



COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY

IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

2008 & 1978

As reported by

Diocesan Chairs of Commissions on Ministry

Research Sponsored and Developed by Members of:

PEALL (Proclaiming Education for All) Task Force

The Mission Leadership Center

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I. FOREWORD: Reason for and Design of Study

A. Commissions on Ministry: Tasks and Structure

Commissions on Ministry are one of the most important diocesan bodies in the Episcopal Church. According to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title III, the Commission on Ministry is charged with assisting the bishop and other diocesan committees in: making decisions on the kind of ministries needed, setting standards for education and training for different ministries, as well as making decision on which candidates will be ordained. In the 2006 Canon III revisions, the Commissions on Ministry were requested along with their Bishop to “require and provide for the continuing education” of Deacons and of Priests and “keep a record of such education.”

All dioceses are expected to have a Commission on Ministry consisting of clergy and lay members, and the Episcopal Church Canons summarized above apply to COM’s in all dioceses. However, it is individual diocesan canons and bishops’ preferences which are central in how these Commissions are actually structured in each diocese, including number and tenure of the members and chair(s), how often they meet, internal organization and rules, tasks emphasized, relationships with other diocesan commissions and committees, and how much influence the COM actually has in making decisions in each of the areas outlined. In other words, the structure, function and power of Commissions on Ministry can and do vary in dioceses across the United States.

B. Research on Commissions on Ministry in 1978 and in 2008

1. The 2008 Impetus: Tracking Continuing Education?

In an April 2007 meeting of PEALL (Proclaiming Education for All), members of this task force wanted to know whether these Commissions were fulfilling the more recent Title III canons on “requiring, providing and recording” clergy’s continuing education. A 2005 tally by Lynne Grifo of what dioceses were tracking clergy continuing education (and factors related to continuing education provision), found that a little less than half of the responding 28 USA dioceses were “monitoring compliance.” Had this situation improved over the following years? And what might be done to assist dioceses following through on these canons?

During the next months, Bud Holland and Adair Lummis completed an interview study with Provincial COM coordinators to learn what dioceses in their provinces were requiring, providing and doing in tracking in clergy continuing education. The ensuing report¹ indicated that although several dioceses (about one or two in each province) appeared to have some intriguing and often well-planned and monitored continuing

¹ Office for Ministry Development (July 2007), “Implementing Canons on Continuing Education: As Seen by Provincial Coordinators.”

education programs, this was not typical. These interviews and later group discussions with provincial COM coordinators further suggested that the whole issue of monitoring clergy continuing education was part of a much larger complex of factors relating to how individual Commissions on Ministry were structured and focused. To get more on these, a larger survey was developed and sent directly to all diocesan COM chairs.

2. The 1978 COM Chair Survey: Structures, Members and Influence

In 1978 the then Education for Mission and Ministry Unit of the Episcopal Church Center sponsored a large national survey of various diocesan practices, ordination and ministry concerns, with surveys sent to bishops, COM chairs, deacons (permanent) and their clergy supervisors. In looking over the questions asked and answered then by COM Chairs, it became apparent that many of these questions were likely applicable today. Because we also have the percentage responses² for how COM chairs answered in 1978, we can look at trends to ascertain if some conditions are likely longstanding or have more recently emerged.³

3. The 2008 COM Chair Survey

The 2008 email survey developed contained questions from the 1978 survey, as well as many questions of particular concern currently to PEALL, the Standing Commission on Ministry Development, and officers of the Mission Leadership and the Evangelism and Congregational Life Centers. This survey was first sent out in early summer from a listing of chairs, which proved to be out of date for reasons that will become evident. After updating the names and emails of non-responding COM chairs, two subsequent mailings resulted in a solid 50% response rate of over 53⁴ Commissions on Ministry chairs..

Many have contributed to the development of this survey and report on the findings, as indicated. The final survey design, analysis, appendix and draft report of the major findings are the responsibility of Adair Lummis. The final reflection is written by Bud Holland, who has been the leader in this project. Other Church Center officers and consultants will be looking at these results and may also write observations.

Members of all groups and organizations named on the title page trust that action will go forth from this point in strengthening and confirming the work of Commissions on Ministry.

² We have the percentage distribution or “marginals” for the 1978 study, but not the raw data. In other words, we cannot run cross-tabulations on the 1978 data.

³ The Appendix to this report shows the percentage responses to each question asked in 2008, and where possible, how COM chair in 1978 answered the same question.

⁴ The analysis of the 2008 data for this report is primarily based on 53 surveys received by 11/15/2008; however, one survey has been received since then and more may be returned.

II. THE VARIED STRUCTURES OF COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

A. Number of Members and Meetings⁵

Commissions on Ministry range in membership from six to over twenty. However, the modal number of COM members per diocese is between 11-15. The number of members on the COM is related to the number of congregations⁶ in the diocese: the fewer the congregations in a diocese, the fewer members there are on its Commission on Ministry. The more congregations in the diocese, likely the more kinds of congregations and ministries need representation on the Commission. In illustration:

Dioceses with # COM members	Number of Congregations in the Diocese		
	Fifty & fewer	51-70 churches	71+ churches
10 and fewer members	50%	14%	5%
16 + members	18%	28%	39%

The number of yearly meetings Commissions on Ministry range from never (one diocese) to nearly monthly. The lower approximate third of the Commissions in meeting frequency have four or fewer meetings, while the upper third have nine or more meetings a year. Regardless of how frequently the Commission meets as full body or how many members it has, COM chairs in majority reported that at least four fifths of their members attended every meeting.

The distance that COM members must travel to attend meetings, as the comment from one chair suggested, may be more pivotal in how many yearly meetings are held. Although some Commissions in dioceses with geographically dispersed congregations and COM members may have few face-to face meetings, as another mentioned, it is possible to augment the number of meetings by holding some through teleconferences. Time pressures on the COM chair may be a more important factor in the number of meeting held years. This possibility is suggested by the fact that ordained chairs hold fewer meetings a year than lay chairs.⁷

More meetings of the Commission on Ministry may have the effect of fewer meetings between the COM members and other diocesan commissions and committees. At any rate, the more yearly meetings the COMs have, the somewhat more likely their chairs are

⁵ For numbers and percentages on this topic, see Appendix pp. 1-2.

⁶ Number of congregations coded in for responding dioceses from the 2006 statistics ranged from 41% with fifty and fewer congregations; 26% 51-70 congregation, and 33% over 70 congregations.

⁷ In illustration, of COM's chairs who report they hold 4 or fewer total group meetings a year, 38% are clergy to only 18% who are laity. In contrast, among COM chairs who hold 9 or more meetings, only 22% are ordained compared to 53% who are laypersons.

to agree that more communication and coordination is needed between the Bishop, Standing Committee and COM.⁸

B. COM Subcommittees: Drawbacks and Advantages

Thirty years ago about four-fifths (83%) of the 1978 COM’s had subcommittees, while in 2008 a little over half (55%) of the responding COMs had subcommittees. Further, COM’s with subcommittees had a greater number of these thirty years ago than presently. Examples of the 2008 subcommittees named are found in the Appendix.⁹

In 2008, the more congregations in the diocese primarily, the more likely the Commission is to have formal subcommittees. More congregations in a diocese may present greater need for Commissions on Ministry to do more specialized work. Correlatively, since the more congregations typically the more members, the better able the COM may be to form subcommittees.

Commission on Ministry Has Subcommittees?		
# COM members	YES	NO
10 and fewer members	17%	36%
16 + members	41%	12%
Dioceses with		
50 and fewer churches	24%	60%
71 + churches	52%	12%

Number of congregations is more related to number of COM subcommittees than number of COM members because not everyone on a subcommittee is necessarily a COM member.¹⁰ The more subcommittees, the less likely it is that all members of these subcommittees are voting members of the Commission on Ministry. Subcommittees are the way that experts in various areas can be garnered to help with COM work without greatly increasing the voting members.

A favorite solution in keeping the COM with many subcommittees working in coordination with one another and others in the dioceses is to have just the subcommittee chairs be full voting COM members. Coordinating the work of subcommittees is not a simple matter, but getting them set up and functioning may be more difficult, to quote one chair:

⁸ In illustration: 76% of COM chairs who hold 9 or more yearly COM meetings agree that more communication is needed between the bishop, Standing Commission and COM in their dioceses. Only 41% of the chairs having 4 or fewer COM meetings believed more such communication was needed.

⁹ See Appendix, pp. 2-3 for statistics and more information on subcommittees.

¹⁰ For percentages of subcommittee members who vote on the COM, see Appendix, p.3, question # 8.

“We are working on developing functioning subcommittees, but that requires a lot of careful leadership. Leaders with time to initiate formation and support of new group of volunteers from disparate communities are hard to come by.”

Commissions on Ministry with many subcommittees may find that communication on essential matters for votes is often blocked or mangled if: (1) subcommittee chairs do not keep in contact with one another and the total COM; or (2) in the more extreme case if the COM has delegated all responsibility for a task area to a separate committee unconnected with the COM.

Subcommittees with specialists may strengthen the influence of Commissions on Ministry. At any rate, Commissions with subcommittees have significantly more influence than those without on setting education requirements for ordination in their dioceses.¹¹

III. COM Member Characteristics, Influence and Conflicts

The bishop exercises some to a great deal of formal power on who becomes a member of the Commission on Ministry or its chair. COM members are appointed only, not elected, in over four-fifths of dioceses responding both in the surveys of 2008 and 1978.¹² At the same time, COM chairs and members may have an influential role in advising on what kinds of members are needed to fill COM vacancies.

A. Attributes Desirable in the Appointment of COM Members

Attributes listed on the survey for new COM member appointments are more likely to be informal than formal criterion, if important at all. The most frequently checked *formal criterion* in 2008 for appointing new members was ensuring that a (vocational) deacon was on the COM. Yet in 1978, this was least likely to be either a formal or informal criterion for COM membership!¹³

Most important *informal* criteria for the majority both in 2008 and 1978 (although more important currently), were (1) selecting persons to achieve a balance of men and women and (2) to obtain expertise in an area needed in the Commission’s work.

Appointing representatives of different kinds of ordained ministry (e.g. senior rector, association, interim, chaplains) and representatives from racial/ethnic groups served by the diocese (e.g. Asian, Black, Hispanic) are criteria far more important in 2008 than

¹¹ In illustration, 62% of COMs with any subcommittees have a “great deal” of influence in this area, compared to 28% of COM’s without subcommittees.

¹² For percentages on selecting COM members, see Appendix pages 5-6

¹³ In fact in 1978, a major reason for the COM survey (which accompanied a survey of deacons and bishops) was the furor in dioceses over ordaining both women and deacons of either gender.

thirty years ago. At the same time, even in 2008 diocesan Commission chairs differ substantially on whether such attributes should even be informal criteria in appointing new members. The major problem they face, several chair noted, was finding volunteers with the requisite abilities willing to serve on the Commission on Ministry at all. Finding those willing to volunteer time for Commission work who represent various types of priestly ministry or different racial/ethnic groups, may prove arduous to fulfill.

Getting a young adult layperson on the COM was of some importance for about half the COMs in 2008. One chair wrote in that getting someone *recently ordained* was an informal criterion. Other criteria for new appointments written in by 2008 COM chairs are geographical or *deanery* representation, *size of congregation*, and personal attributes particularly being a *clergy spouse*. Written comments also indicate that for potential COM appointments, evidence of past service to the diocese and especially willingness/ability to travel to COM meetings are important.

Concerning key demographic attributes of those who become COM chairs in 2008 versus 1978, the following differences are particularly striking.

- Only 9% were laypersons in 1978 versus 30% in 2008.
- Only 5% were women in 1978 versus 38% in 2008.

In questions asked only in 2008, it appears that almost all the COM chairs have at least a four-year college degree. In addition, 72% have either a M.Div. or other professional masters degree, and 35% have a doctorate. These chairs tend to be experienced in life and ministry in that over half (56%) are over age fifty-five, and 58% of the clergy chairs have been ordained over fifteen years.

B. COM's Influence on Education, Ordination and Mission Priorities¹⁴

Commissions vary across dioceses in how much influence they have in various areas of their usual responsibilities.

In both 2008 and 1978 Commissions had the least influence on setting diocesan ministry priorities of areas listed in the survey.¹⁵ A strong majority of Commissions exerted at least “quite a bit” of influence on educational requirements for ordination and on the ordination of individuals in both years, yet on the average it appears that in 2008 COMs have somewhat less influence than they did in 1978. Thirty years ago Commissions had more influence on setting ordination quotas than most do presently. The reasons for these decreases in influence over time are not ascertainable from these surveys results.

¹⁴ See Appendix, pp. 7-8.

¹⁵ Over half had “little or no influence” on diocesan mission priorities, 55% in 2008, 63% in 1978.

C. Conflict and Consensus Within and Without COMs

1. Internal Relations and Relative Harmony Within

Internal relations within the Commissions on Ministry seem congenial, and eventually consensual, typically after “normal and healthy discussion” as one put it. Less than 10% of the chairs in either 2007 or 1978 noted “*quite a bit of conflict*” among members of their COMs “concerning proposed programs, policies, procedures, recommendations for ordination.” Proportionately more 2008 chairs (41%) reported “*no conflict*” compared to 1978 chairs (18%).¹⁶

Much of the internal conflict that occurred in 1978, written explanations indicated, was occasioned by disagreements over accepting persons for ordination who either read for orders, or were not interested in becoming parish priests, or aspired to the permanent diaconate, or sometimes simply because they were women. In 2008, there was also some internal conflict mentioned within at least several Commissions about educational requirements and ordination of (permanent) deacons, “local priests,” and “total ministry.”

2. Screening Issues in Ordination

The extent to which GOEs are used in decisions on ordination have involved some internal debate and occasional conflict within the Commissions over “the importance/consequences that GOEs may have on recommendations for ordination,” as one put it. Survey results in 2008 indicate that three-fourths of the COM chairs do use GOE results in making decisions on ordination.¹⁷ However, the GOE scores may be mainly used as a diagnostic tool (rather than the sole, final examination) in both some dioceses that do and some that do not take GOE scores into formal consideration in recommending individuals be ordained. About a fourth of the dioceses have their own ordination exams, instead of or in addition to GOEs.

Lack of sufficient ordination screening procedures is perceived by about half the 2008 COM chairs as something of a problem in their dioceses.¹⁸ Yet 2008 chairs were significantly less concerned about screening prospective clergy adequately than were chairs in 1978. While over half (55%) the COM chairs in 1978 “*strongly agreed*” better screening procedures were needed to “upgrade the ordained ministry by seeing that only well qualified persons are clergy,” this was true of only 13% of 2008 COM chairs. Over the last thirty years it appears some improvements have been made in the screening procedures for Holy Orders!

¹⁶ For percentages responses on amount of conflict and written explanations, see Appendix pp. 8-9.

¹⁷ For percentages responses & comments on use of GOEs, see Appendix, pp. 4-5, question 11.

¹⁸ See percentages responses in 2008 and 1978 to question 34, Appendix p. 12.

3. External Relations and Structural Issues Without

Sources of conflict experienced by COM members emanate more often, it appears, from disagreements not among COM members but between them and other diocesan leaders, commissions and committees *external* to the Commission. Most often this kind of external conflict involved the bishop or Standing Committee not approving or overriding suggestions proffered and decisions made by the Commission on Ministry, e.g. when “the bishop makes decisions that are contrary to the recommendations of the COM,” as one put it. The COM and the SC too may have different views on policy, procedure or individual ordinations that take a while to smooth out.

There is quite range in COM chairs’ opinions on whether “*more communication and coordination is needed between the Bishop, Standing Committee and COM.*” Although a majority surveyed in 2008 and 1978 at least “*moderately agree*” that better communication was needed, in 2008 it is also true that nearly a fourth “*strongly disagree*” that any changes are needed.¹⁹ Disagreements over the quality of the screening procedures for ordained ministry appear to be a major trigger for chairs’ indicating that more communication is needed between their bishop, SC and the COM.²⁰

There is similarly substantial diversity among chairs on whether their COM: (1) *alone should be the group screening and testing candidates for Holy Orders (e.g. the Standing Commission should not be involved in this at all)*” and (2) “*COMs should have legal veto power on all candidates for ordination.*”²¹ A slight majority disagreed that COM’s should have this much authority in both 2008 and 1978. Yet in 2008 a substantial minority (46%) favor the idea the COM alone should do the screening and testing, and almost a third (32%) applaud the idea of their having a legal veto. Those affirming both ideas are likely to be the same COM chairs who also concur that more communication between the bishop, SC and COM are needed in their dioceses.²²

¹⁹ See Appendix, p. 12, question 33.

²⁰ Those who agree that more communication is needed between these three, are also significantly more likely to also agree that the screening for ordained ministry in their dioceses should be upgraded, and vice versa – chairs who disagree with one statement also disagree with the other.(correlation .41, sig. .002).

²¹ See Appendix, p. 12-13, question 35-38.

²² Those who agree that COMs should have veto power are also more likely to agree that that better screening of candidates is needed (cor .44, sig .001) and better communication between bishop, SC and COM (cor. 41, sig. .002). Similar correlations obtain with the first item and these two.

IV. COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY AND CANONS ON CLERGY CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Title III Canons on continuing education read in essence:

The Bishop and Commission shall require and provide for the continuing education:

Of Deacons

Of Priests

*And keep a record of such education.*²³

A. What Commissions are Doing in Fulfilling These Canons²⁴

A little over half the dioceses (55%), according to 2008 survey results, have an established diocesan plan for continuing education of clergy (a couple also include lay professionals in their planning for continuing education). Fewer dioceses (38%) include in their continuing education plan, however, a standard number of CEU units or days of continuing education advised or required of clergy.

Diocesan educational planning likely focuses less on requirements for clergy continuing education, and more on what programs, seminars, and workshops the diocese will offer that year. (A four-fifths majority of dioceses offer at least some program yearly). Dioceses that put on educational events for clergy and lay professionals are also likely to have some funds for individuals' continuing education. Funding possibilities give clergy the impetus to seek out continuing education opportunities. Typically to get such funding, clergy will have to write applications and get these approved by the diocese or other funding organization. If clergy do not apply for funds and/or attendance is not kept at diocesan programs and workshops, what education individual clergy undertake on their own is not readily available. Nonetheless, two-fifths of the COM chairs reported that in their dioceses the "*continuing education taken by those in active ministry is monitored and recorded yearly.*" This is approximately the same proportion that Lynn Grifo found in 2005.

In 2008, Commissions on Ministry that do monitor and record clergy continuing education taken are significantly more likely to be those which have more influence over (1) setting continuing education requirements for clergy; and (2) monitoring clergy's continuing educational activity, and (3) funds and personnel for clergy continuing education. A major reason that a majority of dioceses are not monitoring and recording clergy continuing education, responses to these two items indicate, are because over half of the COMs have *little or no influence* over either setting the requirements, providing

²³ See *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, 2006* for Title III, Canon 7 (section 5) and Canon 9 (section 1).

²⁴ Percentage responses to questions #28 - #32 are in the Appendix, pp. 10-11.

resources, or even for getting clergy to acquiesce to being monitored or the bishop to enforce their compliance.²⁵

Setting up COM subcommittees, to go back to an earlier discussion, appears to be one factor that is significantly related to getting or maintaining influence over education of clergy. Although it is not possible to tell the actual sequences of events, COM's which have subcommittees are more likely than those without to also have more power in: (1) setting continuing educational requirements for clergy and in (2) monitoring clergy's continuing education activities; and probably consequently (3) those with subcommittees are also somewhat more likely to record continuing education undertaken by clergy.²⁶

B. Interest in Continuing/Beginning to Monitor Clergy Continuing Education?

Chairs have rather different reactions in 2008 to the statement: "*The COM should not have the task of monitoring clergy's involvement in continuing education.*" Chairs' answers range from a fifth who *strongly agree* to almost two-fifths who *strongly disagree* with the statement.²⁷

Less than half of Commissions are currently monitoring clergy's continuing education. Does COMs experience in recording what continuing education clergy undertake yearly make the task easier or more valued part of the COM's responsibilities? Yes likely to some extent: twice as many COM's in dioceses that are monitoring clergy continuing education *moderately to strongly disagree* that their Commission should cease this.²⁸

Commissions which are tracking clergy continuing education are also more likely to be those which have more influence in setting standards for and getting clergy compliance on fulfilling CE requirements, as noted. Both experience and influence in monitoring clergy continuing education appear to affect whether COM chairs believe that monitoring clergy continuing education should be a COM responsibility. Perceived influence in carrying out these tasks, however, is the more important factor in whether chairs would like the Title III continuing education canons revoked or affirmed as COM

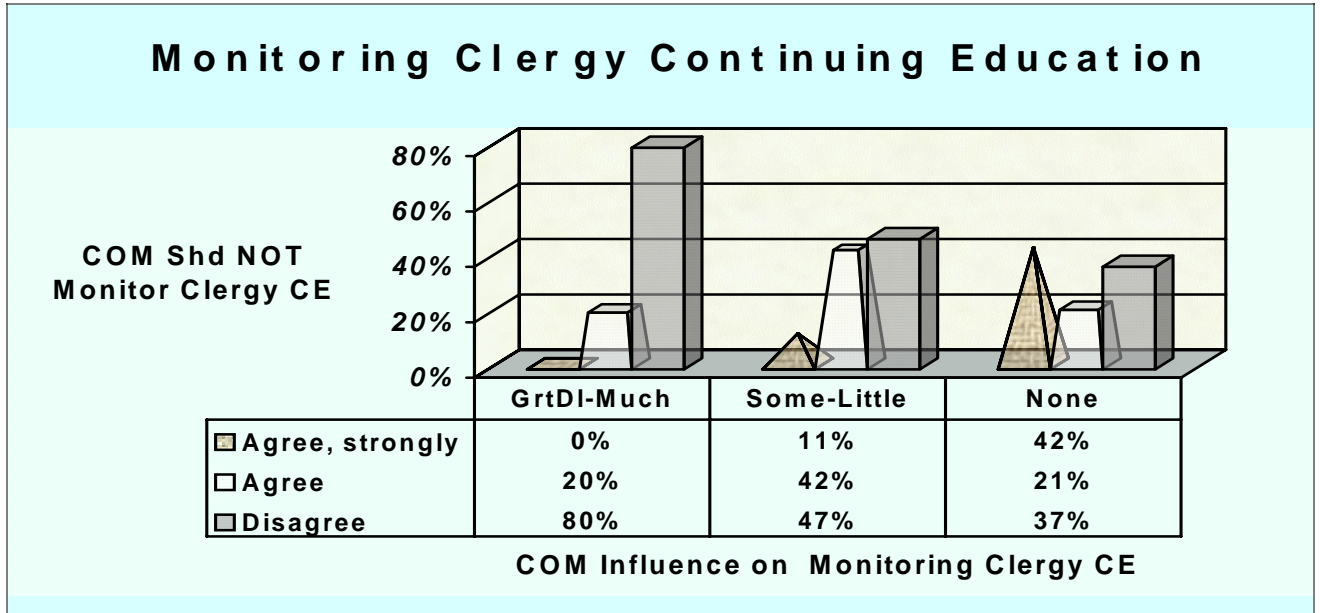
²⁵ See percentage responses to questions #24 and #25 and #22, Appendix pp. 7- 8. Correlations with diocesan monitoring and recording continuing education are correlated with the first question .48, sig. 0001, and with second 37 (.002), but not with the existence of funds, per se.

²⁶ COMs with subcommittees versus none,
which have at least "quite a bit" of influence over
(1) Continuing education requirements, 41% to 12% (39, sig. 004)
(2) Monitoring clergy's continuing education: 27% to 8% (.28, sig. 04)
(3) Do monitor and record clergy continuing education: 48% to 29% (.29, sig. 03)

²⁷ See Appendix p. 13, question #38 for the full percentage distribution on this item.

²⁸ 71% of COM's in dioceses that are tracking clergy continuing education disagree (that they should stop) compared to 31% of the others who disagree (that they should not even begin.)

responsibilities.²⁹ There may well be other factors involved in how strongly COM chairs feel about rejecting or retaining monitoring clergy continuing education as a Commission duty, yet their having substantial influence in this task area is pivotal. This is illustrated in the chart below.



V. INFORMING AND TRAINING COM CHAIRS & MEMBERS

A. Getting Information to COMs from Churchwide Offices & Agencies

Major communication problems in getting information to COM chairs from Episcopal organizations and offices outside of their dioceses became first evident in our initial efforts to send the 2008 email survey to COM chairs; the listserv names or email addresses were quite outdated. Of more crucial future concern, this list will be difficult to keep current as evinced by an examination of number of years that chairs in both the 2008 and the 1978 surveys had been members of the COM compared to the number of years in their position of COM chair.³⁰ Although a chair may have been a COM member for a number of years prior to being appointed chair, over half have been “COM Chairs” for two years or less, and this seems to have been the modal procedure for thirty years. This means it will continue to be difficult to communicate with COMs by national Listservs to COM chairs because the list gets out of date so fast.

²⁹ On whether COM should not monitor clergy CE, among Commissions that:

- Do monitor CE, 91% with much influence to 50% with less – disagree
- Do not monitor, 67% with much influence to 27% with less – disagree

³⁰ See Appendix p. 13, questions #41 & #42.

Other evidence attesting to blocks in communication between Churchwide offices, commissions and committees to those on diocesan COM's was evident from responses to two questions in the 2008 survey about important resources that were suppose to have reached these chairs months earlier.³¹

- The DVD "*Meeting on New Ground*" (and workbook) was designed to assist Commissions in educating and ordaining racial/ethnic minorities. However, 72% of the COM chairs had not seen the DVD nor or had other members of their Commissions.
- *The 2008 Commission on Ministry Handbook*, intended to assist COM's understand the canonical changes and other of their responsibilities, had not even been seen by 75% of the COM chairs.

Provincial meetings of diocesan COM chairs with the provincial COM coordinator might be another way of communicating with Commissions on Ministry. Travel to Provincial meetings pose possible scheduling or funding problems for COM chairs, which is likely why less than fifth in either 2008 or 1978 "strongly agreed" that there should be more such meetings. At the same time in 2008 three-fifths of these chairs were generally favorable to there being more Provincial meetings.³² COM chairs in Province Eight are significantly more likely to want such meetings than chairs in other Provinces.³³

B. Orientation and Consultation for Chairs & Members in their COM Work

Three-fourths of the COM chairs have had continuing education during the last couple of years. However, only 16% have had any continuing education pertinent to their COM work; in at least several instances such education was obtained at Provincial meetings.³⁴

New COM members and COM chairs would benefit by special orientation sessions about the work of the Commission, according to the great majority of chairs, though some felt more strongly about the importance of such orientation. COM chairs were somewhat more likely in 2008 than in 1978 to "*strongly agree*" such sessions would be advisable for new members, and much more apt in 2008 to "*strongly agree*" that special orientation programs should be provided for COM chairs.³⁵ New chairs were particularly likely to indicate they wanted more orientation for their work as COM chair.³⁶

³¹ For responses on the DVD and the Handbook, see Appendix p. 4, questions #10 and #11.

³² For percentages expressing agreement-disagreement that there be more Provincial meetings of the COM chairs, see Appendix p. 13, question # 40.

³³ In illustration, 50% of the chairs in Province 8 "strongly agreed" that there should be more Provincial meetings, compared to only 10% in the other Provinces combined (.40, sig. .003.)

³⁴ For responses and descriptions of the COM chairs' continuing education, see Appendix p 15, #48.

³⁵ For responses on the advisability of orientation sessions, see Appendix p.12, questions #35 and #37.

³⁶ In illustration, 59% of chairs in their position for two years or less "strongly agree" there should be orientation programs for chairs, compared to 29% who had been chairs longer (.32, sig. .02)

Several factors appear to increase chairs' interest in having orientation sessions.

Influence is a double-edged sword; it is great to have, but to exercise it responsibility as well as keep this influence may require specialized training. Possibly for such reasons, the more influence that chairs perceive their Commissions having on screening candidates and particularly the ordination of individuals, the more strongly they agree that orientation sessions are needed for new members and for the chairs.³⁷

Problems in communication and coordination between the COM and other diocesan bodies also raise COM chairs eagerness to have orientation and training sessions for new members and chairs. Chairs who perceive that more “communication and coordination is needed in this diocese between the Bishop, the SC and the COM” are significantly more likely to want more orientation sessions for new members and for themselves.³⁸

Counter intuitively perhaps, the more full COM meetings per year in a diocese, the somewhat more likely the chair is to strongly agree that more orientation sessions for new members would be wise. This may indicate that frequent meetings are associated with a lot of detailed work being done by the Commission, for which getting up to speed fast is necessary. It may also indicate that Commissions that meet frequently are simply more assiduous in seeing that new members are incorporated well in the group.³⁹

From comments made by several chairs, it seems that in addition to “orientation”, many would welcome some ongoing advice and consultation with Churchwide offices and officers. To quote one:

- *I feel relatively alone in my role as Chair of the COM over the past few years. We need to develop much more structure in order to be more effective in this work, and we are making some progress. I have begun to see the ability for networking among dioceses to see what others have done. It feels to me that each diocese has the need to do some very similar work in administering their Commission on Ministry – yet we each create it independently. I thought the National Church could provide substantial resources to assist the dioceses in this work...*

³⁷ Influence over ordination & want orientation for: new members (.37, sig. .007), chair (.33, sig. 02)

³⁸ Poor relations with Bp & SC & want orientation for: new members (.41, sig. .002), chair (.30, sig. 03)

³⁹ Of those COM chairs who “strongly agree” that more orientation sessions for new members should be held, 44% hold under 4 meetings a year, 50% between 5-8 meetings, and 71% hold 9 or more meetings.

VI. REFLECTIONS & PROGNOSIS FOR COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY

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I am grateful for the work of the Commissions on Ministry. This recently formed group in the Church (1970 General Convention) has provided an incredible service to the Church in assisting Bishops and Dioceses to develop and maintain an orderly system of discernment for ministries and a counsel of advice for postulancy, candidacy, and ordination in the Church. This voluntary group has worked long hours and has sought to do this work with diligence, prayer, and concern for the integrity and competence of present and future leaders in the Church. Commissions on Ministry have done this work in part without the training and support they have needed. So the call for the Church to assist in this work is clear, compelling, and hopeful. There are a number of dioceses who have created new ways to engage this work that have resulted in efficiencies and effectiveness that others, if they knew it, might want to emulate. Still others are struggling to deal with the requirements of the canons and their workload and wondering how they might best proceed.

Some ways forward seem evident to me. This is a “village work”. It is not only a village work in a diocese (Commission on Ministry, Standing Committee, congregations, other discernment communities, Bishop, Bishop’s Office, mentors, etc) but also with the wider Church in Provinces and Church Center. The survey indicates to me that these communication and supportive links need to be strengthened. Two resources are located on the Episcopal Church Center website that might be of some help here. One is the Commissions on Ministry Handbook and the other is Meeting on New Ground: Cultural Diversity in the Ordination Process. Both can be accessed through the Mission Leadership Program Center’s site and within the Ordained Ministry site under Publications. Both are intended to share information about our work as well as other resources. In addition there is a listserv for Commissions on Ministry that can be a helpful resource for asking for and/or sharing information. Yet for them to be helpful requires regular updating of pertinent information and an intention from all parties to be use these resources. Additional opportunities also are available in Provincial meetings of Commissions on Ministry.

All of us in this village work can and need to play a part in this effort. Within the Episcopal Church Center the contact office will be Ordained Leadership and Ministry Development. That office together with the offices for Lay Leadership and Ministry Development and Theological Education will work even more diligently in the future with you to ensure that our part of the village work is engaged. We can all be a resource to each other.

The work of the Commissions on Ministry is “evolving”. This certainly is recognized throughout the Church. At the beginning of the Commissions on Ministry the emphasis

was more on appropriate gate-keeping functions. While we know how important discernment is we also know that ministries, lay and ordained, need to be supported and affirmed for the ministry of the Church to flourish. So the work of the Commissions has expanded to a broader work of helping to set the climate for the discernment and support of the ministry of the baptized as well as the process leading to ordination. It has been further expanded by canon to include being a council of advice for ministry in a diocese, continuing education, and mentoring of newly ordained clergy. So in its evolution the members and structures get stretched, sometimes too thin. The Church needs to continue to review the work that is given to Commissions on Ministry and decide what is possible or most appropriate and feasible for Commissions to undertake. I would encourage this ongoing conversation in the next Triennium with the Standing Commission on Ministry Development in their role of oversight and review of the Title III Canons.

I would encourage a new level of creative imagining about discernment, support for ministries, identification of skills, abilities, leadership potential: all in the context of our fast changing contexts of living and emergent needs of our communities. This imaginative work would engage the village in a new, in-depth review of the vision of our mission and ministry and the ways we wish to engage that life and work even more effectively. Several dioceses have begun that work. It is in the context of this larger work that the work of Commissions on Ministries can be seen as an integral part of the mosaic. I am concerned that more and more gets laid on Commissions on Ministry thereby stretching its resources beyond its capacities. The way we support one another in this work should mimic the hoped for results of our efforts.

We live in an ever increasing world of diversity. This diversity holds great promise as well as unique challenges. It is incumbent on all of us to have this creative diversity be present in all phases and timing of our work, including membership on Commissions on Ministry and conversations at all levels of our visioning.

The Commissions on Ministries encompass “different structures”. The canons were changed in 2003 to encourage flexibility with the Commissions on Ministry structures and work. I would encourage this flexibility and the encouragement of the COM’s to expand as needed to accomplish the task. Whereas Commissions on Ministries are councils of advice to the Bishop we all know that takes different forms in dioceses. We all know too that some who go through the ordination process say that the Commission on Ministry turned me down. Of course, the Commission on Ministry has no canonical authority to turn anyone down yet that seems to be a perceived reality in some places. So the structures that relate to conversations with Bishops are crucial in order to position the Commission on Ministry to be on a firm, canonical, realistic ground.

The canons also now mandate that the Commissions on Ministry receive ongoing training. This is crucial for the work itself and is an important way that we can all support the people doing the work. Are there good ways you are already doing this training? If so, please share it with all of us.

Commissions on Ministries occasionally get maligned. The readers of this survey results know what I mean. COM's get maligned for a number of reasons: persons going through the process believe they are "called" to a certain work and how can a group of people who only meet them for a brief period of time know enough to deny them their "call" (this is often repeated in some congregations who believe the same when they refer a person to the process). But Commissions on Ministry are not maligned in this office. Rather you are appreciated for the great work you do and for the integrity, faithfulness, and sincerity with which you do it. Thanks.

Together we can do this work.