through to ensure that our evaluation was moving in the right direction for all concerned.

**Data Collection Analysis**
As with all UFE's, and indeed solid qualitative research, we chose the data collection methods "most likely to work" and which were consistent with the collaborative, person-centered, and ministry focused values of the diocese. One principle of UFE, and indeed all effective qualitative research, is that the methods be usable or workable. No pretense to predetermined or "scientific and systematic" methods is made, since these are inconsistent with the needs of this church community and its participants. Having in hand the collated data from the three questionnaires that had already been done internally with the 43 students, we thought that qualitative data, collected through individual and group interviews would be useful. From conversations with some of the participants in the program and with the leaders of the program, we knew the participants likely would resist completing another questionnaire since they had reached a saturation point. The participation of two of the evaluators in the life of the diocese, and consultation with key stakeholders, made us aware that this diploma program had low impact in the diocese. Therefore we did not do any data collection on the impact of the program. The

program participants (43 in total) were much too small a group in relation to the size of the diocese for us to collect any useful data from parishes, parish councils, or others living in the diocese (129, 905 in diocese). Instead we concentrated on a purposeful sample of those directly involved, for our individual and group interviews.

The interview data was collected manually through field notes and with a back-up tape recording. We chose notations to minimize cost of transcription and to maximize our listening and discernment during the actual interview. The data were compiled into one document and then analyzed using a thematic analysis, which we determined to be consistent with a utilization focused framework (see Aronson, 1994). Themes were first identified, then sub-themes. This early framework was presented informally during our focus group meeting with the board members of the program. We then took their feedback and further refined and analyzed the themes and the data, before writing the final report and this article. We also consulted the available literature to inform our analysis.

Using a thematic analysis (see Aronson, 1994; Merriam & Simpson, 1995), with coding of data, we analyzed the initial documents from the set-up of the program, as well as program evaluations that had been conducted internally. The latter were attempts to assess views of the program. We used an open ended interview with 15 students distributed across the three years; as well as open-ended interviews with 5 facilitators, 5 board members, and 8 priests in the diocese. Our questions concerned: (a) successes or highlights of the program, (b) problems or challenges with the program, (c) recommendations for the program. We decided on these questions having consulted the director and his assistant who completed the written questionnaires. We decided that the data now needed could best be collected through an informal interview process. Finally, we held a group interview with 8 members of the board of the diploma in ministry program at a regular scheduled meeting. This meeting was to give an in-process report and to seek their informed opinions about the evaluation and how it might then proceed.

**Background Information**

This was a 3-year program with a part time priest director who was given a 5-year mandate to graduate three classes. The program also had a board of directors, and employed its instructors on a need basis. The program was highly organized and consultative and graduated 43 people. There was little or no attrition. Candidates were required to have a strong recommendation from their pastor and hold a high school graduation certificate or equivalent, so that they were capable of doing university work. The program, offered during 10 residential weekends per year, was offered in conjunction with a diploma program from a nearby university, meaning that candidates would receive a certificate of completion from the diocese, as well as a diploma from the university. The goals of the diocesan program were to have graduates who were familiar with diocesan structures, church history, Vatican II teaching, moral theology, parish administration, canon law, liturgy, community building, and ministry in the diocese.

The specific direction given the program was to form individuals to be lay ministers who would go back to their parishes and work with their pastors "to figure out what it meant to be lay ministers in each parish situation" (*DMFP,* 1998). Some of the program participants were already active in their parishes, although many were not.

## Themes Arising from the Data

The overlapping nature of categories makes it difficult to list these points separately but for reader clarity we try. We supplement each discussion with data from the interviews, comments from participants, and our observations as a committee. In the spirit of a utilization-focused evaluation's emphasis on continuous consultation, we went back to participants, key informants, and organizers with these themes and findings to hear their interpretations before publishing them in a final format.

### Faith Formation and Education
The stakeholders—priests, students, organizers board members--were in unanimous agreement among the participants that the program had contributed greatly to faith formation and education. Participants, as indicated in each of the three internal evaluations, and in this UFE evaluation, reported an increase in knowledge, prayer life and to some degree, skills. A typical comment: "It was a chance to be challenged and supported, especially the last year when the group was small." Another pointed out that "I wanted to educate myself and I enjoyed program. … it opened my mind, caused me to question my religion, and it strengthened my church involvement."

A strong faith community was built among participants. One noted that "friendship was another positive dimension. [This program] helped me love the Catholic church and be more ecumenical." And there was a desire to share this with others: "This program contributed to my work. It gave me confidence and credibility in parish, CWL had invitations to get me more involved and to lead them. The [local] cluster invited me to do things for them." Some of the participants experienced spiritual growth and noted that they wished "others could learn what I learned [and that she] liked spiritual direction."

The perception of the priests who were interviewed was that this was a good program, that it was structurally sound, well organized and well delivered. (These were mainly pastors of parishes in the diocese who had candidates in the program). They appear to have confidence in the presenters and the content. It was suggested that this was a very effective adult faith formation program and that it provided good ongoing formation for those already involved in ministry such as catechists, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults' directors, pastoral care workers, and those in social ministry. Respondents noted that the program does have definite possibilities for adult faith development and lay education in the diocese. Yet, the evaluators noted that this is at odds with the fact that few people were registered in the program and that most participants reported reticence on the part of their priest when they went back to their parish.

An issue that arises is whether adult education programs such as this one should be offered if their main goal is personal or faith development. Many opportunities exist in the diocese for on-

going faith formation, including retreats, courses offered at the local universities, and educational events provided through parishes. The evaluation data showed that these and other issues need to be clearly identified and clarified, with plans made for the clear recruitment and educational formation of the kinds of ministers needed.

**A Conflicted Theology of the Laity**
The evaluators came to this research with a theology of laity that is rooted in the teaching of the Roman Catholic church. Specifically we were aware that any formation program for ministry must be mindful that the laity are not "filling in for priests" or called to be of service in their church because of a shortage of other qualified people. Instead, laity are: "the faithful, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and have their own part to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the World."[# 430, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ]

The lay ministry program proceeded in the absence of a clear vision and strong church leadership. This absence led to a lack of consensus on the theology of lay ministry operative in the diocese, in the program, among participants, and in the parishes. The data tell the tale clearly. The pastoral document from which this program sprang, provides a confusing mixture of reasons for the need to educate laity. Although it does acknowledge the baptism of all believers (Ephesians 1:5, 1:13) the document then quickly confuses/collates this with the "transition to increased lay involvement" (DMFP, p. 8) and the "precipitous decline in the number of ordained clergy" (p. 8), suggesting that a program could be implemented to train people to make up for the shortage of clergy, rather than provide for the formation of the laity as people of God. This mixture set the groundwork for endless confusions and conflicts over who was being trained for what.

This mixture of theologies of the laity (by baptism versus by default) was evident in the delivery of the program, as well as in the local church culture in which the program was asked to operate. Despite the best efforts of the facilitators, board members, and director to clarify this theology, many participants believed they were being prepared for a more active ministerial role than they were. Of course this ignores the fact that Roman Catholic schools of theology and seminaries offer graduate degrees in divinity to prepare candidates for professional parish leadership.

**Expectation and Disappointment**
Participants in the program were disappointed about the end product. They were unable to answer the key political question that must be asked of all continuing education programs (Cervero, 2001, p. 25): Education for what? Is lay ministry education intended to be education for faith formation or personal development? Is it structured as preparation for leadership in the church? Is it intended to be training to fill-in for the shortage of priests? The variety of answers given by respondents in this study would indicate that there are conflicting visions of what the education was intended for. This is a serious problem that indicates a certain lack of leadership

and vision, a problem made more serious by the fact that considerable resources, financial and otherwise, have been dedicated to these programs. In the letter that inaugurates the program the bishop tells them "you will be working with priests. Your goal is not to replace priests" (letter included in DMFP, 1998).

The participants did not, for the most part, go into the program for adult formation only. Most expected a more meaningful role in their parish. Some expected paid work but most wanted to be in a stronger position of leadership such as directing a marriage encounter program. Indeed, in his welcoming letter to the program, the then bishop (letter included in DMFP) tells the new participants to the program that they are to be "formed to be lay leaders." The initial materials sent out to candidates by the director tell candidates that they are "to become part-time or full time pastoral assistant/associates in parishes" (DMFP, p. 1). That document informs the candidates that a "lay Pastoral Assistant is a lay person (including religious) who is professionally qualified, either through formation or experience, to assist the pastor with the daily care of the faithful" (p. 23). This document also uses the language of "Lay Pastoral Ministers" (p. 26) and tells candidates that there is an intention of developing a program of training in shared leadership. These statements might well lead someone to think they were being prepared for full and active participation in the ministry of the church.

These hopes for meaningful participation by laity were not achieved. The candidates were expecting, if not a paid role, a more significant role in the life of the church. The documents suggest that this program was intended to prepare people for meaningful work and engagement in parish life. Clearly, most (not all) graduates are disappointed that they were not accepted or encouraged to participate more fully in their parish. Fairly typical comments of graduates with regard to how their church involvement has changed as a result of the program are: "I am disappointed that I am not being used more. I am still a lector and I was before."

Other students noted: "The priests in my parish did not always receive me well. The first priest since the program started was supportive; [he] let me do evening prayer; the second priest didn't ask me, nor did the third." While participants were generally supportive of the program they did ask key political questions about it: "The program should be offered again, but the question is why? Need to have a rationale. I am doing same things now as before." Obviously the transition back to the parish did not work well in most cases. Sometimes priests were transferred and the candidate was left with no support. In other cases, the priest was hostile, but in most cases the priest did not know what to do. Obviously there was a lack of preparation for the meaningful inclusion of laity in the parishes during or after this program.

One of the factors that might have contributed to the confused and conflicted theologies of laity was the gender and lay representation in leadership and facilitation. Only 23% of those who led or facilitated the program were laity. Another significant issue raised was that of male gender bias in the program. Only 45% of presenters were women, and most of these women were members of religious orders. While all comments on the individual teachers and leaders were positive, the makeup of the presenters' roster (65 members) was problematic for some of our interview participants.

**Preparation of Priests and Parishes for Laity**
This lay ministry program grew out of a diocesan renewal report (*Pastoral Leadership and Service*, 1996). Of the 18 recommendations of that report, only 2, those pertaining to this lay ministry education program, were implemented. Individual members of the board and participants in the group interview, as well as documents, make it clear that this put undue pressure on the lay ministry education program. As well, there was no structure in the diocese to ease the transition from program to parish. Hence, people began to apply for admission to a program that prepared them for a ministry that doesn't seem to have existed.

Comments from participants included "Priests are not ready, nor are parishioners (for the most part)." Some said they "wouldn't feel comfortable because parishioners don't want lay people leading." "There is a lot of leadership needed from priests to prepare people." "The program should continue with simultaneous education in parishes."

And participants were able to identify where the leadership needed to begin. Specifically they noted that "Leadership needs to come from the bishop. Let's get ready for parishes where there are no priests. Let's start planning now. We need a program--that is clear." Others note that "if the bishop were verbally supportive, then the priests might be too." There was agreement that the "Potential problem is with the priests. Lay people will follow priests if they say laity works."

Again, there was overlap with the false expectations. One woman said. "I thought that we would be pastoral assistants. But the clergy didn't accept us. I am not in a busy parish. What is necessary is leadership from the bishop to accept laity. I wonder why they spent money on me."

The evaluators were given the message that energy has to be put into educating clergy and parishioners about the role of the laity. There is much to be done to strengthen continuing education for everyone in this diocese and to work with the leaders of this program so that they are supported in their work. Specifically, attention needs to be given to encouraging people in local congregations to take a more active role in sponsoring the programs and to further educating clergy about the full participation of laity in the life of the church.

There has been a lack of leadership in the diocese in creating conditions for lay ministry to be accepted. Supportive activity might have included the bishop speaking at Eucharistic celebrations, to having priest days on lay ministry, to having a fulltime director whose duties include educating priests and parishioners. The candidates and the priests both call for strong active leadership on the part of their bishop and their priests. They see this as an integral component of a comprehensive and successful education for ministry. From an education perspective, this program had a unique opportunity to engage laity in an extended and intensive educational process. It had a very strongly motivated group of participants.

## Discussion of the Data

This evaluation study revealed considerable satisfaction with the actual lay ministry education program but considerable dissatisfaction with the transition of ministerial knowledge and skills back to the faith community of origin. As a result of the analysis of the data, we recommended that this adult education program be continued but that several changes be made. Our final report to the bishop included a set of recommendations including: All stakeholders, including the bishop, clergy and lay representatives, should work together to prepare a very clear vision of the future of lay formation in the diocese. This should include the kinds of ministries needed to fulfill the mandate of the Church, selection methods for candidates to be accepted into a diocesan formation program, and general expectations of graduates. We also recommended that the program be continued and that there be specialized training for particular parish ministries, which the diocese has decided it needs, and that it include a practicum. We also recommended a practicum for students. We argued that the organizers need to attain gender equity and increased lay participation in leadership and facilitation of the program.

In many ways the use of a utilization framework was very helpful. In seeking to provide useful information we were able to listen carefully to the participants and leaders to see what mattered to them. We tried to be consultative by doing interviews and having purposeful conversations with key informants, as well as find solutions for some of the problems, solutions that the candidates and other participants could live with. We attempted to move to an evaluation framework that sought to understand and to delve into the programs, rather than find reasons to close them down. In consulting widely and really hearing what the needs and concerns were, we were able to do that. They related to clarity around role of laity, around diocesan priorities and leadership. This UFE framework—including consulting key informants---was helpful in this regard. Yet, there is no doubt that the UFE framework increased our workload considerably and that it might not be a cost-effective strategy for profit groups. As well, the UFE framework runs the risk of "telling stakeholders" what they want to hear. We tried to address this latter point by collecting multiples sources of data, consulting a broad spectrum of participants, and working internally as a team to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.[vii]

The research was not without other ethical issues that are integral to the UFE theoretical framework. One of the major issues was the insider/ outsider dilemma. These three evaluators were external to the program and had no particular investment in this particular program, though we are committed to lay education generally. This gave us a particular vantage point but yet it did not allow us to know all the workings of the program. We were not privy to the everyday experiences of teaching in the programs and we had limited knowledge of how the candidates interacted with other parishioners and the pastors in their parishes. We are left with the question of whether outsiders, such as ourselves, all external to the program, should be doing this evaluation? Would an insider have done a better and more accurate reading of the situation? We do not know.

This evaluation was intended to meet the needs of all stakeholders and to provide useful information on this adult education program (Patton, 1997). We believe we have been

moderately successful in listening and representing the views of those who were involved in the program and in helping them in their planning and improvement process. In retrospect, our evaluation was successful in addressing the basic questions of educational program impact (Kirkpatrick, 1994):

Level 1 Reaction: Did you like the program?
Level 2 Learning: Did you learn anything?
Level 3 Behavior: Did you change how you did your ministry as a result?
Level 4 Organizational change: Did the Church change as a result?[viii]

This program accomplished levels 1-2 but not levels 3 or 4: there was no change or if there was one, it was minimal. The current church culture and structure in which the program existed worked against success in the last two levels. We think that any future program needs to build-in evaluation at the beginning and use it all the way through so that attention to process is given all along the way. As with most evaluations, the data that are collected serve as a needs assessment in the next stage of the planning process.

## Concluding Remarks

Admittedly, this education program suffers the same successes and challenges as its counterparts in other jurisdictions (see English, 2000; Warren & Associates, 1998). Many committed and faithful Christians attend the programs to deepen their faith, become more knowledgeable about the church's scripture and tradition, and to become better prepared for active ministry in their parish. While the first two aspirations are achieved the third is elusive. The bridge to active parish ministry needs more attention through education of clergy, support of the bishop, clearer guidelines for the program, and a parish-based practicum that can educate the parishioners, the priests, and the participants and increase the chances of a more active engagement of our church.

Though there are few surprises in this study, as in much qualitative work, what it does contribute to the literature on adult education for the laity is the specific focus on one case, in one ecclesial area, in one point in time. It shows how a utilization focused evaluation can bring attention to the adult education needs and concerns of a particular church community and how evaluators and participants can work together to identify particular concerns and to create solutions and suggestions that work for them. The themes are not new to us yet the process of working and learning together is invaluable. As an endnote it is worthwhile to note that this report has been implemented and that a successful adult education program renewal is underway. That is the ultimate goal of a utilization-focused evaluation.

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[i] The authors were part of an evaluation committee appointed by the diocesan bishop to review its lay ministry program. The bishop consented to having the data published in a refereed article. The authors thank him for his cooperation and assistance.

[ii] These terms each have their own theological and historical underpinnings, which we will leave to theological journals to decode. We understand fully that the vocation of the laity is not only in active ministry but in full participation in the community of faith and to the world as well. However, all programs that we three have been involved in have emphasized participation in

ministerial activity in the local church.

[iii] A seeming difference between Christian and Jewish lay ministry programs is that the Christian programs often involve some degree of preparation for active lay ministry, whereas the Jewish programs, especially the Florence Melton Mini-School in the United States (see Grant et al., 2004) focuses on studying the Jewish faith and traditions, without emphasis on preparation for active ministry.

[iv] A variety of program materials such as letters to students and internal correspondence between the bishop and the program leaders was made available to us. Because they are not available for public perusal we do not cite them in references, which are usually reserved for information that can be readily accessed.

[v] Indeed, most of the established research frameworks in the social sciences—qualitative and quantitative research—are not used in religious education. See English, D'Souza, & Chartrand, 2005 for a 10-year review of research patterns in 2 religious education journals.

[vi] Participatory is a commonly understood word in education circles, meaning inclusion of participants in the educational research process. This participatory can range from full and active involvement in every stage of the research as in the Participatory Action Research method, advocated by Park (2000), to a contained amount of involvement.

[vii] We use terms such as credible, trustworthy, subjective, and dependability (as opposed to positivistic terms such as validity and reliability) because these are consistent with a qualitative framework and more especially with a utilization focused framework (see Denzin & Lincoln, p. 2000) which is about people, their needs and concerns.

[viii] This is a standard evaluation framework used not only for assessment of participant satisfaction but also for program impact on organizations.